

ABSTRACT

Developing Healthy MBB Community: An Analysis of Relationships Between Muslim Background Believers

by

M. T. C.

Church planting among Muslims is not an easy task. After over twelve years of experience church planting in the Middle East, the most difficult aspect has been gathering believers together to form a church. Both evangelism and discipleship have been much easier by comparison. It is a common experience that two Muslim Background Believers that are being individually discipled and are growing in their faith, will not be willing to meet together, and will never develop more than a superficial relationship.

The purpose of this project was to identify reasons why Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) who remain in their own Muslim context struggle to form healthy relationships with one another, and to discover best methods for relationship building and community formation that lead to healthy MBB church plants. This study took place in a city in Kurdistan. Twelve foreign church planters took part in an online questionnaire, and seven participated in a focus group. More than fifty Kurdish believers participated in two different questionnaires.

Several findings resulted from this study. First, this study found that the biggest barrier to MBB relationships was fear. Believers were scared that family members or others in society would find out that they were now following Christ. Next, church planters do not have a well-defined method for gathering believers. Best practices for

gathering believers included taking risks and persevering. Finally, although fun social gatherings are important for relationship building between MBBs, the best place for MBBs to develop relationships with other MBBs is at a church meeting in a church building.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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An Analysis of Relationships Between Muslim Background Believers**

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CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Chapter

The goal of this project was to investigate reasons why Muslim background believers (MBBs) who remain in their own Muslim context struggle to develop strong relationships with one another, and to discover ideas of what can be done to encourage MBBs to develop relationships that lead to healthy fellowship so that a church can be planted. This chapter provides the framework for this study. It provides a rationale for the project evolving from personal experience supported by research. Included in the overview of the research project are the research design, purpose statement, research questions, participants, and how results were collected and analyzed. To add support for this type of project, themes of the literature review and contextual factors were identified. Further discussion of the anticipated project results establishes the significance for and impact on the practice of ministry.

Personal Introduction

My family and I have been a part of a church planting team in a city in the Middle East since 2008. Our team's basic church planting model is to establish meaningful presence, share the gospel, disciple believers, facilitate the gathering together of believers, and develop leaders.

Our team has done a good job of establishing a meaningful presence, sharing the gospel, and discipling believers. Our biggest obstacle has been in facilitating the gathering together of believers. It has been extremely difficult to get believers to meet together. In our first five years of ministry, we tried to get all of the unconnected

individual believers we knew to meet regularly for a Bible study. Most would not attend and those who did were not very engaged in the group setting.

For our next five years, we changed our model to encourage believers to share Christ with their own friends and family whom they already trust rather than trying to get believers who do not really know each other, to meet together. The problem with this model was that when someone's friends and family members refused to believe, the person was left as an isolated believer.

After ten years, we have individual believers who are being disciplined. We have some small Bible studies of two or three people. Many of the believers are aware of each other. However, a church has not yet been planted.

Statement of the Problem

Although church planters have been working in our region of the Middle East for over ten years, very few groups of believers are functioning independently of Westerners. New believers tend to remain isolated from one another. A sense of distrust exists between believers. New believers are willing to meet with Western Christians but are often much less willing to meet with other MBBs.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to identify reasons why MBBs who remain in their own Muslim context struggle to form healthy relationships with one another, and to discover best methods for relationship building and community formation that lead to healthy MBB church plants.

Research Questions

In order to better understand the issues that keep MBBs from developing strong relationships with each other, and to discover practices that lead to healthy church plants, the instruments used provided data to answer these three questions.

Research Question #1

What are the main obstacles that keep MBBs from developing strong relationships with one another?

Research Question #2

How have church planters among Muslims successfully gathered MBBs and formed community to establish a church?

Research Question #3

What types of environment and activities help develop relationships between MBBs in a Muslim context?

Rationale for the Project

Church planting in the Muslim context is not simply about growing and maturing individual MBBs. Yes, church is a place for spiritual growth, and yes, believers should be in community with other believers. However, if the growth of individuals were the main goal, the best strategy would be to extract the MBB from their Muslim context and establish them in a Christian community, maybe even in Europe or America so that they could avoid persecution and be around many more mature believers. Considering that many people from Muslim countries are already risking their lives to get to Europe illegally, it would likely only be a minority of MBBs who would desire to stay in their home countries if a legal way to Europe was opened up, and they were encouraged to go.

Church planting in a Muslim country is also not about having a church in a geographical location. If that were the main goal, the easiest method would be to have a group of outsiders move to a city and plant an international church. Whether a formal church registered with the government, or an informal house church, it would not be difficult to successfully establish expatriate churches throughout the Muslim world.

The main purpose of church planting among Muslims is not for individual believers to have a place to grow, nor to have a church in a geographical location. The main purpose is to have an indigenous community of believers who can disciple others and plant more churches. Outsiders will never be able to reach people groups with a strategy of getting converts one by one. Not until local MBBs are established in the faith and bonded together in community with a vision of reaching their own people will their society be reached for Christ.

Peter Wagner has called church planting “the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven” (*Strategies* 168; *Church Planting* 11). If people are truly lost and destined for hell without Christ, and if we want to be obedient to Christ’s commission to reach the nations, it will not happen through evangelism that seeks Muslim converts. If we truly want to see people groups come to Christ, it will only be through making reproducing disciples and planting reproducing churches.

However, if a church is to be planted, believers must be willing to form community and meet together. Roland Muller says in his book, *The Messenger, The Message, and The Community*, that when Muslims consider coming to Christ, they examine the community of believers. The community plays a very important role in their decision-making process. What will they see if there is no community of believers? The

very fact that there is no community becomes an impediment to Muslims considering Christ. It is important to understand the reasons why MBBs struggle to meet together and to discover ideas that will deepen fellowship between believers so that churches can be formed, and the gospel can go out.

Believers are hesitant to meet together in many ministry contexts around the world, particularly in the Muslim world. Church planters will be able to use this research to consider ideas that might work to develop relationships between believers and build community in their ministry context. As a result, churches would be established in places where there currently is not a church, and many more people will have the opportunity to hear the gospel and to put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Definition of Key Terms

Muslim Background Believers (MBBs)

Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) are followers of Christ who were born Muslims and have converted to Christianity. They are following Christ and trusting in Him alone for salvation. MBBs recognize the Bible as God's authoritative word, not the Quran. Like any new believer, as MBBs grow, they learn more Christian practices and theology. Perfect belief and behavior is never required to be a Christian. MBBs need to submit themselves to the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Bible, allowing themselves to be changed as they grow and mature. Normally, MBBs continue to refer to themselves as a Muslim, with the understanding that it is a cultural identity rather than a religious identity. MBBs are usually hesitant to call themselves "Christian," because they view that also as a cultural term rather than a religious one, and they recognize they are not of that

culture. Many MBBs find another word, like “believer,” that they feel fits their religious identity.

Church

A church can be defined in many ways. It should be obvious in a study like this that we are not talking about a church building, but a group of people who follow Christ. Church with a capital ‘C’ is often used to refer to the worldwide body of believers. This study has to do more with the concept of a local church in a particular context.

According to Wendell Evans, a local church contains the following essential elements:

1. “Baptized believers
2. Christian families
3. Scripturally-qualified and locally recognized national leaders
4. Meeting place(s) independent of the expatriate church-planter
5. Assumption of responsibility for finances and ministry by the local group” (2).

Dan Brown says that a church must have three things. First, it must have critical mass, which he suggests is at least fifteen adults plus children. Second, there must be at least two men who qualify as elders and are willing to serve in that position. Finally, these elders need to be installed as elders and assume leadership and responsibility for the church (252).

Scoggins and Rockford suggest that a church is a group of believers who have committed together. There should be around ten or more believers involved, including at least three married men and two mature women. Some of the believers have to be

baptized. Some need to be public about their faith, persevering through persecution. There must be at least two leaders who have taken the responsibility of leading the group, and the group must have a Great Commission vision (5–6).

For this study, a local church is defined as a body of believers who have committed to fellowship together. They meet at least once a week to read and discuss the Bible, worship God, pray, and encourage one another. They must have a vision of reaching the lost for Christ. The church is led by a local leader or leaders. There must be at least ten adults including both men and women. At least two of the members must have been baptized.

Church Planting

Planting churches is the act of establishing churches. Church planting should be done with the majority of members joining through conversion, not transferring in from another church. Scoggins and Rockford's *Pioneer Church Planting Phases* does a great job of showing the steps involved in establishing a church in an unreached community.

Delimitations

This study was limited to Muslim background believers who remain in their own Muslim context. It included both men and women age eighteen and over. These believers came from a Muslim background and had made a decision to follow Jesus Christ and to trust in him for their salvation. The MBBs used in this study had been followers of Christ for a minimum of three months.

The church planters in this study are limited to those working with MBBs in the city of S---. They had all been serving in their current ministry context for a minimum of three years.

Successful church planters in this study are those who self-identified as having been a part of establishing an MBB church.

Review of Relevant Literature

To better understand the issues involved in church planting among Muslims, books and articles about missions to Muslims were reviewed. This included *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities: A Team Approach* by Greg Livingstone, *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities* by Don Little, *The Messenger, The Message, and The Community*, by Roland Muller, *A Vision of the Possible*, by Daniel Sinclair, and many articles that have been compiled and edited by J. Dudley Woodberry.

Books and articles on church planting were also reviewed, including works by Peter Wagner, Richard Scoggins, and David Hesselgrave.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research was used for this study. The research led to the discovery of reasons that MBBs struggle to meet together. It also led to the discovery of practices that other church planters have used to overcome this issue, and it identified some best practices that can be used to encourage fellowship between believers in order to establish healthy church plants.

For this project, the primary person who was discipling MBBs gave them a questionnaire to fill out. An online questionnaire was also given to church planters to discover what they found to be successful means of overcoming relational barriers between MBBs. Select church planters were also gathered for a focus group. Another questionnaire was given to MBBs who regularly attended an MBB church.

This study was done through questionnaires and a focus group within a period of two months. The questionnaires for MBBs were all distributed personally by the person who was primarily responsible for discipling them or their church leader. The questionnaires for church planters were made available online.

Type of Research

Qualitative research was used to collect data in this pre-intervention study.

Participants

Most MBBs are first-generation believers from a Muslim background. The Muslim world has very few established MBB churches. Most established churches that exist are less than twenty years old. Most MBB church leaders and pastors are also first-generation believers from a Muslim background.

The questionnaires for MBBs were distributed to believers by their primary disciplers. Some of the MBBs were a part of a church body. Others were not part of a local church. The MBBs questioned have been following Christ for a minimum of three months.

The questionnaires for church planters were distributed electronically. The church planters questioned had been involved in various stages of church planting among Muslims in the city of S--- for a minimum of three years.

The Church Planter Focus Group was made up of church planters working in the city of S---, who had been involved in church planting among Muslims as their primary work for at least three years. It included both men and women.

The questionnaires for church attenders were distributed and collected by pastors and church leaders. The church attenders who were given the opportunity to participate

included all persons over age eighteen who were attending a particular meeting in which the pastor or church leader chose to distribute the questionnaire.

Instrumentation

Four instruments were used in this study to address the three research questions.

RQ1-Believer Questionnaires (BQ)

This questionnaire was made up primarily of open-ended questions for MBBs to share their thoughts and experiences about fellowship between MBBs.

RQ2- Church Planter Questionnaires (CPQ)

This questionnaire was done electronically with people who have been involved in church planting among Muslims as their primary work for at least three years. The questionnaire was made up primarily of open-ended questions.

RQ2-Church Planter Focus Group (CPFG)

This focus group was made up of people working in the city of S---, who have been involved in church planting among Muslims as their primary work for at least three years. They were gathered to discuss best methods for gathering MBBS, building relationships between MBBS, and establishing healthy MBB community that leads to successful church plants.

RQ3-MBB Church Attender Questionnaires (CAQ)

This questionnaire was given by pastors or church leaders to MBBs that were attending a church. It was made up of open-ended questions to explore their motivations for meeting together with other believers and how they overcame common barriers that keep other MBBs from fellowship.

RQ3-Church Planter Questionnaires

These questionnaires were given to church planters who work in a Muslim context. The questions were designed to discover the keys to successfully gather believers together to form a church.

Data Collection

Data Collection was done over a two-month period. Questionnaires were given to MBBs who remained in their own Muslim context by the primary person responsible for their discipleship. The disciplers collected the questionnaires and returned them to me in a sealed envelope.

Questionnaires for church planters were distributed electronically to church planters working for at least three years among Muslims in the city of S---.

A focus group made up of 6-8 church planters in the city of S---, was gathered to have a discussion on the research topic. Audio of the focus group was recorded and transcribed. All these church planters had been involved in church planting among Muslims for at least three years.

Another questionnaire was given by the pastor or church leader to MBBs that were attending an MBB church. The church leader collected them and returned them to me in sealed envelopes.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, the primary patterns in the data were identified, coded, and categorized. The analysis was inductive, as the patterns, themes, and categories emerged from the data, and were not imposed on the data.

Generalizability

This study analyzed the obstacles that keep MBBs from forming or joining a church. Muslim Background Believers from countries throughout the Muslim world face similar obstacles. Believers from other religious backgrounds may face these obstacles too. The suggested practices for helping MBBs gather into churches can be applied to believers from other backgrounds to help build relationships that lead to healthy church plants.

Project Overview

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature in the areas church planting and missions to Muslims. It also reviews biblical and theological foundations for planting churches in a Muslim context. Chapter 3 explains the design of the study, its methodology, and the process of data collection. Chapter 4 presents the results of the research. Chapter 5 discusses the major findings and the implications of the study and offers suggestions for further study and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter considers the biblical and theological foundations for why it is important for believers to meet together and communities of believers to be formed. It looks in both the Old and New Testaments to see why community is important and how community is formed. The chapter then discusses some characteristics of Christian community and some instructions of how believers are to relate to one another within Christian community. It then examines the theological foundations for why God wants believers to be in community with one another and how the church is a specific type of community.

The rest of the chapter examines numerous authors who wrote on the subjects of ministry to Muslims, church planting, and specifically, church planting among Muslims. It explores common barriers that prevent MBBs from forming true fellowship with one another and then considers some healthy practices for church planters to help develop MBB communities so that MBB churches can be planted throughout Muslim regions. This is followed by a brief discussion of the research design, and then the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Biblical Foundations

The Bible has much to say about communities of faith in both the Old and New Testaments. First, this section looks at why it is important for believers to be in community. Next, it considers how communities are formed. It then considers what a

healthy faith community looks like. Finally, it looks at some instructions of how believers are to relate to one another within a community of faith.

The Importance of Community for Believers

God designed humans to be in community with one another. Humans are created to be relational. In Genesis 1:26, we see the trinitarian nature of God present in His creation of humans. In Genesis 2:18 God says that it is not good for man to be alone. It is not natural for people to be isolated and alone.

The scriptures show that God desires to be worshipped in community. Faith is not something that is meant to simply be personal between the individual and God, but communal, shared with others who worship God together. In the Old Testament, God's people worshipped in the tabernacle and then the temple. In the New Testament, God's people met at the temple, in synagogues, and eventually as the church. Throughout the Bible, communities of faith are God's means for teaching his people how to worship Him. Communities of faith are also a witness to outsiders of who God is.

Community was a part of Jesus' ministry from the beginning. He had followers and disciples. Twelve of them were chosen as special and travelled with Jesus wherever he went. At other times in the gospels, others regularly traveled with Jesus as well. After Jesus was crucified, his disciples continued to meet together (John 20:19, 26). After Christ's ascension, his followers kept meeting together and soon the church was formed and began to grow and expand. The book of Acts reveals that wherever the message of Christ spread, believers would meet together in community.

The Formation of Faith Communities

The practice of seeking and worshipping God in community began in the Old Testament. When God called Abraham in Genesis 12, a new people was being formed. This new people had the distinguishing characteristic of being God's people. They were the people who were called out from among the others as God's special chosen ones.

In the Old Testament the people of God were an ethnic people, not seeking to bring outsiders in. They were Israelites who could trace their lineage back to a common ancestor, Jacob. Although some intermarried with other people groups, for the most part, the Israelite community was made up of one ethnicity. Their concern was for themselves, and rather than bless the other nations, their objective was to keep pure from the other nations (For example, Ezra 10). It was not until Paul and Barnabas were sent out in Acts 13 that non-Jews were sought out and welcomed into the community of faith.

The church was formed in Acts 2. From the beginning, the church was meant to grow and expand, welcoming others to come in and be a part of the community. In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, Jesus's followers were all meeting together when they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They then went out into the city as witnesses of Jesus. Many were drawn to them because all were able to hear the message of Christ in their own languages. After Peter preached to the crowd, we are told that about 3000 people were added to the number of believers. Essentially, 3000 people joined the community of believers that had started with 120 people. It is evident in Acts 2 that the formation of this new community was a direct result of the coming of the Holy Spirit. This community was created by the Holy Spirit (Peterson 158).

Throughout the New Testament, the inclusion of Gentile believers into what began as a Jewish religion shows that this new community was different from the Old Testament community. This new community was based not on ethnic or social identities, but rather on a new identity as a follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the common bond that brought this new community together. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that Christ has made both groups, Jews and Gentiles, “into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us... that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace” (2:14-15 NRSV). “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19). To the Galatians he said, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). Peter also wrote, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people” (1 Peter 2:10). The message of Jesus Christ is not just a message of salvation, but it is also the formation of a new community, the Church. The people of God are no longer a particular ethnic group, but now entry into the community is available to all through faith in Jesus Christ.

Characteristics of a Community of Faith

In the Old Testament, God’s people were a special community, different from the surrounding nations. When God brought the people from Egypt to Canaan, he gave Moses the laws for the community. They were to be a community based on religious rules that were ordained by God Himself. They were to be a community that worshiped God together. They were to live differently from the societies around them. However, much of the history in the Old Testament tells stories of how God’s people turned away

from him and did not follow his laws. They turned toward other gods, gods of other nations. They did as the other nations did. Then, time and time again, the people would realize what they were doing was wrong. They would repent and turn to God, and God would show his mercy to them. Repentance was not simply an individual exercise, but a communal one. The Israelites, as God's chosen people, were meant to serve Him and Him alone. In being different from the nations around them, they were to be a light to those nations (1 Kings 8:41-43).

Acts 2 provides a good picture of the early church. One of the best descriptions is found in Acts 2:42, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Other aspects of the early church are described in Acts 2:43-47. They include things like signs and wonders, sharing possessions with the group, selling possessions and giving to the needy, spending time together daily in the temple, eating in homes together, and praising God together. Since verse 47 says that the Lord added to their number each day as people were being saved, it is obvious that evangelism was an important part of this church, as people shared Christ with those who had not yet heard the message. This passage describes several basic functions of a church: teaching, fellowship, prayer, worship, and evangelism.

The Christian community in Acts was so attractive that it was drawing people in. Every day the believers ate together. Sharing food was a normal part of fellowship and meals together were not uncommon. However, this community went beyond eating together. They shared their possessions as well (2:43). Verse 44 says that they sold their possessions and gave the money to anyone who was in need. They spent time together daily (not weekly) in the temple court and in their homes. This shows the deep level of

care the believers had for one another (Bock 155). Luke ends this passage on the early church by saying that more people were being saved. Verse 47 says that they had the goodwill of all the people. People would have seen the group meeting publicly in the temple courts. Outsiders would have been able to observe the prayers, teaching of the apostles, signs and wonders, and the generosity of the community, and wanted to know more. Peterson says that Luke was intentionally putting the Christian community in a positive light to show that this was not some “breakaway movement from Judaism,” but that this was the true Israel where God’s Spirit was “powerfully at work, fulfilling God’s end-time promises” (158–59).

The church in Acts was a defined group of people. There was a boundary line separating those who were in the community from those who were outside the community. Believers in a location were able to recognize one another as Christian and experience fellowship as the body of Christ. In many of the cities in the book of Acts, the believers were gathered together. The church in many places appears to be one group. Meeting places like the temple courts would have been able to accommodate a large group. However, there is also evidence for smaller gatherings of believers. In Acts 12, when believers were meeting at the home of John Mark to pray for Peter, it is obviously a smaller group, not thousands of believers. When Peter leaves them, he asks them to tell “James and the other believers” (12:17). Although this was a smaller local group, it was connected to the larger believing community in the city.

The bond between believers extended beyond their local community to groups of believers in other cities as well. Communities of believers in Acts were able to recognize groups of believers in other cities as brothers and sisters in Christ. Many, if not most, of

the churches were well aware of each other. In his letters, Paul often tells one church about another. It also appears that some individuals were known by multiple churches and that there was a way for churches to contact one another.

The early church developed a leadership structure. Several examples throughout the New Testament show that the early church was self-governing and also that the congregation played a big role in the governance (Geisler 119). In both Acts 1 and Acts 6, the congregation of believers participated in choosing leaders. The congregation had a large role in church discipline in 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Corinthians 2, and 2 Thessalonians 3. In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas did not go out under the authority of an individual. Instead, the church of Antioch sent them out. A common leadership structure of the New Testament is one in which the congregation chose leaders and the chosen leaders led the congregation (119–22).

The scriptures also give evidence of appointed leadership in the early church. In Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each church. This was done so that the churches could continue to grow and thrive on their own. Paul and Barnabas could leave the churches in the hands of these new leaders and continue on to new places. This organization allowed each body to continue to function and grow independently (Keener 2182–83).

The Jerusalem council in Acts 15 shows a leadership structure that carried authority over all the churches. When there was debate about what was required of Gentile converts to Christianity, the apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to discuss the issue. At the end of the discussion, James made the final decision (15:13-21). Then the whole church chose men to travel with Paul and Barnabas to communicate the decision to

the churches. The assumption was that every church would respect the authority of the decision that was made.

Another picture of the church found in the New Testament is the body of Christ, of which, Christ is the head. In Colossians 1:18, Paul says that Jesus “is the head of the body, the church.” In Ephesians 1:22-23, Paul says that God made Jesus “the head over all things for the church, which is his body.” He describes this concept in more detail in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, in the context of spiritual gifts. There he says that just as different parts of the body have different roles and functions, different believers have different roles to play in the church. Just as the body needs the variety of body parts working together, the church needs Christians with various spiritual gifts and abilities all working together. No individual should claim to be better than the others, but all have their unique role in the body of Christ. All are needed.

The New Testament makes it clear that there were immature new believers who struggled relationally with one another. In the early church in the book of Acts, several key people did much of the ministry. Each mention of a local church makes it obvious that there are numerous individuals, but only a few are mentioned by name. Scripture does not indicate whether that means that some members were less active than others or if their role in the church was simply not mentioned. Paul’s letters to the churches, make it apparent that there were problems in the early church. Some members of the churches were living ungodly lifestyles. Some were preaching heresy, and others were following after the false teachers. Some ministered with poor motives, hoping to advance themselves and their own agendas rather than advancing the gospel. The early church was not made up of clones of the apostle Paul, but rather imperfect humans who were trying

to figure out how to live out their new faith together. Relational problems between believers were common. Throughout the New Testament, believers were often in conflict. Paul often wrote against discord and disunity. There has never been a time in the church in which everyone simply got along perfectly.

How Believers Should Relate to One Another

Although strained relationships were normal in the early church, that was never the ideal. Scripture makes it clear that through the power of the Holy Spirit, believers can relate in healthy ways with one another. Much that has been written in the New Testament tells how believers should relate to one another.

Throughout the New Testament, love was to be evident in the lives of believers. Multiple times, Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another (John 13:34, 15:12, 17). He said in John 13:35, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Several times Paul, John, and Peter echoed Jesus’s command to love one another (Romans 12:10, 13:8, 1 Thess. 3:12, 4:9, 1 John 3:11, 14, 23, 4:7, 11-12, 1 Peter 1:22, 4:8). John even wrote in 1 John 3:16, that believers ought to follow Christ’s example of love, and “lay down our lives for one another.” The followers of Christ were to have close, loving relationships. The Christian community was intended to be founded on love.

The New Testament authors gave many other instructions about how believers are to live together in community. John said that believers should have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7). Paul wrote that believers should live together in peace (2 Cor. 13:11) and harmony (Romans 12:16, 15:5). Believers need to forgive one another (Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:13). Peter and Paul both said that believers are to serve one another (1 Peter

4:10, Gal. 5:13). Believers should submit to one another (Eph. 5:21), act with humility toward others (1 Peter 5:5), and honor one another (Romans 12:10). Paul said that believers need to be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32), care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25), and intentionally do good to one another (1 Thess. 5:15). Paul said in Galatians 6:2 that believers are to bear one another's burdens. He said in First Thessalonians 5:11 to "encourage one another and build up each other." The author of Hebrews wrote in 10:24-25, "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Life together was an important topic for New Testament authors.

These and many other commands throughout the New Testament make it obvious that community and relationships between believers was very important in the early church. In his study of the role of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts, Aaron Kuecker has determined that "the Spirit has a transformative effect on individuals, best described as the formation of an allocentric identity" (18). He says that this results in the believer turning away from "self-interest or the interests of the in-group" and turning toward others (18). People become others-focused when they come to Christ and submit to the Holy Spirit residing in them. This focus on others, both inside and outside the Christian community becomes a distinguishing mark of the community of believers.

Theological Foundations

Evangelical Christians place a lot of emphasis on sharing Christ with non-believers. They often place less emphasis on how to incorporate new believers into communities of faith. Some might even be okay with the idea that a person would accept

Christ as their Lord and Savior but remain out of fellowship with other believers. This section looks at the theological foundations of why community is important for followers of Christ and how the church is a special kind of community.

Community

Humans are designed to be in community. God designed humans to be in relationship with both God and with one another. Stanley Grenz says that humans were designed to “participate in the community of God.” It is through this community that we find our identity as children of God (Grenz 268). Community is an important part of Christianity.

Community is damaged or destroyed as a result of sin. Grenz says, “Sin is marked by the disruption of the community that God desires for us and consequently for all creation.” Sin is “both the lack of and the loss of community.” Sin is whatever tries to destroy community the way that God intended it be (243). Grenz says that salvation does not restore only a person’s relationship with God, but it restores all of a person’s relationships (627).

Community has a role to play in bringing salvation to others and restoring community. The community of believers proclaims the message to the world as they send out missionaries. In Acts 13:2-3 Paul and Barnabas did not simply go out on their own. Rather, the believers in Antioch heard from God, fasted, prayed, placed their hands on Paul and Barnabas, and sent them off (Grenz 552).

People cannot come to Christ outside of community. People are saved through the proclamation of the gospel. Missionaries are representatives of the community that sends them out. The community of believers proclaims the message in their own community.

Grenz says that even when someone comes to faith simply by reading the Bible, the community of faith is still present. Through the Bible they encounter the proclamation of the faith community (552–53).

Not only does the community of believers proclaim the message, but the community also incorporates those who respond to the message into their community. Grenz says, “In the conversion process, the new believer appropriates the cognitive framework of the Christian community.” This reorients the new believer’s perspective and facilitates “the formation of a new identity and the construction of a new value system” (554). The Christian community brings both memory and hope as we carry a message of how God has worked in the past and at the same time turn our attention to what God wants to do in the future (554).

As someone comes to faith in Christ, they move into “a new community of participation, the people who name Jesus as Lord” (Grenz 557). This process begins with personal faith in Jesus Christ as their savior. It is then publicly expressed in water baptism. Then it is formalized in church membership as the believer commits to a local church. Grenz says, “Faith marks our acceptance of the story of Jesus for us. Baptism symbolizes our transfer of loyalties. And church membership marks the public meshing of our personal story with the story of God’s people” (711–12). Hesselgrave says that part of the miracle of Pentecost is that “the 3000 became like the 120 and not the other way around!” The new converts were not left alone, but were incorporated into the community (200).

Christians often put so much emphasis on the decision point of salvation that they forget that it involves incorporating the new believer into the community of faith. “If the

new believer has a responsibility to join the believing group, the believing group has a responsibility to do everything possible to incorporate and integrate the new believer into the family of faith!” (Hesselgrave 201).

Church

The church is a very specific type of community. Grenz says that the church is “a people who see themselves as standing in a relationship to the God who saves them and to each other as those who share in this salvation” (605). The church began at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first filled followers of Christ. Now all believers join together in the community of Christ and have the same Holy Spirit living inside them. The Spirit “teaches, leads, and empowers the church” on Christ’s behalf (482–84).

Although the church began at Pentecost, it is also a continuation of the people of God traced back through Jewish history in the Old Testament. The Greek word, *ekklesia*, is often used to refer to the church in the New Testament. In the Septuagint, the word was used for “assembly” or “congregation”. Many would suggest that this indicates that the authors of the New Testament viewed the church as an extension of the people of God who were called out from among the nations in the Old Testament. When Peter spoke of the church as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet 2:9), he was connecting it with the Old Testament. He was saying that just as the Israelites were God’s chosen people in the Old Testament, the church now enjoys this special status with God. The one major difference is that God’s people are no longer a specific ethnic group. Now they are a fellowship that is comprised of believers from all over the world (Grenz 605–07).

The church is also a covenant community. It is a community made up of individuals who have declared their loyalty to God through Jesus Christ. In this sense, the covenant is the confession of the church, “Jesus is Lord.” At the same time, because believers share this common allegiance to Jesus, they share a commitment to join together as the people of God. They agree to walk together in a relationship with one another (Grenz 624–26). God’s main concern is not with redeemed individuals. “He desires a reconciled humankind....The church is far more than a collection of saved individuals who band together for the task of winning the lost. The church is the community of salvation” (Grenz 626–27).

Relevant Modern Literature

This section considers modern literature that addresses the question of what barriers keep MBBs from forming healthy relationships with one another, and it looks at best practices for church planters to develop healthy MBB communities of faith. It briefly examines the topics of church planting, and specifically, church planting among Muslims, in order to show that church planting involves community. It then considers what barriers MBBs face that keep them from forming healthy relationships with one another. The rest of this section considers healthy practices for gathering MBBs together to form MBB churches.

Overview of Church Planting

First, this section looks at what church planting is and why and how it is being used in missions today. Church planting is “the whole process of evangelizing, discipling, training, and organizing a group of believers to a level of development permitting it to function as a viable church independent of the agent(s) who brought it into being”

(Livingstone, *Planting* 73). Eric and Laura Adams write, “Our goal is not just to proclaim the Gospel or to see a few individuals enter the Kingdom of God. Our purpose is nothing short of establishing naturally multiplying communities of believers who follow Jesus within their cultural norms to the extent they can with integrity” (141). Every church planter’s goal is to plant multiplying churches that lead to people movements. The indigenous churches should be self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing. (Duran et al. 233; Brock 12).

Church planting usually works best among people who have other things in common. Don McGavran introduced the idea of the homogeneous unit principle. He said, “The homogeneous unit is simply a section of society in which all the members have some characteristic in common” (69). This characteristic could be a language, education level, ethnicity, or others. McGavran found that this was an important concept for church planting and church growth because people found it much easier to join a congregation of people who were like them (166). Church planters would find more success if they focus on a particular homogeneous unit (Hesselgrave 197).

The goal of a church planting team is not to plant a church, but churches in a city, because most new believers want to worship with people similar to themselves. There should be different fellowships for different cultural subgroups found in the city (educated or uneducated, city or country, wealthy or poor, and others). Multiple churches may also be needed in different regions of the city so that they are easily accessible (Livingstone, *Planting* 101). Each believer needs to be able to be a part of a community of believers that they can relate to linguistically and culturally. Accessible, homogenous

communities of believers make it easier for new believers to feel comfortable and want to join in.

