

## **WHY ARE WE NOT DEVELOPING INDEPENDENT MISSION CHURCHES**

The development of dependent mission churches is not good, but most mission organizations and churches are creating, sustaining, and encouraging a culture of permanent dependency. As a result of this method of doing mission work, strong indigenous groups do not develop and the sponsoring churches are a major part of the reason. The prevailing mode is to help "start the church" by providing U.S. start-up funding for everything. This model lays the foundation for dependency. The alternative is to develop and work through mature local churches to identify local people who want to fully trust in the Lord rather than depending on the sponsoring church and the U.S. dollars, sending them out to start new congregations, requiring that the work depend on local churches. This requires the development in local churches of an indigenous minded local leadership. It also requires a transition in the role of any U.S. missionary presence. U.S. missionaries must learn to transition from executive directors of everything to being simply members of the local church, contributing to the work using their talents just like other members. Failure to make this transition leads to national workers and missionaries who seek to become executive directors of everything, simply because they are following the model they have observed.

Regardless of how much emphasis we put on the need for self-sufficiency, local churches tend to revert to dependency relationships. On a recent mission trip, the members of a local church (Church X) asked to meet with me. Church X began three years ago with no dependency on U.S. funds. It began when a church member from another city was visiting her mother. During her visit, she evangelized two young men who are now leaders in the church. (The church member later moved to City X where Church X exists.) Over the past three years, others have been evangelized and they are now meeting in the living room of the church member who initiated the effort, with as many as 20 present. They know the need to do things on their own, but the purpose of the meeting was to present to me an opportunity to purchase land and build a building since they have volunteers among the new members who would donate their time. I listened as they shared their dream and tried to ask good questions about timing, costs, and what the volunteers would do for a living while they were working full-time on a new church building. After listening and asking several questions, I politely told them that they were not considering all of the alternatives. What would be the cost of renting an adequate facility that the local church could afford? The cost, no more than \$150 per month, would be a challenge for the church but was a workable solution to allow them to grow numerically with the possibility of moving again to another rented location as they grew. I suggested the best involvement from the U.S. would not be dollars but rather support for evangelistic campaigns.

This story shows that the existing dependency model that has virtually permeated our past mission work is easily transferred to new congregations, even those established independent of U.S. funds. What is required is a new way of looking to and depending on God. The "need" for a church building deceived the local leaders into returning to the dependency model which they recognized as normal, legitimate, and worthy in the face of unique and pressing opportunities.

If the local church learns lessons of stewardship, generosity, and personal involvement through facing the problem with their own resources, God will be glorified, the church will be strengthened, and the future will be more secure.