

Apostolic Leaders: A Common Misconception of the #NoPlaceLeft Movement

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As someone steeped in Southern Baptist heritage for multiple family generations, the apostolic role has been commonplace. The term apostle is anything but commonplace. “International missionary” was the term used to describe the apostolic function. For years missionaries described the evangelistic and church planting focus in foreign places and cultures. This role was and is still considered a function for the international context by many with the Western perspective. The question currently gaining momentum, especially in the US context is “Why not here?”

The rise of the missional movement has also given rise to the apostolic impulse, and rightfully so. Alan Hirsch, Mike Breen, Ed Stetzer, Reggie McNeal, Steve Addison, Roland Allen, Neil Cole, Dave and Jon Ferguson, JD Payne, Steve Smith, Ying Kai, Hugh Halter, and Nathan Shank represent a handful of the voices who have called and are calling for practicing a resurgence of the apostolic role. Yet, how does a forgotten role find a place within an established church context that is centuries old? By looking to what is coming, not just to what has been.

The current Western context increasingly justifies a predominantly missionary strategy and response. USA Today reported on NewsWeekly and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life research concerning shifts in US religious identities:

The big news about people with no religious identity, the Nones, isn't that they're No. 2 now in the USA, 19.6% and climbing. But it's the diversity among these 46

million people. They're everyone. They're everywhere. They're gone and they're not coming back.¹

This report highlights only one aspect of the larger rapid cultural shift. Everyone feels the change in one way or another.

The shift, if uniform across the entire culture, would not pose an equal need for apostolic resurgence. The magnitude of diversity among cultures living as neighbors requires apostolic leadership. Diverse cultures require diverse entries for the gospel. The everyone-everywhere aspect, of this shift requires approaching the Great Commission task from a sojourner perspective rather than a majority shareholder. In other words, persons in the Western context no longer need to be taught what it means to be a Christian, they need to know what a Christian is. When Christendom no longer reigns as the majority culture, diversity extends to a truly multi-subcultural milieu with little Gospel understanding and the church struggles to find Great Commission expertise, it is time for apostolic missionary thinking and strategies like those of our international missionaries in our neighborhoods.

Many common misconceptions arise about the #NoPlaceLeft movement as they engage the diverse cultures. While space and time do not allow for a comprehensive treatment, the apostolic role prevalent in the movement represents a significant source of the misconceptions. If one is to gain a clear understanding of the #NoPlaceLeft movement, one must understand the apostolic influence and its implications.

¹ Cathy Lynn Grossman, "The emerging social, political force: 'Nones'" *USA Today Online*, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/10/09/nones-religion-pew-study/1618607> Accessed Sept. 1, 2016.

What is the role of the apostolic gifting in the #NoPlaceLeft movement?

A handful of words in the modern evangelical context bring debate with every mention. Apostle never fails to stir opinions. Depending on the understood background of the apostolic gift, unexpressed expectations surround those who seek to fulfill the apostolic mission. Even the mention of the word without specifying the use of a “Capital A” or “lowercase a” can limit conversation and cooperation. Yet, the #NoPlaceLeft vision and strategy is marked by the apostolic desire and derives its missionary impulse from the gifts leading to new people and new places.

These leaders practice and refine field tested strategies within local contexts to regain the diminishing Great Commission expertise. The goal is to see multiplying disciples and multiplying churches. Hirsch described the apostolic role as particularly focused on extending Christianity, guarding and embedding DNA of the church both theologically and missionally, establishing the church in new contexts, founding the environment for other gifts to flourish, developing leaders and leadership structures, and bringing strategic missional perspective and relationship networking.² The diverse cultural opportunities continue to increase the need for apostolic leadership and action. Indigenous churches must be established even among neighbors in our own cities.

The church planting focus of these apostolic leaders is not meant to replace the established church but rather to extend the kingdom of God through churches making disciple-making disciples and multiplying churches. Simply put, missionary methods can no longer apply only to international missionaries and mission trips. The very nature of a vision to see #NoPlaceLeft where the gospel hasn't been pushes the church to extend it's

² Alan Hirsch. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Bravos Press), 171.

gospel witness beyond familiar cultures through the influence, leadership, and lessons learned from apostolic church planters.