B. Church Planting Among Muslims

Church planting among Muslims comes with a unique set of challenges. Establishing churches made up of former Muslims is a relatively new practice. Before 1960, it was rare that anyone would advocate establishing a separate church made up of Muslim background believers. Most missionaries considered it too difficult to establish such a church (Livingstone, *Planting* 19).

Greg Livingstone said in 1993 that not much attention had been given to church planting among Muslims. Many books and articles had been written about how to reach Muslims for Christ, but not much had been written about gathering Muslims into communities of believers. Livingstone suggests that this might be because it had been assumed that Muslim converts would naturally seek out and support other Muslim converts (*Planting* 16–17). More has been written in the past 25 years, but there is still a lack of literature on the topic.

Very few fellowships of MBBs exist. Livingstone says that it is very disappointing how the few fellowships that do exist fall short of “being a lighthouse to their people” (“Laborers” 52). Many of the gatherings are too weak to even be considered congregations (“Laborers” 53).

It is common for church planters among Muslims to find it difficult to gather MBBs into fellowships. Fran Love writes, “One of the most difficult goals to achieve in church planting is to gather MBBs into a body. Bringing them to faith in Christ and discipling them individually is a relatively easy task compared to getting believers to

work together as a church” (“Developing” 205). Roland Muller says that church planting is difficult in any place or culture, but it is especially difficult in the Muslim world.

“There are few success stories from which to learn and few who have even managed to get more than a handful of believers together” (373). Kathryn Kraft says that she has found that most MBBs do not have close contact with other MBBs (*Searching* 80). This is a common problem, and it needs to be solved.

Church planting literature emphasizes communities of believers. However, it also demonstrates that it is very difficult to establish community among MBBs. The next section reviews literature that highlights the barriers to community for MBBs.

Barriers that Keep MBBs from Gathering Together

Numerous factors work against trying to gather two or more believers into a small fellowship. A real threat of persecution exists in a Muslim context. Most Muslim cultures are clan and family oriented, making it difficult to form a close relationship with someone outside of one’s own clan. These factors can “create an absence of trust—a force which can keep believers apart, or pull them apart soon after initial introductions” (Sinclair Loc. 31/263).

The lack of faithful MBB fellowships is itself a barrier to other Muslims coming to Christ. Greg Livingstone says, “Seldom have Muslim converts transferred their primary loyalty from their blood relatives to their brothers and sisters in Christ. Perhaps this is because few have experienced biblical fellowship.” He says that if the MBB church becomes a community that bears one another’s burdens, confesses sins to one another, and cares for one another, the group would stand out in Muslim society and the group itself would be a tool of evangelism (*Planting* 184–85). Authors have suggested

several reasons of why it is difficult for MBBs to form community. These barriers to community will be examined below.

MBBs Are Not Sure Where They Belong

One of the barriers to community among MBBs is that MBBs are not sure where they belong. Muslims have a strong sense of community. Community is such a strong force in Islam that Muslims around the world feel very connected to one another. A sense of local community is even stronger. When a believer converts to Christianity from Islam, they are leaving a very strong community. They often have high expectations from their past experience about what a religious community should look like (Kraft, *Searching* 56). Sometimes when new believers enter into the community of believers, they do not receive clear signals of what is expected of them and what it means to be a member of the community. Although the expectations might seem clear for other community members, the unclear expectations might cause the new believer to avoid the group of believers, or even leave them altogether (Hesselgrave 202).

There are often barriers between Muslims and traditional Christians which make it difficult for an MBB to find a home in a traditional Christian church. Years of hostility have resulted in prejudice and even hatred. Often when an MBB enters a Christian community, they are greeted with suspicion and doubt (Baig 74). Sometimes although MBBs are welcomed joyfully and allowed to share their testimony widely, they never find true community in the Christian church (Adams and Adams 148). MBBs might not feel trusted by others in the church. They are not often asked to serve in the church or to be involved in other ways. Although they sense love, they might not feel like they are really respected and accepted into the Christian community. Even in the best situations,

MBBs rarely find that the Christian community meets the expectations they have from their former community (Kraft, *Searching* 57). At the same time, their involvement in the church leads to their rejection by friends and family. In such cases, the MBB is often left without community, which sometimes leads them to leave Christianity and return to the community they knew before (Adams and Adams 148).

Kraft says that MBBs become a “minority within a minority.” Christianity is a minority in a Muslim country and MBBs are a minority within Christianity. It is usually illegal for a Muslim to convert to Christianity, so there is no legal status for the MBB. They are not accepted by the Muslim community, but they are not really accepted by the Christian community either (*Searching* 58).

Gathering Is Not Part of MBBs’ Cultural Habits

A second barrier is that gathering may not be a part of an MBB’s cultural habits. When a Muslim comes to Christ, he or she has probably never had a habit of attending church on a regular basis. Non-religious Muslims may have no habit of gathering for religious purposes at all. Livingstone suggests that it is not the inclination of Muslim believers to “think church.” The fact that Western Christians meet together might reflect our history and culture rather than “an innate, or even Spirit-led, behavioral pattern” (*Planting* 17). It is important that church planters help new believers begin to form new spiritual habits.

MBBs Do Not Trust Each Other

Another barrier to community among MBBs is that MBBs often do not trust each other. One of the most important issues in a Muslim country is the issue of trust (Muller 373; Pietzsch 20). Evans says, “Lack of trust is perhaps the single greatest barrier to

creating and maintaining the cohesiveness factor in Muslim-convert churches. Only as there is a sufficient core group with strong bonds of mutual trust and loyalty will the church continue independently of its planter” (10).

It is not natural for strangers to have a high level of trust for one another. Eric and Laura Adams write, “Many field workers labor diligently to disciple individual Muslim believers. When they bring these individuals together, expecting them to fellowship, they are dismayed that Muslims who are strangers to each other find it hard to trust each other” (149). A missionary that Eric and Laura Adams interviewed said, “Bringing strangers together and calling them ‘community’ is not comprehensible in most contexts” (149). Issues of trust that must be dealt with always exist.

Muslim culture does not operate with a high level of trust. Don Little says that lack of trust among MBBs and MBB groups, and also a lack of commitment to a group, “stems from the social realities of Muslim communities, in which widespread lack of integrity and stress on saving face makes it hard for new believers to trust each other.” A community that operates on the basis of trust is a new concept to most of the new believers (172–74).

Sometimes MBBs have a particularly hard time accepting someone who took a different path on their journey to find Christ. For example, one person might make a strong rejection of Islam as an act of rebellion, and then later come to faith in Christ. Another might find Christ in the mosque and attempt to stay connected to their Muslim community. Over time the second person’s commitment to Christ is key in their life and Islam has lost any meaning. However, the first person might view the second as having never left Islam. The second might view the first as only choosing Christ as an act of

rebellion. They might both have legitimate faith in Christ, but they find it difficult to trust each other (Kraft, “Relationships” 12–18).

MBBs Are Not Related to Others in the Group

Another barrier that keeps MBBs from community with one another is that they are not related to other believers in the group. Easterners view nearness of people, not in terms of proximity, but rather in terms of relations, first blood relations and second marriage relations (Muller 273). “In an Eastern setting, bonding usually starts at the family level and often stops at the tribal/ethnic level” (285). Moving beyond that is difficult because it can involve different skin tones, languages, cultures, and worldviews. Many Easterners have never considered that community could extend beyond their tribe or ethnicity (285).

Generally, Muslims are most trusting of their own family and relatives. It is rare to find deep relationships in the Muslim world, outside of the family grouping. “Even within that grouping, relationships are more often cemented by fear and necessity than by love and trust” (Evans 10). Culturally, MBBs find it difficult to trust others whom they are not related to. Fran Love writes, “Fears of being betrayed and a cultural distrust of nonfamily members keep most believers from trusting one another long enough to become a church” (“Developing” 205).

Fear of Persecution

Fear of persecution is another barrier that can keep MBBs from gathering together. Persecution is a significant and serious concern for many MBBs. David Greenlee says that in his study of twelve MBB churches, persecution was common. It ranged from social pressure to intimidation and harassment to even torture by police. He

said, however, the most common characteristic of the churches was the fear of what could happen. Usually persecution caused the believers to be more cautious about sharing Christ publicly and in some cases it led to the demise of the church (262).

A Half-Commitment

Finally, some have suggested that a half-hearted commitment to Christ is a barrier to forming community among MBBs. New believers are often immature, and it is possible that some who claim Christ are not truly committed to Him. Pietzsch suggests that part of the problem is that some MBBs are not truly converted. He says that true conversion should bring about a brokenness before God. If this does not happen, the MBB will often “not integrate into the fellowship of believers” (29–30). MBBs who do not mature in their faith “often suffer from inferiority or superiority complexes.” Struggling with inferiority might cause someone to withdraw and keep from fellowshiping with other believers. Those who struggle with superiority might tend to seek power and glory and look down on others (48). Immaturity and lack of commitment keep MBBs from gathering.

Best Practices for Healthy MBB Church Plants

The last section looked at what literature has said are barriers to MBBs forming community. This section discusses healthy church planting practices that lead to community so that MBBs will view each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and communities of faith can be established.

As in any Christian endeavor, prayer is of utmost importance. Everyone agrees that prayer is essential in church planting among Muslims (George 105; Trousdale 180; Garrison 172–77; Wagner, *Church Planting* 46). Of great importance is that church

planters are individually people of prayer and that they pray as a group. Church planters must also enlist prayer partners who will pray regularly and specifically for the team and the church plant, and the church planters need to communicate well with their prayer partners (Wagner, *Church Planting* 46–49; Watson and Watson 79–103).

Healthy MBB churches will not come about without the working of the Holy Spirit. In 1985, Wendell Evans wrote that compiling guidelines as to how to form Muslim-convert churches in the Arab-Muslim world seems a presumptuous undertaking. No one, on the basis of visible results, can yet claim to be an expert in the field. No definable method has so brilliantly succeeded as to become a model of procedure. We increasingly realize that an unprecedented moving of the Spirit of God in these lands is the final and essential secret of effective church-planting. (1)

Since that time, numerous studies have been done, more churches have been successfully planted, and many books and articles have been written. A lot of progress has been made, but it is still true that “an unprecedented moving of the Spirit of God in these lands is the final and essential secret of effective church-planting” (1).

Recognizing that church planting is the work of God does not give missionaries an excuse to be unaware of best practices. Greg Livingstone says that we can assume that God is doing his part. Now we must examine our methods (*Planting* 16). Don Allen suggests that without a lot of precedent, it is important to use the “Fruitful Practices Approach” to church planting among Muslims. This is a five-step process. First, a church planting team needs to “discover the most common effective practices for establishing fellowships.” Next, they need to “explore ways to apply these fruitful practices” to their

situation. Then, they need to evaluate their efforts after a season of practicing them. Next, they need to share their results with others. Finally, they need to begin this process over again (106). This process takes intentionality. Churches are not normally planted among Muslims without multiple people in the city seeing church planting as their primary task (Livingstone, *Planting* 94).

A number of best practices have been discovered in church planting among Muslims that lead to healthy community. Church planting works best when using local partners. The gospel spreads quickest, and groups are established more easily when missionaries focus on responsive people and use family lines to share Christ. When gathering unrelated individuals, it is important to help them find identity and learn to build trusting relationships with one another. For MBBs to feel comfortable at gatherings, it is important for the meetings to be contextualized.

Use Local Partners

One of the best methods for gathering MBBs is to use local partners. Two main methods have been used. One method is to train MBB leaders to do the gathering. The second is to use near-culture partners.

MBB Leaders

The best way to encourage MBBs to gather is to train local MBB leaders to do the gathering. As MBBs lead others to Christ, it is natural for them to meet together for discipleship. Seekers who are investigating community will look at the MBB leader's family as an example of MBB community. Contextualized meeting practices will happen much more naturally without the involvement of a foreigner. The best way to see churches planted and grow is to use local leaders. More than church planting, the

missionary's focus needs to be on discipleship and leadership training (George 82, 99). The local leaders will become the most effective church planters.

Livingstone says that in most cases, it is the Muslim converts, not the foreign missionaries, who establish a church. The job of the missionary is to introduce people to Christ and disciple them until the right person comes along to lead the new people movement (*Planting* 165). If a missionary comes alongside and helps establish just one Muslim background believer in ministry, the impact of their ministry can continue on long after they are gone (Little 283). Little says that it often takes years of discipling for new believers from a Muslim background to mature to the point that they can be pastors or leaders in a local church (303).

Near-Culture Christian Partners

A common method of reaching Muslims in the past has been to go to the Christian peoples nearby and work with them to reach their Muslim neighbors. The theory was that the local Christians would be more similar linguistically and culturally to their Muslim neighbors. This would make them better communicators than the foreign missionary. George Patterson and Richard Scoggins, among others, support this method, saying that when the culture is very different from that of the missionary, the missionary should work with a church that has a similar culture to the people they are trying to reach (142).

Christian background evangelical churches can be a blessing to be used by church planters. Muller says that it is true that there is mistrust between Christian background believers and Muslim background believers, but this mistrust is no greater than the mistrust between two Muslim converts (375).

Local Christian background believers can play an important role on a church planting team. Greeson said that his team found church planting difficult because they were seen as outsiders by the locals. To overcome the problem, they had national Christians and national MBBs join their team. With their new team, the church planting effort took off (16).

Often it is not best for missionaries to minister directly to local Christian peoples with the goal of getting them to reach out to their Muslim neighbors. Greeson noted that although their team sought after the support of local Christian churches, none of the churches wanted to partner with them. Individuals within the church were willing to help reach Muslims, but not any churches as a whole (21–22). Often cultural Christians in Muslim areas are reluctant to share Christ with their Muslim neighbors. Robert Blincoe writes that for over 100 years, protestant missionaries worked with Christian minorities in Kurdistan to get them to reach out the Muslim Kurds around them. Rather than learn Kurdish and evangelize Kurds, the missionaries would learn local Christian languages and work directly with the Armenians, Syrian Orthodox, Assyrians, and Chaldeans who lived among the Kurds. Blincoe says that this method failed repeatedly. The Christian minorities had no desire to reach the Kurds, and the missionaries became so preoccupied with the Christians that they did not have time to reach the Kurds either (Blincoe 194).

The most important thing in using near-culture partners is to make sure that they are properly trained in cross-cultural church planting. Livingstone says that it does not really matter how close someone lives to Muslims. If they are not properly guided, “even near-culture workers tend to start churches similar to their own without consideration of how they may be perceived by those they hope to reach” (“Laborers” 65)

Find Responsive Portions of Society and Use Relational Networks

To establish faith communities, it is important to start with the right people. Community is established more quickly when responsive people and portions of society are targeted with the gospel because they will more likely come to Christ together rather than as individuals. Community also forms naturally as heads of households are reached for Christ, and the gospel is spread along relational networks.

Although we need to go to both responsive and unresponsive places, as we share Christ, we need to seek out the families and segments of society that are more responsive. Missionaries should concentrate ministry on the responsive while continuing to sow among the less responsive as well (Livingstone, *Planting* 32). Watson and Watson suggest that church planters should seek to find “persons of peace.” These are people who welcome the church planter and the message and are willing to share the message with others. Persons of peace are open to a relationship with the church planter, hungry for spiritual answers, and quick to share what they learn with others (123–35). As these persons of peace and their families come to Christ, they will share the message with others.

Missionaries need to intentionally seek out heads of households and other people of influence with whom they can share Christ. As Muslim families are usually hierarchical and patriarchal, it is important that church planters are intentional to approach women and children through men, and young men through their fathers. Missionaries need to work within the family structure rather than in opposition to it (Little 266–68; Parshall, *Beyond* 187–88).

Working through heads of households might seem strange to Western Christians. Western missionaries are often drawn toward individuals and end up reaching people who are on the fringe of their society. This often results in the impact of the gospel never moving beyond them into the broader community. If church planters are able to keep their focus on the heads of households, families and entire clans can come to faith in Christ (Garrison 227–29).

Church planters need to resist the urge to focus on young people, rather than heads of households. Sometimes reaching the youth is all they can do. Other times missionaries find it easier to reach young people and lose their goal of trying to reach families (Patterson and Scoggins 101). Kay Waters suggests that when missionaries have single people who are open to the gospel, they should look for ways to meet the whole family. They should try to visit them in their home (176–77). Livingstone said he knew of a time when a twenty-year-old man asked a missionary for a New Testament. Rather than simply give him one, the missionary told the young man that he needed to get permission from his father. This led to the father inviting the missionary to his home and asking for a New Testament for both himself and his son (Livingstone, *Planting* 122).

As heads of households come to Christ, church planters need to teach them and help them to reach their own families and social circles. Scoggins and Rockford say that this is especially important to emphasize at the beginning of the discipleship process (4). Heads of households who have made a decision for Christ should be encouraged to start reading the Bible in their homes with their families and discussing the Bible together. They could then invite other friends and relatives to join them in this. These meetings can eventually evolve into formal church meetings (Patterson and Scoggins 102–03).

Working within relational networks is the best way to overcome the problem of trust. In established relational networks, a level of trust is already established. When pre-existing family networks, work networks, friendship networks, and student networks begin to come to faith in Christ they keep their trust, and community is formed (Adams and Adams 149–50; Trousdale 40–41; Watson and Watson 105–12). Witnessing through “social and relational networks (families, neighbors, community groups, etc.)” is one of the most fruitful practices of successful church planters. These networks function “as natural bridges to the formation of fellowships or churches” (Greenlee and Wilson 113). “It is a natural step to organize a relational network that believes together into a house church” (Adams and Adams 149–50). Church planting movements “typically explode through a people group by moving through family relationships” (Garrison 209).

A popular church planting method by Ying Kai, Training for Trainers (T4T), has found this method of using social networks to share Christ to be very effective. In T4T, the discipler tells the new believer to list all of their unsaved friends, which is usually over 100 people. Then they tell them to pick the top five that they would like to share Christ with and share Christ with them that week. They then choose the next five, then the next five, and so on (*CPM*). This method takes advantage of the natural relational connections that new believers already have.

It is important that missionaries try to keep MBBs connected with their social networks. Parshall says that they regularly send solitary believers back to their friends and families to share their faith. The intent is to do it in a way that does not lead to social opposition. If necessary, the new believers can wait until their friends and family see a

life change in them before they share with words. However, it is important that the Muslim convert remain in his or her own community (*Beyond* 186–87).

The missionary can play a part in helping new believers stay connected to their families and remain a part of their family network. The family might be more accepting of the new believer if they know and trust the missionary and see the love the missionary has for the people and the culture. If they see the missionary as “holy, God-fearing, hospitable, loving and generous,” they might be less likely to reject the MBB (Waters 179).

Sometimes the job of the missionary is not to simply keep the MBB in his or her family network. They might need to encourage some MBBs to restore their relationship with their family. It is common for MBBs to have abandoned Islam and been disillusioned by their culture before coming to Christ. After coming to Christ, the family relationship needs to be restored. “The willingness of a formerly alienated family member to undertake the hard and slow work of rebuilding family relationships can be a powerful testimony to the truth of the gospel and evidence of the sincerity of a believer’s faith” (Waters 181).

Gathering Unrelated MBBs

Many times, church planters find themselves working with individuals rather than social networks or extended families. Although church planters might be focused on heads of households and family networks, when individuals want to come to Christ, the church planter cannot ignore them. It is important that the church planter meet with them and disciple them. Church planters need to show them what Christian community looks like. They need to help MBBs find their new identity and help them form new

communities of faith. Several ways have been found to promote gathering unrelated MBBs. I discuss each of these below.

Disciple Individual Believers

One of the ways that people found to promote gathering among unrelated MBBs is to disciple individual believers. Sinclair says that it is likely that if a church planter is working with two unrelated believers individually, it will be difficult to bring those two together. The church planter should continue to disciple each one and build a strong relationship with each (Loc. 29/263). With all of the factors that work to keep the two believers apart, the friendship with the church planter becomes the one positive factor that they both have in common. As each MBB studies the Bible more, they will realize the importance of being in Christian community. Also, as they continue to follow Christ, it will only be natural for them to want a support system when they face difficult things (Loc. 31/263).

Discipling individual believers has value. Fran Love says that she often felt frustrated when she went to the home of an MBB to do individual discipleship. She wanted to have a group, not an individual. Love concluded that when she was meeting with the MBB, she was the church. It was the church scattered, not gathered, but it was still the church. Love realized that this was her opportunity to invest in this new believer. Although the MBB was not a part of an MBB fellowship, Love could still train her to pray, worship, study the Bible, and share a meal, so that when a fellowship would be formed, this MBB would be comfortable in the gathering (“Developing” 206).

From the beginning of discipleship, church planters need to teach that truly following Christ means being in community with other believers (Scoggins and Rockford

4; Ott and Wilson 244). Even before coming to Christ, Muslims must learn that the idea of following Christ includes committing to fellowship with other believers. If converts fail to see other believers as their brothers and sisters, conversion is not complete (Livingstone, *Planting* 13). Patterson and Scoggins say that new believers “need to know that they have been born into a new, loving community. Having been forgiven, they enter into a whole new kingdom” (100). This relational aspect of salvation is “an essential part of evangelism. The message of salvation includes the purpose God has for us in salvation, to strengthen and extend His Kingdom” (100).

Rather than focusing on planting a church, a church planter should focus on discipling individuals (George 82). Church planting is “all about making and multiplying disciples” (Bevins 76). One of the main goals of discipleship is that the MBB should become “a reproducing Christian in a reproducing church” (H. 167). For discipleship to happen, the discipler needs to be committed to the discipleship of the new MBB. New MBBs need someone to walk alongside of them. This might mean that the discipler will need to reschedule life and adjust priorities for a time. The discipler does not need to have all of the right answers. The discipler needs to walk alongside the MBB, “praying encouraging, having fellowship, correcting discipling, tutoring and waiting on God’s answer to prayer” (Pietzsch 11–12).

Discipleship takes time and disciplers should not be discouraged if they do not see rapid change in the life of the new believer. Don Little says that effective discipleship “involves persevering effort over long periods of time. It involves a deep commitment to building community. It involves a commitment to deep-level healing and transformation at God’s pace, over time, in both individuals and communities” (306). He suggests that it

might even take multiple generations of believers over decades to grow strong believers and a strong church. Effective disciplers need to be in it for the long haul with the intention of transforming former Muslims into the type of believers “that will affect their families and communities into the third and fourth generations and beyond” (307).

Discipleship needs to be comprehensive, not simply focused on a particular area of need. Don Little says that there are five elements that are extremely important for the processes of discipleship and spiritual growth. They are:

1. Individual: Develop personal intimacy with God in prayer and obedience.
2. Community: Belong to Holy Spirit-led worshiping communities with fortifying corporate routines.
3. Mentor: Be personally mentored by a more mature believer.
4. Scripture: Submit to and learn from the Scriptures individually and corporately.
5. Ministry: Share the gospel and use spiritual gifts in ministry and service (160).

Intentionally focusing on all these elements will help to produce mature believers who could eventually become leaders in the new church.

Disciplers need to teach what Christian community looks like. In many Muslim societies, a community of MBBs is a new concept. There is no precedent of how MBBs should relate to each other. They need to be taught (Adams and Adams 150). One way to build a loving Christian community is to emphasize the “one another” passages in the Bible (Patterson and Scoggins 57; Watson and Watson 165–69). As believers learn to put these verses into practice, they will “encourage one another, pray for each other, confess faults to one another, etc.” (Patterson and Scoggins 57). Even in one-on-one discipleship,

the church planter can teach biblical principles on relationships between believers and the importance of Christian fellowship (Sinclair Loc. 31/263).

Show MBBs Christian Community

Another practice that encourages unrelated MBBs to gather is to show them examples of Christian community. As Muslim seekers are investigating the message of Christ, they are usually at the same time investigating the community that the messenger represents. Most Muslims are a part of a strong community, and they want to know what their new community would be like if they were to accept Christ (Muller 312).

Understanding the Islamic community the MBB had been a part of before is important. The new community will need to meet needs formerly met in the Muslim community (Iliam 142).

Considering that most Muslims find their strongest sense of community in extended family and their tribe, all that their community means to them becomes obvious. Most single people turn to their community when they want to get married. Often young people look first to their community when they want to get a job (Muller 273–74). In times of crisis people turn to their community for financial and other support. Community is a place of “security, acceptance, protection, and identity.” To leave such a community is an enormous sacrifice (Baig 71). As Muslims realize that they would likely lose all of these things if they were to accept Christ, they are looking to see if the Christian community would be able to meet these needs. Church planters should plan for a way to help MBBs.

Muller says that missionaries usually think that they can share Christ with people and form the new believers into local communities of faith. They are often surprised to

find that the new converts want to join the missionary's community! The new converts see that the Westerners get support from back home and live a different lifestyle. It is common for new believers to notice this and want to be a part of that community too (313). Missionaries need to consider what types of personal lifestyle will best communicate Christian community to local believers.

If church planters are expecting new believers from a Muslim background to form their own communities, they need to communicate this to the new believers. They need to help the new believers understand the Bible in their own context so that they can apply the principles and develop a new faith community. Muller says, however, that this is an almost impossible task because most Muslims have never read a religious text or thought about religious things. Muslims are taught to obey their religious teachers and not to question them. They are discouraged from thinking religiously for themselves (328). Muslims look to the Quran for rules about how to live. The Bible teaches principles and concepts, and Christians are taught to apply them to their lives. When discipling a Muslim, it is important to explain how the local community of believers functions. Muller writes, "When community is explained, confidence is imparted" (282).

Not only do new believers need to be taught about the church, but church also needs to be modeled for them by the church-planting team (Ott and Wilson 244). Without an established MBB church, this can be done by introducing new believers to examples of Christian churches or to the worship practices of the church planting team.

Often new MBBs want to join an established Christian church. Kathryn Kraft says that converts from Islam usually want to be a part of the traditional Christian church in their community as a way to connect with historical Christianity. This is especially the

case for Muslims who convert without the influence of others, and for those who come to faith through contact with a Christian. She says that only converts who come to faith through contact with another MBB who has chosen not to be a part of a church will typically choose to not be a part of a church (*Searching* 56).

Established churches can be good places for Muslims to find Christian community. It has become common for evangelical churches in Muslim countries to open their doors to MBBs. Most churches now have a few MBBs regularly attending their services. Some churches have tried special services for MBBs. Some pastors readily baptize MBBs, and some churches have even asked MBBs to join their elder boards (Muller 376).

However, problems can surface for MBBs who are connected to traditional churches. Sometimes when MBB churches form near Christian communities, they feel pressured to be like the Christian church. They accept the Christians as experts since they have been following Christ for much longer. This can result in the MBB church taking on forms that are not natural to their group. This aligning with Christians can sometimes further alienate the MBBs from the society around them and make them less effective in reaching their community (Adams and Adams 148).

In places where there is no Christian church, the fellowship of the church planting team can serve as an example of Christian community to new believers. It is important for seekers to have the opportunity to explore the messenger's community of faith. Muller suggests that church planters welcome seekers into their community and live transparently in front of them. If church planters usually mix business with worship, prayer, and fellowship, it might be best to have a business meeting at another time so that

they can invite the seeker to join in for the worship, prayer, and fellowship (329).

Livingstone says, “Particularly in the Muslim world, where distrust is both endemic and of epidemic proportions, it is vital for Muslim inquirers to see how believers should love one another.” Church planting teams serve as a model church to the new believers as they observe how the Christians interact as a team (*Planting* 111–12).

Help MBBs Find New Identity as Followers of Christ

A third valuable practice in gathering unrelated MBBs is to help MBBs find new identity as followers of Christ. “An understanding of the believer’s new identity in Christ goes hand in hand with the sense of being the family of God” (Ott and Wilson 244). Church planters should teach new believers from scripture that they are “new creatures” and “children of God”. Our identification with Christ “trumps all other allegiances and bonds. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil.3:20) and is no longer based on nationality, ethnic background, economic status, gender, caste, education or any other human feature” (244). The believer’s new identity in Christ, along with a sense of Christian community must be both taught and experienced in the emerging church. Deeply rooted and complex social barriers can only be overcome with “great patience, bold examples, and persistent teaching” (245).

For an MBB, finding new identity can be very complex and connecting with other MBBs greatly helps the process. Tim Green says that there are three layers of identity. They are collective identity, social identity, and core identity. Collective identity is the identity of the group one belongs to. Social identity is how others see someone. Core identity is the individual’s private identity. Often Christ changes the core identity first. Green suggests that it is difficult to have a new core identity without having a social

support group of other MBBs. Converts that try to go it alone often revert back to Islam. A community of believers is vitally important so the person can have a new social identity as well (“Conversion” 44–49).

Often MBBs find it most difficult to manage their social identity. Green says that there are generally three ways that people cope with their social identity as they live as followers of Christ from a Muslim background. Some MBBs switch between identities. They present themselves as Christians to the Christian community and as Muslims to the Muslim community. In a sense, they are living two separate lives. Other MBBs suppress one of their identities. They might leave their Muslim community and live as a Christian among Christians, or they might leave the Christian community and live as a Muslim, secretly following Christ alone. Neither of these two options work well for an extended time. The third and best option is for an MBB to synthesize their two halves. Ideally, an MBB will learn to live as a follower of Christ in the Muslim community, known by others as an MBB (“Identity” 56–57).

To successfully synthesize the two halves of an MBB’s identity, certain conditions must be met. First, both the Christian community and the Muslim community must be willing to allow the MBB to live on the border of the two groups and relate to both of them. If either group does not allow it, the MBB will have to choose between them. Next, both the Muslim community and the Christian community must be willing to allow the MBB to experiment with different cultural combinations and meanings. There will also need to be a marriage partner who allows the person to relate to both groups. Otherwise, the MBB will have to marry into one of the groups. Finally, the real successful mix of cultures will happen in the next generation as children are raised into

this new identity and culture. If enough MBB children are able to maintain this new identity rather than integrating back into either the Muslim or Christian communities, then a new MBB community will successfully be formed. If the group reaches a critical mass, then society will accept them as a new group (“Identity” 57–63).

Help MBBs Form a New Faith Community

Finally, one of the best ways that has been found to help unrelated MBBs gather is for church planters to help believers form fellowships. Garrison and Garrison say that in their study of church planting movements (CPMs), one of the main factors of CPMs is effectively forming fellowships. “When fellowship formation is done well, it knits new Jesus-followers into a community of fellow disciples who will nurture and encourage one another as they follow Christ. A viable, healthy fellowship reproduces the life and work of Jesus Christ within the community and exponentially multiplies the work of the Christian worker as it transforms an outsider movement into a movement within the community” (213). Fellowship formation starts by building trusting relationships between believers, but eventually leads to the establishment of a church with local leadership. There are two phases involved in transitioning from an outsider movement to a movement within the community.

Build Trust and Relationships: The first phase is to build trust and relationships. Church planters need to find creative ways to help new believers build trusting relationships and bond with each other in order for community to develop (Livingstone, *Planting* 220). To plant a church group members must love one another. For love to develop there must be fellowship. Livingstone says that it is not enough to simply show up for a weekly study (*Planting* 220). Part of the job of the church planter is to find ways

for believers to interact with each other in nonthreatening contexts (Sinclair Loc. 31/263). “Progress toward gathering will likely involve a variety of pre-gathering activities” (Scoggins and Rockford 4).

