

When Does a Movement Count as a Movement?

By L.D. Waterman

As I finished reading the book *Understanding Insider Movements*, one question struck me. It may have been catalyzed by John Travis' description of "a small movement" (in "Insider Movements among Muslims: A Focus on Asia"). I began wondering: How large is a "small" Insider movement? How large would an *average*-sized Insider movement be? How many people, fellowships (*ekklesia*), or *somethings* would be needed for something to properly qualify as an Insider Movement? I couldn't find an answer anywhere in the book.

Discussions of Church Planting Movements (CPM), in contrast, have offered clear delineations of size and scope. For example, David Garrison begins *A Wind in the House of Islam* with this definition: "For the sake of clarity and consistency, let's define a movement of Muslims to Christ to be at least 100 new church starts or 1,000 baptisms that occur over a two-decade period." (p. 5) More stringently, David Watson in *Contagious Disciple-Making* writes: "We defined a Church-Planting Movement as an indigenously led Gospel-planting and obedience-based discipleship process that resulted in a minimum of one hundred new locally initiated and led churches, four generations deep, within three years." (p. 4) In both cases, their definition enables them to offer a clear estimate of the number of CPMs in the world at the time of their writing (Garrison: 70 among Muslims; Watson: 68 total).

We can understand clearly from *Understanding Insider Movements (UIM)* that in an Insider Movement, the believers remain within their prior socio-religious group. But I couldn't find any numerical criteria for a "movement." In quickly reviewing the 719 pages of this definitive work on the subject, I found almost no mention of what size we should be envisioning when we hear or read the phrase "Insider Movement" (IM).

The closest thing I found to any size indicator in a definition was in Kevin Higgins's "The Key to Insider Movements: The 'Devoteds' of Acts," on page 226. This definition includes the phrase "believing families...." Since the word "families" is plural and a family, by definition, constitutes plural individuals (and could be quite large) this gives encouragement that at least according to Kevin, an Insider "Movement" must be more than a few groups of single young men (or women) meeting together. This still leaves a lot of room for skeptical imagination about what is actually in view when proponents such as contributors to *UIM* discuss an Insider "movement."

I must say I was somewhat encouraged by the specific examples shared in two *UIM* articles. Ben Naja, in "Jesus Movement: A Case Study from Eastern Africa," wrote: "several hundred have been baptized, dozens of home-based fellowships have been started and in two instances Jesus mosques have been built and are used for the gatherings of the Jesus disciples. This movement is still growing." (p. 129) I also noted in Tom Payne's "And the Spirit Fell upon Them" that: "The original *Injil*-reading group has now multiplied many times over, with new insider groups starting in several other places around the country." I greatly rejoice in these testimonies, yet

they still seem to fall in a numerically different category than the kinds of movements being described as Church Planting Movements.

Thinking I may have overlooked something, I asked a number of friends (many of them authors of articles in *UIM*) if they knew of any minimum size criteria for something to be considered an IM. Some offered very helpful *qualitative* evaluative criteria (including “Leaders from within the people group train other leaders,” which has implications for size), but nothing directly specifying size or *quantitative* criteria. And in soliciting estimates from those who might know, I received confirmation of a total of one (perhaps two) IMs that would fit David Garrison’s criteria of a CPM.

Adding together all the best pieces being offered still appears to leave a vast chasm between the size component of “movement” in “Insider Movement” as compared to in “Church Planting Movement.” In CPM’s definition (at least according to two key proponents), “movement” means a certain number (or greater) of churches started within a certain number of years. In the clearest IM definition, it means at least plural “believing families.” This is not necessarily a criticism of IM (though some might interpret it as such). I would take it, however, as a noteworthy word of caution, lest in strategic discussions of “movements,” someone get the impression that CPMs and IMs differ only in socio-religious identity of believers. It appears there may often (almost always?) be a vast difference in size.

We don’t consider size of a movement to be the most vital consideration. Yet for those who see some value in numerical reports of God’s work (among whom I would count the Holy Spirit, in his inspiration of Luke as the writer of Acts), it seems noteworthy to compare the one or two IMs (stated to be as large as some CPMs) with the 70 or 68 CPMs cited by Garrison and Watson. Not that more and bigger always means better. But if we aim for the biblical goal “to win as many as possible” (1 Cor. 9:19), the vast difference is well worth noting.