

nection with others who, nonetheless, may have similar objectives.

Reflecting on the last dozen years of closely watching tentmakers in action, here are a few factors that I think make it more likely that a tentmaker will be effective.

1. Tentmakers work best when they are humble and understand that they need others to help address the full Biblical process of evangelism and planting the Church. It is very rare that a single individual does the whole job of “stone-clearing, sowing, watering, reaping, and discipling!” (John 4:3, 5-38). That is why tentmakers generally work best in Partnerships.

2. Tentmakers have a greater sense of fulfillment when, understanding #1, they can see how they “fit in” to the larger picture of what God is doing in the country or language group. In their often lonely and difficult task, working consciously in Partnership, they know that they do not have to do everything to do something of eternal value. In a Partnership, the tentmaker can see that together the group is doing virtually everything that needs to be done.

3. Tentmakers are most fulfilled, have greater integrity, are more credible, and usually more effective when they bring a skill/experience to the field that is valued by the people and their country. Artificial “platforms” which provide only a paper shell to justify one’s presence in the country are not only risky but lack the integrity which should be basic to the Gospel. Such “activities of convenience” can and frequently do seriously set back the efforts of evangelism/church-planting. A tentmaker should give serious thought as to whether they have a genuine interest in the people and seek to serve their welfare through their tentmaking role. Seeing

tentmaking only as a means for “spiritual” issues is a sure recipe for frustration and lack of effectiveness.

4. Tentmakers are most effective when they give their “professional” trade serious attention. A person cannot have a paper company complete with phony business cards and effectively connect with national counterparts.

Tentmakers need to believe in and

**Working in Partnerships  
allows the tentmaker to forge  
strategic alliances with  
like-minded individuals to  
accomplish efforts impossible  
for a person “going it alone.”**

experience the power of witnessing through the relationships naturally developed in the business or technical field. Their tentmaking job is not “secular” and their witnessing platform is not necessarily “sacred.” This is particularly true in traditional cultures such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism where the worldview integrates all things within the sacred. Countless times, unfortunately, I have seen tentmakers struggling with this issue—victims of Western theological dualism and modern secularism.

### **A Case Study**

A tentmaker I once met had a strong background in computer systems and programming. He was using this background to do contract work for businesses in the Islamic country where he resided. At that time, the country did not have a single commercial/trade school where young people could learn how to operate PCs and use even rudimentary applications

such as word processing, spread sheets, accounting systems, etc. The tentmaker lamented that his consulting time was taking so much effort and that it deprived him from the time he felt he needed to make contacts and witness! I asked if he had ever considered setting up a simple computer training school. We discussed how his home church would probably gladly fund the needed equipment and likely send out a technical team to help set up the simple installation; how the companies he now worked for would be likely clients; and how that eventually, since so many companies needed staff of this kind, he would develop a large, influential network of relationships—within the business community—with the growing number of students, and, potentially, with the students’

families. His response was, “Why would I want to do that? It would take so much time to develop and run the business I would have no time left to do what I came here to do!”

This story could have been quite different if the following had happened:

1. The tentmaker had been committed to the country, its people and its holistic development as a Kingdom priority—lending integrity to his “tentmaker” role and credibility to his life and message with the Muslims he was trying to reach.

2. He had seen “work” as a truly God-given blessing (given to us by God before the fall and only later to be distorted because of sin) and a natural context in which worship and praise to God could be realized.

3. He had not seen everything as depending on him but, rather, seen

*Continued on page 18 “Partnership...*

# Tentmaking and Partnership for Church Planting Among the Unreached

*Here's a report on eleven years of experience in facilitating the formation, development and long-term operation of strategic evangelism/church planting partnerships; on the impressive growth of diversity among the global missionary force; on the transformation of former "receiving" countries into "sending" countries; and on the diverse ways that new regional partnerships are assisting various ministries in working effectively together.*

by Phill Butler

**M**y personal experience in mission activity has been focused almost exclusively for the last decade in the Hindu, Buddhist/Tibetan Buddhist, and Islamic world. By definition, this world is, but with rare exception, inaccessible to individuals who apply for visas as "missionaries." Therefore, those doing Kingdom work almost always function in some type of tentmaker role.

In these regions, for the last eleven years, my colleagues and I have been engaged in helping launch and sustain Strategic Evangelism/Church-Planting Partnerships—and in training/mentoring those who lead these Partnerships. However, my field involvement with missions stretches over thirty-five years. This has allowed me to meet and work with hundreds of tentmaker missionaries.

In helping develop and sustain these Partnerships over the last eleven years, we have found ourselves connecting with missionaries playing every conceivable role. Scripture translators, literacy workers, literature production, radio programming, health and medical work people, environmental and business personnel, and those engaged as teachers or academics would be just some of the cat-

egories of tentmaking activity we have regularly seen.

## **Mission Diversity**

As many know, the diversity of the global missionary force is increasing at a staggering rate. The sending countries of these missionaries, the societies who sponsor them in the field, and the roles which they play are all increasingly diverse. Former "receiving" countries are now missionary "sending" countries. So, it is not unusual, but rather typical, that a Strategic Evangelism/Church-Planting Partnership in one of the larger unreached language groups will have missionaries present from 15-20 different countries. At the moment, the Partnerships which Interdev assists in one way or another have over 300 ministries participating from more than 50 countries. Nearly one-third of those ministries are from Third World, so-called "developing countries."

One of the most beneficial aspects of a Partnership approach to evangelism/church planting is that it provides a forum in which such a diverse group can see a whole strategy and where their particular contribution "fits in." Tentmakers working in a

Partnership can, therefore, generally find greater fulfillment and more easily link with other individuals and their ministries who are playing vital roles in the evangelism and church-planting process.

## **Effectiveness Factors**

Tentmakers working in a Partnership context frequently find that their effectiveness, or lack of it, is more readily apparent. As they meet, pray, plan, and minister with others, the extent to which the tentmaker is achieving their objectives becomes more evident. Frequently this has led specialist tentmakers to form task forces or working groups as a natural by-product of a Strategic Evangelism/Church-Planting Partnership. Gathering like-minded individuals together around common issues, such as translation, educational, or health initiatives, Scripture distribution, etc., the tentmaker is able to plan, develop, and execute strategies that are vital to the overall evangelistic effort but impossible to have done on his/her own.

This is in sharp contrast to the "go it alone" approach where the tentmaker is isolated and has little con-