

Is This Really Happening?
A Report on CMA for 2006-2007
By Neil Cole

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead

In 2006 Church Multiplication Associates conducted 35 Greenhouse Training events in 14 cities and 11 nations. There were over 2000 people trained in our Greenhouse events last year by 14 different trainers. We are definitely growing, but are we growing through transformed disciples and church multiplication?

We had almost 400 people attend our national leadership conference January of 2007. Two years earlier we had a leadership conference and had nearly 100 attend. This could indicate that we are still doubling each year, but that could be an exaggerated claim. We need better data to know how well we are actually doing.

At the conference a study was conducted by an outside source. Leadership Network sponsored a “House Church Report” conducted by Ed Stetzer’s ministry surveying some of our leaders who attended the conference. 97 leaders responded representing 53 organic churches.

82% of the leaders were being mentored and/or coached by other individuals as one of their primary means of training, which is important in a multiplication movement. Discipleship in organic churches was significant in 79% of those in the survey group. These numbers are probably much higher than conventional Christian leadership would claim, but in my opinion they are not high enough.

From the 53 organic churches represented in the survey, there were 52 new churches started out of them in 2006 alone. I can’t complain about that number (nearly 100% reproduction), but I do want to know which church was the one that didn’t plant a church and ruined our perfect score (just kidding).

There were 34 church plants started in the past 5 years by the 97 leaders surveyed alone. And of those 34 churches planted, 10 of them had gone on to start new churches themselves. In other words, 30% of the daughter churches had grand-daughter churches over the past 5 years. In a sample of almost 100 Christian leaders there were 34 new church starts out of them in the past 5 years and 30% of their daughter churches reproduced to a third generation. That is a pretty high level of missional involvement. But again, I think we can and should do better.

The 53 organic churches in the survey reported seeing 189 people who became followers of Christ (first time commitments) in 2006. That is an average of 3.5 people coming to Christ per organic church in a single year. Considering the average organic church has about 12 people in it that is a high percentage of conversion growth for any Western nation—higher than 25% conversion rate. Of course that is simply an educated estimate based on the survey data. That is not confirmed data.

CMA is not just a US movement. We had representatives from 11 or 12 different nations at our conference where this survey was taken. If those churches outside of the US were taken under consideration there would have been 944 decisions in 2006 out of 55 churches (yep, if you do the math, two churches overseas account for 755 conversions, things do change when you cross borders). That would mean we are averaging over 17 conversions per organic church, which would probably be a conversion rate higher than 100% in our churches. But this study was really looking at the movement in the US, where we are more likely at closer to 25%.

The Center for Missional Research (CMR) of the North American Mission Board (Southern Baptist) conducted a survey of 3600 Americans. In it, 26.3% of the respondents indicated that they meet weekly with a group of 20 people or less to pray and study scriptures as their primary form of spiritual or religious gathering. Of course that can be an organic church, or a terrorist cell waiting to blow up a building.

Of those who identified themselves as born-again Christians, 42.1 percent said that they met weekly with a group of 20 or less people as their primary form of spiritual or religious gathering. CMR discovered that 50 out of 3,600 adults surveyed attended a group of 20 or less, but "rarely" or "never" attend a place of worship. This alone, accounts for almost 1.4 percent of the American population. Sociologists have shown that if just 2% of a population is committed to a specific cause they can positively affect the entire populace. We are getting close and gaining ground daily.

All this to say that there is something happening. Last year Time Magazine did an article on the rising movement. This year the LA Times did an article on it. I was interviewed last week by a Japanese newspaper (with a circulation of 2.5 million) about our movement. I was also interviewed by the Wall Street Journal this week. Something is going on. We are at the start of a new move. Will this be a truly transformative reformation of the church or a short-lived fad? I am praying for the former but working hard out of fear of the latter.