

Guide to Adopting A People

By the Frontier Mission Alliance

The Rationale

In our world today there are an estimated 24,000 ethno-linguistic groups each with their own dialect and cultural tradition. The amazing reality of our day is that in over 14,000 of these groups the Church has become firmly established. Still remaining however are 10,000 groups in which the Church is very weak or has yet to become established. Each of these groups require the immediate and priority assistance of believers from outside their group. Such groups encompass over 2.2 billion people, or by religious adherence represent 1.3 billion Muslims, 600 million Hindus, 200 million Buddhists and 100 million Animists. Evangelical Christians in the 14,000 reached groups number over 600 million and fellowship in over 2 million congregations. As a ratio that means there is one evangelical for every four unreached individuals and 200 congregations for every unreached group! If everyone does their part we can easily see every unreached group and every person be given access to the gospel within our generation.

Basic Dimensions to Adopting A People

By way of definition, Adopt-a-People is a church and mission agency program designed to develop a stronger identification and a greater involvement between the sending church and the people with whom a missionary is working.

Typically this involvement is in the areas of prayer, finances, missionary care, development assistance and/or short-term evangelistic outreaches. Prayer is the primary ministry focus of Adopt-A-People and the most important. Every church should begin with this first and basic commitment, and as God leads, prayerfully move into the other dimensions as opportunity permits.

Churches that adopt make a commitment to use the resources God has given them to ensure that the missionary and the indigenous church have all that they need to reach every community and person of the target group. In an adoption network churches work to share the burdens of prayer, finances, missionary care, and field ministry. Often times this involves a partnership with churches living in the country or nearby the adopted group. An adoption coordinator works to facilitate communication and joint efforts between those churches involved in the network.

Finances

Adopt-A-People does not mean a church stops supporting other ministry endeavors, but in addition to its present ministries gives a special focus to a specific unreached people ministry so that greater understanding and participation can be fostered between the members of the church and the missionaries work among the people. There are a great number of projects that need to be financed in a saturation church planting effort beyond the basic living costs of the missionary team. These could include: producing and printing Bibles, developing radio programs and evangelistic videos; producing training, evangelism and discipleship materials; conducting research-- linguistic surveys and unchurched area surveys; national leadership support, building costs, etc.

Field Ministry

With regard to short-term evangelistic ministry, it is important that a church not work in isolation from what others are doing among a particular group. To work in isolation could create unnecessary duplication, confusion for the indigenous church and may hinder and endanger the missionary's work. Working together with the indigenous church and missionary creates a synergistic momentum that catalyzes the ongoing work. This ensures that your efforts are maximized and sustained.

The best liaison between the adopting church and field work is the mission agency which is structured to network churches and service missionaries with specialized programs and tools. Working closely with a mission agency will allow your church to become more effectively involved in the ongoing work and stay in touch more frequently with current progress. This is especially true for those sensitive areas in which the majority of the world's unreached peoples live. Developing a relationship with your mission agency's adoption coordinator will be a key factor in the effectiveness of your churches AAP program.

There are many dimensions in which your fellowship can contribute to the ongoing work of church multiplication. Utilizing the gifts and knowledge of your entire congregation will allow your AAP program to really become a blessing to the missionary team and the national church. You may have doctors, contractors, computer experts, educators, lawyers, desktop publishers, videographers, sound engineers, as well as disciple makers, evangelists, counselors and many more gifted people in your fellowship who can contribute their skills provided they are given the opportunity.

Missionary Care

When missionaries see and feel that their churches are behind them 100%, the church then becomes an associate member of the missionary team. The missionary's burdens become the church's burdens. The passion to reach the target group becomes the passion of the church at home. Frustrations, joy, persecution and triumph are shared alike and the prayers of the missionary and the sending church become united in a common voice. When missionaries return home for a time of rest and spiritual renewal, the church knows how to meet their needs, encouraging their efforts, praying through their difficulties and working through their struggles in light of God's word. This will require a great deal of understanding regarding the missionary's situation and needs. This kind of understanding can only be developed over a great deal of time and interaction with the missionary. Ministering to your adopted missionary team and national leaders, providing counsel and fellowship, will strengthen their commitment and help connect the national church to the larger body of Christ.

