

MISSIONARY CHURCH PLANTING IN GERMANY:
A SURVEY OF THREE EVANGELICAL DENOMINATIONS

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Introduction

Working as a missionary church planter in Germany for over two decades, it has been my privilege to observe many new works develop from inception to birth, move through the various stages of development, and then finally reach maturity. Some of these churches were planted by missionaries, but most were planted by German pastors. Only a few of these works have flourished; most have made the gradual progress that is quite typical for the German context. It is sad to say that some of these new works peaked quickly, and have been in a declining mode for a longer period of time. In spite of the many challenges of planting churches in Germany, my heart always beats just a bit faster when I think about this all important matter. As a missionary I continually pray that the “Lord of the harvest” would raise up many church planters to minister in the Land of Luther. This paper will hopefully inform future workers about the need as well as the church planting scene in Germany. My prayer is that these men and women will respond to the urgent call of the Master. At the same time I want to enter into an ongoing dialogue that is taking place among missionary church planters in Germany who desire to see many more churches planted than in the past.

I will attempt to answer the broad question: how effective have missionary church planters been who have initiated German speaking congregations in the last thirty years? I will specifically be looking at three German free church denominations who have profited the most from missionary church planters. It must be pointed out that these three denominations have also planted more churches than all other free church denominations combined. The three denominations in this paper will include the *Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchliche-Gemeinden* (Union of Baptist Churches - BEFG), the *Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden* (Union of Pentecostal Free Churches - BFP), and the *Bund Freier Evangelischer Gemeinden* (Evangelical Free Church - FEG).

Other underlying questions to be addressed will include: What past and present models are being used in missionary church planting in Germany? Are there new paradigm shifts on the horizon for missionary church planters? How have partnership relationships developed between missions agencies and the denominations mentioned above? As various church planting missionaries and key denominational leaders actively reflect on these questions, my desire is that more insight will be gained which will foster

the planting of even more churches in Germany. I concur with the enthusiasm of GEM (Greater European Mission) missionary Fred McRae about the present opportunities in Germany.

The situation for church planting in Germany has really turned the corner and as a church planter I would say Germany, relatively speaking, compared to where it used to be, is a church planting paradise.¹

A Historical Overview of three Denominations

The BEFG

The first Baptist church in Germany dates back to 1834 in Hamburg. The merchant Johann Gerhard Oncken and six fellow believers were baptized in the Elbe River by an American Theology Professor with the name of Barnas Sears. Johann Oncken's spiritual journey began with his conversion many years earlier in a London Methodist church. In 1824 he was sent back to his homeland as a missionary with the non-denominational organization called the "Continental Society for the Diffusion of Religious Knowledge over the Continent of Europe" and based himself in Hamburg. Oncken is considered the father of the German Baptist movement which spread from Hamburg to many other European countries. In 1849 the Union of Baptist Churches was officially organized, in spite of strong religious opposition and intense political discrimination. By the time of Oncken's death in 1884, this movement which practiced the "priesthood of all believers" had 30,000 members gathered in 165 churches in a dozen European countries.²

In 1941 the Brethren joined together with the Baptist to form an even stronger Union. Due to the fact that East Germany became a part of the East Block after World War II, the BEFG was divided into an East and West Division during 1969. In 1991, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, this division was once again united. The BEFG is an active member of the World Baptist Alliance that is represented in 200 countries of the world. Interestingly enough, the Southern Baptist Convention pulled out of the WBA in 2004, and until recently all SBC missionaries in Germany have worked closely with the BEFG.

¹ "Church Planting in Germany sees Huge Growth", Christianity Today, (July 28, 2004).

² "Ein Überblick des Kirchengeschichtlers Günter Balders", (<http://www.baptisten.org/>).

The BFP

The first Pentecostal churches were established in the German cities of Velbert, St. Ingbert, and Berlin between 1906 and 1909. Today these churches are a part of the BFP. The BFP traces its beginnings to the *Erweiterte Brüderkonferenz* (Conference of the Brethren) during May 1947 in Stuttgart. This conference was attended by 25 people from various German Pentecostal churches and set the stage for formal organization.

Due to the chaotic conditions in Germany after the war, there was a new desire by various Pentecostals leaders to seek fellowship and closer cooperation. As a result of this desire for closer cooperation among various Pentecostal churches the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Christen in Deutschland* (The Christian Worker's Fellowship of Germany - ACD) was constituted as a non-profit organization in 1954. The Bible School, first located in Stuttgart then in Erzhausen, was established by Assemblies of God (USA) missionaries in 1951. It (the Bible School) played an important role in bringing unity in a divided Pentecostal movement.³

In 1974 the ACD changed its name to BFP after receiving the much sought after legal status of *Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts* (corporation of public jurisdiction). In May 1988, the *Volksmision* (VM) with churches located primarily in Southern Germany affiliated with the BFP. In 1991 after the fall of communism 13 Elim churches that were part of the BEFG in East Germany joined the BFP, and in May 2000 about 30 *Ecclesia* (ECCA) churches formally joined ranks with the BFP.⁴

The BFP is a member of the Pentecostal European Fellowship which is now headquartered in Brussels. PEF office space is provided by the Assemblies of God (USA) ministry center located in Rhode-St.-Genese. Ingolf Ellssel, who is the current superintendent of the BFP, is also the PEF Chairman. The BFP is an active participant in the World Pentecostal Fellowship and has a close fraternal relationship with the World Assemblies of God.

The FEG

The first FEG church was started in Wuppertal during 1854 as a revival swept the area. Twenty years later 22 churches joined together to form the FEG. For many years

³ Paul Clark, *Orientation Manual: For New Missionary Arrivals in Germany*, (Unpublished but available from the author, 2002):47.

⁴ Ibid, 47.

most of the FEG churches remained located in the Rhineland and bordering areas of Hessen. Forty years ago there were only 4 FEG churches in all of Southern Germany. Today that number has increased to 70.⁵ The FEG is a member of the World Free Evangelical Churches.