Since the movement seeks to bring the gospel to new people and new places, the apostolic role of extending the gospel to new contexts and providing an environment for prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to flourish is vital. This gifting is hardly the only aspect of the movement, as you will briefly see, however it currently tends to be the most visible and discussed. On the front of any movement traditional boundaries will be tested and norms will be challenged. The fact that anyone could actually live life without hearing the gospel and be given an opportunity to follow Jesus is inexcusable. The cultural shifts require pioneers to carve new paths.

What is the role of “Houses of Peace” in #NoPlaceLeft?

Pastor-planter tends to be the accepted and majority practice among church planting leadership. At the most basic level the pastor-planter model seeks to establish a church and the lead visionary expects to pastor the congregation. Two assumptions play a significant role in this model. 1. The planter will connect well with the prevailing culture of the target demographic. 2. The prevailing culture will accept the leadership of a relative newcomer. The process is weighted on the gifts, relational capacity, and cultural adeptness of the leadership. The process looks something like:

*Church → Identify Planter → Education → Gather Launch Team → Disciple
Launch Team → Evangelism → Lostness*

The #NoPlaceLeft movement also relies on the gifts, relational capacity, and cultural adeptness of the leadership. The key strategy difference is the environment in which the leader is found. Jared H., an experienced church planting movement catalyst says, “Leadership is in the harvest. Look at Luke 10, Jesus tells the disciples to find the

laborers they prayed for in verse 2 in the cities they went to in verse 5.”³ This small difference has significant effects on methodology. Specifically, the starting point for church planting. The process looks something like:

*Lostness → Evangelism → Disciple → Gather Church Start → Identify and Train Leader(s) → Release Healthy Church*⁴

If the leadership is trained from the harvest, the role of the planter never intends to transition to pastoral, but seeks to identify and train a maturing believer(s) in the role of a biblical pastor/elder. The apostolic foundation for multiplication is best served through a search for a House or Person of Peace. Simply defined, a House or Person of Peace accepts the messenger, the message, and the mission.

The #NoPlaceLeft movement is often understood to be primarily an evangelistic push with house-to-house emphasis. Yet the end goal, to plant multiplying churches, drives the House of Peace Search method modeled by Jesus in Luke 10 and Matthew 10. Practitioners seek to find homes and persons, readied by the Spirit to trust Christ who already possesses the relational connections and native cultural adeptness to create gospel movement. Jeff Sundell, a seasoned #NoPlaceLeft practitioner described the concept, “We are not just wanting the grape. We are going after the whole cluster.”⁵ From the cluster of a House of Peace relational network, the #NoPlaceLeft practitioner seeks to establish a multiplying church. These culturally indigenous believers can be trained on who to share with, what to say, how to disciple, and how to be the church.

³ Personal conversation with the author.

⁴ Whiteboard graphic illustration from Four Fields training session.

⁵ Personal conversation with the author.

Steve Addison explained one of the essential components of gospel movement is contagious relationships.⁶ Houses and Persons of Peace initially do not require relationship building, but instead spread the gospel along existing connections. He also observed rapid mobilization and adaptive methods consistently manifest in gospel movements.⁷ Training and releasing maturing believers on the ground allows for all three components. This aligns with Jeff Sundell's experience that, "Responsibility is the fertilizer for movement."⁸ House of Peace searches are the means, not the end, for establishing culturally-indigenous, relationally-connected, multiplying churches.

What is a church in NoPlaceLeft?

The goal of #NoPlaceLeft practitioners is to see the gospel proclaimed among people of every tribe, tongue and nation (Rev. 5:9, 7:9) and establish multiplying churches to multiply the work of the gospel. When leadership comes from the harvest and the people are released as biblical churches a significant misconception arises. Can these churches be biblical, guided by the Holy Spirit, and orthodox in their theology and practice without a seasoned spiritually mature leader? The answer is yes, but one cannot expect a newly formed church to behave and believe according to centuries of reformation tradition quickly. For reference see 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians along with Paul's other epistles. Disciple making is messy and takes time.

