

Integrating the Adopt-A-People Emphasis into the Local Church

by Bruce K. Camp

The Adopt-A-People emphasis and concept is an important mission strategy. Given that a missions committee has a limited amount of energy, time and money, how does it evaluate how the Adopt-A-People program should be integrated into the church? This article outlines some thoughts to help work through this process. First we will look at four steps to integrating the adoption.

1. Determine Your Priorities

Is the Adopt-A-People project going to be one of many missions emphases, or is it one of the top priorities of the church and missions committee? The missions committee must answer this question and then plan accordingly.

2. Total Integration

Assuming your church has determined that the adoption program is a top priority, the missions committee will want to think through how it can systematically and sensitively bring an Adopt-A-People emphasis into the various groups and programs within the entire church. For example, one congregation went to every adult Sunday School class to explain the adoption concept and who the church's unreached people group was. They also highlighted the project during the Vacation Bible School program so that all the children were aware of their unreached people group. If your church has a men's retreat, a women's prayer breakfast, a couple's conference, leadership meetings, or small group Bible studies, consider how it can inform each constituency periodically about its progress in evangelizing the people group.

3. Pastoral Visit

The pastor is the key information giver in a church. If he strongly believes in something, normally, it will be highlighted. If at all possible, try to

send your pastor to visit your unreached people group. If your church has multiple staff, send several of them over a period of time to visit the people group. The more leaders you assist in gaining a passion for your church's people group, the easier it will be for the church to integrate the Adopt-A-People emphasis.

4. Plan Ahead

A key to any ministry that leaders are trying to integrate into the life of the church is planning. Most church leaders and workers are willing to assist others in their ministries, as long as there is advance warning and planning. For example, if your church wants to place an Adopt-A-People quiz in the packets of college students who are going on a retreat, the time to do that is not when they are getting on the bus to head to camp. If the missions committee wants to update the congregation on its people group, it arranges opportunity with the pastor to have regular four minute missions moments about its people group.

5. Stages of Adoption

Let me outline three stages of adoption, along with thoughts about integrating these into your church. They are commitment, focus and ownership.

Commitment:

The church asks what it can do to help reach this group. It can begin by officially adopting an unreached people group and commit to praying for them until it is evangelized. A church may want to inaugurate the emphasis with an Adopt-A-People Sunday, during which the church officially adopts the people group in a worship service.

Focus:

The church needs to focus attention and resources on the goal of planting churches within the unreached people

group. Education about the unreached people group is provided continuously and integrated into the departments and ministries of the congregation. Various strategies are implemented to evangelize the people group. The church endeavors to recruit missionaries to minister to the unreached people. Short term teams are sent continually to augment the work of the missionaries. These teams might be comprised of medical, agricultural, educational or other professional workers.

For example, one church has sent several within its fellowship to maintain a presence and coordinate ministry efforts in a Muslim refugee camp. The church has sent teams of four to eight people to minister to the refugees via sports, Vacation Bible School programs, Christian films, teaching English classes, crafts and music. In addition, ministry efforts are considered in reaching displaced populations of the people group.

If a congregation has targeted the Druze of Israel and Syria, they might try to plant a church among the Druze in the United States. An international student ministry could be contacted for ideas on how they could work together to reach the Druze on various college campuses. Partnerships are also developed with other agencies and churches who have adopted this people group. National Christians who can get into the unreached people group can be located and supported. Additionally, church members are encouraged to take a course like "Perspectives on the World Christian Movement" (coordinated by the U.S. Center for World Mission) which accents the biblical and strategic rationale for targeting the unreached peoples of the world. Ultimately, a variety of international ministry opportunities (tentmaking missions) are promoted and encouraged.

Ownership:

In the case where the unreached people group has not been targeted by a church mission agency, the church must sponsor efforts to reach them. Agencies can be utilized as they partner with the vision and strategies of the local church. It is a rare church that can operate competently at this level. Great expertise is needed as the fellowship takes full ownership for this level of adoption and the opportunity to make significant difference in the world for Christ is tremendous. Networking with many individuals and organizations is foundational to this step.

While the local church is the catalyst in evangelizing the unreached people group, most local churches realize that they cannot do it alone. They need outside advice and assistance in training missionaries, guidance to the missions committee on security issues, help in recruiting individuals from outside the church to participate, etc. There are a number of organizations which provide such training. Some even exist for the sole purpose of networking together with churches that are sending church planting teams to unreached peoples.