All three of the above mentioned denominations are active members of the *Vereinigung Evangelischer Freikirchen* (Federation of Free Evangelical Churches – VEF). The VEF offers a platform for the free churches of Germany to present themselves in a united way to the public eye. Due to the cultural dominance of the Lutheran and Catholic Churches, most free churches are still viewed by Germans as cults. Free church according to Dietrich Schindler:

defines an evangelical denomination or nondenominational body unaffiliated with the established Protestant Church. The adjective “free” has historically been used to describe three issues: the freedom of each individual member to confess the member’s faith, the freedom of the church from taxation, and the separation of the Church from the State.⁶

The VEF has established various working groups where cooperation takes place in the area of media, church planting, compassion ministries, youth ministries, and children ministries. Other members of the VEF include the Methodists, Nazarenes, Salvation Army, and several other smaller denominations. The Seventh Day Adventists and the Moravian church are associate members of the VEF. The VEF represents about 260,000 free church Christians.⁷

All three denominations are active participants in the *Evangelische Allianz* (Evangelical Alliance - EA). The EA’s main goal or objective is to bring together Christians from different denominations and organizations for prayer, fellowship, and proclamation of the Gospel throughout Germany. At the local level the EA is organized in most German cities. Up until the past 10 - 15 years Pentecostal and charismatic churches were not allowed to participate. Today there still remain several local groups in Germany that do not allow Pentecostal or charismatic participation. Each year around the second week of January the EA Week of Prayer takes place throughout the country of

5 “Wir wollen in 25 Jahren die Zahl der Gemeinden verdoppeln“, *Idea Spektrum*, (25,): 18-19.

6 Dietrich Gerhard Schindler, *Creating and Sustaining a Church Planting Multiplication Movement in Germany*. (Dissertation, available from the Author, 2006): 30-31.

7 “1.500 “neue” evangelische Gemeinden“, *IDEA Sepktrum*, (36, 1999): 6.

Germany, and believers from all different churches come together for prayer and fellowship.

The BEFG is a full member of the German Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen (Ecumenical Council -ACK) at the national level, as well as the regional level. The FEG is an associate member of the ACK at the national level and has associate and sometimes full membership at the regional level. The BFP does not have an official relationship with the ACK at the national level, however at the regional level some of its districts have become associate or full members.

The ACK provides an avenue for free churches to become more acceptable in German society as they relate officially to the Catholic and Lutheran churches, which dominate religious affairs in society. It becomes more difficult for German institutions and governmental agencies to label free churches as cults if they are officially a part of the ACK. Also the ACK offers an excellent forum for free churches to educate the two state churches on doctrinal and ecclesiological issues that may not fit into Catholic or Lutheran theology. This writer remembers being at one ACK meeting in Southwest Germany where a Catholic representative became very irate because the BEFG was evangelizing and trying to plant a church in his area that he claimed had been Christian since the 8th Century. At this point in the meeting the free churches united together, pointing out the major difference between being a nominal Christian and someone having a personal relationship with Christ.

Because of this type of mindset and others, the environment can be very difficult in Germany for Evangelical churches in their efforts to reach the lost by planting new churches. Roland Werner, himself an Evangelical Lutheran, describes the difficult state of affairs that every missionary must confront.

Pervasive existential and liberal theology has reinforced the nominalism that has marked the mainline church for several generations.⁸

To top this off, most of the Catholic Dioceses and Lutheran Synods in Germany have hired *Sektenbeauftragte* (cult expert theologians) who issue statements and pamphlets about various religious groups. It is sad to say, but many of the *Sektenbeauftragte* label free churches and especially Pentecostals and charismatics as

⁸ "Germany: The Church and Missions Today", World Pulse Archives, (www.Lausaneworldpulse.com, September, 2003).

being dangerous cults. This type of labeling presents many problems for local free churches. When new converts decide to join a free church and leave one of the state churches they must go to the appropriate government office (city hall or probate court) to officially deregister.⁹ From this point on their church tax will no longer be withheld from their salary.

An overview of Numerical Data

BEFG membership has declined in recent years by over 3% due in part to conservative Russian-German *Aussiedler* (immigrant) congregations who have pulled out of the Union.¹⁰ In the same 10 year period the BFP experienced a dramatic rise in membership of 51% followed by the FEG with an increase in membership of over 15%.

	<u>Membership</u>		<u>Number of Churches</u>	
	2004	1994	2004	1994
BEFG	84,975	87,972	851	902
BFP	39,500 ¹¹	26,000	598	351
FEG	34,100	29,448	410	367 ¹²

It is important to note that 20% of all BFP churches are ethnic congregations. This figure reflects the growing immigrant population that has migrated to Germany in recent years. Over half of all BFP ethnic congregations are of African background.¹³ Also since the 1990s many independent charismatic churches have joined the BFP as they have seen the need for belonging to an organization that provides a spiritual covering as well as legal status. It bears noting that 43% of all BFP local churches have a membership of 30 or less.¹⁴

⁹ Paul Clark, Orientation Manual, 54.

¹⁰ Wilfried Bohlen interview, Director of Missions for the Union of Baptist Churches in Germany. (June 22, 2006 in Leichlingen, Germany).

¹¹ "BFP-Statistik", BFP Bundessekretär, (Erzhausen, Germany, 2006).

¹² "In Deutschland wurden in den letzten zehn Jahre mehr als 1.500 Gemeinden gegründet", Idea Spektrum, (25, 2004): 17.

¹³ Hartmut Knorr, BFP Secretary, email correspondence. (September 7, 2006).

¹⁴ „BFP – Statistische Auswertung“, BFP Bundessekretär Gerhard Oertel, (Erzhausen, Germany, 2005).