People need to spend significant time together in situations where they can relax and be open with each other. This can happen through meals, classes, retreats, or other activities. Community is formed as people share life together (Parshall, *Beyond* 226). These events might start off as simply social events to get to know one another, but eventually they must become times of worship, prayer, and Bible teaching (Sinclair Loc. 33/263). Time is the key to making this happen. “Nothing establishes fellowship like time spent together” (Wagner, *Church Planting* 112).

Working together to show care to others is a great way to develop relationships. Iliam says that caring for one another during times of need as well as during special events can form strong bonds of community. She suggests working together in times of danger, sickness, funerals, weddings, and holiday celebrations. She also suggests that ministry projects such as visitation ministry, retreats, evangelism programs, and special days of prayer are great ways of bonding (142). Livingstone says that church planters should aim to involve the new believers in social projects. Ideally followers of Christ will become known as “the most caring people in the country!” Social projects also give a reason for the convert to be seen often with the international worker (*Planting* 221).

Celebrating together also forms community. With birthdays and holidays, there are lots of opportunities to invite believers over for food. It is usually a comfortable atmosphere for people to get to know each other (Sinclair Loc. 33/263). Greenlee found that special events and holiday celebrations were extremely important in MBB churches.

Summer Bible camps and Christmas and Easter celebrations brought believers together for celebration, fellowship, and teaching. These kind of events were significant in building up the church (263). Eric and Laura Adams agree that the celebration of significant life events can “forge deep bonds in community identity” (146). Muller says that when bringing new converts together in a social, non-religious setting, they should not be told that the others are believers. This way they can meet others and form an unbiased opinion of each other without trying to figure out if they are sincere and trustworthy (373–74). If appropriate, parties can also involve worship, prayer, and Bible teaching (Sinclair Loc. 33/263).

Transitioning to Church Formation: The second phase in helping MBBs form faith communities is transitioning to church formation. As relationships between believers are formed and developed through informal gatherings, the church planter needs to help the believers incorporate Christian practices into their gatherings. This can start with periodic gatherings for worship, prayer, and Bible teaching, but eventually, the church planter needs to suggest that the group meet regularly. This might take a lot of time, effort, and resources, but it needs to happen (Sinclair Loc. 33/263).

Having steps and goals as the church planting team moves through various phases of church planting is helpful. Dick Scoggins and James Rockford have created a document called “Pioneer Church Planting Phases.” In it they list seven phases of church planting. In their model, phases four and five focus on gathering believers and forming a church. Phase four is “Discipling Believers and Working Toward Gathering” and phase five is “Developing the Body of Believers” (4–5). Essentially phase four is the process of

taking individual believers and creating the nucleus of a church and phase five is taking the nucleus and forming it into an actual church.

The first step is to form a nucleus. A nucleus is a group of at least three believers who meet together regularly. To form a nucleus, one must start with at least one believer who is being discipled and has potential to reach his or her family and friends. The believer is taught from the beginning that followers of Christ are to be in community with other believers and that it is important to share the good news of Jesus with others. As other individuals come to Christ, the church planter is intentional to introduce them at informal pre-gathering events. As the believers get to know each other, they are encouraged to meet together with the intention of forming a fellowship (4).

To move from a nucleus to an actual church in phase five, a group identity needs to develop, and group members need to commit to one another as the Body of Christ. During this time, the group members really need to catch the vision of leading others to Christ and multiplying fellowships both locally and in neighboring places (5).

Scoggins and Rockford suggest these criteria for recognizing when a nucleus is ready to be transitioned to an actual church:

GROUP COMMITMENT: The local believers have committed to one another and see their assembling together as an expression of being a local church (using whatever word is most suitable for ekklesia reality).

SIZE: Around 10 or more believers of the people group regularly involved, including older believing children. This does not necessarily mean that meetings average 10 or more, just that there is regular involvement of the 10+.

BREADTH: 3 or more married men (heads of households), and 2 or more mature women, of local believers regularly involved (whether or not their spouses are believers, though that is clearly stronger).

LEADERSHIP: At least 2 key believers who seem to be “elders in the making”, who are assuming more and more shepherding and overseeing, and whom the others recognize as leaders.

STRENGTH: Not all hidden believers with hidden faith. Some believers are baptized and have already faced serious threats and persevered, maintaining their faith and their “confession of Christ before men” (Mt.10:32). Believers regularly share their faith; prayer and planning have begun for starting a sister fellowship.

(5)

A group with these criteria is ready to be established as a church.

Commitment is one of the keys to establishing a church. Evans says that in his experience, MBBs often were very committed to Christ, but had very little to no commitment at all to the body of Christ. To plant a church, it is essential that believers are taught to commit to the church as the body of Christ (9). Eric and Laura Adams say that it can be helpful to have the MBBs commit to each other “through a meaningful covenant or ritual” (150). Hesselgrave says that some sort of tangible insignia can be given to believers to help them identify with the community of believers. He suggests that this could be a Bible with a special imprint, a pin, or even a small card (215).

There must also be a commitment to solving problems within the church. If believers leave every time they have a disagreement, it will be difficult to reach a critical mass. They must learn to work out their problems within the context of the church. There

must also be a commitment to continue to function as a church in the face of opposition. The church might need to change venues or suspend weekly meetings for a time, but there must be a commitment to stand together and support one another in times of persecution and opposition (Evans 9).

Leadership is key to the success of a new church. The church planter's role in any particular place is temporary, but the church is meant to be permanent. The church planting process ends when the church planter passes all the authority and responsibility to local church leaders. The church planter's priority needs to be finding and training individuals who have been chosen by God to lead the church (Evans 3).

Finding the right local leaders is vital. If the foreign missionary thrusts a national into leadership who does not have the support of the group, the group will most likely fall apart. A group needs to have a qualified local leader who has the support of the local group and who accepts the responsibility to lead (Evans 2; Livingstone, *Planting* 21–22). Ott and Wilson say that all committed members of an emerging church “should have some say in the process of determining the leaders,” either by a formal election process or through informal discussions (247).

Character is more important than credentials when choosing a leader. A person with good character can learn Bible knowledge and skills for ministry. Character is hard to teach (Viveza and Samuel 160–61). Muller says that it is important to find someone who is teachable, humble, and loves God and others. The leader must be a servant and also someone who is generous with the things God gives them (381–84). Leaders must have trusting relationships with other church members. Relationships are key for the health of the church (Greenlee 261–62).

It is usually best that MBB church leaders be self-supported lay people. Although needing to be qualified leaders, if they remain without titles, the leaders will be less open for persecution. Also, if the leaders do not get paid, other Muslims can't say that they converted for financial gain (Evans 11–12).

In an MBB church, it is often better to have multiple elders rather than one pastor. Jansen says that choosing one person to lead makes it more likely for the leader to fail and for the church to fail as a result. In places where most of the believers are young in the faith it is important to have a group of leaders that work together, rather than an individual (193–94). Hesselgrave agrees that it is important to have a few recognized, gifted leaders. If there is just one leader, it can be dictatorial. However, he says, if there are too many leaders, it can become ineffective (206).

Fran Love suggests that the best ministry leadership model for an MBB church is a husband-and-wife team. This way the wife can lead the women and the husband can lead the men. As a couple, they can also open their home and comfortably meet with both singles and other married couples (“Developing” 209–10).

Contextualize the Gathering

To form community among MBBs, people have found it very important to contextualize the gathering. Missionaries often spend a lot of time considering how they themselves should contextualize to their new culture. They consider how they should dress, what foods they should or should not eat, how they should spend their time, and so forth; but often they fail to consider what a contextualized church might look like. Because of this they unintentionally might bring in Western forms of church that could cause conflicts between believers or between them and their families and communities. It

is important to consider what a contextualized church might look like in each setting (Waters 181). “The most fruitful church plants have an identity that is firmly rooted in their own culture and includes a viable, attractive witness to the wider Muslim society” (Adams and Adams 141). Although this might seem obvious, cross-cultural church planters can easily and unintentionally influence the emerging church to look foreign and seem non-reproducible (141).

The gathering of believers needs to be suitable and appropriate for the local believers. Several issues must be considered in order to successfully gather MBBs and form a church. The location and meeting time must be appropriate in the culture and context. Local culture needs to be considered to determine the most appropriate forms and worship practices. It is important to consider if the meetings should be co-ed or gender divided, and to decide who should be at the meetings. I discuss each of these below.

What Is the Best Meeting Place?

The best meeting place is the one that works best for the MBBs. Hesselgrave says that church planters should work with locals to rate possible meeting places as good, fair, or poor based on factors that will affect the willingness of people to participate. He suggests that this should be done not only for the large group meeting, but also for small group Bible studies. These places should be reevaluated periodically as circumstances change (Hesselgrave 217).

Culture must also be considered in choosing a place to meet. Phil Parshall points out that mosques are supposed to be as simple as possible. They usually have only mats or carpets on the floor. The only thing on the walls might be verses from the Quran. The

pulpit that the preacher uses on Fridays is the only furniture (*New Paths* 158). A contextualized MBB meeting place might need to look more like a mosque than a typical Western church to provide a more familiar religious atmosphere.

If meeting in a home, the home of a local believer is much better than the home of a missionary. In his study of twelve MBB churches, Greenlee found that it is best to have a secure, regular meeting place that is more associated with the nationals than the missionaries. Depending on the missionaries for a meeting place was found to be unhealthy (263). Evans agrees that a missionary home is not a place for a church. “Only national families can provide the atmosphere necessary for a church to develop properly” (2). The group needs to meet in a place where the locals themselves are responsible. In the Arab world, a place will usually be a private home rather than a public hall (2–3). This need for a local meeting place underscores the importance of reaching heads of households who can open their home as a place to meet. If the group of believers is simply made up of young singles, they likely will not have access to a home to use for meetings (*Livingstone, Planting* 176). Evans warns against the missionaries using their own home as the meeting place even for a limited time. He says that often such a group is unable to successfully transfer to a local home (17).

House churches have generally proven to be the best places to meet throughout the Muslim world. Eric and Laura Adams note that in their consultation with many workers among Muslims, the predominant form of MBB community was small house churches (157). Garrison says that all CPMs use house churches (191).

House churches have many benefits. The size makes it easier for a leader to manage. If heresies occur, they only affect a small group, not a large body. The closeness

helps with both accountability and member care. The structure is simple and easy to reproduce. House churches are better than large churches at sharing Christ and assimilating new believers. Meeting in homes keeps the church in neighborhoods near lost people. House churches are harder to spot, which cuts down on persecution. The home environment keeps the attention on daily life issues, and it promotes multiplication both in house churches and church leaders (Garrison 191–93). House churches encourage national leaders to take responsibility, and provide opportunities for leadership development (Evans 11). House churches can be used for meetings in any community and they require little or no funds (Adams and Adams 157).

One of the best benefits of a house church is that it is a very relational setting. Fran Love likes that house churches are informal. Although they are religious meetings, “they are genuinely social occasions” (“Developing” 208). The focus of a house church is on relationships and community rather than form and structure (Waters 181–82). Every believer is expected to contribute to the Bible study and discussion. Children are usually included as well (Love, “Developing” 208). The house church model may help strengthen the MBBs’ relationships with their families and friends. It is a safe, non-threatening environment for MBBs to invite their nonbelieving friends and family to. The house church environment also allows new believers to closely observe other MBB families and how they have been able to make peace and reconcile with their extended families (Waters 181–82; Adams and Adams 157).

House churches work well for women, who might find it difficult to attend other locations. Hibbert says that the home is “the natural forum for Christian meetings for women and children and one of the best venues for teaching” (292). Love agrees that a

house church is the best form of church for women. Because house churches are usually based around family networks, they are comfortable for women. In a house church, women are involved with their families (“Developing” 208).

A concern with the house church method is that the size of the home might limit the growth of the church. Evans says that when a church outgrows a home, the group should not look to rent a larger meeting place, but rather multiply and form more house churches. In this way, there would be no limit on how big a community could grow.

House churches can find ways to fellowship with the larger believing community in a city through events like picnics and parties (Evans 11). Case studies have shown that house churches thrive best when they are networked with other house churches. This network can provide a sense of a wider community identity as well as mutual encouragement and support (Adams and Adams 157).

The most important thing about a meeting is that it actually takes place. Sinclair says that some might argue one location is better than another, but when it comes down to it, everyone agrees that it is better to meet at a less-than-ideal location than not to meet at all (Location 33/263).

Is There a Best Time and Day to Meet?

The best day and time to meet is the time that works best for the MBBs. Jansen says that for house churches, the day and time for the meeting do not matter. Rather, the key is to make sure to meet regularly. If different house churches meet at different times, it makes it easier for the groups to fellowship together (193). To find the most suitable day and time to meet, Hesselgrave suggests working with local believers to rate different possible times as good, fair, or poor. This should be done both for the large group

meeting and for small groups. The meeting times should be reevaluated periodically as circumstances change (217).

Fridays work well for many to meet in the Muslim world. Many might find it best to meet on Fridays while other Muslims are at the mosque (Parshall, *New Paths* 162–63). This is already a habit that religious Muslims would have, so it might be easy to work into a schedule. Since Muslims view Friday as a special day of prayer, choosing Friday might come with little conflict.

What Contextual Worship Forms Can Be Employed?

Appropriate contextual church forms and structure must be considered. Evans suggests four principles to think about when considering culturally appropriate forms:

- 1) They should foster a spirit of worship and encourage participation in that worship.
- 2) They should make nationals feel at home in a church gathering.
- 3) They should be such that nationals themselves can easily adopt and carry on without the presence of the expatriate church-planter.
- 4) They should communicate a clear Christian message without syncretistic confusion (12).

These criteria are helpful in discovering appropriate forms.

Church planters need to consider the meaning behind cultural forms. Wells warns that if Muslim religious forms are used in the MBB church, it is important that these forms are adequately divorced from the meaning they formerly had in Islam (107). Phil Parshall says that he does not encourage converts to continue to pray at the mosque. He

says it leads to either compromise or deceit, neither of which is acceptable for a follower of Christ (Parshall, *Beyond* 184).

An MBB church should look very different from a traditional Western church. Greeson suggests that in an MBB church, “believers might sit on the floor and pray with their hands in front of them, palms facing upward” (10). Phil and Julie Parshall suggest emphasizing food, removing shoes, women covering heads, chanting scripture and scripture memorization as ways to contextualize worship for Muslims (Parshall and Parshall 255–56). Using familiar language is important, especially in Bible translation (Parshall, “Lessons” 254; Greeson 15). Church planters need to work with MBBs to determine what Christian or Muslim holidays can and should be celebrated in the church (Livingstone, *Planting* 185–86).

Forms of worship need to be chosen by the new believers themselves. Church planters can encourage them to experiment with different ideas until they find meaningful forms (Livingstone, *Planting* 185). “Local people free from outside control and imported designs can, under the Spirit’s direction, become the natural contextualizing community” (Ott and Wilson 112).

With all this consideration of contextualizing church forms, it would be easy for church planters to get so concerned with making mistakes that the process of church planting is paralyzed out of fear for doing something wrong. Sinclair says, “Mistakes will be made; no one is going to get it perfectly ‘right’” (Loc. 35/263). “Concerns over foreign influence are important but secondary, by comparison, to laying solid biblical and spiritual foundations” (Loc. 175/263). “As the church planters play a smaller and smaller

role—eventually leaving all together—the church will naturally drop off any unintended and unhelpful foreign baggage” (Loc. 35/263).

Should Meetings Be Co-Ed or Gender Divided?

Understanding gender roles and family dynamics in the formation of MBB communities is important. In many Muslim societies, women do not regularly interact with men who are not their relatives. Women often have their closest friendships with other women. As an MBB community is formed, it needs to be determined if men and women should meet at separate times, or sit on separate sides of the room, or if it is appropriate for family units to stay together when meeting with other believers (Adams and Adams 150–51).

Church planters should consider separate meetings for men and women. Evelyn Hibbert says that the presences of men can stunt the growth of women MBBs. She points out that it is common throughout the Muslim world for women to be religious educators of other women. It is cultural for men and women to meet separately (292).

If missionaries were to develop separate women’s meetings, it would need to follow the pattern of gatherings for women that are already occurring in the local context. The meetings would be private for women and children only. Men would respect the meetings and not interfere with the meetings. Women would develop their own “approaches to interpreting and applying God’s Word in relation to the practical needs of their life experience” (Hibbert 291). Hibbert says, “Sometimes by instituting alien social structures in churches missionaries inadvertently create social disorder” (292). She concludes that “missionaries to highly gendered societies, especially Muslim societies,

need to be open to different patterns of expression of community of Christ, and to be ready to support meeting structures that are congruent with local patterns” (293).

Separating genders is already a common practice in many MBB churches. Fran Love says that in her experience, gender separation is typical (Love, “Developing” 203). Love suggests that it is ideal for women to have their own groups. Often women are nervous to meet with other men. They are nervous about the idea of being baptized by a man. They are concerned about what others might say about them if they are meeting in a co-ed group. Women need to gather in a place where they are safe and comfortable and are able to grow in their gifts. She says that an all-women’s group can develop like any other church and find its place in a large community of believing men and women (“Church Planting” 375).

Who Should be Included in the Meetings?

For MBBs to feel comfortable it is important to consider who can be involved in a meeting of MBBs. It must be determined if the meeting is open to seekers and how a new person might enter into the group. Deciding if and how foreign missionaries might be involved is also important.

Should Unbelievers/Seekers Be Allowed to Attend?: One topic that needs to be addressed is whether or not unbelievers or seekers should be allowed to attend. Any group that grows must have a way for new members to join. However, in a context where betrayal could have serious consequences, having a plan of how new believers might enter the group is vital (Greenlee 261).

Seekers need to have the opportunity to investigate the community that they are being encouraged to join. For this to happen, there must be a time and place for seekers to

interact with the community of believers (Muller 356). The context should determine whether Muslim seekers can be invited into MBB gatherings. If the context is open, it is ideal to bring the seeker into the community sooner so that they can experience a sense of belonging in the group (Becker and Simuyu 131–32).

If believers feel that they need a time that is only for believers and closed to others, they should have a clear plan of how a new convert could eventually enter into that closed meeting too (Muller 356). Some groups of believers would be very uncomfortable to have a seeker present, as it could be dangerous for others in the group. In such a case, it is important for the seeker to slowly be introduced to the community and finally accepted only after they make a decision to follow Christ (Becker and Simuyu 131–32).

Can Foreign Missionaries Be Involved?: Another question that needs to be addressed is how directly a foreign church planter should be involved. Viveza and Samuel say that in their study, MBB communities that were led by nationals only were much more likely to reproduce than were MBB communities that were led by a partnership of nationals and cross-cultural workers (167). Garrison notes that most CPMs happen in places that are insulated from outsiders. Outside involvement is not really a factor and it could even be a hindrance (223–24).

Although church planting with national leaders works best, that does not mean that foreigners do not have a place in the work. Every work among unreached people can ultimately be traced back to an outsider coming to introduce them to the gospel (Garrison 223–24). The question to consider is the extent of the outsider's involvement. Foreigners can be a power catalyst for helping develop healthy MBB churches, but they must allow

the churches to form and spread naturally, being careful to keep their cultural traditions and biases out of the fellowship (Adams and Adams 150).

Most everyone agrees that the end goal is to have a church with local leadership, completely independent from outside involvement. Often the start is an outside church planter with a few new believers. What types of involvement should the church planter have during the forming of the church?

There are many opinions on how involved the church planter should be. Sinclair lists seven tasks that he says somebody must do, either the church planter or some of the believers. The seven tasks are:

1. disciple younger believers;
2. gather believers together;
3. cultivate body life (mutual care, prayer, worship, sharing, etc.);
4. teach the Word;
5. problem solve;
6. pastor (give care and support); and
7. develop leaders.

Determining who is best to do each of these tasks comes from knowing who is in the group of believers. If there are mature believers who can take on these ministry roles, then it is probably best to allow them to do it from the beginning. If there are only new or young believers, then the church planter might have to do all of these things (Loc. 169-171/263).

It is common for the church planter to do much of the leading and teaching of the group, especially in the beginning, depending on the maturity of the believers in the

group (Scoggins and Rockford 5; Watson and Watson 173). In a 2003 study of church planting movements among Muslims, expatriate church planters “played a vital and active role early on, but then, when it was strategic to do so, withdrew to allow local leaders to blossom in their ministries” (Sinclair Loc. 184-186/263).

Usually, it is best for church planters to leave the new church plant as soon as possible. To do this, they will need to hand over the responsibilities to the local believers. “This requires a process of training, delegation, review, and further equipping. And throughout that process the local believers will both fail and succeed” as they continue to grow in Christ and develop their gifts (Sinclair Loc. 181/263). Garrison says that in CPMs, local leaders are quickly trained and entrusted with the movement. One way to do this is for church planters and mature believers to always bring newer believers with them in ministry, in order to model ministry and mentor them (187). Sinclair points out that “until indigenous leaders who have the spiritual and character qualifications to become elders are appointed, the work is not done. The church planters cannot simply walk away and say ‘We planted a church’” (Loc. 172/263). A church without leaders is not a church.

Research Design Literature

Qualitative research methods were best suited for determining reasons why MBBs struggle to build healthy relationships with other MBBs. Because the intent of this project was to determine reasons and make suggestions, a pre-intervention model was used.

Qualitative research is a flexible research design. In qualitative research, there is not a set of procedures to follow step by step. Rather, the researcher must be able to determine the best way to proceed, and it may not always be obvious. To do this well, researchers must be able to tolerate ambiguity, they must be sensitive to the context,

people, and various agendas, and they need to be good communicators, empathizing with the respondents, asking good questions, and listening well (Merriam 20–23).

Qualitative research takes an in-depth look at a small sample of people or cases. The advantage of qualitative research, over quantitative research, is that qualitative research methods produce a lot of information about a small number of people and cases. This reduces the generalizability of the results, but it increases the understanding of the cases (Patton 14). The questionnaires used in this survey were distributed to a relatively small number of MBBS, with the intent of gathering more detailed information from them.

Patton finds three kinds of data collection that make up qualitative methods. They are in-depth open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written documents (10). This study used in-depth open-ended interviews, as well as written documents. In particular, the written documents were open-ended responses to questionnaires.

Careful data collection is an important part of qualitative research. The basic source of raw data in qualitative research is direct quotations. These quotations reveal the emotions, thoughts, experiences, worldview, and perception of the respondents. The researcher must provide a framework in such a way that the respondents can accurately share their point of view from their own perspective. Researchers must check their own preconceived ideas and allow the respondents to freely share their thoughts as they see it (Patton 24).

In qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to recognize their theoretical or conceptual framework. Every qualitative research project is based on a

theoretical or conceptual framework. Merriam says, “the trick is to make this framework explicit” (Merriam 45).

In qualitative research, the researcher must be careful not to influence the research subjects in a way that alters the results of the study. Patton suggests that the researcher take a stance of “empathic neutrality.” This simply means that the researcher does not set out to prove a point or manipulate data to say what he or she wants, but it also requires the researcher to take and understand the “stance, position, feelings, experiences, and worldview of others” (54–56). In this study, I, as the researcher, tried to use neutral forms to collect data and analyze the results. Data was gathered from church planters electronically. It was the disciplers and church leaders, rather than the researcher, who distributed the questionnaires to gather data from the MBBs.

Data analysis needs to be done during data collections. Analysis of the data can help the researcher form better questions to ask. Themes can be noted, and the data can be organized throughout the process. The researcher should not wait until all the data is collected before beginning to analyze it (Merriam 161–64).

Summary of Literature

God designed humans to be in relationship both with God and with others. Sin distorts that relationship. Through the saving work of Christ’s death and resurrection, not only is our relationship with God restored, but God brings us into a new community with others as well. Salvation guarantees our future in heaven, but it also gives us a new identity (both individual and communal) in the present.

Throughout history, God has called people to himself. In the Old Testament he chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A worshipping community centered around God Himself was formed with particular customs and laws.

In the New Testament, Jesus began a new community as he preached the kingdom of God and called a group of men to follow him as disciples. After Jesus' death and resurrection, his followers continued to meet together. When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, their community was transformed. That day their community went from around one hundred twenty people to over three thousand. That was just the start! The book of Acts tells the story of how the people of God spread throughout the known world sharing the message of Christ and establishing groups of believers wherever they went. The Epistles give instructions for the followers of Christ to know how to live with others in their new communities of faith.

Today, Christians are still called to preach the good news to all creation and to make disciples of all nations. The gospel has traveled all around the world, but there are still places that have very little Christian witness. Some of the least evangelized regions of the world are Muslim countries and Muslim people groups. Many Muslim countries and regions do not have any significant population of followers of Christ. The only way for these Muslims to hear the good news and respond is for outsiders to come in to share the good news.

Church planting is considered one of the most effective strategies of evangelism that exists. If we want to reach a people, we need to plant churches. Established churches made up of committed disciples who desire to reach their own people will make more

disciples and plant more churches. Disciple multiplication and church multiplication is the fastest way to reach the world for Christ.

However, among Muslims, it is very difficult to gather believers together. The work is often slow, and Muslims tend to not trust each other. Muslims are so connected with their own family and tribe that it is difficult to establish healthy relationships with others from another family and tribe. Although MBBs might find it easy to meet with a Western missionary for discipleship, they often shy away from forming solid relationships and establishing community with one another.

Overcoming the cultural barriers that keep MBBs from forming community takes prayer, dependence on the Holy Spirit, time, effort, and intentionality. There are practices that have been found to be more effective and practices that have been found to lead to problems. Church planters need to persist in efforts to plant churches in Muslim areas so that entire nations and people groups can be reached for Christ.

National believers can be a great asset for foreign missionaries. Discipling and training nationals to do church planting is ideal. Even near-culture Christians can be great partners in church planting among Muslims, if properly trained. Discipling and establishing the right national leader can have a widespread and lasting impact on a society.

Church planters need to be intentional about reaching heads of households and sharing the gospel through social networks of families and friends. Not only is this a quick way of seeing the gospel spread to many people, but it also works along lines of people that have natural trusting relationships. This makes it easier for communities of faith to form among the believers.

If church planters have several individual believers that they are working with, they should continue to disciple each of them separately. While doing this, they need to teach them the importance of Christian community. They must look for ways to build relationships between the believers. The key to building relationships is spending time together. Church planters need to find reasons (parties, picnics, projects, and so forth) to bring believers together in comfortable settings. As the believers get to know one another and are being taught the importance of Christian community, the church planter can talk with them about meeting with the other believers for prayer, Bible study, and worship.

The formation of a church begins with a nucleus of just a few believers, but it should grow. Eventually the group should have several families, including both spiritually mature men and women. Leaders from within the group should start to emerge and begin to take more responsibility for the activities of the group.

As the church is being established, contextual forms must be considered. Local believers should be encouraged to make decisions about styles and forms of music, prayer, meeting place, structure, and other forms of worship. The church planter can help talk this through with the locals, but these are decisions for local believers to make.

With prayer, time, and faithfulness, churches can be established in unreached Muslim communities all over the world. As these churches continue to reproduce, the message of Christ will spread throughout the Muslim world.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the research methodology for this project. The nature and purpose of the project are briefly reviewed. Then the research questions are presented along with the tools that were used. It includes a description of the ministry context. The participants are described along with the selection criteria. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of how the data was collected and analyzed.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

Church planting among Muslims is generally slow and hard work. In over ten years working in our city, our church planting team has found this to be true. We have found that it is easy to share our faith. Periodically a Muslim chooses to follow Christ and is willing to meet for discipleship. The biggest obstacle that we have found over the years is trying to get Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) to meet with each other. Although new believers are willing to meet with expat workers, they sometimes do not want anyone else to know that they are believers. Even believers that are more mature in their faith often say that they do not like to meet with other MBBs for worship, Bible study, and prayer. They prefer to meet with foreigners.

If the gospel is going to spread throughout the Muslim world, it is going to be done by local MBBs, not foreign Christians. The best way for this to happen is through church planting. Churches can train believers in their faith, and through churches, believers can work together to bring the gospel to the lost people around them. However, if MBBs are unwilling to meet together, there will not be an MBB church. The purpose of

this project was to identify reasons why MBBs who remain in their own Muslim context struggle to form healthy relationships with one another, and to discover best methods for relationship building and community formation that lead to healthy MBB church plants.

Research Questions

RQ#1: What are the main obstacles that keep MBBs from developing strong relationships with one another?

The purpose of this question was to determine what caused the relational barriers found between MBBs. It considered what obstacles keep MBBs from developing close relationships with one another. Believer questionnaires (BQ), church attender questionnaires (CAQ), church planter questionnaires (CPQ), and a church planter focus group (CPFG) were used to help discover these obstacles. Questions 11, 13, and 14 on the believer questionnaire and questions 9-11 on the church attender questionnaire addressed this question. Questions 2, 4, and 5 on the church planter questionnaire addressed this question. The church planter focus group questions 1, 2, and 5 also addressed this research question.

RQ#2: How have church planters among Muslims successfully gathered MBBs and formed community to establish a church?

The purpose of this question was to discover successful methods of relationship building and community formation among MBBs. Believer questionnaires, church planter questionnaires and a church planter focus group were used to find these successful methods. Question 16 on the believer questionnaire addressed this research question. Questions 3, 6, 11-12, and 15-16 on the church planter questionnaire addressed

this research question. The church planter focus group question 6 addressed this research question.

RQ#3: What types of environment and activities help develop relationships between MBBs in a Muslim context?

The purpose of this question was to determine what environment and activities help develop relationships and form community among MBBs. Church attender questionnaires, church planter questionnaires, believer questionnaires and a church planter focus group were used to find this information. Questions 13-14 on the church planter questionnaire addressed this research question. Questions 8 and 12-16 of the church attender questionnaire addressed this research question. Questions 12, 15, and 17-19 on the believer questionnaire also addressed this question. The church planter focus group questions 3 and 4 addressed this research question.

Ministry Context

The ministry context is a predominantly Muslim city in the Middle East. According to the Joshua Project, 99.95% of this people group are Muslim. This particular city is considered to be a more open, liberal city than others in the region. Many of the people are Muslim in name but do not really practice their religion. There is a mixture of conservative and liberal families in the city. On the conservative side are families that support ISIS and their ideology. On the liberal side are families that revere secular European values.

Many people in Islam understand that they are allowed to lie to a non-Muslim. Some say that a Muslim could even falsely claim to be a Christian if it helps his or her cause. This makes it difficult to determine the sincerity of the faith of other MBBs.

This region is very volatile. Although this particular city is generally safe and secure, there has been war and terrorism in the country for years. This particular people group is also constantly threatened by surrounding people groups. War has left the country with a poor infrastructure. Most people view the government as corrupt. Problems with neighboring countries have led to a struggling economy. Although they have good relationships with outside countries, this people group has learned that it cannot trust its allies to support them in times of trouble. Although there is constant growth and improvement in this city, there is also an overwhelming sense of hopelessness that pervades many in society.

The people of this region live with the effects of decades of war. Every family can tell stories of fleeing its home. Every family has members who have fought, and many have members who have died fighting. Wars were not only fought with other countries and people groups, but in the 1990s, there was a civil war as well. The effects of that war are now felt among various political parties and regions of the country. Although there is a sense of unity against people on the outside, there is also constant disunity within their own region.