The context of a church planting conversation always needs to be explained to compare apples with apples. The #NoPlaceLeft movement is operating as a missions movement focused on multiplication with a noticeable apostolic impulse. All established

⁶ Steve Addison, *Movements That Change the World: Five Keys to Spreading the Gospel*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press), Kindle Location 639.

⁷ Ibid., Kindle Locations 771, 934.

⁸ Four Fields training session.

Christianity began as a movement. The Baptist and Methodist denominations of the US both spread as lay lead mission movements. This is not to say that the established church in the Western world is irrelevant, but instead to acknowledge the common misconception. The diverse Western context needs to be viewed as a mission, not as a territory to protect. In order to multiply and establish a maturing church among the diverse subcultures, leaders must be trained from the harvest. This would be considered Phase 1 of a multiplication movement.

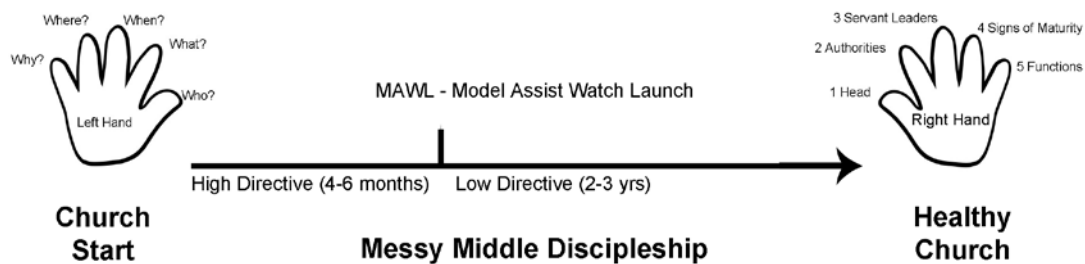
Historical experience among South Asian church planting movement leaders has demonstrated three definable phases. Phase 1 is multiplication. Here the focus is new people and new places. Consistently sharing the gospel, discipling those who believe, establishing church starts and multiplying the same. Phase 2 is foundations. Here the focus is on long-term discipleship. Leaders teach a Genesis to Revelation biblical story to effect worldview and set context for mission. Pastors are trained to teach, lead, and set the example as a follower of Jesus. Phase 3 is doctrinal. The maturing movement leaders and pastors search the scriptures to answer the questions arising in a biblical way. They are released to answer questions and wrestle with the non-negotiable tenants of the faith.⁹

In centuries old western church contexts leaders are accustomed to operating in a highly sophisticated Phase 3 environment. The expectations of leaders in this environment for other church leaders often prohibits releasing responsibility, especially among leaders coming from a biblically illiterate background. It is like the seniors on a high school basketball team frustrated with the freshman on the first day of practice

⁹ Four Fields training and personal conversations with experienced church planting movement leaders, both indigenous and traditional missionary.

because they don't know the drill. Defining the path to church health will be helpful to clear up some apostolic church planting misconceptions.

Apostolic church planting patterned after the Gospels and Acts requires maturity among churches to sustain the movement. No farmer sows seed without expecting a harvest. In the same way, gospel proclamation is done with the church in mind. The following diagram may prove helpful to understanding the ecclesiological path to church health.



Left Hand – Church Start

Every church must have a start. The beginning focuses in embedding DNA and assisting them in owning the identity of a New Testament church. The following helps define a church start DNA:

- Who is the church? Repentant baptized believers (Mark 1:15, Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38).
- What is the church? Those who repent and believe, baptize, make disciples of all nations, pray, endure persecution, love one another, practice generosity, take the Lord's Supper, worship Jesus, devote themselves to scripture, gather, and listen to leaders (Acts 2:38-47). The high directive short-term discipleship is based upon the commands of Jesus practiced by the newly formed church on the day of Pentecost. Think about how the apostles knew what to teach the church. They taught them all that Jesus commanded them. This initial high directive season of growth does the same.