The Methodists in Germany, one of the larger VEF denominations, have a membership just over 36,000 which indicates a decline of 10% since 1994. The Adventists with a membership of just over 35,000 members have had marginal growth in the same 10 year period, but have 21 less churches as compared to 1994.¹⁵

Total number of German speaking church plants by denomination 1970-2006
(This includes missionary-lead church plants)

BEFG	70
BFP	275
FEG	160

BFP church plants broken down by decade

1970s	31
1980s	67
1990s	107
2000 – 2006	70

Number of German speaking churches planted by foreign missionaries by denomination 1975 – 2006¹⁶

BEFG	9 Churches	0 daughter churches have resulted from these church plants
BFP	33 Churches	4 daughter churches have resulted from these church plants
FEG	31 Churches	8 daughter churches have resulted from these church plants

As a comparison the Methodist Church in Germany has not planted one German speaking church with foreign missionaries. However, two missionaries since 1970 from the US have helped to plant several ethnic churches.¹⁷ The Adventists in Germany, due to their church structure, do not allow foreign missionaries to plant churches.¹⁸

¹⁵ "In Deutschland wurden in den letzten zehn Jahre mehr als 1.500 Gemeinden gegründet", Idea Spektrum, 17.

¹⁶ Paul Clark. Summary of Churches Planted by Missionaries affiliated with the BFP, BEFG and FEG in Germany: 1970-2006. See Appendix.

¹⁷ Eberhard Schilling, Church Development Secretary for the United Methodist Church of Germany, email correspondence. (August 30, 2006).

¹⁸ Holger Teubert, Press Spokesman for the Seventh Day Adventists in Germany, email correspondence. (September 1, 2006).

Percent of missionary-lead church plants compared to total of church plants by denomination 1970-2006

BEFG	12%
BFP	12%
FEG	19%

Origin of missionary church planters working with German denominations: 1975 -2006

BEFG

9 Southern Baptist Convention (IMB) USA

BFP

18 Assemblies of God	USA
6 Pentecostal Church	Norway (one church plant was a joint project with Swedes)
3 Pentecostal Church	Sweden
2 Pentecostal Church	Finland
2 Pentecostal Church	Holland
1 Liberty/Globe Missions	USA
1 Independent local church	USA

It is interesting to note that missionaries working with the BFP come from other European countries and not just North America as experienced by the BEFG and FEG.

FEG

9	TEAM	USA
7	EFCA	USA
8	GEM	USA
1	Liebenzeller	USA
2	Koinania	USA
1	Covenant Church,	USA
1	Pocket Bible League	USA
1	Independent	Switzerland

Erhard Michel, director of FEG home missions, does an excellent work in partnering with different missions agencies and making each group of missionaries feel at home under the FEG umbrella. This is no easy task in light of the various different

doctrinal positions brought from North American by missionaries of various church backgrounds.

Number of churches planted by missionaries in East Germany by denominations
1990 - 2006

BEFG 3
BFP 13
FEG 3

AoG Missionaries from the US have started 22 new churches in the last 30 years. All but two of these churches are now affiliated with the BFP.

1970s 2
1980s 4
1990s 12
2000-2006 4¹⁹

Cities where there has been a doubling up of missionary church planting

City	Year	Denomination	Missions Agency
Augsburg	1984	BFP	Pentecostal Ch, Norway
Augsburg	1987	BFP	Globe/Liberty USA
E. Berlin	1992	FEG	Covenant Church, USA
E. Berlin	2003	BFP	AoG, USA
Koblenz	1975	BFP	Pentecostal Church, Norway
Koblenz	1989	FEG	Koinia, USA
Magdeburg	1998	FEG	Liebenzeller, USA
Magdeburg	2000	BEFG	IMB, USA
Mainz	1981	FEG	GEM, USA
Mainz	1982	BFP	Holland
Neuwied	1991	BFP	AoG, USA
Neuwied	1996	FEG	GEM, USA
Potsdam	1995	BFP	Aog, USA

¹⁹ Paul Clark, Orientation Manual, 54.

Potsdam	1996	FEG	Independent, USA
Saarbrücken	1981	FEG	GEM, USA
Saarbrücken	1984	BFP	AoG, USA

Partnership

Missionary partnership and the FEG

Former EFCA missionary Craig Ott summarizes the growing relationship between the FEG and various missions agencies which have planted churches in Germany.

The partnership between the EFCA mission and the BFeG was and is outstanding. It developed in the late 1970's and became the model which GEM, TEAM and the Evangelical Covenant Church missionaries used in forging their partnership agreements with the BFeG. It also became a model for partnerships in other Eastern European countries. After language school, missionaries do internships under a German pastor. They are also fully accepted and integrated into the German ministerial fellowships. Planning is done in careful consultation with the German home mission leadership. The church planters have access to all the denominational resources.²⁰

Edward Rommen stresses that when missionaries are integrated into a larger fellowship, they will discover national pastors as resource people who will assist in the continued development of the new churches that are being planted.²¹ During the 1960s and 1970s some missionary agencies worked independent of the larger German Evangelical denominations. Then in the 1980s, as one example, GEM moved from independence to cooperative church planting with the FEG. Former GEM missionary Forrest Weiland describes what took place and the benefits that followed.

We desired for our missionaries to serve in the capacity of their gifts, but along side Germans. Many decisions that we normally made as American pioneer church planters, became unnecessary, as soon as we began working with qualified German leaders who began to make these decisions for us. Cooperating with a German denomination is always helpful and encouraging, and at times gave impetus to implement new ideas. Actually one of the greatest experiences was merging our independent work with the FeG.²²

²⁰ Craig Ott, email correspondence. (August 10, 2006).

²¹ Edward Rommen, "Planting in Tandem for Church Growth", *Evangelical Missionary Quarterly*, (January 1985): 54.

²² Forrest Weiland, email correspondence. (September 4, 2006).

Gary Cowin stresses that, “there should be a linkage as much as possible of all local congregations in a national fellowship. People need connectedness to God’s people beyond their local context.”²³ TEAM missionary church planter Dietrich Schindler highlights what partnership actually looks like when working with the FEG.