This people group is very tribal. Although the tribes are not obvious in the city, many people are aware of their tribe and the tribes of others. Some families require their children to marry within their tribe. Often people use connections within their tribe to find employment or other types of help. Past history makes it difficult for certain tribes to have good relationships with one another. Many people have very close relationships with their extended family but are suspicious of outsiders.

Participants

Participants were chosen from among the MBBs and church planters in the city of S---. As there is not a large population of MBBs or church planters, the intention was to find as many qualified participants as possible.

Criteria for Selection

The MBBs in this study had all been believers for at least three months. They all came from a Muslim background and had chosen to follow Christ and trust in Him alone for salvation.

The church planters in this study had all been involved in church planting among Muslims for at least three years. They were all currently working in the city of S---.

All known people in the city of S--- who met these criteria were encouraged to participate in this study. Participants were found through contacts known to the researcher and connections these contacts had to others.

Description of Participants

The MBB participants in this study included both men and women age eighteen and over. These believers came from a Muslim background and had made a decision to follow Jesus Christ and to trust in him alone for their salvation. The MBBs used in this study had been followers of Christ for a minimum of three months. They had various levels of involvement with other believers and churches. They also had various vocations and levels of education. All MBB participants were of the majority people group of the city of S--- and spoke the local language as their first language.

The church planters in this study were limited to those working with MBBs in the city of S---. The church planter participants were men and women age eighteen and over

who had been church planting among Muslims for a minimum of three years. They had various educational backgrounds and came from various ethnic backgrounds.

Ethical Considerations

All participants in this project gave their informed consent by indicating that they agree to the terms of a consent form.

To protect confidentiality, no names or distinguishing descriptions have been used in this study. Questionnaires did not include names of participants. Names of focus group participants have also been left out. No audio files were shared, and the audio recording was immediately deleted after the focus group discussion was transcribed.

Questionnaires that were dispersed by paper were returned to me in sealed envelopes.

The translator signed a strict form of confidentiality that he would not share any of the information.

All the raw data was kept on a password protected computer or stored in a locked file cabinet.

Instrumentation

Four instruments were used to collect data for this study. All were predominantly qualitative in nature. The instruments were as follows: Believer questionnaire, church planter questionnaire, church planter focus group, and church attender questionnaire. I designed all the instruments, and they were expert-reviewed.

Believer Questionnaire

I designed the believer questionnaire to discover the relational barriers that MBBs in the city of S--- perceive and have experienced. The first ten questions were

quantitative with the purpose of gathering some basic information about how long the MBB had been a believer and how connected the MBB was to other MBBs. The next nine questions were qualitative and asked about relational barriers and potential ways to get around those barriers. This questionnaire was translated and distributed in the local language.

Church Planter Questionnaire

I designed the church planter questionnaire to gather information from church planters who work in a Muslim context. This questionnaire was predominantly qualitative. Questions 1, 4, and 7 were quantitative. This questionnaire was given in English. The purpose of this questionnaire was to discover what church planters perceived to be relational barriers between MBBs and some potential solutions to getting around those barriers. Questions 8-16 were specifically addressed to church planters who have been successful in planting an MBB church to share from their experience of success.

Church Planter Focus Group

I designed the church planter focus group collect information from church planters about relational barriers between MBBs as well as methods to overcome those barriers. A group of 7 church planters in the city of S--- was gathered to discuss these issues. I led the discussion in English.

Church Attender Questionnaire

I designed this questionnaire to discover what helped MBBs who regularly attend an MBB church overcome the obstacles that keep other MBBs disconnected. This questionnaire was predominantly qualitative. The only quantitative questions were

numbers 1-7 and 10. This questionnaire was designed to determine some information about the church attender and to find their thoughts about methods of building relationships between believers.

Expert Review

These researcher-designed assessments were reviewed by three experts. Two of the expert reviewers had significant experience doing church planting in a Muslim context. The third was a missions professor at Asbury Theological Seminary. A cover letter was sent to each of the experts, along with the instruments and rubrics for evaluating the instruments (See Appendix A). The cover letter introduced the problem that was being addressed, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. The expert reviewers were asked to make sure the questions in each instrument aligned with the project's research questions. The rubric gave the expert reviewers the opportunity to say if each question was needed or not, give suggestions to help clarify the questions, and suggest additional questions. I integrated the suggestions into the final version of each instrument.

Reliability and Validity of Project Design

This preintervention study design was appropriate for investigating common reasons for relational barriers between MBBs and discovering some ways to get around those barriers so that MBBs can develop healthy relationships with one another, making possible the establishment of a local MBB church. The qualitative instruments were designed to gather information on this topic from MBBs and church planters who work with MBBs, both knowledgeable groups of people, but with different perspectives. MBBs were questioned individually through questionnaires. Since poor relationships between

MBBs was the subject of the study, it was felt that MBBs would be free to share more openly without the presence of other MBBs. Questionnaires give a much greater degree of anonymity for believers than interviews, which is important for the safety of the MBB. Questionnaires also give the opportunity for the participant to answer honestly without the influence of others. Expert reviewers were used to make sure the questions in each instrument were aligned with the project's research questions and purpose statement. Changes were made to the instruments based on feedback from the expert reviewers.

The instruments were all used in a consistent way. The believer questionnaires were distributed by people discipling the believers, and they were returned to me in sealed envelopes. The disciplers were instructed to explain the purpose of the study along with informed consent, but not to discuss the questionnaires with the believers. They were to allow them to complete it on their own. The church planter questionnaires were made available electronically for a period of two weeks. Church planters were alerted electronically at the beginning and again in the middle of the two-week timeframe. All participants received the same reminders and had the same opportunity to complete the questionnaire. The church planter focus group was gathered at a convenient date two to six weeks after the completion of the church planter questionnaire. All participants in the focus group had been invited previously to participate in the church planter questionnaire. The church attender questionnaire was given by the pastor or church leader to those attending their church at a particular meeting of the leader's choice within a given month. The church leader was instructed to distribute the questionnaires. The church attenders were to complete the questionnaire while at the meeting. The leader then was to gather the completed questionnaires and return them to me in a sealed envelope. All

qualifying church attenders of a particular church at the chosen meeting were given the same opportunity to complete a questionnaire. The pastors or church leaders were each given the same set of instructions for distributing and collecting the questionnaires. The use of multiple instruments increases the trustworthiness and generalization of the findings.

Data Collection

This project is a pre-intervention research project. The project analyzes a problem and makes suggestions to address the problem. However, there was no intervention done during the time of the project.

The research done in this project was qualitative. The goal was to acquire in-depth information about the subject from many sources and viewpoints. The purpose was to discover why the problem exists and what can be done to solve the problem.

The research for this project was conducted between August 3 and Oct 2, 2020. In the first week, believer questionnaires and envelopes were distributed to Christians in the city of S--- who were discipling others. They were told to hand out the questionnaire to anyone they were discipling. They were to explain the purpose of the questionnaire and go over the consent portion of the form. Once the questionnaire was completed, the discipler was instructed to have the MBB put the questionnaire in an envelope and hand it back to them. The discipler then returned the completed questionnaires to me. The goal was to have all the questionnaires collected by the end of the first month. The second month was also available if there was a need to give more time to collect more data.

Church planter questionnaires were made available online during the first two weeks of the research period. An email went out to church planters in the beginning,

inviting them to participate. An email reminder went out again in the middle of those two weeks to encourage them to fill it out by the deadline. If there was not enough data collected, a third week would be granted.

The church planter focus group was scheduled to take place during the second month of the study. I asked eight church planters in the city of S--- to be a part of the focus group with the goal that at least six would participate. I tried to get both men and women from a variety of church planting teams. The focus group was told that the time frame would be limited to two hours and the participants helped choose a time that worked for everyone. At the start of the time, I explained the purpose of the study. Then I asked questions and led the discussion. The discussion was audio recorded and transcribed at a future time.

The church attender questionnaire was distributed to pastors and church leaders at the end of the first month of the study. They were told to choose a week in the next month to distribute the questionnaire to their church and give time for it to be completed. They were then to place the questionnaires in an envelope, seal it, and return it to me.

Data Analysis

This preintervention research project used questionnaires and a focus group to gather qualitative information. As the data was collected, I began the process of sorting through the data and analyzing it, looking for common themes across the multiple tools that were used and the groups of people that gave input.

As the believer questionnaires were gathered, I looked for themes that arose from the responses and coded the various responses to find similarities and differences. The

data was categorized in a way that it could be compared to the responses from the other tools.

The results from the church planter questionnaires were analyzed in a similar way. I looked for commonalities and differences. The themes in the responses were coded and categorized.

When the completed church attender questionnaires were received back, I coded the responses and looked for common themes. The results were categorized in a way to be compared with the results from the other tools.

After the church planter focus group was completed, I transcribed the audio recording. The themes from the conversation were coded and categorized.

After collecting, coding, and categorizing all of the data, from each tool, I compared the data to see commonalities and differences between the various groups that gave input.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

A fairly common problem for those working among Muslims is to find that Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) have a difficult time forming healthy relationships with one another. This makes it very difficult to plant churches among Muslims. The purpose of this project was to identify reasons why MBBs who remain in their own Muslim context struggle to form healthy relationships with one another, and to discover best methods for relationship building and community formation that lead to healthy MBB church plants.

This chapter provides the research findings from data collected from church planters and MBBs to address this problem. The chapter opens with a description of the participants in this project. Next, evidence for each research question is addressed, listing results from the various research tools. The chapter concludes with a summary of the major findings of the study.

Participants

Three different sets of participants were in this research project. The first were church planters. The second set of participants were MBBs, and the third set were MBBs who attended church.

Church Planter Questionnaire Participants

Twelve church planters participated in the online questionnaire. All the church planters came from outside of Kurdistan. They had been involved in church planting among Muslims between three and fourteen years, with the median time of involvement

being 6.5 years. Six of the twelve responded that they had been a part of successfully planting a church.

Church Planter Focus Group Participants

Seven church planters participated in the church planter focus group. I chose participants who viewed church planting as their main work and who were in the city at the time of the study. The focus group was made up of five men and two women. Six participants were from the United States, and one was from Cameroon. They had all been serving in the city from three to eleven years at the time of the study. They represented four different sending organizations.

Believer Questionnaire Participants

There were fifty participants in the believer questionnaire. Thirty were men, and twenty were women. Sixteen participants were age eighteen to thirty. Twenty-three were age thirty-one to fifty. Eleven were age fifty-one or over (Fig. 4.1).

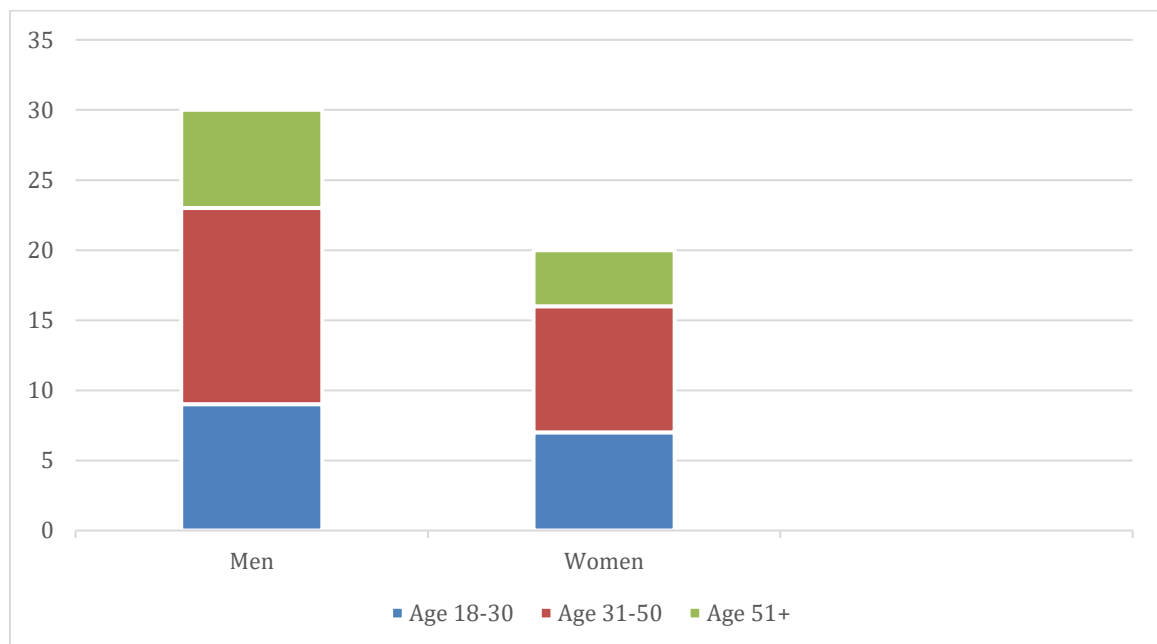


Fig. 4.1. Gender and age of BQ participants.

The average (median) participant had been a believer for 7.9 years. Four had been believers for less than two years. Six had been believers for twenty years or more, including one who had been a believer for twenty-five years (Fig. 4.2).

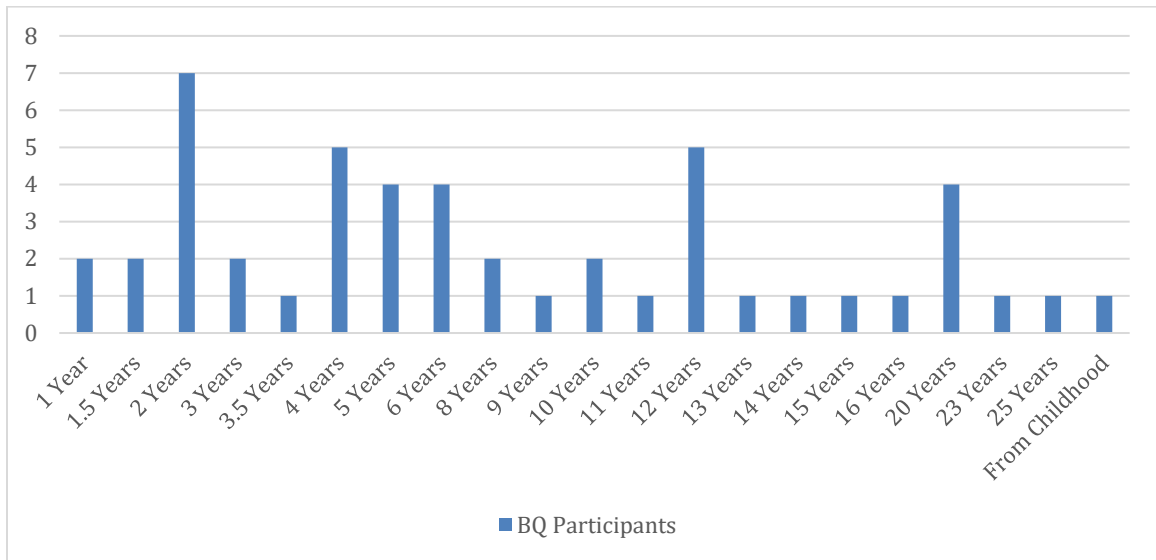


Fig. 4.2. BQ participants: Years as believer.

Three participants said their parents were believers. A fourth had a Christian mother and a Muslim father. Three said that their parents had no religion. The other forty-three participants all listed their parents' religion as Islam (Fig. 4.3).

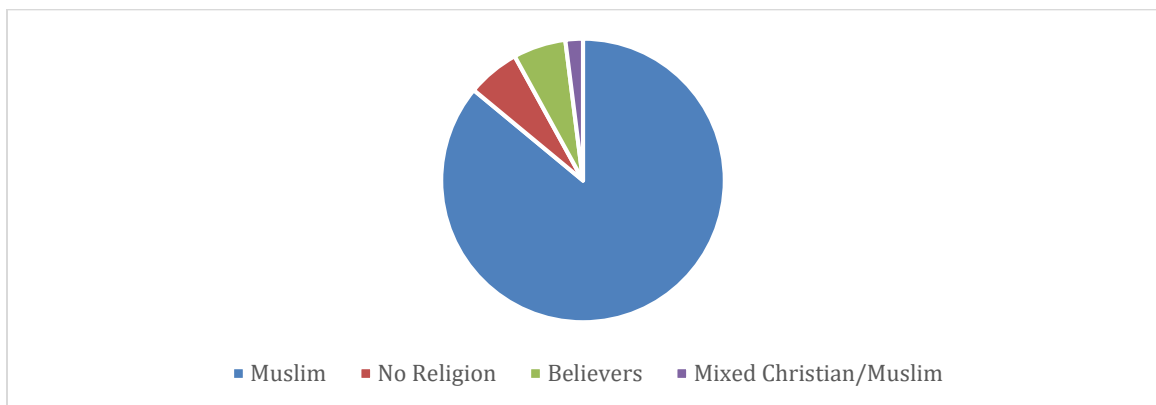


Fig. 4.3. BQ: Religion of parents.

Twenty-six had primarily been discipled by a Kurd. Twenty-Four had been discipled by a non-Kurds, including Arabs, Americans, Mexicans, and Europeans (Fig. 4.4).

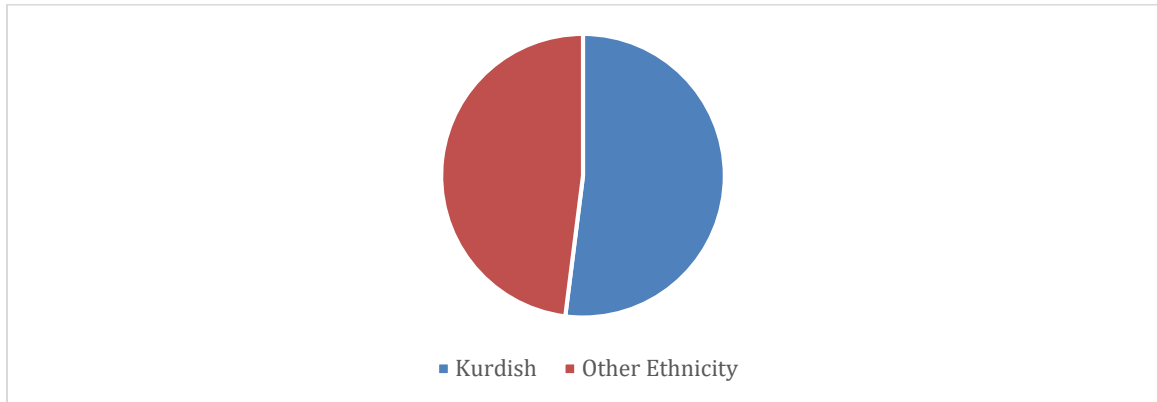


Fig.4.4. BQ: Ethnicity of discipplers.

Four participants said that all their family members are now believers. Seventeen more participants were able to list at least one believing family member. Twenty-seven participants were the only believers in their family. Two participants did not respond to the question about believing family members (Fig. 4.5).

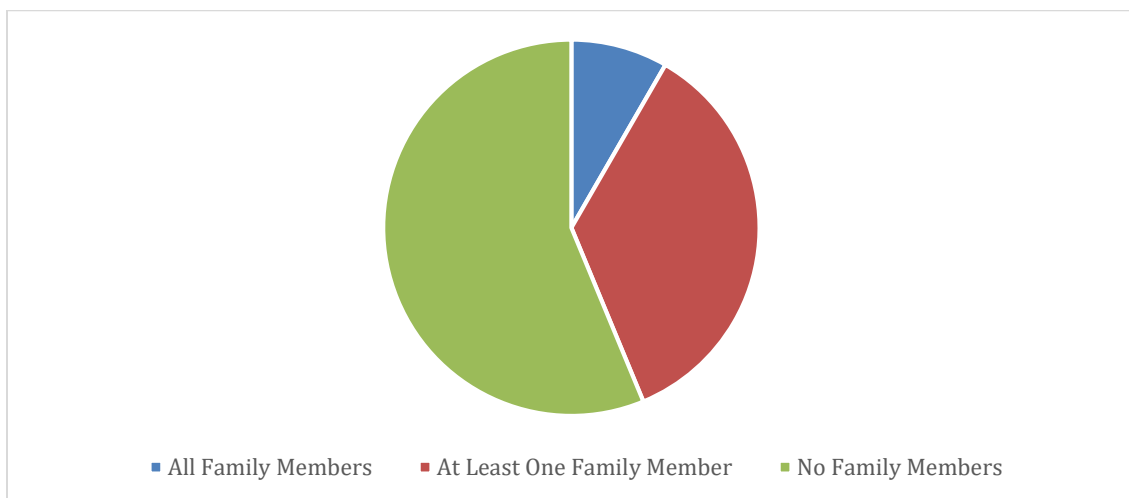


Fig. 4.5. BQ participants: Believing family members.

Forty-five of the participants had met with other Kurdish believers in the previous two weeks for Bible study, worship, or prayer. Five participants had not met with others (Fig. 4.6).



Fig. 4.6. BQ: Have you met with another Kurdish believer who is not a family member for prayer or Bible study in the last two weeks?

When asked if they would continue to meet with other Kurdish believers without the presence of foreigners, eleven participants said that they would only meet if foreigners were involved in the meetings. Thirty-nine said that they would meet to worship with other Kurds without the presence of foreigners. Of the eleven that said they would only meet with the presence of foreigners, ten had been primarily discipled by a non-Kurd. Three of those who said they would not meet without foreigners, had not met with other Kurdish believers in the past two weeks (Fig. 4.7).

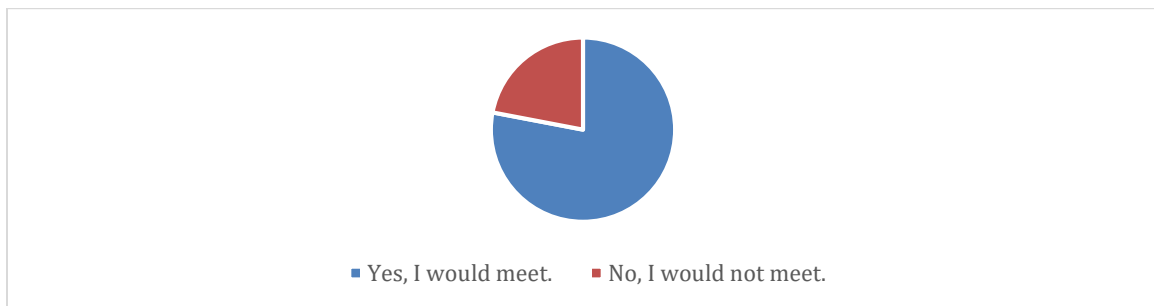


Fig.4.7. BQ: Would you continue to meet regularly with other Kurdish believers if there were no foreigners involved in the group?

Church Attender Questionnaire Participants

Fifty-three people participated in the church attender questionnaire. All were believers. Twelve were women, and forty-one were men. Eighteen participants were age eighteen to thirty. Twenty-seven participants were age thirty-one to fifty. Eight participants were age fifty-one or older. All the age 51+ participants were male (Fig. 4.8).

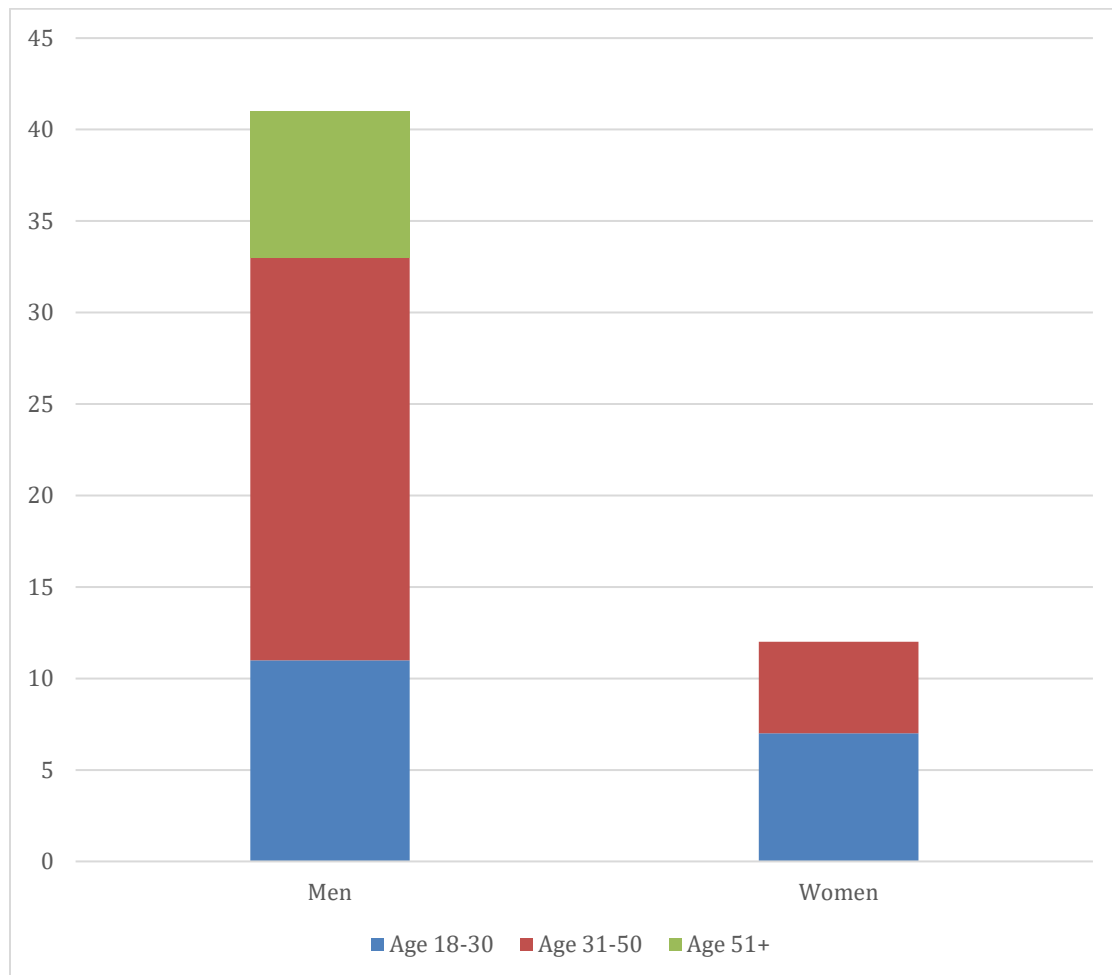


Fig. 4.8. Age and gender of CAQ participants.

The average participant had been a believer for 5.6 years (median). Two participants had been believers for only six months. One participant had been a believer for twenty-two years (Fig. 4.9).

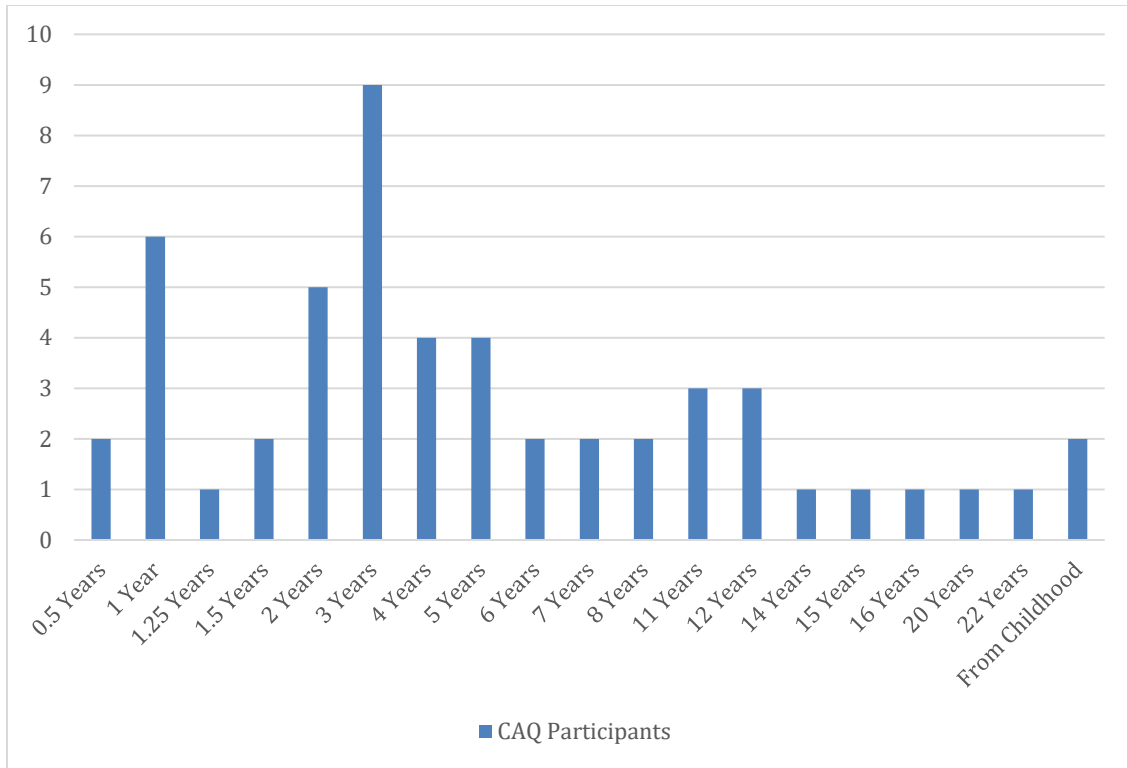


Fig.4.9. CAQ participants: Years as believer.

Four of the participants had parents who were also believers. Another had a believing father and a Muslim mother. The other forty-eight participants all came from Muslim families and were first generation believers (Fig. 4.10).

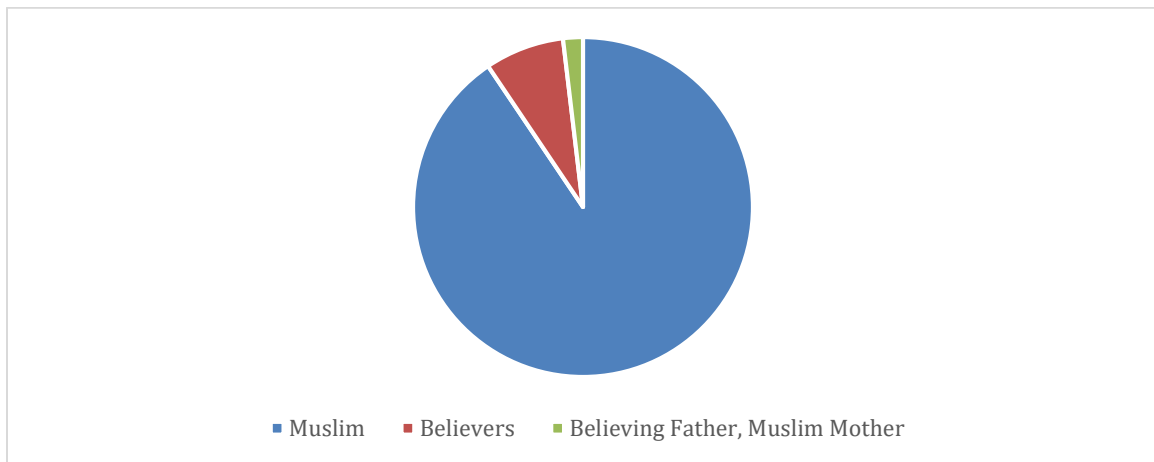


Fig.4.10. CAQ participants: Parents' religion.