Creative Ideas

In closing let me suggest some ideas to inform and involve the congregation about its unreached people. Below is a list of ideas that might be used and adapted:

1. Traveling Suitcase

One church bought an old suitcase and filled it with a wide variety of materials on their people group, the Kurds. Included in the suitcase were such items as: a welcome folder, a Kurdish Reader, a coffee table picture book on the Kurds, Kurdish music, a National Geographic issue on the Kurds, a video about the Kurds taped from a television special, a jigsaw puzzle of the Middle East, prayer requests, a list of opportunities for further involvement, puzzles, games, framed photos, Iraqi

coins, etc. Families in the church can check the suitcase out for two weeks at a time. This suitcase has been used especially by parents who home-school.

2. Ethnic Dinner Kick-off

To launch its Adopt-A-People pro-

gram, one congregation had a kick-off dinner in a nice Chinese restaurant, since the church was adopting an unreached people in China. An expert on China addressed the gathering and then a leader from the church spoke on what it meant to adopt this people group.

3. Muslim Dinner

A medium sized church hosted a Middle Eastern dinner in the home of one of the members of the church. To accommodate the crowd, all the furniture was removed and people sat on the floor. A cassette tape of Middle Eastern music was played in the background as the church people ate food from that part of the world. A converted Muslim speaker was brought in to share his testimony and explain his ministry.

4. Book Marks

A 2.5 by 8.5 inch cardboard book mark was made for every attendee of the church. On one side of the book mark were prayer requests for the unreached people group and on the other side was a quote about the importance of prayer by J. O. Fraser. It read: "I am not asking you just to give 'help' in prayer as a sort of sideline, but I am trying to roll the main responsibility of the prayer warfare on you. I want you to take the burden of these people on your shoulders. I want you to wrestle with God for them."

5. World Marketplace

During its missions conference, a church asked every one of its adult Sunday School classes to make a booth which would highlight a country or unreached people group. The purpose of each display was to emphasize the needs of that particular country/people

group. If there were no missionary available to man the display, then the Sunday School class would occupy it. Some classes cooked food characteristic of the region; others dressed in the clothes typically worn in that part of the world. Since many classes were involved, numerous people had the opportunity to learn about missions even before

the conference started. On Sunday morning, the booths were placed in front of the sanctuary so that everyone who attended to the church service had to pass through the marketplace. While the service was going on, all the children walked through the village marketplace and learned about the various needs in the world.

6. Missions Committee Retreat

To help bring the missions committee up-to-date about world evangelism, one missions chairman scheduled an all day retreat. He began by asking the committee to define missions. After writing their answers on a white board, then they watched the video on prayer and missions. After seeing the video, the chairman then went back to the white board, and the committee discussed their previous definitions of missions. The committee then discussed an article about priorities in world missions. By the end of all the discussions, the committee had come to the realization that missions is cross-cultural evangelism and that reaching the unreached has to be their top priority. They then discussed the Adopt-A-People program and how it would work in their church.

7. Loose Change Offering

During its missions conference, one church brought all its adult Sunday School classes together for a presentation on unreached peoples. At the end of

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the class period, the teacher passed out labels and jar lids and asked each family to collect loose change for a fund which was established for the congregation's unreached people group. Additionally, in the church foyer, a display was set up which explained the loose change project. Labels and jar lids were made available to the entire church family. The money is collected on the last Sunday of each month. The church is now in their second year of loose change offering, and the missions chairperson is very pleased with the results.

8. *Weekly Prayer*

There is a missions insert each week in the Sunday church bulletin. On the front side is information about the missionary of the week. On the back side is information about various mission concerns. There is always a paragraph highlighting the church's unreached people group. The pastor, in his morning prayer, always ties his prayer in with the information on the people group. In

addition, this insert is distributed to all the home Bible studies and prayer groups. Information for this insert on the unreached people is obtained by the missions committee. It has asked every missionary who works with their group to send to the church their prayer letter, even though the church does not support them. A formal commitment is made annually in the church service to pray and give so that the church's adopted group will be evangelized.

9. *Perspectives Class*

While doing research for this article, one of the resources individuals continually referred to was the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course. As a result of this course, church members were willing to be involved actively in reaching the unreached. One mission pastor said: "The Perspectives class is foundational to everything we do. It is one of our mission anchors." Information regarding the Perspectives class can be obtained from the U.S. Center for World Mission.

Conclusion.

Remember that the goal is to see a church planted in the unreached people group that has been adopted. Integration of that people into the church will be most effective by keeping this goal in mind. If the goal can be realized by supporting nationals and sending radio broadcasts into the region, then that needs to be done. If it can be accomplished most effectively by tentmakers, then we need to take that approach. In other words, the appropriate strategy is whatever it takes for a congregation to plant the church among the unreached people group that has been adopted.

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