Missionaries come with support in hand, a learning posture, and a positive attitude. Sometimes they can be more effective than nationals because they have not been inoculated against new strategies or tactics. Generally, the author of this paper finds North Americans to be more forward looking and pragmatic than their German counterparts because they often come from home churches with adequate training. Currently, seven couples from North America serve in the Inland-Mission. A partnership between nationals and expatriates, in which mutual respect and learning together, can make for enhanced church planting effectiveness.²⁴

Missionary partnership and the BFP

In the Evangelical missiological literature hardly any reference has been made to Pentecostal missionary church planting endeavors in Germany. The BFP, as the FEG and BFEG, has profited greatly from missionary church planting efforts. As the BFP (formally ACD) was officially organized in the early 1950s, Erwin Lorenz became its first superintendent. Lorenz had received his Bible School education in Sweden, and thusly there has always been Scandinavian Pentecostal missionary presence in Germany. However, it was AoG missionaries from the USA who provided manpower and finances to initiate the BFP Bible School. Within a few years AoG missionaries turned the Bible School located in Erzhausen over to the national church. During the 1960s and 1970s there seems to have been some tension between the leadership of the BFP and the AoG missions leadership in Springfield, Missouri, relative to the issue of missionary placement without BFP consultation. The BFP felt slighted in this procedural matter, and there were hard feelings on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁵ However, it bears pointing out

²³ Gary Corwin , “A second look: Church Planting 101”, *Evangelical Missionary Quarterly*, (April, 2005): 142.

²⁴ Dietrich Gerhard Schindler, *Creating and Sustaining a Church Planting Multiplication Movement*, 43-44.

²⁵ The Author has copies of several letter exchanges between Erwin Lorenz and the leadership of the Assemblies of God Division of Foreign Missions in Springfield, Missouri. The letters are dated from 1960- 1967.

that during this era most AoG missionaries working in Germany enjoyed a very close relationship with the BFP.

As a new generation of AoG missionaries arrived in Germany during the 1980s and especially the 1990s, dramatic improvement took place in partnering with the BFP. One reason for this change was that, as with the FEG and the BEFG, AoG missionaries began planting churches in areas where the BFP was not able to go. As a result, more and more AoG missionaries became involved at the regional level with their German colleagues in reaching out to more and more communities with the Gospel. In the last 15 years various AoG missionaries have held leadership positions at the regional and the national level within the BFP. This too, has fostered an even stronger relationship between missionaries and the national church. All AoG missionary church planters in Germany hold ministerial credentials with the BFP. I have found that it is much more advantageous in the public arena to emphasize my affiliation with a German free church as opposed to mentioning that I am a missionary being sent out by the AoG, USA.

AoG missionary church planters were able to provide initial funding for the purchase of seven buildings in the past eighteen years. The remaining mortgages on these facilities were financed through the BFP church loan revolving fund. When one sees the excellent partnership that can take place between missionaries and a national church, it is sad that many still want to work independently. AoG missionary Matt Riegel notes:

One mistake that many missionaries make is the “work alone” mentality. Church planting is now a new pattern for church growth. No one must do the work alone. The BFP has many resources and people who work alongside a church planter. At the same time, culture is changing, so a church planter must work with those who are watching what is happening with cultural trends. The BFP has both.²⁶

Another AoG missionary Steve Walent underscores Riegel’s assessment why some missionaries go it alone.

This may be due to a region where relationships amongst pastors are not real strong, so the missionary feels alone and has no choice. I have found in Saxony, that when we build strong relationship within the region, other pastors and churches are very willing to help and get involved. An independent attitude is one of the great hazards for missionary church planters.²⁷

²⁶ Matt Riegel, Assemblies of God missionary to Germany, email correspondence. (September 1, 2006).

²⁷ Steve Walent, Assemblies of God missionary church planter in East Germany, email correspondence. (September 1, 2006).

AoG missionary Steve Dunn explains further the advantage of closely networking with the BFP.

I have lived and worked for many years in the South Bavarian District and have developed strong relationships with the pastors in this region. The fellowship at regional meetings has been a source of encouragement. When I went on vacation or on deputation, different pastors filled in for the Sunday services, and I was able to leave contact information from one or two pastors for the congregation should an emergency arise. At one crisis point early in the church plant, the music team walked out just before our first major outreach and other regional churches sent us help for the outreach. Everything went smoothly. At the time of the Moosburg church plant the GGW in the BFP was just developing. Therefore we did not have actual support for the church planting process. When we started a branch in the city of Erding, we were able to send our core group to the church planters school. This was encouraging for those attending.²⁸

Having the right attitude and expectations from the beginning will help any missionary to enjoy his relationship with the national church.

At the beginning of this learning process, all is new and I can not come with preconceived ideas of what I want to do. All my dreams and desires must be wrapped in the German culture and their needs. That mentality tends to soften "challenges".²⁹

Missionary partnership and the BEFG

As noted in the previous section, at least 9 BEFG churches have been planted by Southern Baptist Convention missionaries sent out by the International Missions Board since the 1980s. Compared to the BFP and FEG my interview research has indicated that in recent years the partnership between the BEFG and IMB has not been all that smooth. There are many reasons why this may be so. Could it be that the BEFG being Germany's largest free church denomination has not deemed it necessary to pursue missionary church planting involvement as the BFP or the FEG? Could it also be that the sheer size and scope of the IMB does not permit it to coordinate their activities in great detail with the BEFG in Germany? Even before the SBC pulled out of the WBA in 2004, the IMB has gone in a new direction in terms of church planting. For the future the IMB will no longer coordinate their efforts in Germany with the BEFG. I will write about this new

²⁸ Steve Dunn, Assemblies of God church planting missionary to Germany, email Correspondence. (September 13, 2006).

²⁹ Matt Riegel, email correspondence.

approach later. Even though future IMB missionaries will plant new churches in Germany, it is possible that these churches may become a part of the BEFG.