The average (median) number of times they attended church in a month was 4.2. Four participants attended only once per month, and two attended church twelve times in a month. One participant wrote that he attended church all the time. (Note: When a respondent wrote a range like three to four times per month, I recorded the median, 3.5 times) (Fig. 4.11).

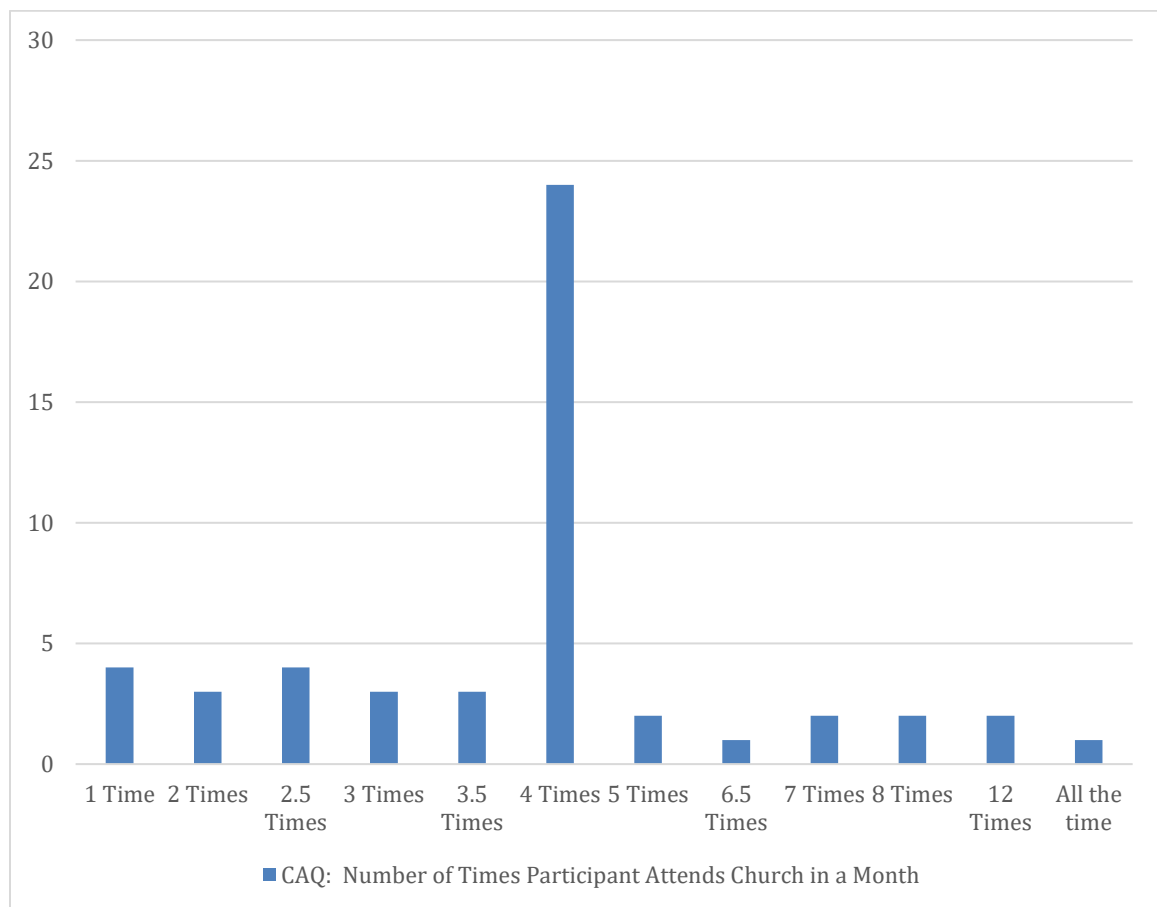


Fig. 4.11. CAQ: Number of times participant attends church in a month.

One participant had only been attending a church for three weeks. A total of six had been attending for less than a year. Eight participants had been attending church for over ten years, and three of those had been attending for fifteen years. The average (median) length of church attendance was 4.4 years (Fig. 4.12).

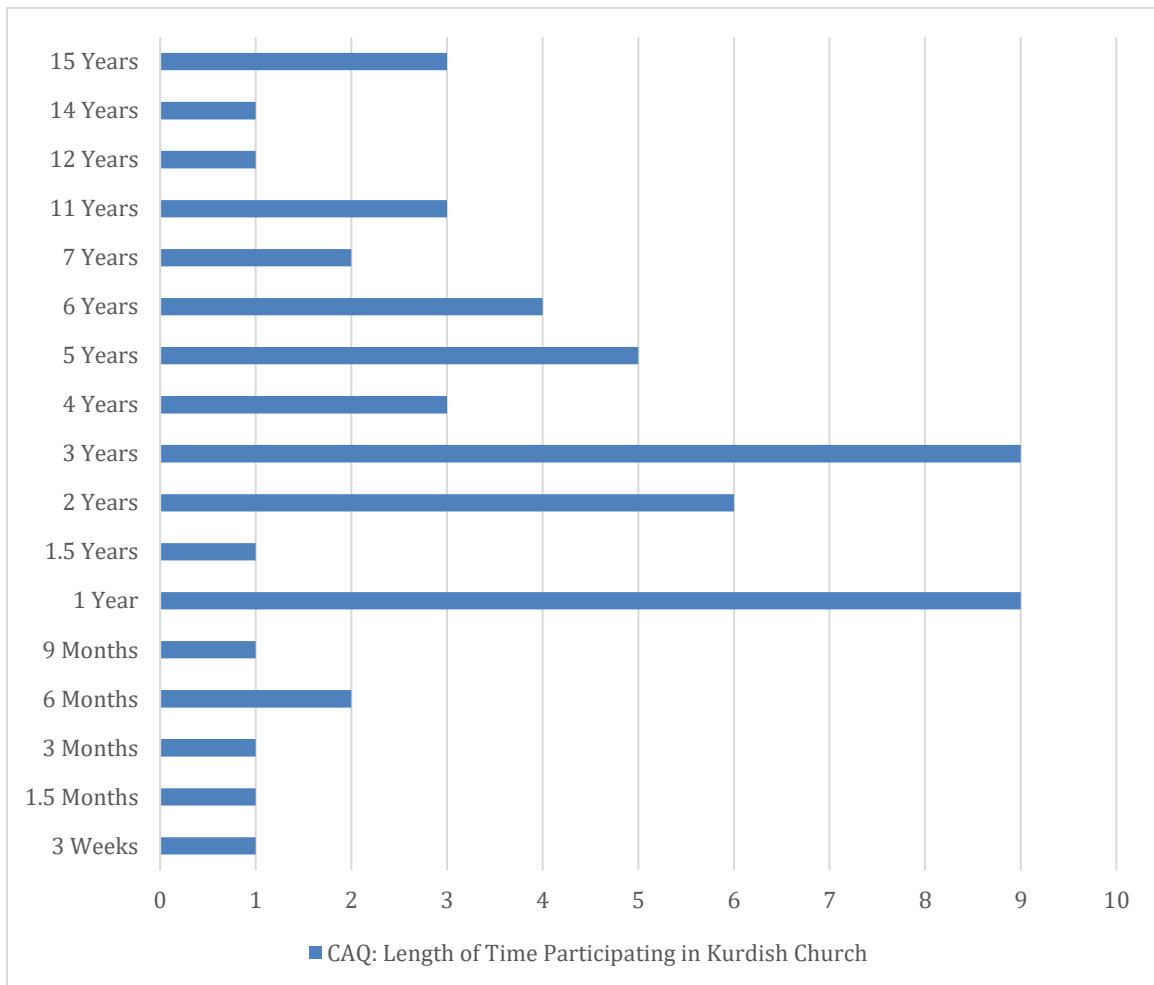


Fig. 4.12. CAQ: Length of time participating in Kurdish church.

By subtracting the length of time a participant had been attending church from the length of time they had been a believer, I was able to determine the amount of time between a participant's decision to follow Christ and their involvement in a Kurdish church. Thirty-one participants indicated that they began attending a church when they became believers. Nineteen participants indicated that there was a period of time after making a decision to follow Christ before they began attending church. Of those nineteen, the average (median) time between believing and attending was 3.35 years (Fig. 4.13).

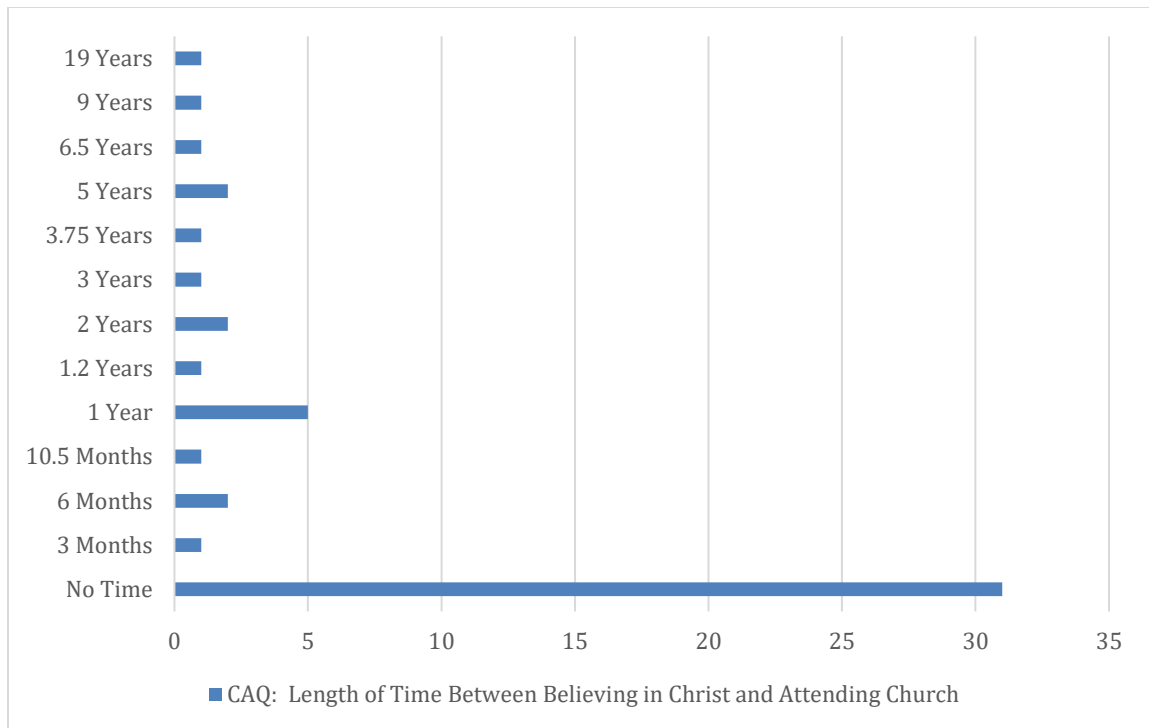


Fig. 4.13. CAQ: Length of time between believing in Christ and attending church.

Twenty-four participants said they did not know any believers who did not attend church. Twenty-eight participants said that they did know other believers who were not attending church.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

The purpose of this research question was to determine what caused the relational barriers found between MBBs. It brought to light things that keep MBBs from developing close relationships with one another. Believer questionnaires, church attender questionnaires, church planter questionnaires, and a church planter focus group were used to help discover these obstacles. Questions 11, 13, and 14 on the believer questionnaire and questions 9-11 on the church attender questionnaire addressed this question. Questions 4 and 5 on the church planter questionnaire addressed this question. The church planter focus group questions 1, 2, and 5 also addressed this research question.

Barriers to Meeting

Several questions were designed to determine barriers to meeting together. First, believers were asked on the believer questionnaire, “What are some reasons that make it difficult for Kurdish believers to meet together?” The majority of responses had to do with fear. One believer wrote, “We are afraid that others might realize we are Christians” (BQ Participant 27). Another believer wrote, “They would be afraid that their faith might be used against them” (BQ Participant 42). Eighteen people mentioned “fear of society”. Eight mentioned “fear of family”, and eleven simply said that “fear” makes it difficult to meet. Another five responded that a lack of trust made it difficult to gather (Fig. 4.14).

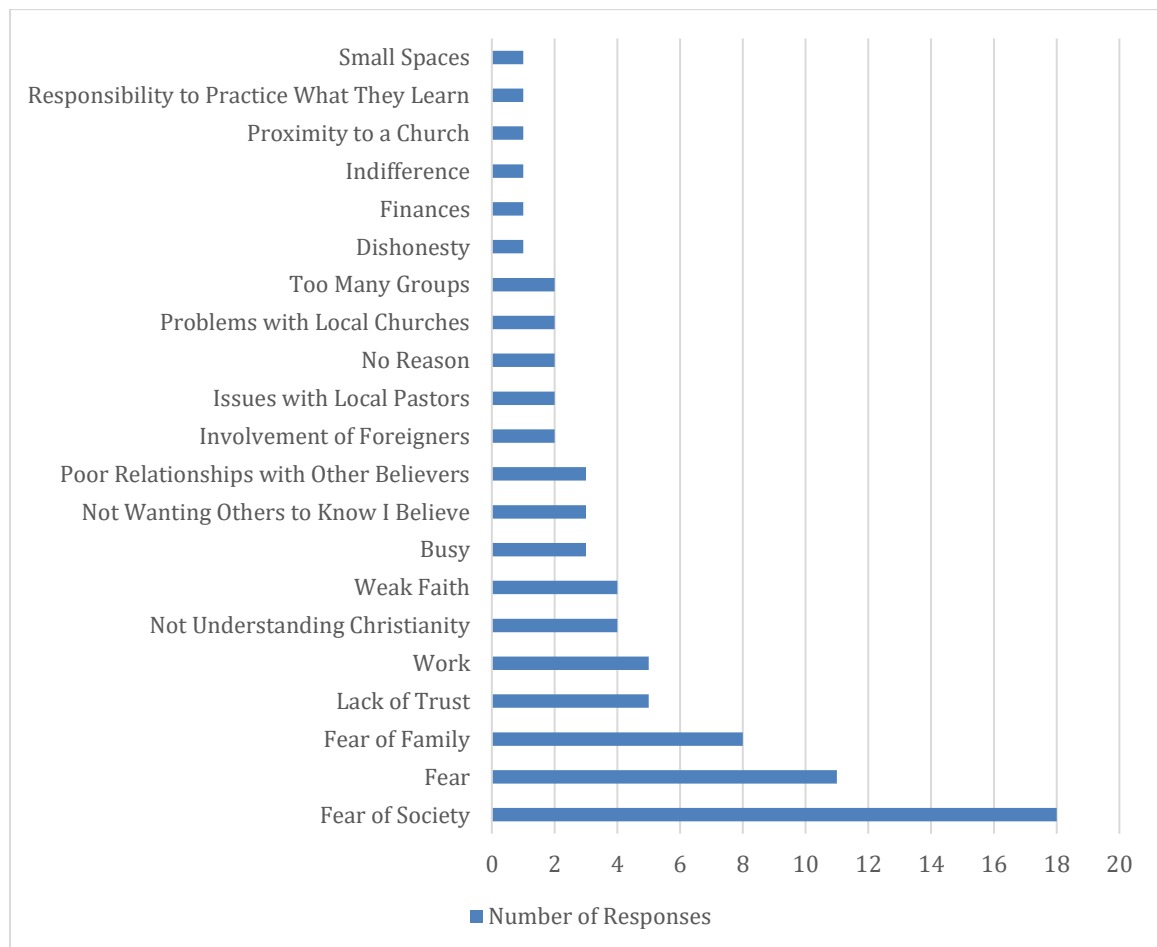


Fig. 4.14. BQ 11: Reasons that make it difficult for Kurdish believers to meet together.

Church attenders were similarly asked, “What do you think keeps Kurdish believers from meeting together?” Again, fear was the most common response. One participant wrote, “They do not want to be seen at the church by others because they will get in trouble with people, mostly relatives and family members” (CAQ Participant 51). However, a number of church attenders also said that there was nothing that keeps believers from meeting together. One church attender wrote, “Honestly, there are not any barriers or obstacles” (CAQ Participant 2). CAQ Participant 10 wrote, “In my opinion, if they want to meet, nothing will stop them” (Fig. 4.15).

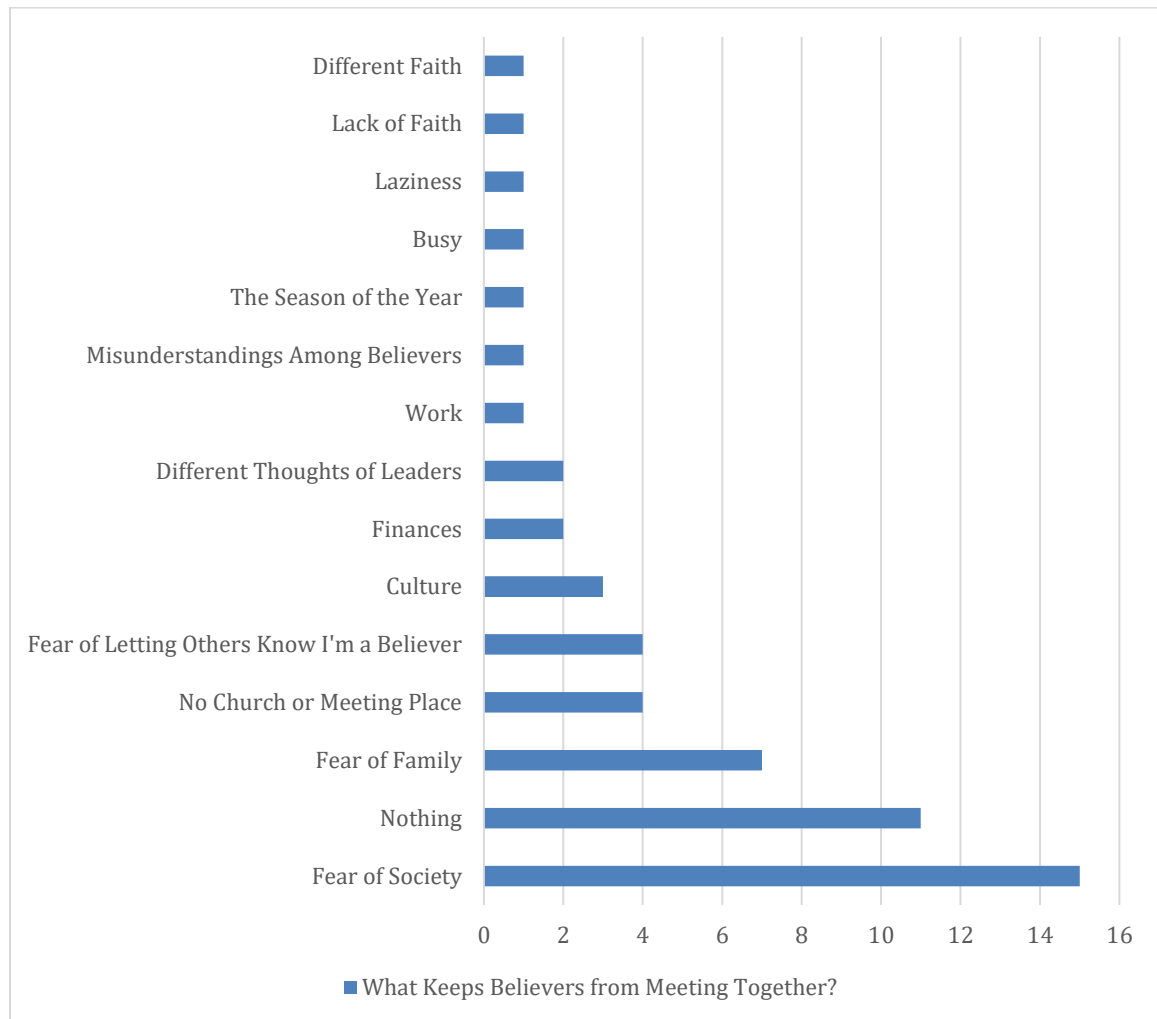


Fig. 4.15. CAQ 11: What keeps believers from meeting together?

When asked if they found it difficult to get believers to gather together, all twelve participants of the church planter questionnaire answered, “yes.” Church planters were then asked about major obstacles that keep believers from meeting together. Eleven of the twelve participants said that “lack of trust” was one of the major obstacles. “Fear of family/persecution” was mentioned by seven of the participants. One respondent wrote, “They have extreme trust issues with each other. There is a lot of fear of family or friends finding out about their new faith. Fear of when expats leave, they will betray each other to other locals” (Fig. 4.16).

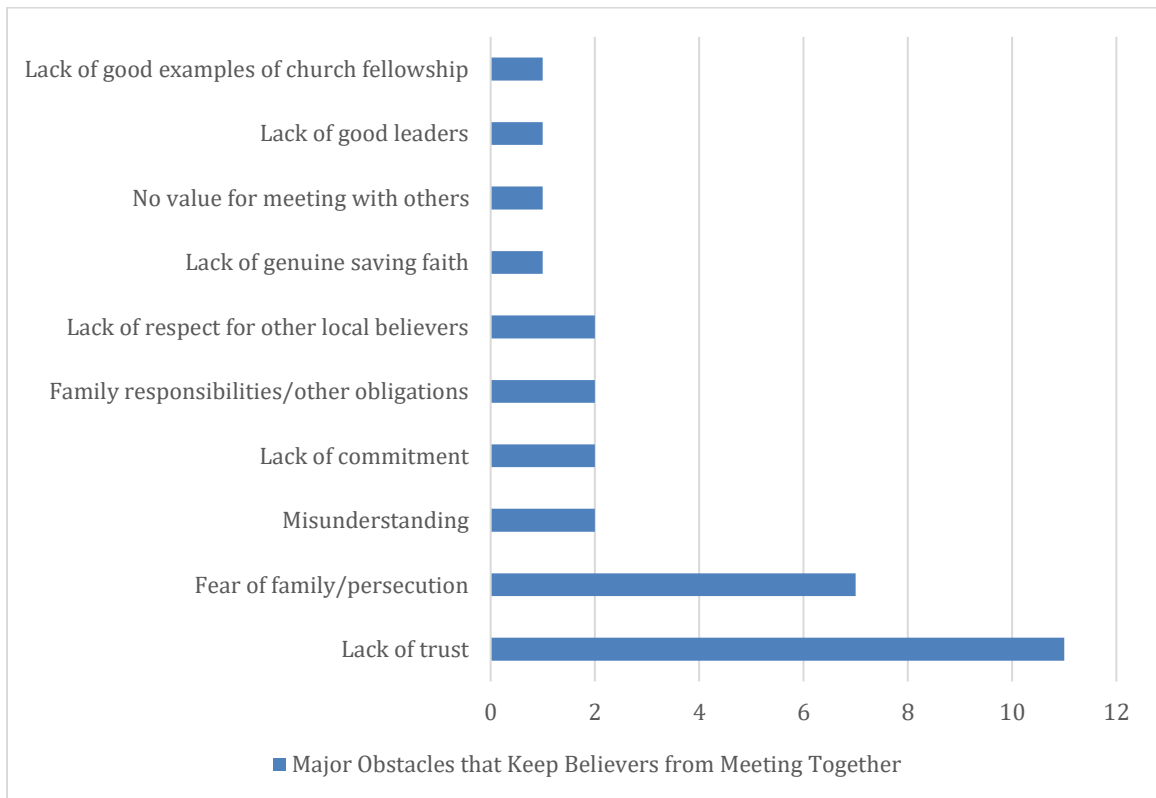


Fig. 4.16. CPQ 5: Major obstacles that keep believers from meeting together.

Church planters in the focus group were asked, “What are some of the relational barriers that you have observed between MBBs?” and, “In your experience, what keeps

Muslim background believers from gathering to worship, pray, and study the bible?” The biggest response was “fear” and “distrust.” CPFG Participant 1 said he was talking with a local believer who was having trouble trusting another believer. The foreign church planter asked the believer, “What if this brother walks faithfully with Jesus for twenty years, would you trust him then?” The believer responded, “I don’t know.” CPFG Participant 5 said that some of this distrust is a result of the “cultural context where there is a built-in and bred-in distrust for anyone you are not related to.” He went on to say that it is even difficult for locals to trust their own family, so “why on earth would you trust somebody who you’re not related to?” Some local believers think the foreigners are foolish for trusting other local believers. CPFG Participant 7 said, “They think we’ve been fooled into trusting somebody. We know that anything can happen...that they could betray us. And yet, it’s worth the risk for the sake of the gospel.” The local believers “haven’t understood that yet.”

Distrust was found to be a common barrier to healthy MBB relationships. CPFG Participant 1 shared a story about distrust among believers. He said that the security police had come to their home during a meeting and told them they were not allowed to meet in a home. When a believer friend from another group heard about it, he came quickly to tell the foreign church planter that if the security police were concerned, it was for a good reason. “You can’t trust those people,” he said. The participant said that although he was not really too concerned about the people in his group, it could be true that the security police were aware of a security concern with some of the people. Then he said, “I still think the body’s worth it.”

In considering the problem of distrust and hatred, CPFPG Participant 4 said, “Ultimately, it’s just Satan at work...Sin has been perpetuated for centuries upon centuries...We’re not dealing with a lost generation, we’re dealing with generations upon generations and sins passed down, and it’s just brutal trying to break through in that.”

CPFPG Participant 2 brought up the idea of “academic distrust.” Sometimes local believers do not want to learn under the leadership of a local believer because they do not trust the leader’s credentials. They assume the foreigners come with degrees or at least years of experience as Christians in a church. No local believer has anything more than a certificate in a Bible program, and many have not been believers for very long. This participant said that “one of the reasons they distrust other Kurdish believers and have a strong distrust and potentially distaste for Kurdish leadership is that they look around and say, ‘Well, what qualifies him to be over me?’” and “‘Why should I trust him with the Word? Why should I trust him to be the source from which I’m being taught?’” CPFPG Participant 3 agreed and said that if people know he is teaching, they will come, but if they know a local believer is teaching, the church will be empty. Some have told him, “I don’t want to leave my home and come to church just to listen to this person teaching.” This participant went on to say that now he just allows local believers to teach. “I know that they’ll make a lot of mistakes, but I prefer to walk with the leaders on a separate day, not on the meeting day.” He said that since he no longer appears at the pulpit, locals have struggled to come, “but overtime, they’re learning to kind of trust those that are teaching.”

Several focus group participants said that one reason believers do not gather for worship, prayer, and Bible study is because they have never experienced good

fellowship. CPFPG Participant 2 said that he thinks many believers have done a cost-benefit analysis. They have already counted a cost in making a decision to follow Christ. It is a risk to have a Bible in their home or a Bible app on their phone, but they take these risks knowing they need to read the Bible and pray to grow as believers. The idea of meeting with other believers is taking another huge risk, and since they have never experienced the blessing of good fellowship, they do not think it is worth the risk. They believe that they can continue in their faith on their own, periodically asking questions to a foreigner, who is not a threat.

Focus group participants also pointed out that many believers do not understand the importance of fellowship, biblically. CPFPG Participant 1 pointed out that not gathering with other believers can actually be evidence that someone is not a true believer. He said that he wants to say to a believer who is not gathering, “Dude, you feel much better about your status before God than I feel about it, you know, based on the fact that you’re not gathering. You don’t even love God enough to know your brothers and sisters!”

CPFPG Participant 4 said that a big barrier is lack of prayer. He said that although he is trying hard to do so many things, God can do it without him. He said, “The times that have been most encouraging for me here in my short three years have been moments that have just fallen on my lap.” He said all his efforts did not usually lead to fruit. Rather than trying so hard, we need to spend more time in prayer, and watch God do the work.

Initial Concerns About Attending Church

As another way to discover obstacles that keep MBBs from developing healthy relationships with one another, church attenders were asked about what concerns they

had when they first started going to church. Twenty-four responded that they had no concerns. Another twenty-four mentioned fear as their main concern. One participant wrote, “Since we live in an Islamic community, we are always worried about the threats of people” (CAQ Participant 2). Another wrote, “At first, I was worried and indecisive because I have always been a Muslim and grown up as a Muslim. Also, my whole family and relatives are all Muslim. Even now, they do not know I am not a Muslim and converted to Christianity. So, I am always worried” (CAQ Participant 15). Another participant wrote, “In the beginning I had some fear that relatives might hurt us” (CAQ Participant 43). Still another wrote, “I was worried that I might get kicked out of my house. I was afraid that my family might disown me. But thank God, nothing happened, and everything went well” (CAQ Participant 22). CAQ Participant 23 shared, “I didn’t have any concerns, but I came in secret” (Fig. 4.17).

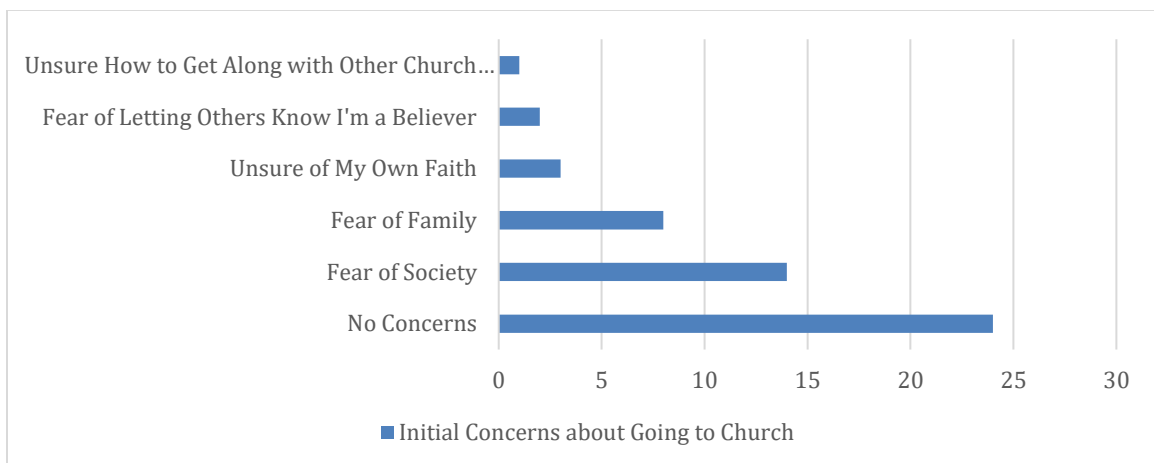


Fig. 4.17. CAQ 9: Initial concerns about going to church.

Trusting Other Believers

To find out more about how distrust acts as a barrier between MBBs, believers were asked on the believer questionnaire how they knew if they could trust another

believer. The most common response was by observing their words and actions. One participant wrote, “If the believer continues attending the church gatherings consistently, and is ready to help other believers, then from his conduct and deeds, you can tell if he is trustworthy or not” (BQ Participant 1). Another wrote, “If his deeds and words are from Bible, then I can trust him” (BQ Participant 10). Others said they needed to get to know the person. One participant wrote, “I can trust those believers who are close to me. For example, I am really close to some of my friends who became followers of Jesus” (BQ Participant 3). Another wrote, “If other believers trust him, then I can trust him too” (BQ Participant 28). A few simply said they cannot trust other Kurds. BQ Participant 37 wrote, “Most of the time I can’t, but I trust in Jesus, so it doesn’t matter” (Fig. 4.18).