The young people in your fellowship should be encouraged to write frequently to the missionary kids on the team. Wives and mothers should communicate with one another about like concerns and husbands and fathers as well. Elders and counselors should make themselves available to minister as needs arise. Where possible, sending your missionaries information about what your church is doing, even tapes of sermons and events, will help them stay connected and relate better to the needs of the sending church as well.

Prayer

Prayer is the most important dimension of your fellowships adoption program. Missions can have all the money and personnel the church can offer, but without prayer the ministry is in vain. The apostle Paul frequently asked for prayer from the sending church. His letters often follow a pattern in which at the beginning of the letter he tells the church he is praying for them and at the end of the letter he asks the church to pray for him. Most of the New Testament documents are actually missionary prayer letters! Encouraging your missionaries to regularly send updates for prayer will be an important factor in sustaining the vision and commitment of your church's adoption program. Missionaries need ongoing prayer for their physical health, emotional stability, safety, spiritual vitality and family relationships. In addition to their personal needs, your adopted missionaries will need prayer for their ability to adjust to the culture, learn the language, find open doors for evangelism, obtain wisdom in church multiplication, and of course many other areas. The national church as well needs prayer for leadership in disciple making, evangelism and cross-cultural ministry into neighboring groups. (For more about prayer see appendix A.)

How to Implement and Integrate

Implementing the Adopt-A-People emphasis into your church will involve several critical dimensions from selecting a group to sustaining the vision until the group is reached.

I. Defining Goals

The first step in adopting an unreached people is to bring together all those who are interested in working through what the adoption program can do for your church-- how it will be carried out and how it will benefit the unreached. If your church already has such a committee in place such as a church board or a mission committee than this should be sufficient to establish the operating goals necessary for your church to move forward in adopting an unreached people. Goals and issues should be discussed with regard to the commitment your church can make, how to educate the congregation, and how to implement the program.

A. Selecting an Unreached People: Selecting a group that is right for your fellowship is the first step to a successful program. Prayerfully consider what opportunities are presently available and the ability of your church to pursue them. The basic question to be answered is, "How can your church maximize its efforts in helping to fulfill the Great Commission among an unreached people?" It is important to remember that this decision will affect all others in establishing an adoption program. Working through the questions listed below may be helpful in working through these issues.

1. Is your fellowship already supporting a missionary working among an unreached people? This would be a natural way to begin an Adopt-A-People program.
2. If you are part of a denomination, find out what unreached peoples your denomination is working among. Many denominations already have AAP programs in place with unreached people profiles produced and adoption coordinators available to help facilitate the program in your church. (Check the list of participating agencies in appendix B.)

3. Are there members of an unreached people nearby your fellowship? Usually adoptions such as these produce the greatest amount of involvement within the congregation. There may even be a convert from an unreached people in your own fellowship!
4. Is God calling you to pioneer a work among a group with no ministry yet involved? This takes an incredibly mature congregation as it will be difficult to sustain vision over the long period of time needed before results can be visibly seen. Working closely with your denomination or an agency that specializes in the country or type of group you are considering will greatly maximize your efforts.
5. Is God calling you to partner with the national church to help be a catalyst in reaching a particular group within their country?
6. Other considerations could be the size of the group, religion, current responsiveness of the group, proximity of the group to other believers, rural or urban habitat, etc.

B. Appointing an Adoption Coordinator: Designating a specific person to coordinate efforts in your church's AAP program will be one of the keys to its success. This person will liaison between the field work and the church and help stimulate involvement within the congregation by facilitating projects, coordinating prayer initiatives and organizing other related events. A list of responsibilities should be drawn up by the adoption committee for the appointed Adoption Coordinator.