Wilfried Bohlen, who directs the BEFG missions department, has praised IMB church planting missionaries for demonstrating a high level of motivation. He has also been impressed by effective husband and wife teams who work together to get new works off the ground. He has observed that IMB church planters are *kontaktfreudig* (people friendly) which is a necessary prerequisite for reaching secular Germans.³⁰

Critically Bohlen notes, that in the past some IMB missionaries have not done an effective job in communicating with the BEFG. Also, some IMB missionaries have not even taken the time to relate to local German pastors in the cities where they live. He finds it regretful that some American missionary church planters have not found it necessary to honor the way membership transfers are handled in Germany between the various free churches at the local level.³¹ I too have tried to explain to my missionary colleagues the necessity of recognizing these agreements. This practice simply means, anytime a member leaves one church and begins attending another church there needs to be pastoral consultation in both churches. Such a practice is definitely foreign in the North American church setting, where people show up continually from neighboring churches.

Church Planting in the FEG

Erhard Michel who coordinates the *Inland Mission* (home missions) for the FEG has hired church planting consultant Bob Logan to work closely with his denomination in the last 10 years. Logan was one of the speakers at the FEG *Inland Mission* 100th Anniversary in 2004. Michel has successfully brought the awareness of church planting to a new level in the FEG. Michel is highly esteemed by all other German free churches as the church planting expert par excellence. He often is invited to speak at other free church denominations in the area of church planting.³²

³⁰ Wilfried Bohlen interview.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Eine Gemeinde, die Geld braucht, sollte evangelisieren“, *Idea Spektrum*, (27, 2004): 9.

Michel has been convinced by his mentor Logan that if a church needs money the best thing to do would be to plant a new church. There are great resources available in the harvest. The yearly budget of the FEG is around 4.8 million Euro (6 million Dollars) and 30% of these funds are given to home missions with primary focus on church planting. Each year support is gradually decreased for the new church and after 10 years all support should be stopped.³³ This pattern of support highlights the slowness of church planting development in Germany as compared to North America and other parts of the world.

Even though the FEG has made great strides in church planting, Michel is still not satisfied with the mind-set of his denomination:

Many of our church members live in a Christian sub-culture. Thusly they are not aware of how few Christians there are in Germany. We are convinced that people without Jesus are lost, but that does not seem to effect our evangelistic effort whatsoever.³⁴

Michel is very much aware that established churches in target cities for church planting are not usually thrilled when the FEG comes to start a new church.

We do not base our decision upon what other Christians want us to do, we are only concerned about what those want who do not know Christ.³⁵

It must be pointed out, however, that most Evangelical churches accept the fact that there need to be new church plants by other denominations in their cities.³⁶ Generally when a church planter moves to a new city, he meets with the local Evangelical Alliance and then joins this inter denominational association from the very beginning.

The most successful church plants in the FEG have been when mother churches intentionally allow a group of people to leave their church to be led by a missionary church planter.³⁷ Here it must be pointed out that the FEG has been much more successful in convincing their churches to mother daughter churches than the BEFG or

33 Ibid.

34 "Wir wollen in 25 Jahren die Zahl der Gemeinden verdoppeln", *Idea Spektrum*, (25,2004):18-19.

35 Ibid.

36 Generally speaking in German cities with a population between 50,000 and 200,000 there are a handful of Evangelical churches. Usually the BFP, BEFG, FEG, The Methodists, and Adventists each have one church. It is not common that one of these free church denomination would have two churches in a city.

37 Erhard Michel interview, Director of Home Missions for the Free Evangelical Church of Germany. (June 21,2006 in Witten, Germany).

the BFP. Again, Michel's influence is strongly felt in the FEG and he is able to convince existing churches to release members to be a part of a new church. Many of the missionary church planters working with the FEG often are the ones who lead the daughter churches that are being planted.

Church Planting in the BFP

In 1997 Manfred Lanz and a small group of BFP pastors initiated the *Gemeindegründungswerk* (church planting task force – GGW). Lanz, who continues to coordinate GGW expresses the purpose and vision for this ministry.

In order to reach our nation with the gospel, a large number of new dynamic churches are needed in order to carry out the Great Commission in their respective locations. The GGW was born out of a deep desire for revival, evangelism and church planting in Germany and recognition of the deep spiritual needs of this nation. The ministry understands itself to be a partner for church planting and desires to support the greatest possible number of news church plants in Germany, through consultation, coaching, training and practical support.³⁸

Within less than 10 years GGW has established a very viable network of regional ministries within the BFP that operates in the following areas.

- Promoting the vision of church planting
- Regional research
- Training (e.g. church planting schools)
- Motivating and consulting "mother churches"
- Coaching of church planters and their teams
- Promotion of regional prayer initiatives for church planting
- Fundraising for the release of church planting ministries
- Planning and coordinating evangelistic activities related to church planting³⁹

Manfred Lanz and his team of BFP pastors have looked to Erhard Michel of the FEG and church planting consultant Bob Logan as being role models in the field of church multiplication. AoG missionary Steve Walent, heading up GGW in the East German

³⁸ Manfred Lanz, "Unsere Vision", (www.gemeindegruendungswerk.de).

³⁹ Ibid.

State of Saxony, and a member of the GGW national leadership team, explains how GGW works at the regional level:

We have a team of 8-10 people who bring their various giftings to the table. All are either in fulltime ministry in local churches or working secularly. We have developed a vision, goals and strategy, but what is needed is time to communicate and demonstrate this to individual pastors and churches. It has become my conviction, that without anointed relationships, anointed communication, anointed demonstration of God's heart and desire concerning church planting, we will at best grow by addition. Relationship building, coaching, mentoring does much to encourage, inspire and release faith, resources and cooperation to the point where we will see multiplication. Good relationships are addicting when the Holy Spirit kicks in and this turns to exponential growth.⁴⁰

Types of Missionary Church Planters

Craig Ott has done a great service in describing three types of missionary church planters that have relevance for our study in the German context. These three types include the pastoral church planter, the apostolic church planter, and the catalytic church planter.⁴¹

The goal of the pastoral church planter is quite simply to begin a new church and pastor it until it can call and pay its own pastor. The missionary can then move on and plant another church.⁴²

According to Ott, this approach is taken by most, whether in the homeland or overseas. The author's research and others indicate that this is the approach up until now taken in Germany.⁴³ With church growth being relatively slow in Germany, it becomes very difficult for a new church to find the resources to pay a national pastor who will replace the missionary.