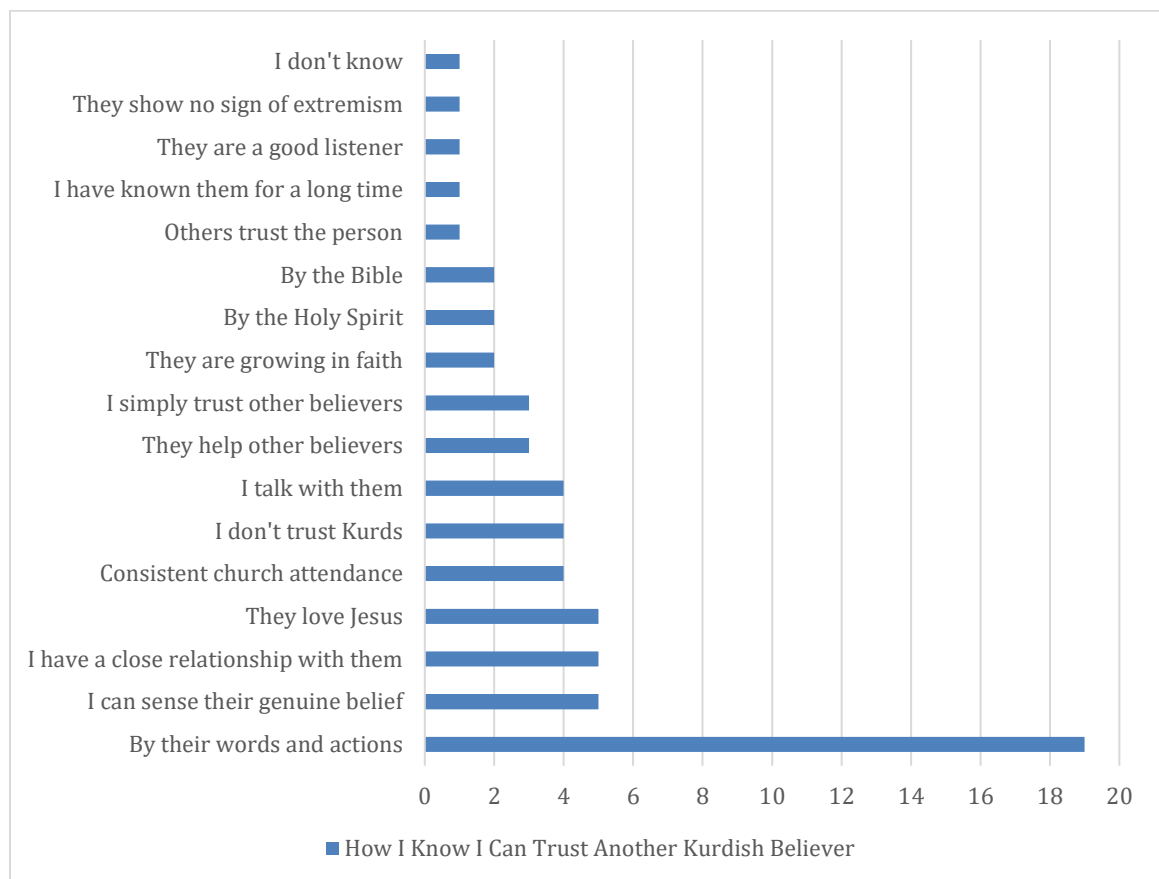


Fig. 4.18. BQ 13: How I know I can trust another Kurdish believer.

Safety Concerns

To know to what extent safety concerns made it difficult for MBBs to develop relationships with one another, believers were asked on the believer questionnaire about any safety concerns they had about meeting with other believers. The safety concerns were varied. One participant wrote, “In Kurdistan, you do not feel completely safe and secure” (BQ Participant 48). Another participant wrote, “If my family finds out that I am a follower of Jesus, I will get in trouble” (BQ Participant 26). BQ Participant 27 said he was concerned about “having non-Christians in our church to spy on us.” BQ Participant 28 said that she was “afraid that one day radical Muslims will get into power.” Twelve of the fifty participants said they had no concerns. BQ Participant 5 wrote that she feels safe around other Kurdish believers, but “the community forces us not to trust everybody” (Fig. 4.19).

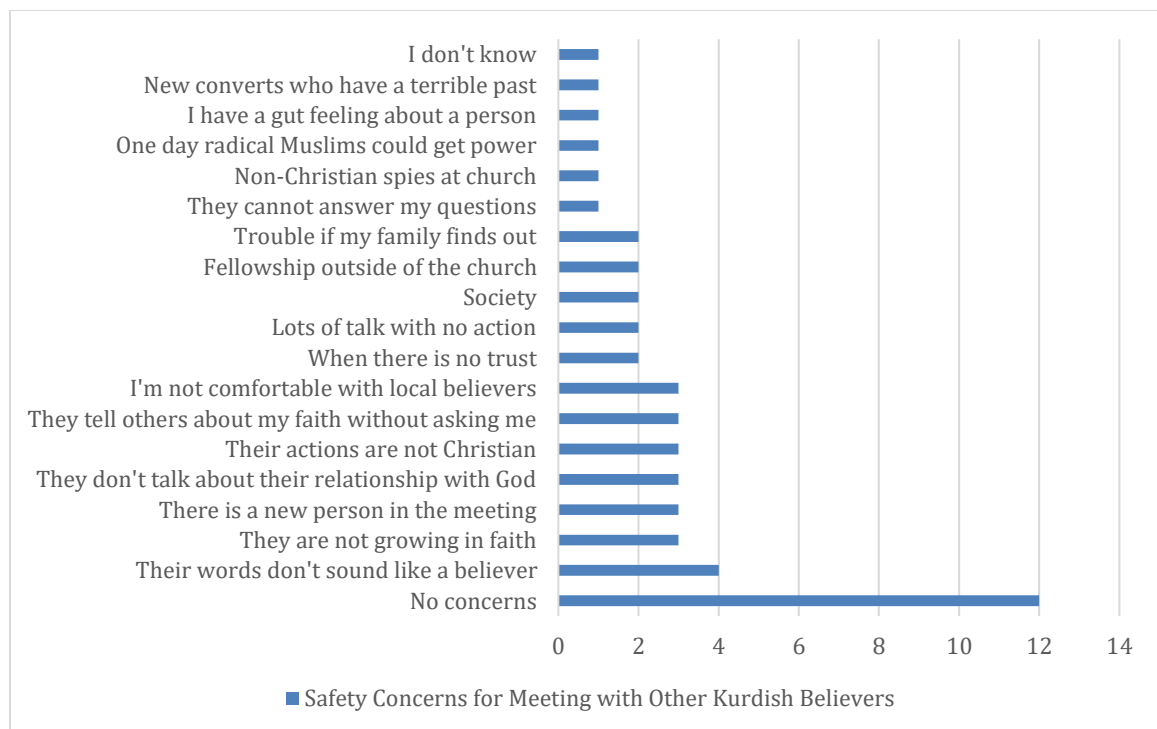


Fig. 4.19. BQ 14: Safety concerns for meeting with other Kurdish believers.

Summary

It was clear from the evidence above that church planters found it challenging to gather believers together. Based on the data, fear was the biggest obstacle keeping MBBs from meeting together. Many believers were afraid that relatives, family members, or others in their community might find out that they were now following Christ. Many were afraid they would be seen associating with other believers. Many were unsure that they could trust other MBBs with the knowledge of their new faith. Many MBBs live with a very real threat that if word got out that they had left Islam and were following Christ, they could be kicked out of their home, lose their job, or even lose their life. If they reveal to others that they are believers, they not only have to trust that other believers are not spies who will use that information against them, but they also have to trust that the other true believers are careful and will not let the information accidentally slip out.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

The purpose of this research question was to discover successful methods of relationship building and community formation among MBBs. Church planter questionnaires and a church planter focus group were used to find these successful methods. Questions 3, 6, 11-12, and 15 on the church planter questionnaire addressed this research question. The church planter focus group question 6 addressed this research question.

Church Planting Successes

To discover how church planters have gathered MBBs, formed MBB community, and established an MBB church, church planters were asked on the church planter

questionnaire about their biggest church planting successes. The top answers were “people coming to Christ,” “believers gathering consistently,” and “believers being disciplined and growing.” One respondent wrote, “We praise God that he has led Muslim background believers to himself and that we are a part of a small church that consists of about 10 local believers. They have all been or are being individually disciplined and growing in their faith” (Fig. 4.20).

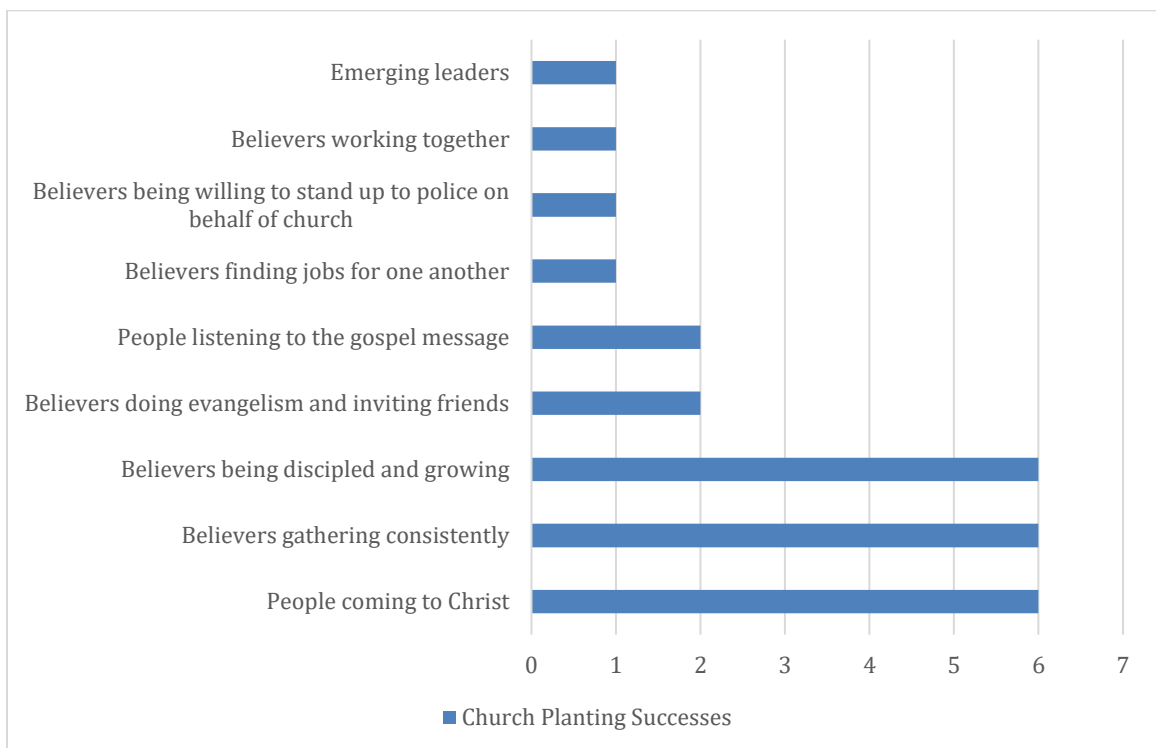


Fig. 4.20. CPQ 3: Church Planting Successes.

To further understand what has led to successful church plants, church planters were asked to share some of their church planting successes in the church planter focus group. CPMG Participant 1 shared that he was skeptical when teammates suggested getting a group of foreigners together to do church in Kurdish and inviting Kurds to join, but because teammates were excited about it, he decided to give it a try. He said it took

six months before local believers would regularly come. Several times in the first six months it was only foreigners who showed up to the meeting. Now, several years in, they have a group of five locals who show up regularly for church on a Friday morning. That might not sound like a huge success, but compared to many other groups, it is a success!

CPFG Participant 2 shared how their church group got started. He said that after a few years of working in the city, their team found themselves walking with fifteen or sixteen believers who did not want anything to do with each other, and he said it felt like a “massive success.” At that point they decided to do a Christmas party as a way for the believers to interact with one another, and that resulted in a weekly gathering. He said,

All we were wanting to see happen was create that space where they could come and taste and see that there’s benefit, that there’s profit to corporate gathering...It’s been messy. It’s been inconsistent, but...I can say in confidence that we have faithfully, consistently, created an opportunity for them to come and taste body life, for them to come and experience why the church is valuable.

(CPFG Participant 2)

CPFG Participant 6 said that their team found one of the keys to successfully planting a church was the participation of entire families of foreigners. It would have been easy for wives and children to stay home at first when the local believers were mostly all single men. It also felt strange to have so many foreigners participate when the group of locals was so small. This participant said, however, that the participation of foreign families has been important for bringing local families into the group.

Focus group participants mentioned several other things that led to more healthy community within the MBB church. These were a local believer’s confession of sin to the

rest of the church, local believers sharing Christ with others, a believer boldly standing with other church members before the police when he did not need to, the group of believers giving money to buy food for the needy during the Covid-19 crisis, and the faithful perseverance of foreign international workers in a difficult place.

To find out how church planters have established a church, church planters who said they had been a part of a successful MBB church plant were asked on the church planter questionnaire about the keys to their success. The top answer was consistency and persistence. One respondent listed three keys, “Consistency; one core family needed to give others confidence to come; participation of women so that ladies can come too.” Another wrote that a key was, “Just starting rather than waiting for everything to be missiologically perfect.” Another key mentioned was, “continuing to meet with very few people” (Fig. 4.21).

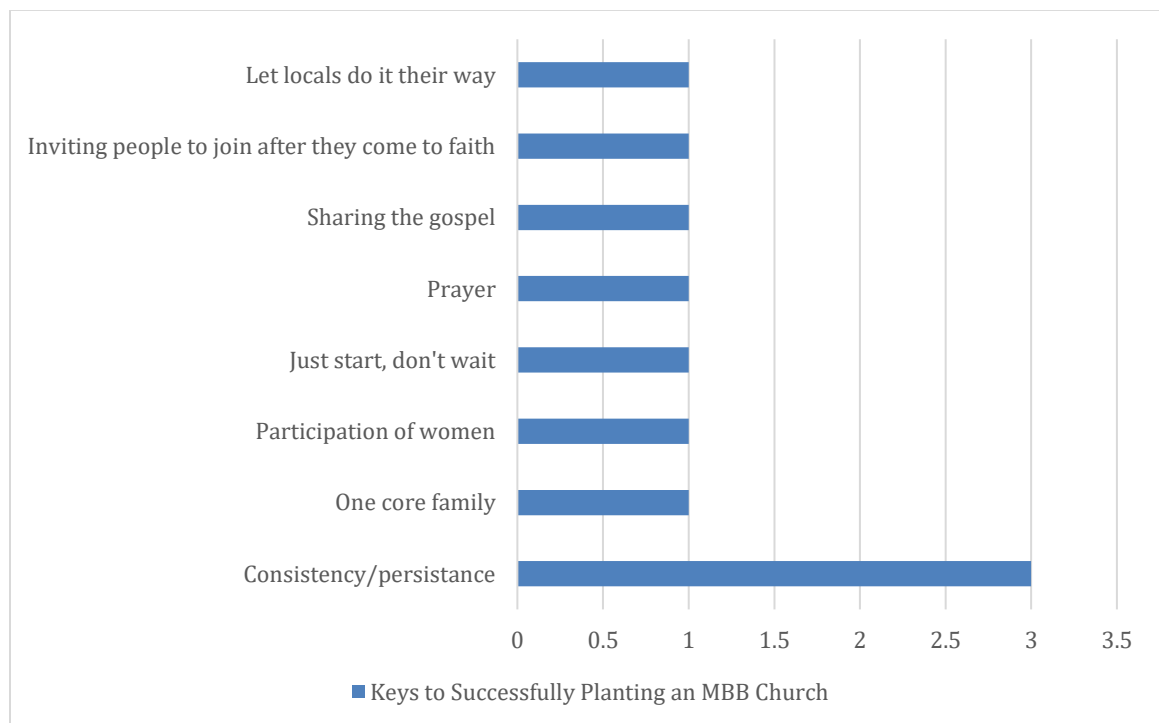


Fig.4.21. CPQ 11: Keys to successfully planting an MBB church.

Overcoming Barriers that Keep MBBs from Gathering

To understand how church planters have successfully gathered MBBs and formed MBB community, church planters were asked on the church planter questionnaire what they found to be successful to overcome obstacles that kept MBBs from meeting together. The top answer was to have fun social activities. Several said to persevere, continuing the course even if progress is slow. Others pointed out the importance of good leadership. One respondent wrote, “Keep gathering; focus on families; give real attention to both men and women; have fun together; pray for one another; don’t accept one on one [discipleship] as a sustainable option” (Fig. 4.22).

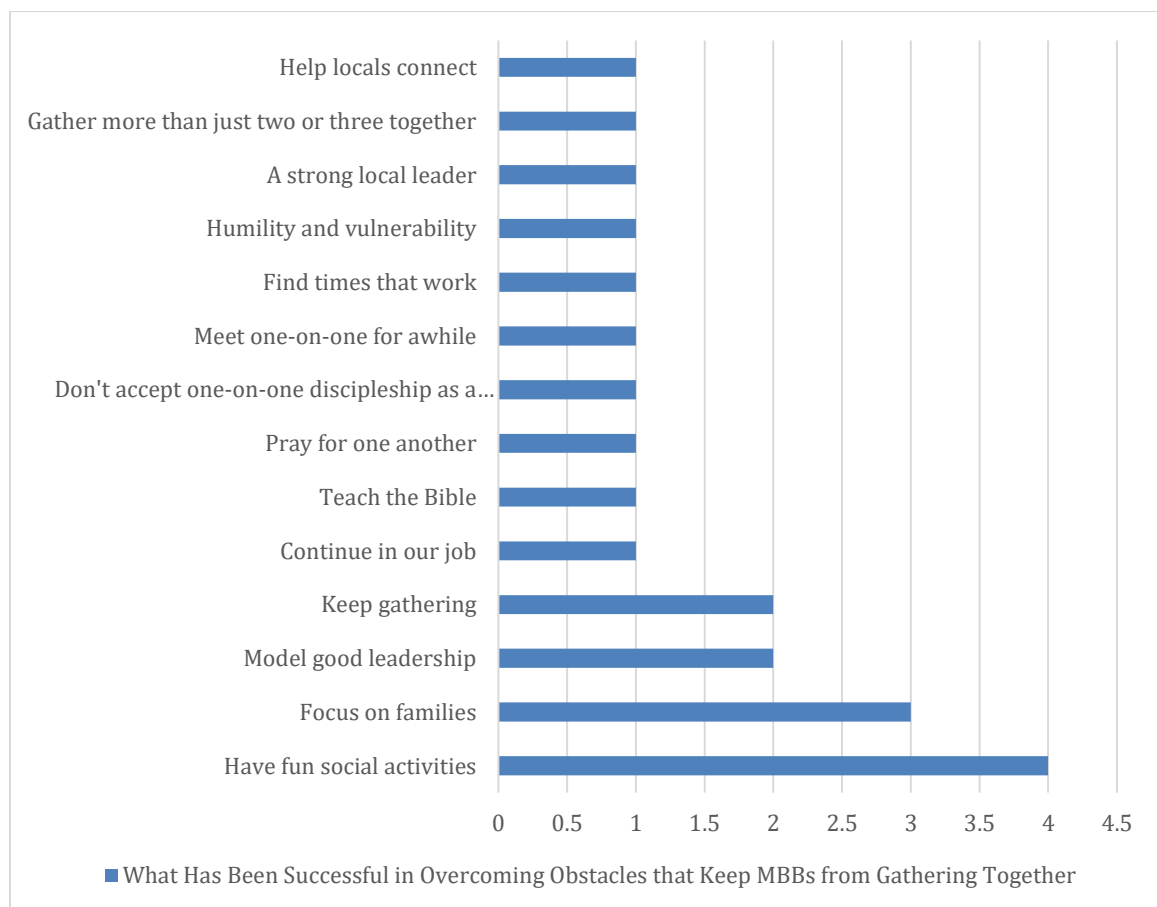


Fig. 4.22. CPQ 6: What has been successful in overcoming obstacles that keep MBBs from gathering together.

To find out more about what church planters have done to create MBB community, church planters who were part of a successful MBB church plant were asked on the church planter questionnaire how they overcame the problem of MBBs not wanting to fellowship with one another. Out of six respondents, two people gave the credit to God, “God did it.” Two others said they have not yet overcome this problem and that it is a constant issue. One respondent wrote, “We are still in that process. I personally have noticed when the Holy Spirit is really powerfully working in someone’s heart, they are much more willing to gather with others. When the person’s faith seems more immature or lacks giving God lordship in the area of fear they do not meet with others” (Fig. 4.23).

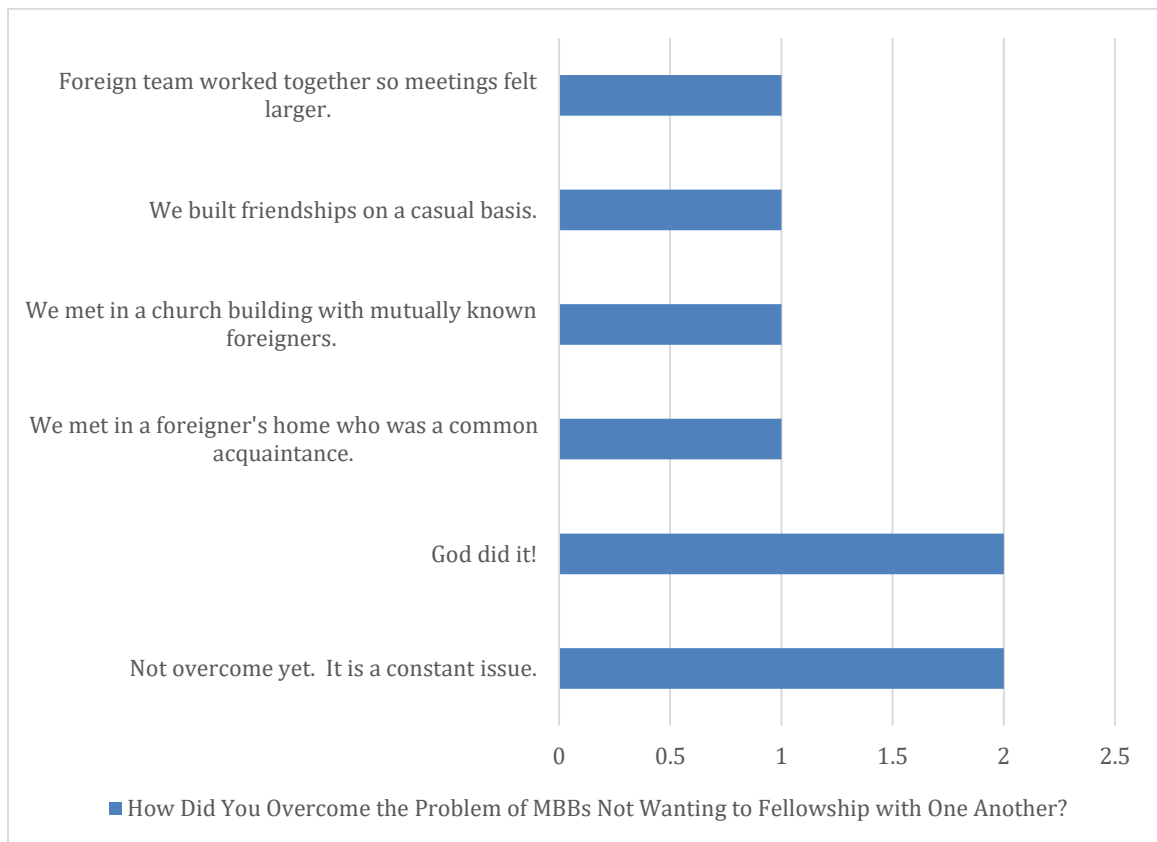


Fig. 4.23. CPQ 12: How did you overcome the problem of MBBs not wanting to fellowship with one another?

As another way of finding out what has led to the successful establishment of an MBB church, successful church planters were given the opportunity on the church planter questionnaire to give advice to others who are church planting among MBBs. Two of the six respondents said to know it will be messy. Two also said to just start doing something. One wrote,

Pray a lot. Start small and don't stop meeting even if it is only expats some days. Create a culture of trust and total transparency for everything especially financial matters. Voraciously evangelize to those you sense are open to the gospel and invite to the group once there is mutual trust and trust from the group. Have gatherings outside of church to build community and create a culture of togetherness. (CPQ Respondent)

Another wrote, "Do something. Start something. Be willing to make mistakes and learn from them. Planting a church is like the beginning of anything: it will be messy, and if you wait for the perfect situation to come, you will never do it" (Fig. 4.24).

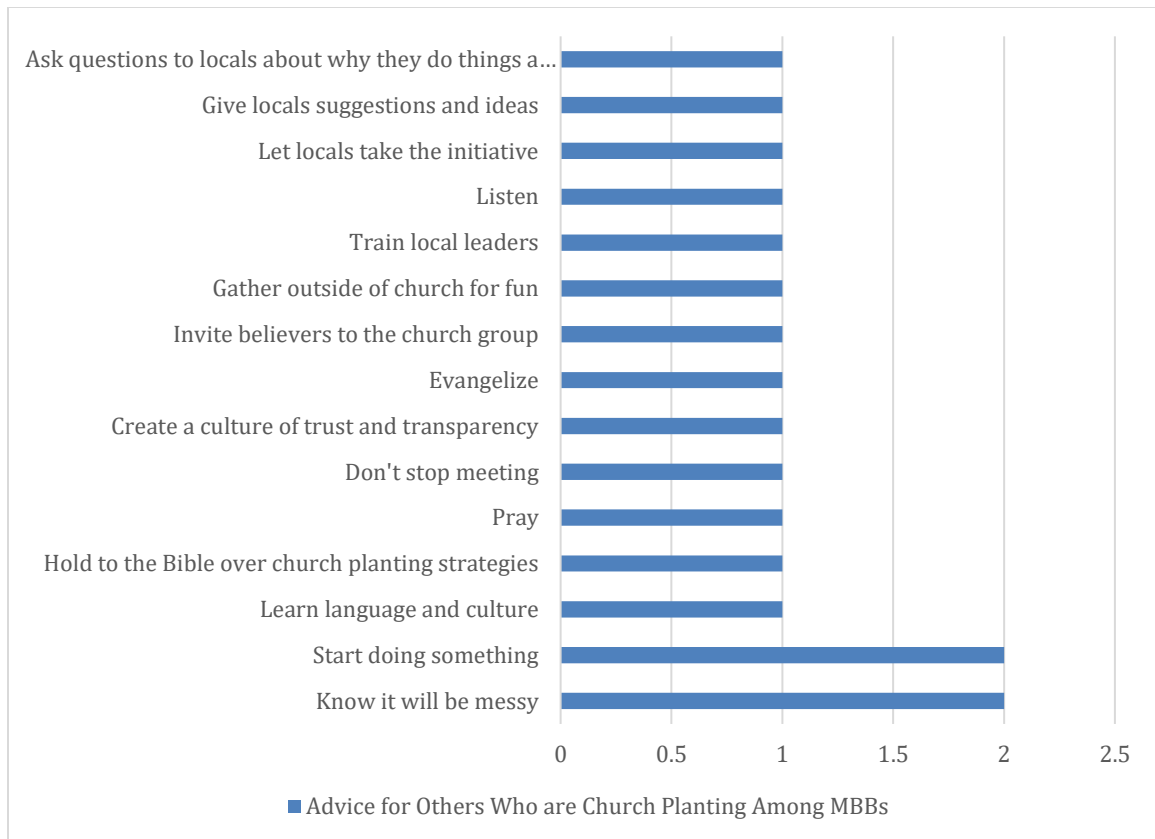


Fig.4.24. CPQ 15: Advice for others who are church planting among MBBs.

Summary

Data from the evidence showed that one of the keys for successfully gathering MBBs and forming community to establish a church was getting started and continuing through difficult times. Social activities were also found to be important. It was important to focus on families rather than individuals. Developing local leaders was also key. Prayer and trusting God were crucial to successfully establishing a church.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

The purpose of this research question was to determine what environment and activities help develop relationships and form community among MBBs. Church planter questionnaires, church attender questionnaires, a church planter focus group and believer

questionnaires were used to find this information. Questions 13-14 on the church planter questionnaire addressed this research question. Questions 12-16 of the church attender questionnaire addressed this research question. The church planter focus group questions 3 and 4 addressed this research question. Questions 12, 15, and 18-19 on the believer questionnaire also addressed this question.

Good Activities for Building Relationships Between MBBs

To find out what activities were helpful for building relationships between MBBs, successful church planters were asked on the church planter questionnaire, “What were some activities that you found helpful for developing relationships between MBBS?” The top answer was social gatherings like picnics and parties. One respondent wrote, “People can just talk have fun and get to know each other.” Respondents also mentioned going through difficult times together, the Lord’s supper, and “craft time for ladies.” One respondent said, “when they support one another in a difficult time- that is a big help in building trust” (Fig. 4.25).

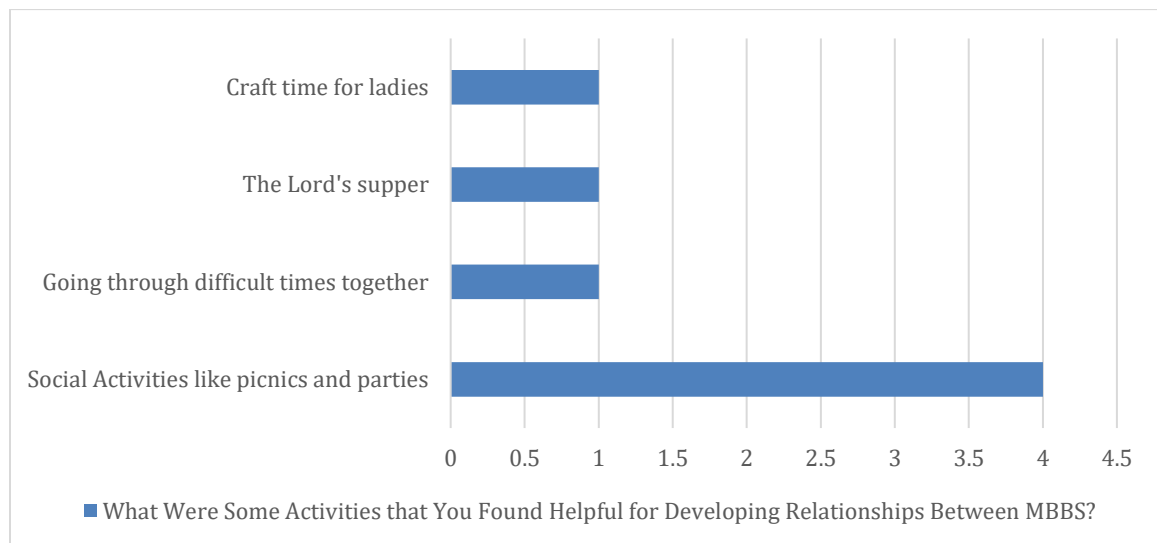


Fig.4.25. CPQ 13: What were some activities that you found helpful for developing relationships between MBBs?

To hear from church attenders themselves about what kinds of activities they found to be helpful for building relationships, church attenders were asked on the church attender questionnaire, “What are some activities that you find helpful for getting to know other Kurdish believers?” Seventeen participants said that weekly church meetings were helpful for getting to know other believers. Ten said that fellowship was helpful, and nine said that special occasions, like Christmas, Easter, and baptisms, were helpful for getting to know others (Fig. 4.26).