C. Defining the program: Basic questions should be asked that will define the parameters of your adoption program. Some of these could be as follows:

1. How can we educate and involve the members of our congregation in this project?
2. How much financial commitment can we make? If there isn't any work yet to finance should we set up a special fund to prepare for the day when God will raise up workers for our adopted group?
3. What commitment in prayer are we willing to make?
4. What kind of ministry opportunities would we consider being involved with to further the gospel among our adopted group?

D. Adoption Covenant and Ceremony: After the committee has decided on which group to adopt and has defined a program for your church it is important to present the program to the congregation in an official way. Many churches have drawn up an adoption covenant, listing what their intentions and commitments are, the rationale for their involvement, and then signing it in an official adoption ceremony. You might want to consider asking a missionary who is involved in ministry among this group to come speak at such a ceremony or perhaps the agency adoption coordinator from the mission agency you are working with. (See appendix C for an example.)

E. Educating the Congregation: There are many ways to inform your church about the AAP emphasis in your church's mission program. You might consider setting up a special bulletin board that will post information and pictures. You could send a team to make a simple video on your adopted group. Placing information regularly in the church bulletin or newsletter could be a primary means of communication. Some churches have even set up a live interview over telephone with their adopted missionary. Sending prayer and ministry teams among the group

itself will be a powerful way to sustain vision. If there isn't an Unreached People Profile yet designed for your adopted group you might want to start there. Sending a profile form for your missionaries to fill out will be one way to get this started. You might also want to consider a special prayer form that your missionaries could regularly fill out listing specific items such as financial needs, health concerns, family issues, etc.

F. Establishing Prayer Initiatives: Coordinating regular times of prayer for your adopted group will be one of the most important tasks of the adoption coordinator and the most important dimension of the program. The important thing is to keep up regular communication with your adopted missionaries. This will be your most important link with what is going on among the group and in the missionaries lives personally.

1. Sunday Morning: Establishing a special time each Sunday for prayer and updates concerning your adopted group will be an effective way to involve most of the congregation. Perhaps you could make a commitment to praying five minutes each Sunday for your adopted groups, maybe in small groups or from the pulpit. A list of 10 or 20 prayer concerns could be drawn up for each Sunday prayer time, perhaps in a form that people can take home for personal prayer times.

2. Monthly Mission Meetings: Establishing a special monthly meeting for missions is probably the most effective way to build and sustain vision for missions in your congregation. In this meeting you could have a special time for emphasizing your adopted group and giving more detailed updates.

3. Other initiatives: You might consider having special interest groups in your church take on a particular dimension of the adoption program. Groups such as Sunday school groups, youth groups, and families could incorporate an adoption emphasis into their times together. A family might consider adopting a specific family among the adopted group, each member of a youth group could adopt a specific young person, perhaps a Sunday school class could adopt a specific village or town among the unreached group. Some Churches also have established a special Adoption Prayer Chain in case emergencies arise.

The bottom line: there are many creative and innovative ways to encourage and facilitate prayer in your church for your adopted group. The important thing is to involve everyone as much as possible.

II. Networking

Does your church want to help mobilize other fellowships to adopt, perhaps within your own denomination or even in other countries where there are churches that can participate? Taking a pro-active role on behalf of an unreached group is another good way to involve more people in your church and increase their participation.

A. Exploring the Opportunities: What relationships does your fellowship currently have with other fellowships within your denomination or city? Perhaps you have worked with other churches in joint projects before. Most importantly, do members of your congregation, especially the pastoral staff, have good relationships with decision makers in other churches? Consider making use of every door of opportunity God has opened up to expand your adoption network.

B. Presenting the Opportunity: You will need to present very clearly what Adopt-A-People is and how other churches can be involved in helping to reach an unreached group. You will probably want to present some information on your adopted group, such as a profile and/or a simple video.

C. Coordinating the Effort: So that the missionary is not overwhelmed by requests from many different churches it would be best to appoint an adoption coordinator for the adoption network, or an Adoption Network Coordinator. The coordinator will work with adoption committees to help facilitate joint projects and distribute information among them concerning what is presently needed in prayer, finances and ministry involvement.