Sometimes the missionary church planter remains faithfully at the location for ten or even twenty years, hoping that one day a national pastor can be called to replace him. Usually frustration sets in sooner.⁴⁴

40 Steve Walent, email correspondence.

41 Craig Ott, "Matching the church planter's role with the church planter's model", *Evangelical Missionary Quarterly*, (July, 2001): 338.

42 Ibid.

43 Fred McRae, "The German Church Planting Movement", *Evangelical Missionary Quarterly*, (April, 2006): 185.

44 Craig Ott, "Matching the church planter's role", 340.

The answer to this dilemma is to raise up more lay leaders to plant churches that will reach their respective communities.

Let's not forget that this was the New Testament pattern and throughout history most church planting movements were lay driven. Furthermore, because the pastoral church planting missionary assumes that one day a professionally trained pastor will replace him, minimal effort is invested in training and empowering laity for genuine pastoral ministry. Finally, believers in the church plant can become "spoiled" by having a full-time missionary pastor.⁴⁵

The apostolic church planter is modeled after Paul who never became a local church pastor but was very instrumental in empowering lay people to carry out the ministry. From time to time he even took workers with him on his journeys so they too would catch a vision for church multiplication.⁴⁶ The advantage of this model is obvious for missionaries and missions agencies; you will never have to worry which pastor will follow the church planter. The financial pressure for supporting a pastor is eliminated. Fred McRae as a GEM missionary working with the BEFG has taken this approach as he works with several church plants simultaneously.⁴⁷ McRae points out that this method eliminates the power struggle that often occurs when the missionary church planter moves on.

Church planters act as advisors, trainers and mentors who encourage the laity to preach, teach and counsel. (Eph.4:12) The trainer is invited to come and lend his or her expertise to particular church plants. The missionary holds no official office of authority other than what is given by the denomination.⁴⁸

McRae goes on to state the tension of "when to leave" is eliminated making the transition much easier for the missionary and the church alike. Also, the missionary does not have to get bogged down in doctrinal disputes as this becomes the responsibility of the governing denomination. Another advantage is that a congregation will be established that is more contextual and avoids the trappings of a North American church (Mc 188). One major disadvantage to the apostolic approach is that the missionary church planter

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Fred McRae, "The German Church Planting Movement", 188-189.

48 Ibid.

must frequently change locations and this can be very difficult for a family and is not conducive in building long term relationships.⁴⁹

The catalytic church planter remains for an extended time and does all in his or her power to facilitate church multiplication. As the new church grows in numbers and strength other new churches are launched by the missionary church planter. Here the missionary pastor continues to have his base and becomes a resource person and visionary for other church planters who go out and reach their communities for Christ.⁵⁰

The “mother-daughter,” “hiving off,” or “cell division” approach to church planting is among the most effective methods for rapid church multiplication. Such movements, however, rarely develop apart from catalytic leadership. Churches need visionary, motivational, and specially gifted leaders to move them from maintenance to multiplication.⁵¹

AoG missionary Steve Dunn’s methodology in church planting is typical of how most Evangelical missionaries tackle the task.

We have usually tried to develop a home group, then have an outreach or two in the community to let people know that something is happening in their area. The third step was to start public meetings. People that were searching would start showing up.⁵²

Dietrich Schindler is on one hand pleased about the many new churches that have been started by missionaries in Germany during the past thirty years, yet he is very critical about the conventional methods that are being used by most church planters.

Simply planting more new churches in Germany in a conventional manner will not significantly improve the current crisis. Conventional church planting describes a slow process by which an established church starts a new church and then may require a decade of recovery before undertaking another planting project. Aggressive church planting has been pursued among the Free Churches for the past thirty years, but only yielded marginal denominational growth. Conventional church planting has done little to stop decline of Christianity in Germany. The author of this paper believes a successful German church planting multiplication movement must emphasize a rapid and healthy multiplication and replace the current mode of planting.⁵³

49 Craig Ott, “Matching the church planter’s role”, 342.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid, 343

52 Steve Dunn, email correspondence.

53 Dietrich Gerhard Schindler, *Creating and Sustaining a Church Planting Multiplication Movement*, 1-2.

Schindler devotes an entire chapter to the “ten values and distinctions of high impact church planting”. I highly recommend any serious church planter in the German context to review this part of his dissertation.⁵⁴ Schindler is quite enthusiastic about the work of David Garrison who is the key strategist for the IMB’s New Directions in church planting. In my interviews with IMB missionaries in Germany they too feel that things have moved very slowly in the German church planting context, thusly the IMB in Germany is instituting the New Directions as missionary church planter Wayne Jenkins explains:

Very briefly, New Directions focuses on our missionaries leading nationals to start churches rather than our missionaries personally starting the church, preaching each Sunday and teaching all groups. Now we focus on reaching key nationals, and leading them to do the work. Our "Exit" strategy is already planned from the beginning.⁵⁵

Jenkins who is presently the last of the traditional IMB missionary church planters working in Bavaria, does say that it remains to be seen if this new strategy will actually take hold in Germany as it has in other parts of the world. In the Bavarian city of Anberg the IMB has its first New Directions pilot project to start an indigenous German church. The IMB missionary team there has been living and working in Anberg for the past five years making personal contacts with the community through various non-threatening outreaches such as baseball clinics, various children’s programs and other activities. The hope is that one or more of these contacts, who are well known and accepted in the community as new followers of Christ, will be able to plant a church. Right now, the IMB missionaries through their personal contacts are able to pull together around 150 people for events that they sponsor. Mark Wagner, who is the urban strategist for the IMB effort in Germany, feels there needs to be a mixed approach: New Directions combined with some of the conventional methodologies. One thing that concerns Wagner about dynamic missionary church planters is that they often are a hard act to follow for the German pastor who will take over the church plant, and usually is not quite as charismatic or dynamic. This tension can cause problems for the new church.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid, 108-123.