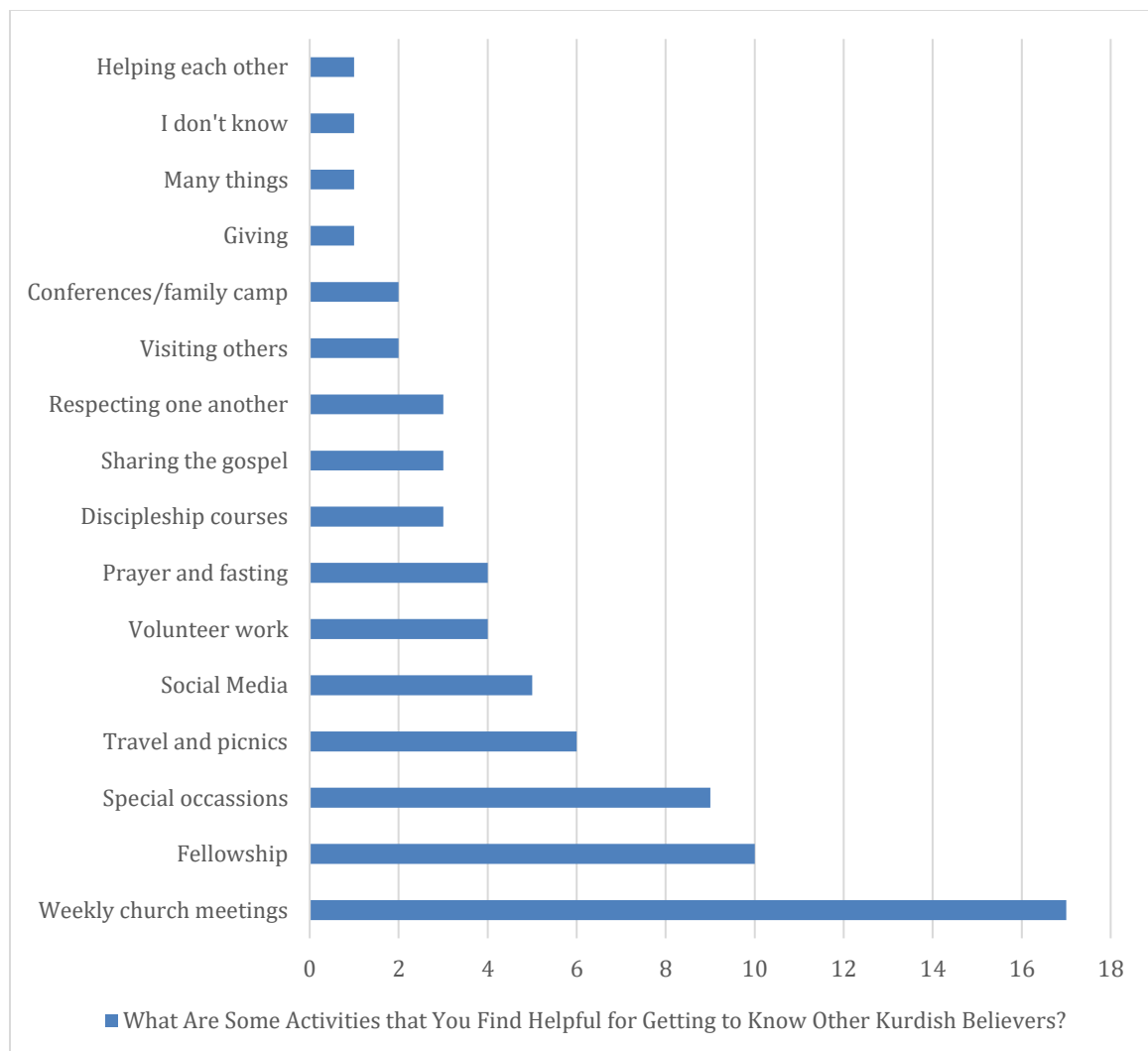


Fig. 4.26. CAQ 13: What are some activities that you find helpful for getting to know other Kurdish believers?

To draw out a few more activities, church attenders were also asked, “What are some activities that you have observed that have helped other Kurdish believers form healthy relationships with one another?” Twelve respondents said church meetings were helpful. Five suggested that special occasions were helpful, and another five said that honesty, respect, and trust was helpful (Fig. 4.27).

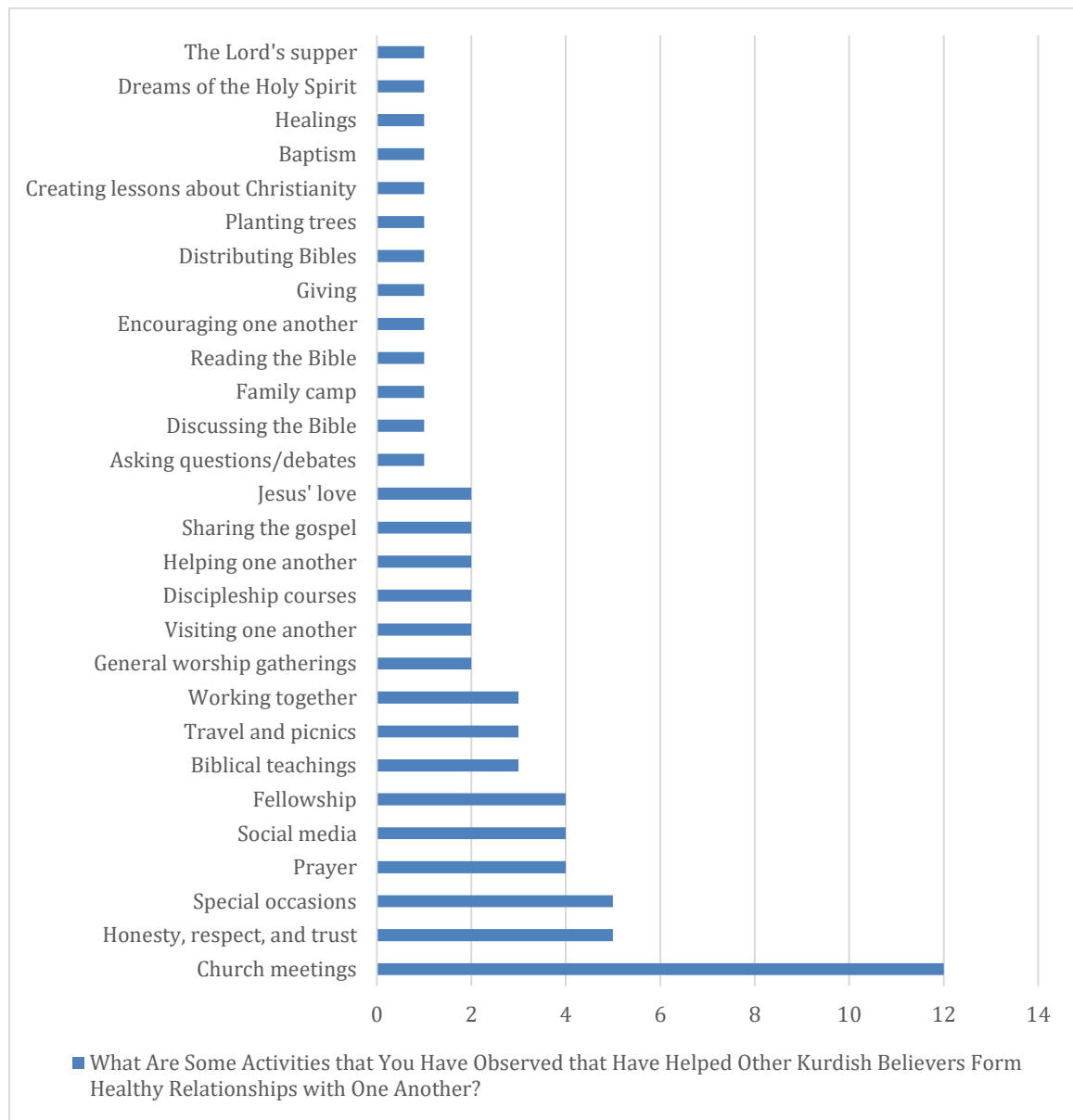


Fig. 4.27. CAQ 14: What are some activities that you have observed that have helped other Kurdish believers form healthy relationships with one another?

As a way of discovering more helpful activities for building relationships between MBBs, the church planters who participated in the focus group were asked, “What have you found to be successful ways of building relationships between believers?” Several participants said it was important to have fun social gatherings like picnics. Some suggested getting believers to serve together, or to share the gospel with others together. CPFPG Participant 6 said it helped when believers went through difficult things together. Her group had experienced the security police showing up at a meeting in her home to break up the meeting. She said that that experience brought the members of the group much closer together.

Foreign church planters recognized that they need to try to get the local believers to communicate directly with one another. Two participants in the focus group talked about the necessity of encouraging believers to turn to one another to share prayer requests or praises. They said that when a local believer called with either good news or a prayer request, they would tell them to make sure to tell another local member of the group too. They said that the locals do not like it when they tell them to call another local believer, but the foreigners recognize it is an important practice to take themselves out of the center of the relationships.

To discover more activities that would be helpful for building relationships between MBBs, believers were asked on the believer questionnaire, “What could be done to make it easier for Kurdish believers to grow in relationship with one another?” The top answer was “meeting and talking with believers.” Other popular answers were “study the Bible,” “attend gatherings,” “care for one another”, and “love.” BQ Participant 6 wrote, “We should care for each other. But sadly, we don’t see this much.” BQ Participant 42

wrote that they could grow in relationship with one another “by visiting each other and being there on bad and good days” (Fig. 4.28).

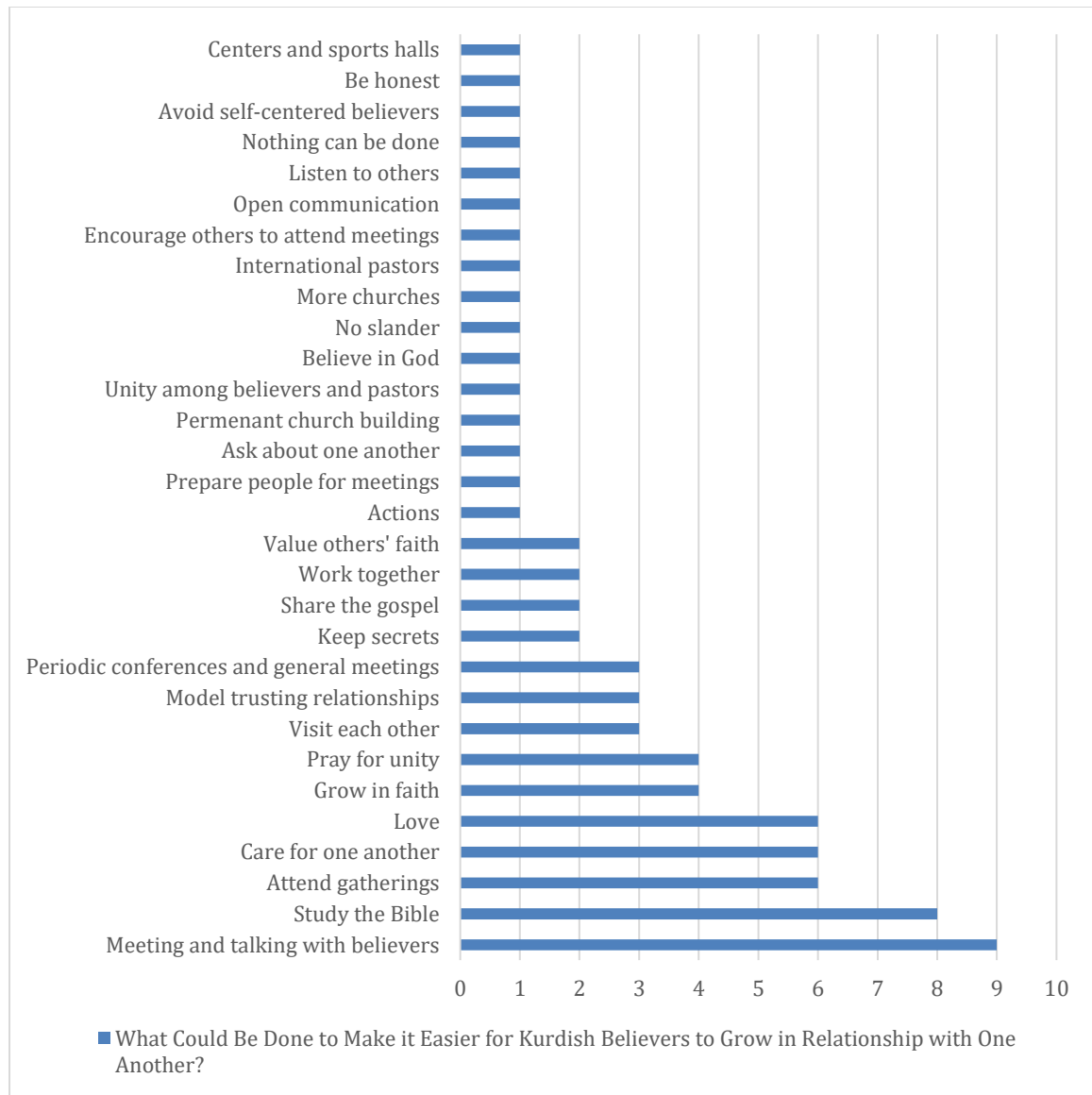


Fig. 4.28 BQ 15: What could be done to make it easier for Kurdish believers to grow in relationship with one another?

To get more ideas of activities that would help MBBs build relationships, church attenders were asked on the church attender questionnaire, “What could be done to help build relationships between Kurdish believers in order to encourage Kurdish believers to

meet together to worship God, pray, and study the Bible?” The top response was “church meetings.” The next most common responses were “Read the Bible” and “Working together.” One participant wrote that it was key for believers to grow in their new faith. She said, “If they have a stable and healthy faith, then they would have good relationships” (CAQ Participant 8). Another wrote, “Apart from the general meetings, it would be good to have small group gatherings, even if it is only three believers” (CAQ Participant 10). CAQ Participant 50 wrote, “Sometimes the churches present sermons together and visit one another. The members of different churches go on picnics together or hold courses so that everybody from every church can participate” (Fig. 4.29).

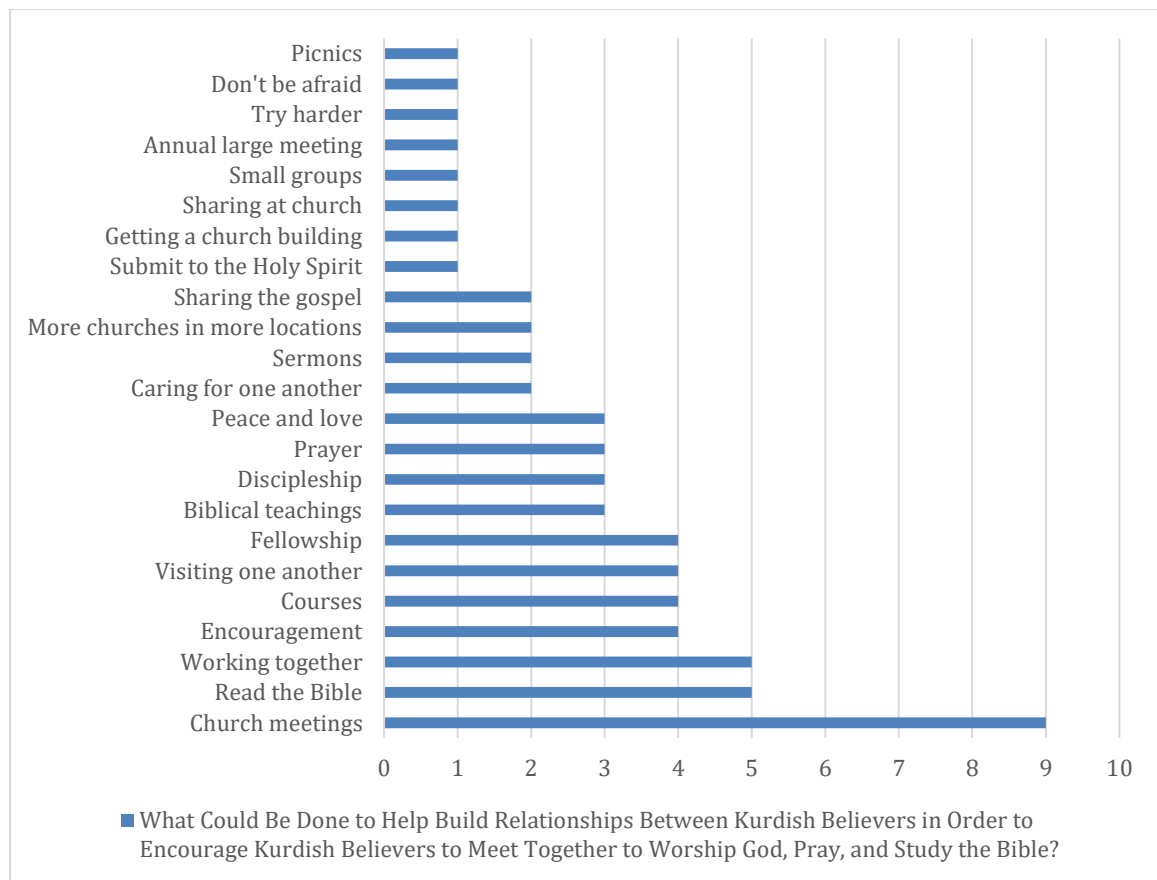


Fig.4.29. CAQ 15: What could be done to help build relationships between Kurdish believers in order to encourage Kurdish believers to meet together to worship God, pray, and study the Bible?

Times and Locations

As a way of determining what types of environment helped to develop relationships between MBBs, church planters were asked on the church planter questionnaire, “What type of meeting place worked best for gathering MBBS and building MBB community?” The top answer was a church building. Homes were mentioned as a location both positively and negatively. One respondent wrote, “They seem to like the formally identified church building, plus in-home gatherings are illegal. They are giving us a legal option, so it seems prudent to take it.” Other locations mentioned were coffeeshops and outdoors in open places (Fig. 4.30).

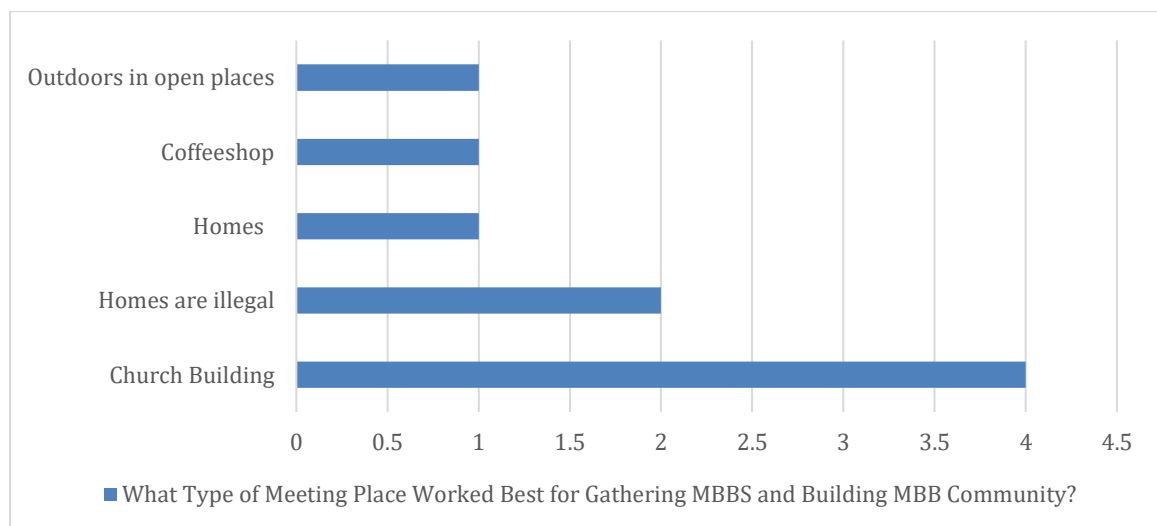


Fig. 4.30. CPQ 14: What type of meeting place worked best for gathering MBBs and building MBB community?

To discover a good environment for meeting with other MBBs, believers were asked on the believer questionnaire, “Are there locations and times that would make it easier for Kurdish believers to meet together? If so, what would you suggest?” Sixteen of the fifty participants said that a church building was the best place to meet, and seven

said that weekends were the best time to meet. Six participants simply said that there are good places and times to meet, and five participants said that there were no good locations or times to meet. BQ Participant 17 wrote, “If the believers really love to hear the word of God and would love to have fellowship, they don’t care about time and place. They could gather anywhere” (Fig. 4.31).

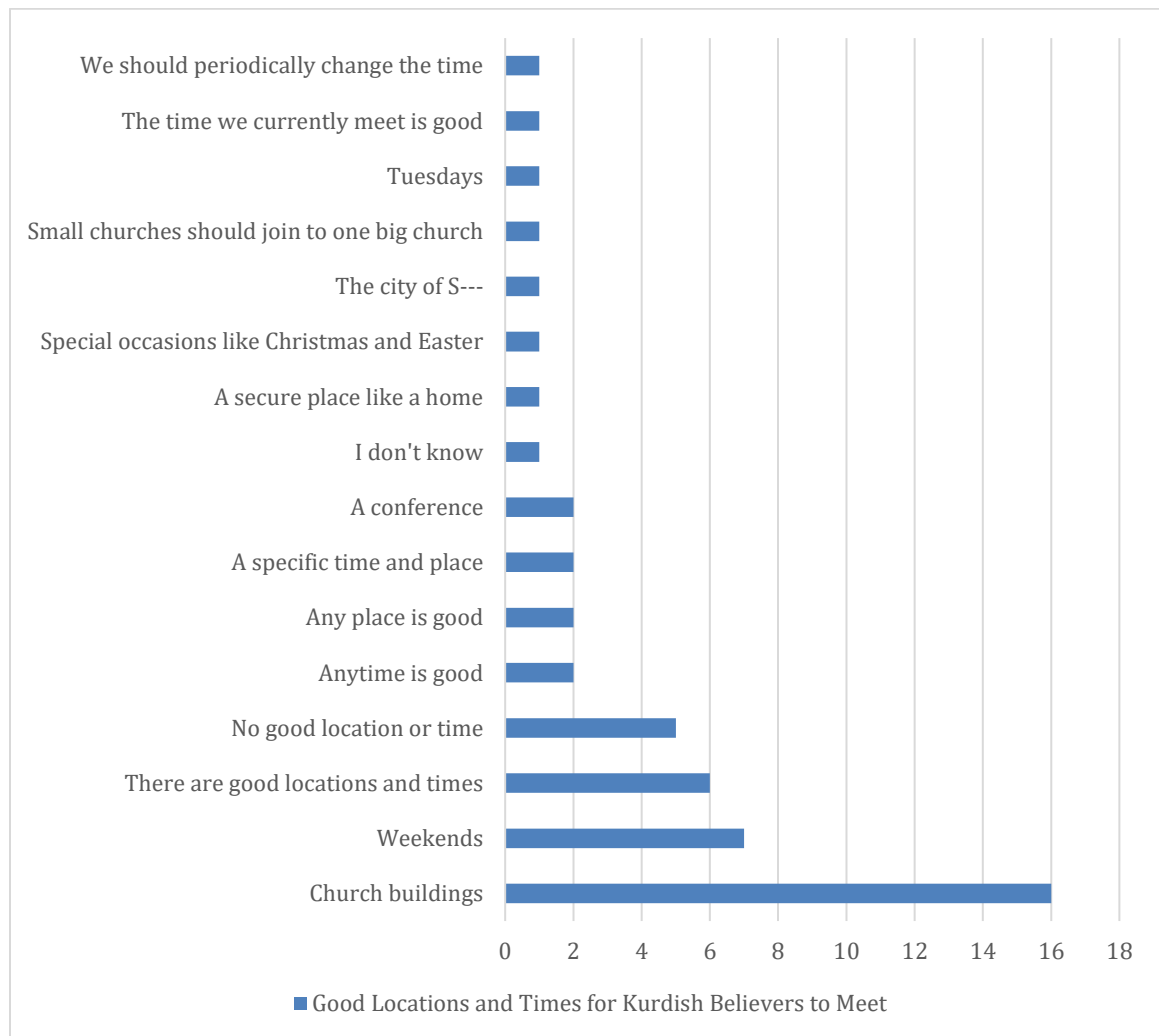


Fig. 4.31. BQ 12: Good locations and times for Kurdish believers to meet.

Church attenders were asked their opinion about a good meeting environment. They were asked on the church attender questionnaire, “In your experience, what are

some good places to meet with other Kurdish believers for worship, prayer, or Bible study?” Forty of the fifty-three participants responded that a church building was a good place to meet. Five respondents said parks were good to meet in. Four said that homes were good to meet in, and another four said that public places were good meeting spots. CAQ Participant 2 wrote, “If the government does not make us in trouble, everywhere is suitable for Kurdish believers to have fellowship” (Fig. 4.32).

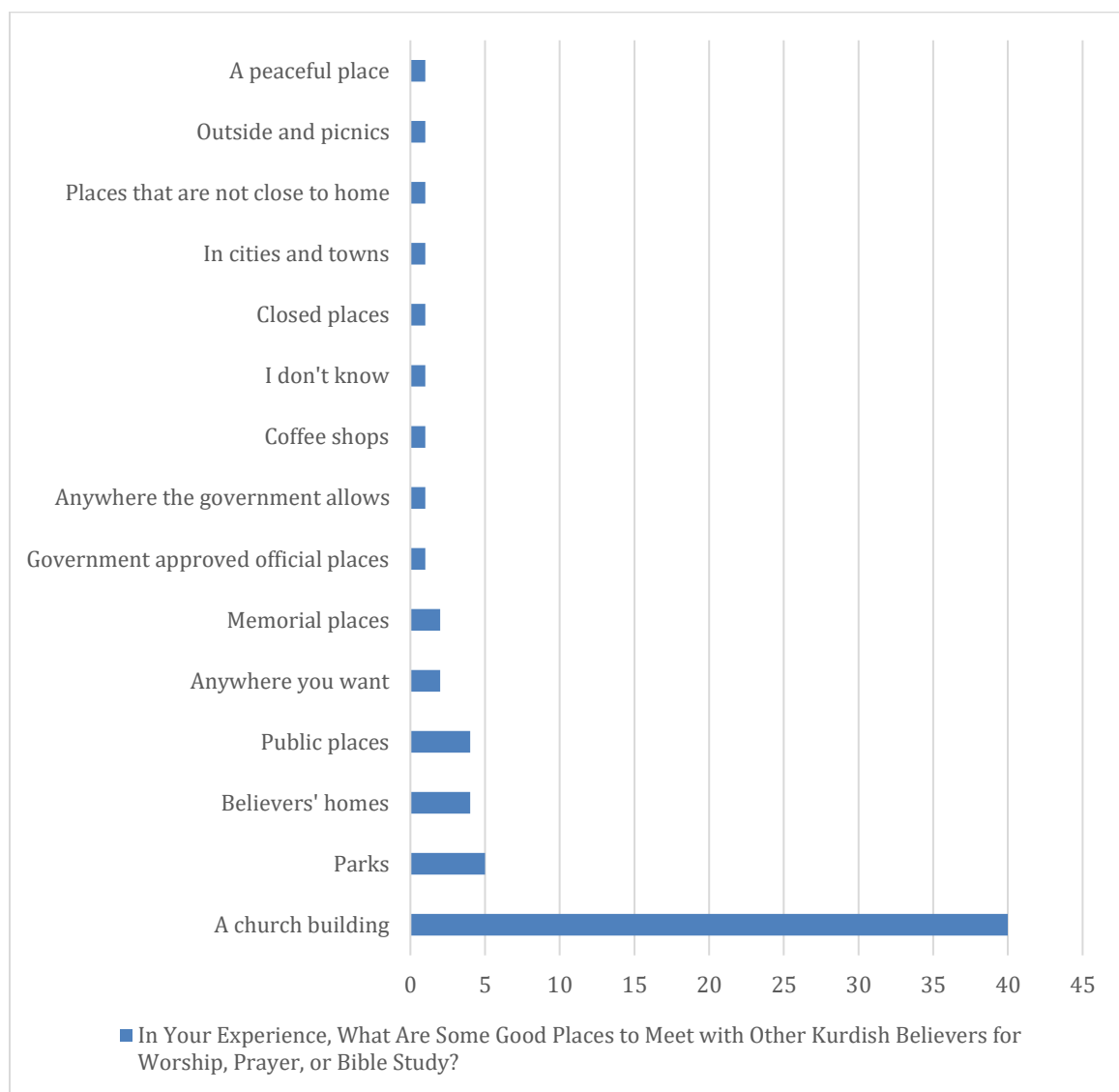


Fig. 4.32. CAQ 12: In your experience, what are some good places to meet with other Kurdish believers for worship, prayer, or Bible study?

To hear more about what kinds of environment might be helpful for developing relationships between MBBs, church planters in the focus group were asked, “In your experience, are there certain meeting locations or times that work for MBBs to meet?” Several mentioned that homes were not good because they were not formal enough and were illegal. CPFPG Participant 7 said, “We had a guy one time who was afraid to meet in homes or told us it wasn’t wise to meet in homes, because that’s what the extreme Islamic groups do.” CPFPG Participant 2 added, “He told us that on the basis of having been an extremist Islamic leader who had a group that met in his home.” Others said homes were good because the setting was more intimate and comfortable, and local believers could tell family members that they were simply going to someone’s house. A home was considered even better if it was in a complex that had security guards because the security guards would be added protection. Some said that locals told them they would not meet in a public church because that was too risky.

Focus group participants also discussed what times work best for MBBs to meet. They said Fridays seem to work well. The specific time of a meeting can change throughout the year, based on when the call-to-prayer is. Some suggested that locals do not want to prioritize a church meeting. CPFPG Participant 7 said that it seems like “the believers want it to be when there is absolutely nothing else that is going to interfere.”

In considering the best meeting environment, several focus group participants pointed out that there are many different opinions about the best place and time to meet, and if believers are committed to meeting, the place and time do not really matter. CPFPG Participant 5 said that needing to have a very particular place and time were just excuses. He said, “They don’t understand the value in obedience of gathering together. They don’t

understand what church actually is, the community of believers. It is a deep misunderstanding missiologically in every place where the church doesn't expand. Every place it does expand, there is a clear understanding of biblical gathering of believers." He went on to say that everyone wants something different. They do not understand that "this is valuable, no matter what." He said, "It's not going to be a location or a time. It's going to be a group of people committed to the idea of gathering."

Summary

Data from the evidence showed that most MBBs found church meetings to be the best place for building relationships with other MBBs. Both church planters and MBBs also mentioned fun social events as a good way of building relationships. Working together and supporting one another through difficult times also helped with building relationships. The majority of all the participants said that a church building was the best place for MBBs to gather.

Summary of Major Findings

Several major findings emerged from this research. They are listed here in summary form and will be discussed further in the following chapter.

1. The biggest barrier to MBB fellowship is fear.
2. Successful church planters did not have a well-defined method for gathering MBBs for fellowship.
3. Local believers said that church meetings in church buildings were the most appropriate place to grow in relationship with one another.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Although Muslim background believers (MBBs) make a significant and often costly decision when they choose to follow Christ, they often find it difficult to take the next step to meet with other MBBs. The purpose of this project was to identify reasons why MBBs who remain in their own Muslim context struggle to form healthy relationships with one another, and to discover best methods for relationship building and community formation that lead to healthy MBB church plants.