D. Document Your Efforts: It will be very helpful to those coordinating the Adopt-A-People campaign in your denomination or country to know about your program so others can be encouraged and perhaps gain new insight about what can be done with the Adopt-A-People initiative. If there is a national campaign in your country please let them know which group you've adopted so that unadopted groups can be emphasized. Some questions to answer in documenting your adoption story could be as follows:

How did you hear about the Adopt-A-People program?

How did you get started in implementing the program?

How did you educate the congregation and get them involved?

What happened among the unreached group as a result of your involvement?

You can send your adoption stories to info@finishthetask.org

Appendix A

Why Pray?

Why should we pray for our missionaries and emerging churches out on the frontlines of the Great Commission? To find the answer, one needs to go no further than the great missionary Paul's urgent petitions for prayer among every major church in his day:

To the Church in Rome:

"I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to **join me in my struggle by praying** to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service may be acceptable to the saints there so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed." Romans 15:30

To the Church in Corinth:

"On Him we have set our hopes that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the **gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.**" 2 Corinthians 1:10-11

To the Church in Ephesus:

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains. **Pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should.**"
Ephesians 6:18-20

To the Church in Philippi

"Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for **I know that through your prayers** and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance."
Philippians 1:18-19

To the Church in Colosse

"Devote yourselves to prayer being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. **Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should.**" Colossians 4:2-4

To the Church in Thessalonica

"Finally, brothers, **pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly** and be honoured, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith." 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2

Appendix B

Adopt-A-People Participating Agencies

The following agencies represent 90% of missionary effort among the unreached peoples in the world and the 10/40 Window. As participants in the AAP program they are eager to assist your church in adopting one of the least-reached peoples. Never before have so many agencies and churches come together for the completion of world evangelization!

Advancing Native Missions	Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
Africa Inland Mission	Lutheran Brethren World Missions
Arab World Ministries	MBMS International
Ameri Tribes	Middle East Christian Outreach
Anglican Frontier Mission	Mission (21) India
Assemblies of God USA	Mission Society for United Methodists
Baptist General Conference	Mission to the World--
Bethany Fellowship Mission	Presbyterian Church in America
Bible League	Mission to Unreached Peoples
CB International	OMF International
CAM International	Partners International
Children of Promise	People International
BALL World Missions	Pioneer Bible Translators
Christar	Pioneers
C&MA	Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship
CMF International	SEND International

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship--
World A Link Office
Eastern Mennonite Missions
Evangelical Covenant Church
Evangelical Free Church Missions
Evangelical Friends Church
Evangelical Mennonite Church--
International Ministries
Every Home for Christ
Foursquare Mission International
Free Methodist World Missions
Friends Church Southwest
Frontiers
Frontier Mission Alliance
Int. Pentecostal Holiness Church
International Students
InterServe

SIM
South American Mission
Southern Baptist Conv.--
Prayer Plus
People Link
The Evangelical Alliance Mission
Team Expansion
United World Missions
WEC International
World Concern
World Gospel Mission
World Mission Prayer League
The Missionary Church
World Radio Miss. Fellowship (HCJB)
World Team (RBMU)
Youth With A Mission
Wycliffe Bible Translators

Appendix C

Adoption Covenant

Believing that it is God's will for all peoples to be reached, we at First Baptist Church are making a formal commitment to reach the 7,300,000 Baloch of Pakistan and Iran by encouraging our members to pray daily for them. To facilitate this adoption we will implement the following:

1. We will pray every Sunday for our adopted group during the worship service.
2. We will encourage our members each Sunday to be praying daily during the week.
3. We will distribute prayer updates to each member as we receive them from the field, preferably every two months.
4. We will help our members stay accountable to their commitment to pray daily.
5. We will appoint a person or group of people to act as facilitators for for this program.
6. We will set up a special fund to finance strategic ministry projects as recommend by our partner missionaries.
7. We will offer all the assistance we can in terms of missionary care and encouragement as the Holy Spirit directs.

Before the Lord, we covenant to carry out these commitments to reaching the Baloch until the Church is firmly established among them. At which time we will consider adopting another unreached group.