- When does the church meet? Regularly (Hebrews 10:24-25) and possibly any day/everyday (Acts 2).
- Where does a church meet? Homes work well, but location is not as important as regularity. In the New Testament they met in homes (Acts 2:46, 5:42, 16:40, 17:5-7, 18:7, 20:20, etc.), the temple courts (Acts 2:46), and in a school (Acts 19:9).
- Why does the Church meet? For the Glory of God in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:31).

Right Hand – Healthy Church

The multiplying goal of church planting requires healthy churches to sustain the movement. #NoPlaceLeft is not defined by house church, simple church, small church, mega-church, traditional church, or any particular model of church. The goal is healthy churches led by the Holy Spirit to own the identity of church, mature, and accomplish mission through reproducing disciple making and church planting. The following helps define the goals for a healthy church:

- One Head – Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22-23)
- Two Authorities – The Holy Spirit (John 14:26) and the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). These two authorities are the way in which Jesus Christ exercises his headship.
- Three Servants – Pastors, Deacons, and Priesthood of believers (1 Tim. 3, Titus 1, Eph. 4)
- Four Signs of Maturity - Self-Governing (Acts 6:1-3, Acts 14:23), Self-Supporting (1 Cor. 9:6-16), Self-Reproducing (1 Thess. 1:7-8), Self-Correcting (Gal. 2:11).
- Five Functions – Worship, Fellowship, Ministry, Discipleship, and Evangelism (Acts 2).

The messy middle represents the challenging season of disciple making to move a church start to healthy church with all its successes, failures, maturity, and childishness.

The leader influencing the development uses the 3/3rds process to make disciples and the

MAWL process (Model, Assist, Watch, Launch) as a way to identify and train leaders.¹⁰

Can these churches be biblical, guided by the Holy Spirit, and orthodox in their theology and practice without a seasoned spiritually mature leader? The answer is yes, because one day they will be the seniors training the freshman.

#NoPlaceLeft in the US is currently known for our focus on new people and new places as we engage the multiplying phase of gospel movement among the diverse cultures rapidly growing all around the Western world and beyond. Allowing new believers a season to mature, learn through obedience, and take responsibility, then releasing a church start knowing there will be mistakes requires patience and understanding. Roland Allen helps us understand the tension well when he wrote:

We must learn the distinction between leaving Christians to learn what they can only learn for themselves, and abandoning them. It is a distinction which we find it hard to make; it is a lesson which we find it hard to learn. The moment any one suggests leaving new converts to find out for themselves by their experience without the guidance of a foreign missionary how to manage the simple affairs of a simple village Church, instantly the father-mother, elder-brother, directing, spirit of the energetic missionary rises in revolt and cries: "You cannot abandon them so early to their own devices." To leave new-born Churches to learn by experience is apostolic, to abandon them is not apostolic: to watch over them is apostolic, to be always nursing them is not apostolic: to guide their education is apostolic, to provide it for them is not apostolic. The missionary and the bishop must watch over their education.¹¹

Messy? Yes. Necessary? Absolutely. We should not let the common misconception of the apostolic influence inhibit gospel cooperation. The common Great Commission goal is the same. #NoPlaceLeft practitioners are ready partners in the expansion of the kingdom for established churches and long-time Christians, as well as,

¹⁰ For more information about the 3/3rds process please reference *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources) by Steve Smith and Ying Kai. Also see the article in this edition written by Carter Cox and Chuck Wood.

¹¹ Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: And the Causes That Hinder It* (Public Domain) Kindle Location 2515.

for leaders and churches still waiting in the harvest. The church is a sleeping giant and a wellspring of gospel movement practitioners waiting to be released. The foundation of disciples only needs to be trained to multiply.

Together apostolic leaders and pastor-teachers can regain the movement dynamic latent in the gospel and Jesus' Great Commission. We can grow together to regain our Great Commission expertise diverse culture by diverse culture. We can gain a kingdom foothold among people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, even those in our own neighborhoods. May God raise up laborers for his harvest that produce 30, 60, and 100 fold until there is #NoPlaceLeft!