⁵⁵ Wayne Jenkins, email correspondence. (August 7, 2006).

⁵⁶ Mark Wagner phone interview, IMB urban strategist missionary to Germany. (August 30, 2006).

It is nothing new for the German context that lay leaders plant churches. Most of the free church denominations accept this fact, as there are not enough finances or personnel to go around and simply leaving the church planting endeavor to paid clergy. Schindler further explains the challenges faced in Germany.

Clergy-centered church planting is expensive. For example, in a Free Church it takes approximately fifty members to support a pastor and double that to support a pastor and a building. Limited denominational funding leaves only enough resources to finance one or two new church planting projects annually. In a country in with a high standard of living, property is expensive and even rental space for a fledgling church can be costly. Money that could be spent on evangelism and discipleship, the vanguards of church planting, is instead spent on facilities.⁵⁷

The Ecclesia church fellowship, which joined the BFP in 2000, historically prided itself, as compared to other fellowships, that their churches were lay-led. This approach seemed to work as the movement began in the early 1950s, but as time went on there became a demand for trained paid ministers. Generally speaking, the lay-led churches of the Ecclesia fellowship are smaller and weaker than those led by trained and paid pastors. It has been my observation that the task of leading even a church of 40 or 50 can be very demanding and time consuming for the lay leader. Many of these men and women in Germany become stressed out, and they themselves desire to have someone lead the church who can invest more time.

Also many Germans feel that a church needs to have some official status. This is not a valid concern of the New Directions paradigm. Edward Rommen states that Germans have a very interesting relationship to their churches.

And although many consider the institutional church irrelevant and thus maintain no active relationship to it, it is an integral part of the cultural matrix and formal ties, especially membership, have become the primary focus of religious commitment. This institutional orientation will also severely limit the credibility of the missionary's church-planting efforts. He will be perceived as sectarian, or as the representative of just another of the many cults and sects that have their origins in America. Right from the beginning the fledgling church can be given a name which, although unfamiliar, can be presented as one of the legitimate German free churches. As a fraternal worker of that denomination, the cross-cultural missionary can defend his activities on the basis of the commission given by German church leaders, who will even represent his interests should that become necessary.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Dietrich Gerhard Schindler, *Creating and Sustaining a Church Planting Multiplication Movement*, 163-164.

As mentioned above most missionaries would fall into Ott's category as being pastor church planters who McRae and others view in a critical light. However, I have discovered that presently many missionary church planters in Germany along with pastoring church plants, are also coaching and assisting others to plant churches in their region. They are continually keeping their eyes and ears open to where a new church might begin. TEAM missionary Ted Holzman, who is a church planter in Bavaria, typifies this type of apostolic ministry that many missionaries are involved in today. In his previous church plant in Neuburg, along with pastoring he helped to coordinate a FEG regional church planting school that convened every 6 weeks or so, where 9 other church planting teams received training and mentoring. Presently, in his new church plant in Mainburg which he is pastoring, Holzman coaches another church plant that is getting started in his area.⁵⁹ Many of today's missionary church planters would have overlapping characteristics as described in Ott's three missionary types. By having pastored church plants in Germany, others, and myself included, have instant credibility as facilitators in training and mentoring others to start new churches.

FEG Reflections on Missionary Church Planting

I found it quite revealing how Erhard Michel has observed the three main reasons, why missionary church planters do not succeed in Germany. First and foremost, these missionaries lacked language proficiency and therefore, found it difficult to relate to German culture.⁶⁰ Michel's position on language acquisition is supported by all other church planting missionaries I have interviewed.

Strong leaders tend to think that in their case, their leadership ability will over-shadow any language deficiencies. In general, language acquisition is essential, though the Germans inside the church are very gracious regarding this issue.⁶¹

58 Edward Rommen, "Planting in Tandem for Church Growth", 57-58.

59 Ted Holzman phone interview, TEAM missionary church planter to Germany. (September 27, 2006).

60 Erhard Michel interview.

61 Forrest Weiland, email correspondence. (September 4, 2006).

The second reason for Michel that some missionary church plants fail is simply due to the missionary's limited giftings in this area of ministry. Too often missionaries arrive overseas, who have been on staff of a larger church or who have had more of a teaching ministry at home and they soon discover that the church planting venture is overwhelming. Ideally, it would be best for the new missionary church planter to have tackled a church plant in his or her own culture before attempting such a feat overseas. Thirdly, according to Michel, some church plants do not succeed due to the missionary having family problems or personal emotional issues. The last of these two reasons given would also be the probable reason why many ministries in the homeland too do not succeed.

As Michel looks back over the years as being director of Home Missions he assesses that out of 20 missionary church plants only 3 or 4 were really outstanding. Michel is convinced that only the best trained and those who understand German culture can make a difference. Michel views the following three prerequisites as a must for the missionary church planter.

- Spiritual depth
- First-class know how and mental agility
- Leadership abilities that can inspire and deeply influence men and women to reach their potential as workers and leaders in the Kingdom⁶²

Traditionally in the past 10 to 15 years many more missionaries have been working with FEG than today. Since 2002, there are only about 4 church planting units working actively with the FEG.⁶³

BFP Reflections on Missionary Church Planting

BFP treasurer Roman Siewert would like to see that all missionary church planters working with the BFP stay anywhere from 5 to 7 years before turning the church over to a German pastor. He believes this longer period of time would help to solidify the maturity of the congregation.⁶⁴ My research indicates the following about the average

⁶² Erhard Michel interview.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Roman Siewert, BFP treasurer, email correspondence. (September 5, 2006).

stay of a missionary, before turning the church plant over to a German pastor. These figures do not reflect those church plants that are still being led by a missionary.

	<u>Average Stay</u>	<u>Number of churches turned over to German Pastor</u>
BEFG	6 Years	7 Churches
BFP	7 Years	18 Churches
FEG	4.4 Years	20 Churches

Siewert assesses the transition from the missionary pastor to the German pastor in the BFP church planting setting as generally being positive. However, he does feel that there needs to be a longer time span given before the missionary is to leave the church.⁶⁵ That a longer period of time is needed before transition takes place is a definite cultural adjustment for most North American missionaries. In North America it is customary that a resignation is turned in, and the pastor leaves his church in a period from 2 to 4 weeks. This is a very short time for most Germans. Germans prefer that these transitions are announced six months to one year in advance. Siewert goes on to state:

I view the ministry of foreign missionaries and their families as uncalculated capital for our church movement. The only critical thing to say about missionary involvement is that the BFP has not fully appreciated this gift of partnership. I would propose every 12 to 15 months that there should be some kind of coming together with the BFP leadership and missionaries to even strengthen this partnership. I think it would be beneficial in the future, that when new missionaries come to Germany, some of our pastors would meet officially every three or four months for one day with them where exchange can take place, so that the new missionaries could learn to better understand our country and our denominational structure. For example, one topic for discussion would be the differences between East and West Germany.⁶⁶

One current first-term AoG missionary working with the BFP notes:

The BFP not only welcomes help in church planting, but encourages it and is thankful for missionaries from around the world that help.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Matt Riegel, email correspondence.

Conclusion

As a church planter I can not conceive how anyone can call into question that Germany is not a church planting mission field. Depending on where one ministers, only 0.5% to 3.0% of the German population today is Evangelical. Only 1 out of every 2 communities with a population of over 5,000 has the witness of an Evangelical church. Thusly, there are hundreds of communities of 5,000 or less that do not have an Evangelical witness.⁶⁸ A survey conducted in 1998 in the state of Rhineland Palatinate indicated that 71 of 94 communities with a population between 5,000 and 20,000 did not have the witness of an Evangelical church. This same survey conducted in the neighboring state of Saarland proved to be even more dramatic, as 34 of 38 communities with a population between 5,000 and 20,000 did not have an Evangelical church.⁶⁹ Survey data from the Emid-Institut found that in 1999 only 10% of all Germans felt that personal faith was of any significant value. Nine percent of the East Germans felt the same way.⁷⁰

There is a mission field called East Germany. During the era of communism even nominal Christians left the church to follow the socialistic way. Today, many East Germans are third or fourth generation without any link to a church. Most East Germans do not have a basic understanding of the meaning of Christmas or Easter.⁷¹ Wilfried Plock who leads a Church Planting conference of 200 independent evangelical churches notes the possibilities in East Germany.

For young pastors who really desire to do pioneer work – ministry there is as exciting and challenging as reaching the pagans of New Guinea.⁷²

Church planters who minister in East Germany must accept a missiological perspective that views East Germany as a different country than West Germany. Forty years of communism has left behind a very different culture with different norms.⁷³

⁶⁸ In Deutschland wurden in den letzten zehn Jahre mehr als 1.500 Gemeinden gegründet“, 16-17.

⁶⁹ Paul Clark, BFP-Region Rheinland Pfalz-Saarland Gebetsaktion, (Unpublished but available from the author, October 7, 1998).

⁷⁰ “Umfrage: Ist Deutschland gottlos geworden?“, Idea Spektrum, (36, 1999): 6.

⁷¹ “Germany: The Church and Missions Today”, World Pulse Archives, (www.Lausaneworldpulse.com, September,2003).

⁷² “In Deutschland wurden in den letzten zehn Jahre mehr als 1.500 Gemeinden gegründet“, 16.

⁷³ Erhard Michel interview.

Roland Werner, who is a leading Evangelical in the German Lutheran church, is very much supportive of missionary activity in Germany and at the same time establishes parameters for effective missionary endeavors.

Germany is still a sending country of about 2,000 missionaries. Missionaries from other countries to Germany are welcome, but it is important for them to get to know the existing local structures, both regionally and nationally, and to cooperate with German Christians. This will increase their effectiveness and will make for less missionary drop-outs and isolation in the long run.⁷⁴

I concur with Edward Rommen who answered the question posed in the 80s whether missionaries are still necessary in Germany.

The American missionaries have not merely provided manpower, but have been able too, in cooperation with German evangelicals, to bring an effective contribution to the church planting efforts in this country.⁷⁵

As a result of this study I have been able to correspond and speak with church planters from other missions agencies, and I have come to appreciate their ministry and insight. I believe the time has come for missionary church planters from different missions agencies to come together for a one or two day consultation in Germany.

If a man or woman is called by God, they must heed that call no matter how dry spiritual things may appear to be. It still behooves missionary sending organizations to facilitate these precious calls, just as they facilitate calls to other regions of the world where the “action” is a bit more exciting. I recall one successful Latin American missionary church planter who came to Europe, and within a few years planted two churches that were very small in comparison to what he had known in Latin America. The veteran missionaries in this European country found his work to be successful, but the disappointed Latin America church planter left Europe to go where the “fish were biting”.⁷⁶

As I have walked the streets of German cities where churches are being planted, I often thought of our small successes as being like a drop in the proverbial bucket. IMB missionary Wayne Jenkins has spoken to my heart in this matter, as he beautifully uses the analogy of a stranded star fish being thrown back into the sea. This act does not seem

74 “Germany: The Church and Missions Today”, World Pulse Archives.

75 Edward Rommen, “Planting in Tandem for Church Growth”, 57.

76 Scott Smith, Assemblies of God missionary church planter in Spain, email correspondence, (September 11, 2006).

like anything special, but it is “life saving” for the one star fish concerned.⁷⁷ How many Germans have been touched by the Gospel as a result of the 73 churches planted in Germany by the missionaries represented in this paper?⁷⁸ How many of these lives have gone on in their Christian walk to reach others with the Gospel and disciple new followers of Christ? Of course we do not have this data at our fingertips, but suffice to say, many individuals have been reached and these individuals are still reaching others today in Germany. May the Lord of the Harvest continue to raise up missionary church planters for the nation of Germany!

⁷⁷ Wayne Jenkins phone interview, IMB church planting missionary to Germany. (August 24, 2006).

⁷⁸ See the Appendix at the end of this paper.

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