This chapter analyzes each of the major findings through the lenses of personal observation, the literature review, and the biblical framework. It then considers the ministry implications of the findings and the limitations of the study. Next it discusses unexpected observations and recommendations and concludes with a postscript.

Major Findings

Three major findings emerged from this research. Each finding is discussed below.

First Finding: Fear, the Biggest Barrier

The research indicated that fear is a major barrier that keeps MBBs from forming healthy relationships with one another.

Personal Observation

Many foreign church planters consider the biggest relational barrier to MBB fellowship to be a lack of trust. Lack of trust and fear sound very similar. Lack of trust can be a result of fear. Fear could also be a result of lack of trust. One of the key

differences is that foreigners seem to be looking at the relationship between two MBBs as involving only the two of them. When they observe that they do not connect, they assume it is because they do not trust one another. MBBs recognize that more than two people are involved. The entire community can be observing who a person spends time with. Associating with another MBB puts a person at risk because if the community knows the other is a believer, it could come out that he or she is a believer as well. People in the community might start asking questions if an MBB starts meeting regularly with a new person who is not a relative, neighbor, or co-worker. Not knowing the other MBB's reputation can put a person at risk for being seen with them.

Muslim background believers can face serious persecution if their family finds out that they are now following Christ. I have known very few new believers who have said that their parents were okay with their decision. I have known several believers whose parents have told them that it is permissible for them to follow Christ, but they cannot let relatives or coworkers know because it would bring shame on their family, and they might lose their job. I know several who have faced more serious persecution when their families found out. Some have been kicked out of their homes. Several have been beaten up by relatives. Several marriages have been threatened as the wife's parents have tried to take her away from the husband. Many will not tell their families about their decision to follow Christ because they fear they would face serious persecution or even death if word were to get out.

Literature Review

All the literature recognizes that persecution and fear of persecution is common in MBB churches. Fear of persecution often hinders the church and sometimes leads to its

demise (Greenlee 262). Much of the literature recognizes that lack of trust is one of the biggest barriers to forming an MBB church (Muller 373; Pietzsch 20; Evans 10; Love, “Developing” 205; Adams and Adams 149). Both the threat of persecution and distrust keep MBBs from developing close relationships (Sinclair Loc. 31/263).

Biblical Framework

Persecution was common in the early church. Jesus said it would be.

They will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name... You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. (Luke 21:12-17)

Jesus indicated that persecution would be a normal part of following Him.

Many examples throughout the book of Acts, show Jesus’ followers boldly standing up to proclaim Him in the face of persecution and even death. However, it was also natural for people to avoid persecution if possible. After the death of Stephen, Acts 8:1 says that “a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.” People hold up the stories of believers boldly standing in the face of persecution, but Jesus’ followers fled on the night that he was arrested. Paul also spoke of being abandoned by believers when he was taken to prison. Fear is still a human response to danger, even for followers of Christ. The Holy Spirit that gives believers that supernatural boldness that we love to see in the book of Acts.

Second Finding: No Well-Defined Method for Gathering

Church planters who participated in the research did not have a well-defined method for gathering MBBs for fellowship.

Personal Observation

It would have been great to have found clear simple steps that a church planter could follow to successfully gather MBBs for fellowship. Unfortunately, gathering MBBs is not that easy. Some of the best advice was for church planters to start trying, not waiting for everything to be perfect. Taking risks and trying new things is important. Church planters should be willing to fail and adjust their methods as they continue to try to gather MBBs together.

I have tried gathering MBBs on my own, and I have tried gathering MBBs with teammates, including families. In my experience, it has been much more encouraging to attempt to gather MBBs when working with teammates and including families. When I was doing it by myself, most weeks, two or three MBBs would attend the gathering. When working with three church planting families together, most weeks, four or five MBBs would attend. The main difference was that when it was just me, most weeks only men would come. With church planting families involved, women were regularly a part of the group. Also, when I did it alone, it felt very discouraging when attendance was low. When working with a group, it was not nearly as discouraging because we were together.

Church planters should also persevere even when numbers are low. I have participated in and observed several attempts to start a gathering of believers. It is common to start a new gathering with several believers, hoping that it will grow over

time. If, instead, the gathering shrinks over time, it is natural for the church planters to give up and wait to start something new. Consistency in meeting when attendance is low has been key in successful MBB church plants. I observed one group go through a season in which there were numerous weeks with no MBBs at the gathering. As an outside observer, I wondered if it was worth their efforts to continue, but eventually the group was established. Typically, in every group, more people will come at times, and at other times people will move away or experience relational conflict and leave the group. Church planters need to expect the ebb and flow in attendance and continue to offer an opportunity for MBBs to experience what it is like to meet with the body of Christ.

While striving to gather MBBS, church planters must simultaneously work to train local leaders. As MBB leaders become the evangelizers, disciple makers, and gatherers, new MBBs will more quickly enter into fellowship with other MBBs. The three larger churches in our city are led by local pastors, not foreigners. Foreigners have a role to play while there are still few local leaders. However, the foreigners, themselves, can be one of the barriers to MBB relationships as they unintentionally become the relational hub of their MBB friends. If a local MBB leader is the initial relational hub that connects MBBs, others find fewer questionable motivations about why the new believer has come to Christ and is meeting with the group, and the new believer will feel more comfortable meeting with other MBBs.

Literature Review

Unfortunately, the literature also does not have a clearly defined method for planting MBB churches. Planting MBB churches does not have a long history (Livingstone, *Planting* 19). Most established MBB churches are weak and ineffective in

reaching their own people (Livingstone, “Laborers” 52–53). Wendell Evans wrote “No definable method has so brilliantly succeeded as to become a model of procedure” (1). Roland Muller agreed, “There are few success stories from which to learn.” (373).

Much of the literature emphasizes the importance of working through relational networks (Adams and Adams 149–50; Trousdale 40–41; Watson and Watson 105–12; Greenlee and Wilson 113; Garrison 209). Although this sounds great, in experience, much of the time when an MBB shares his or her faith with a trusted family member or friend, that person does not make a decision to follow Christ. As ideal as it would be for the gospel to spread through relational networks and family lines, that is not the norm.

The literature that was reviewed in chapter 2 did not specifically address involving church planter families in the church plant, but it did address using teams. Several authors said that when there is no MBB church, church should be modeled by the church-planting team (Ott and Wilson 244; Muller 329; Livingstone, *Planting* 111–12).

The literature agrees that training local leaders is key (George 82, 99; Little 283; Evans 3; Muller 381–84; Livingstone, *Planting* 21–22; Greenlee 261–62; Garrison 187; Sinclair Loc. 172/263). Livingstone says that most MBB churches are established by MBBs, not foreigners. The foreigner’s job is to introduce people to Christ and disciple them until the right MBB comes along to lead the movement (Livingstone, *Planting* 165).

The literature also agrees that prayer and the working of the Holy Spirit are vital in MBB church planting (George 105; Trousdale 180; Garrison 172–77; Wagner, *Church Planting* 46; Evans 1; Watson and Watson 79–103). Evans wrote, “We increasingly realize that an unprecedented moving of the Spirit of God in these lands is the final and essential secret of effective church-planting” (1).

Biblical Framework

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, community was important for God's people. In Acts, often believers were reached through synagogues. Many times entire households believed and followed Christ. It was less common to find individual believers. Because the believers were already connected to one another, ongoing meetings appeared to take place naturally. When Paul left a city, groups of believers continued to meet. Today, many MBBs are coming to Christ as individuals. Without the family and social networks that the believers in Acts had had, the MBBs do not find it natural to meet together.

In the New Testament the church was not perfect. In his epistles, Paul wrote against heretical teachings, sinful lifestyles, and discord and disunity. Any group of believers is going to have problems. Church planters need to expect church planting to be messy, just like it was in Paul's time. The problems did not stop Paul. He communicated with the churches about correcting the problems as he continued forward, working to expand the church.

Foreign church planters felt that a key to success was for the entire family of foreigners to be involved. The involvement of foreign women in church meetings made it more comfortable for local women to participate. It is interesting that in the Acts, the only couple to travel with Paul was Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18-19). It appears that Paul and most of his companions were either single men, or men traveling without their families. However, even without working alongside wives of their own, these men were able to successfully engage women and include them into the local churches that were planted. For example, in Philippi, in Acts 16, it appears that four men, Paul, Silas,

Timothy, and Luke, went to the river on the sabbath expecting to find a place of prayer. Women had gathered there, and these four men were able to sit and speak with them. One of the women, Lydia, opened her heart to Paul's message and ended up inviting Paul's group to stay with her family. There appears to be a big cultural difference between Philippi in the first century and modern Muslim society. It is hard to imagine a group of men even going to talk to a group of Muslim women that they do not know, not to mention the idea that a Muslim woman would invite the men to stay in her home! Unlike Paul's time, in the Muslim context, if foreign church planters want to reach women and families, it is important to have women involved on the church planting team.

It was important to for the early church to have leaders. In Acts 1 and 6 Christ's followers chose leaders. In Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas appointed leaders. Paul used several methods of developing leaders. He brought some with him as he traveled, including Mark, Timothy, Luke, Silas, and others. Much of his leadership development was also done through teaching. He taught believers in many cities in which he ministered. In some places he seemed to find those who already had qualities of leadership, and he appointed them as leaders, rather than developing them into leaders.

From the beginning, the Holy Spirit was the one creating the church. In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the believers, and as they proclaimed Christ to the crowds that day, about 3000 were added to their number. Church planters have a part to play, but if the Holy Spirit is left out of the equation, nothing will happen. Church planters must pray and depend on the Holy Spirit to do the work!

Third Finding: Most Appropriate Place to Grow in Relationship

The research revealed that local believers view church meetings and church buildings as the most appropriate place to grow in relationship with other MBBs.

Personal Observation

Most of the MBBs that I know do not have many or even any MBB friends on their own. They often come to Christ alone and discover that the few friends or family members that they trust enough to tell about their decision to follow Christ are not interested in following Christ themselves. As much as it seems great to have the gospel spread through family and friendship lines, it often does not work out that way. Believers are left on their own unless someone can help to connect them to other MBBs.

The most natural place for MBBs to connect with other MBBs that they do not already have a relationship with is an MBB church meeting. To stress the importance of meeting with other MBBs for worship, prayer, and Bible study, church planters often make the greatest effort to encourage MBBs to attend such a local meeting. Less energy goes into encouraging locals to attend social events because many locals might naturally find low-key social events easier to attend. This means that church planters are more consistent in setting and keeping regular meeting times for worship gatherings. Social events are sometimes more of an afterthought. Regular worship gatherings are a great place to connect with other MBBs simply because they happen regularly.

Many church planters have assumed that homes were the best place for MBBs to meet. It was assumed that homes were safer because anyone can visit a home for any reason. A person would not be noticed entering a home, the same as they would if they entered a church.

However, in our local context, homes appear to be less ideal. The government does not want religious gatherings in homes, but they seem to be fine with believers meeting together in recognized churches. Many Muslim background believers also seem to be more comfortable in a church than in a home. Although it might seem easy for a person to invite someone to his or her own home, it is much less comfortable to invite someone to the home of another person. A church building, on the other hand, is a neutral location that is comfortable to bring others to.

In Muslim culture, the mosque is the standard place to meet for religious purposes. Mosques are busiest on Fridays around noon when the mullah gives his weekly sermon. Muslims can attend these meetings without really knowing others in the congregation. A mosque is a normal place for Muslims to worship with other people that they do not know. Perhaps the role of the mosque in Muslim society makes a church building a more natural place for MBBs to meet than a home.

The fact that many MBBs said that church meetings in church buildings were the best place to build relationships with others, shows a hesitancy for MBBs to invite other MBBs into their lives. However, it makes sense if they are trying to keep the fact that they are believers a secret from their family and neighbors. Another consideration is that the church meeting might be the only place some have ever met with other believers. They may have never considered other options. It is hard to know how many of those church relationships between MBBs continue outside of the context of church meetings.

Literature Review

The literature agreed that social activities are important for relationship building (Parshall, *Beyond* 226; Greenlee 263; Adams and Adams 146; Muller 373–74). However,

although many of the local believers in the study considered the church meetings to be the best place to build relationships, much of the literature suggests that relationships between MBBs should be developed outside of church meetings (Livingstone, *Planting* 220; Sinclair Loc. 31/263; Scoggins and Rockford 4).

Contrary to the data in the research in chapter 4, much of the literature suggests that house churches are the best places for MBBs to meet in the Muslim world (Adams and Adams 157; Garrison 191; Evans 11; Waters 181–82; Love, “Developing” 208; Hibbert 292). Authors discussed the concept of MBBs being included in a traditional Christian church, but very few mentioned the idea of MBBs having their own church building. Parshall alluded to it when he discussed how to contextualize a meeting place (*New Paths* 158).

Biblical Framework

Acts 2:42-47 points out that fellowship and sharing food together was an important part of the early church. Daily, the believers spent time in the temple together, and they also ate in homes together. They also shared possessions with each other. The description of the early church shows that the believers were developing close relationships. They did not simply show up for a worship service once a week. They lived their lives together.

The tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament were clearly designated places that God’s people were to meet together for worship. The New Testament mentions several locations where believers gathered. In Acts 2-5, believers in Jerusalem often met in the temple courts (2:46; 3:1; 5:12, 21, 42). Paul often taught in synagogues (Acts 13:5, 14-16; 14:1; 17:1-2, 10, 17; 18:4; 19:8) and other public places including a river side

(Acts 16:13, 16), a marketplace (Acts 17:17), and a lecture hall (Acts 19:9). However, it appears that most of the gatherings of believers took place in homes (Acts 2:46, 5:42, 12:12 18:7, 20:20) (Russell 5). Russell points out that other models in society, including households, philosophical schools, synagogues, associations, and mystery religions, influenced many of the early church practices of gathering (3). Synagogues and associations of that day often met in private homes, so it was natural for the church to use homes as well (9). As was mentioned in chapter 4, in Kurdish culture, religious gatherings in homes are unusual and often indicate that the group is made up of religious extremists. In modern day Kurdistan, religious home gatherings are discouraged by the local government. In the New Testament, buildings were not set aside for the sole purpose of church meetings. Today, not only are church buildings common throughout the Christian world, but Muslims also meet in designated religious buildings. Having a specific building set aside for religious gatherings is the norm in much of the world today. Just like the early church followed models of meeting from their society and chose to meet in homes, the church today can follow models from modern society and choose to meet in designated church buildings.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

This study can be used by those who are working to plant MBB churches in the Muslim world. The context of the study was in the Middle East, working with a non-Arab people group. This study will hopefully encourage church planters to persevere in the work, even when it is difficult. The study can give new ideas and fresh perspective to church planters, as they strive together to do a seemingly impossible task.

Church planters working with MBBs need to recognize that this is a difficult task. There are very few success stories. The path forward is not clear. Church planters need to venture out in faith, willing to take risks. They need to be willing to dive into the messiness, knowing that when they are frustrated and discouraged, they must push forward because it means that they are doing something right! As church planters press on in the hard work of sharing the gospel, discipling and gathering believers, and training leaders, lives will be changed, and the Church will be planted and expand throughout the Muslim world.

Limitations of the Study

This study was done in a particular city with a particular people group. As much as MBBs are similar in many ways, cultural differences increase the further you get away from location of the study. Church planters should test the presented ideas and conclusions in their own context to see if they remain valid.

Many of the local believers said that church meetings in church buildings were the best time and place for building relationships with other believers. Perhaps church meetings in church buildings is all these believers know. As three local pastors helped distribute many of the questionnaires for this study, believers connected to their churches may have been overly represented. The research methods did not include a way to gather information from believers who truly had no connection with other believers. All the questionnaires were distributed by either local or foreign believers. Other networks of MBBs may never want to venture into a church building.

The three local pastors were not interviewed as a part of this study. The church planting perspective is all from foreigners, not locals. Most of the MBB participants were

connected to the three local pastors more than the foreign church planters. Much of the perspective of the foreign church planters may be related to the fact that they are foreigners. Had the local pastors also been interviewed, there may have been a different perspective.

Unexpected Observations

I was surprised to find that the local believers thought church meetings were best for building relationships. From my perspective, often, MBBs come to the meetings, sing, pray, listen to the teaching, and then leave with only minimal interaction with other believers. It would seem to me that MBBs would need to spend more time together outside of that context to better know one another. Perhaps some of the churches that participated in the study had meals together or other means of extended fellowship at each meeting.

After the focus group, I had a strong impression that God has placed some great foreign church planters in this city. Their knowledge and experience, along with the depth of their commitment was impressive. They appeared to relate well with one another and view one another as fellow workers, not competitors. I was very encouraged and excited about how God is going to use this group of people to do great things in this city and among this people group.

Recommendations

One recommendation is that church planters continue to persevere in the work. They need to take risks. They need to get in the mess. Sometimes issues like faulty theology of MBB leaders, mixed motives of believers, conflict between believers, or known sin in the church can make church planters want to stay away. Church planters

need to see these issues as reasons to press in closer and develop better relationships with church leaders to speak into these issues. They need to meet with MBBs and help them work through their issues as they meet together to form a church.

Another recommendation is that foreign church planters focus on discipling and training leaders. In both the literature and in the city in which the study was conducted, local leaders had more success than foreigners in gathering believers together. Results will increase if foreign church planters are able to train and walk alongside a local leader, helping the local leader to do the work of gathering believers.

An area that would benefit from future research is to learn how MBB pastors developed from new converts to leaders in the church. Identifying the similarities that the pastors experienced could help those working in Muslim areas to know better how to develop leaders in an emerging church.

Postscript

It has been a joy to be able to research MBB churches. I enjoyed reviewing the literature on the topic. It became clear quite early that although there are many books written about how to reach Muslims for Christ, very few are written about how to draw those believers together after they have made the decision to follow Christ. It has been exciting to have an opportunity to contribute to this neglected area of study.

Personally, one of the best things that came out of this project was getting to know local pastors and other church planters better. I really enjoyed getting to better know the local MBB pastors in my city. It was nice to talk with them and hear some of their hearts for their people and their ministries. I was encouraged by what they said and hope to continue to get to know them better. I also enjoyed getting to know other church

planters and hearing more about their experiences and ideas. I look forward to more opportunities to work together across organizations to see the gospel spread throughout the Kurdish region.

Finally, this project has strengthened my resolve to continue the work of church planting among the Kurdish people. Many Kurds have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. Much more work remains to be done. Although the work here is difficult, we see that God is at work, drawing people to Himself. I'm excited to see what the future holds.

APPENDIX A

Documents for Expert Review

Expert Review Cover Letter

Dear _____,

I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary. My research project is examining relationships between Muslim Background Believers (MBBs). The purpose of my research is ***to identify reasons why MBBs who remain in their own Muslim context struggle to form healthy relationships with one another, and to discover best methods for relationship building and community formation that lead to healthy MBB church plants.***

My research questions for this project are:

- 1. What are the main obstacles that keep MBBs from developing strong relationships with one another?***
- 2. How have church planters among Muslims successfully gathered MBBs and formed community to establish a church?***
- 3. What types of environment and activities help develop relationships between MBBs in a Muslim context?***

As part of my research I plan to use three questionnaires and a focus group. The Believer Questionnaire will be given to MBBs in the city of S---. The Church Planter Questionnaire will be given to people who are involved in church planting in the city of S---. The Church Attender Questionnaire will be given to MBBs who regularly attend an MBB church in the city of S---. The Church Planter Focus Group will be made up of 6-8 church planters in the city of S---. However, before I can use these research instruments to collect information for this research project, the instruments need to be expert-reviewed. I am asking you to be one of my reviewers.

I have included a copy of each of the research instruments. I am asking that you consider each question in light of the overall purpose of the project and research questions. Please comment whether the questions are stated clearly and are appropriate for gathering the intended data. I welcome any feedback, including additional questions that you think would be important for me to include. Please email this back to me by December 15, 2019. Thank you for your help with this project.

Sincerely,

M. C.

Believer Questionnaire

1. How long have you been a believer?

Evaluation of Question #1		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

2. Is the primary person who teaches you about the Bible a Kurd?

Evaluation of Question #2		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

3. How many other Kurdish believers do you know?

Evaluation of Question #3		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

4. How many other Kurdish believers know that you are a believer?

Evaluation of Question #4		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

5. Do you have any family members that are also believers? If so, who? (State the relationship like "Father" or "Sister", not the person's name).

Evaluation of Question #5		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

6. Have you met with another Kurdish believer who is not a family member for prayer or Bible Study in the last 2 weeks? Why or why not?

Evaluation of Question #6		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

7. What are some reasons that make it difficult for Kurdish believers to meet together?

Evaluation of Question #7		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

8. Are there locations and times would make it easier for Kurdish believers to meet together? If so, what would you suggest?

Evaluation of Question #8		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

9. How do you know if you can trust another Kurdish believer?

Evaluation of Question #9		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

10. What safety concerns do you have for meeting with other Kurdish believers?

Evaluation of Question #10		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

11. What could be done to make it easier for Kurdish believers to get to know one another?

Evaluation of Question #11		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

12. Have you been taught about the importance of fellowshiping with other believers?

Evaluation of Question #12		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

13. In what ways should Kurdish believers support one another?

Evaluation of Question #13		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

14. Would you continue to meet regularly with other Kurdish believers if there were no foreigners involved in the group? Why or why not?

Evaluation of Question #14		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

Do you have any recommendation of questions that were not asked that need to be asked?

Review Completed by _____

Signature _____ Date Completed _____

Church Attender Questionnaire

1. In a typical month, how many times do you meet with other Kurdish believers for the purpose of prayer, Bible study, or worship?

Evaluation of Question #1		
3. ___ Needed 4. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

2. How long have you been a part of a Kurdish church?

Evaluation of Question #2		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

3. What made you want to be a part of a Kurdish church?

Evaluation of Question #3		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

4. How did you feel when you were first invited to go to church?

Evaluation of Question #4		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

5. At first, did you consider not going to the church? Why or why not?

Evaluation of Question #5		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

6. Do you know Kurdish believers who do not meet regularly with other believers?

Evaluation of Question #6		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

7. What do you think keeps Kurdish believers from meeting together?

Evaluation of Question #7		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

8. What are some good places to meet with other Kurdish believers for worship, prayer, or Bible study?

Evaluation of Question #8		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

9. What are some activities that you find helpful for getting to know other Kurdish believers?

Evaluation of Question #9		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

10. What are some activities that you have observed that have helped other Kurdish believers form healthy relationships with one another?

Evaluation of Question #10		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

11. What could be done to help build relationships between Kurdish believers in order to encourage Kurdish believers to meet together to worship God, pray, and study the Bible?

Evaluation of Question #11		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

Do you have any recommendation of questions that were not asked that need to be asked?

Review Completed by _____

Signature _____ Date Completed _____

Church Planter Questionnaire

1. How long have you been doing church planting in a Muslim context?

Evaluation of Question #1		
5. <input type="checkbox"/> Needed 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Not needed	a. <input type="checkbox"/> Clear b. <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

2. What are some of your biggest church planting struggles?

Evaluation of Question #2		
1. <input type="checkbox"/> Needed 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Not needed	a. <input type="checkbox"/> Clear b. <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

3. What are some of your biggest church planting successes?

Evaluation of Question #3		
1. <input type="checkbox"/> Needed 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Not needed	a. <input type="checkbox"/> Clear b. <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

4. Have you found it difficult to gather MBBs together for regular fellowship?

Evaluation of Question #4		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

5. What are some of the major obstacles that you have observed that keep MBBs from meeting together?

Evaluation of Question #5		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

6. What have you found to be successful in overcoming these obstacles, leading to MBB fellowship?

Evaluation of Question #6		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

7. Would you say that you have successfully planted an MBB church?

If so, please continue. If not, you are done.

Evaluation of Question #7		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

8. Describe the MBB church(es) that you helped plant.

Evaluation of Question #8		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

9. To what extent does the MBB church rely on outside finances?

Evaluation of Question #9		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

10. To what extent are foreigners involved in the leadership of the MBB church?

Evaluation of Question #10		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

11. What were some of the keys that you found to successfully planting an MBB church?

Evaluation of Question #11		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

12. How did you overcome the problem of MBBs not wanting to fellowship with one another?

Evaluation of Question #12		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

13. What were some activities that you found helpful for developing relationships between MBBS?

Evaluation of Question #13		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

14. What types of environment worked best for gathering MBBS and building MBB community?

Evaluation of Question #14		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

15. What advice would you give to others who are working to plant churches among MBBS?

Evaluation of Question #15		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

Do you have any recommendation of questions that were not asked that need to be asked?

Review Completed by _____

Signature _____ Date Completed _____

Church Planter Focus Group

1. What keeps MBBs from gathering together to worship, pray, and study the Bible?

Evaluation of Question #1		
7. ___ Needed 8. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

2. What are some of the relational barriers that you have observed between MBBs?

Evaluation of Question #2		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

3. What have you found to be successful ways of building relationships between MBBs?

Evaluation of Question #3		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

4. Are there activities that you have found helpful for building relationships between MBBs?

Evaluation of Question #4		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

5. Are there certain meeting locations or times that work for MBBs to meet?

Evaluation of Question #5		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

6. What atmosphere works well for building relationships between MBBs?

Evaluation of Question #6		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

7. What are some of your biggest church planting frustration stories?

Evaluation of Question #7		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

8. What are some of your greatest church planting success stories?

Evaluation of Question #8		
1. ___ Needed 2. ___ Not needed	a. ___ Clear b. ___ Unclear	Suggestions to clarify:

Do you have any recommendation of questions that were not asked that need to be asked?

Review Completed by _____

Signature _____ Date Completed _____

APPENDIX B

Research Tools

Believer Questionnaire

Consent Statement:

You are invited to take part in a research study being done by a student from Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between believers who come from a Muslim background. The results of this study will benefit the community of believers here in this city as well as in other similar locations. Your participation will help with this study. Your answers will be completely anonymous. Neither your name nor a description of you will be mentioned in the study. You do not have to participate in this study. Participation is voluntary. If you decide at any time that you do not want to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want. Do you agree to participate in this study? (Circle one)

Yes

No

1. Are you male or female? (Circle one)

Male

Female

2. What is your age? (Circle one)

0-17

18-30

31-50

51+

3. Have you made a decision to follow Jesus Christ and to trust in Him alone for salvation?

4. How long have you been a believer?

5. What is your parents' religion?

6. Is the primary person who teaches you about the Bible a Kurd?
7. How many other Kurdish believers do you know?
8. How many other Kurdish believers know that you are a believer?
9. Do you have any family members that are also believers? If so, who? (State the relationship like “Father” or “Sister”, not the person’s name).
10. Have you met with another Kurdish believer who is not a family member for prayer or Bible Study in the last 2 weeks? Why or why not?
11. What are some reasons that make it difficult for Kurdish believers to meet together?
12. Are there locations and times that would make it easier for Kurdish believers to meet together? If so, what would you suggest?
13. How do you know if you can trust another Kurdish believer?
14. What safety concerns do you have for meeting with other Kurdish believers?

15. What could be done to make it easier for Kurdish believers to grow in relationship with one another?

16. What have you been taught about the importance of fellowshiping with other believers?

17. In what ways should Kurdish believers support one another?

18. Would you continue to meet regularly with other Kurdish believers if there were no foreigners involved in the group? Why or why not?

19. Is there anything else you would like to share about relationships between believers from a Muslim background?

Church Attender Questionnaire

Consent Statement:

You are invited to take part in a research study being done by a student from Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between believers who come from a Muslim background. The results of this study will benefit the community of believers here in this city as well as in other similar locations. Your participation will help with this study. Your answers will be completely anonymous. Neither your name nor a description of you will be mentioned in the study. You do not have to participate in this study. Participation is voluntary. If you decide at any time that you do not want to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want. Do you agree to participate in this study? (Circle one)

Yes

No

1. Are you male or female? (Circle one)

Male

Female

2. What is your age? (Circle one)

0-17

18-30

31-50

51+

3. Have you made a decision to follow Jesus Christ and to trust in Him alone for salvation?

4. How long have you been a believer?

5. What is your parents' religion?

6. In a typical month, how many times do you meet with other Kurdish believers for the purpose of prayer, Bible study, or worship?

7. How long have you been a part of a Kurdish church?

8. What made you want to be a part of a Kurdish church?

9. At first, did you have concerns about going to the church? What were your concerns?

10. Do you know Kurdish believers who do not meet regularly with other believers?

11. What do you think keeps Kurdish believers from meeting together?

12. In your experience, what are some good places to meet with other Kurdish believers for worship, prayer, or Bible study?

13. What are some activities that you find helpful for getting to know other Kurdish believers?

Church Planter Questionnaire

Consent Statement:

You are invited to take part in a research study being done by a student from Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between believers who come from a Muslim background. The results of this study will benefit the community of believers here in this city as well as in other similar locations. Your participation will help with this study. Your answers will be completely anonymous. Neither your name nor a description of you will be mentioned in the study. You do not have to participate in this study. Participation is voluntary. If you decide at any time that you do not want to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study. Do you agree to participate in this study? (Circle one)

Yes

No

1. How long have you been doing church planting in a Muslim context?
2. What are some of your biggest church planting struggles?
3. What are some of your biggest church planting successes?
4. Have you found it difficult to gather MBBs together for regular fellowship?
5. What are some of the major obstacles that you have observed that keep MBBs from meeting together?
6. What have you found to be successful in overcoming these obstacles?
7. Have you been a part of successfully planting an MBB church?

If so, please continue. If not, you are done.

8. Describe the MBB church(es) that you helped plant.
9. To what extent does the MBB church rely on outside finances?

10. To what extent are foreigners involved in the leadership of the MBB church?
11. What were some of the keys that you found to successfully planting an MBB church?
12. How did you overcome the problem of MBBS not wanting to fellowship with one another?
13. What were some activities that you found helpful for developing relationships between MBBS?
14. What type of meeting place worked best for gathering MBBS and building MBB community?
15. What advice would you give to others who are working to plant churches among MBBS?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share about the relationships between MBBS?

Church Planter Focus Group

Everyone introduce yourselves. Know that your names will not be used in the study. Nor will any identifiable descriptors be used in the study. Introductions are really just for us to know each other today. I will start recording after the introductions.

Introductions

Start Audio Recording

You have been invited to take part in a research study being done by a student from Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between believers who come from a Muslim Background. The results of this study will benefit the community of believers here in this city as well as in other similar locations. Your participation will help with this study. Your answers will be completely anonymous. Neither your name nor a description of you will be mentioned in the study. You do not have to participate in this study. Participation is voluntary. If you decide at any time that you do not want to finish the study, you may leave whenever you want. By choosing to stay and participate in this focus group, you are agreeing to participate in this study. If you agree to participate in this study, please say “I agree.”

Today we want to discuss some of the barriers that keep MBBs from fellowshipping with one another and some ways that we can help build relationships between MBBs. One of our goals is to see MBBs primarily connected with one another rather than with foreigners. The goal of this project is to discover how we can develop healthy MBB community so that a healthy MBB church can be planted and spread throughout the region.

1. What are some of the relational barriers that you have observed between MBBs?
2. In your experience, what keeps MBBs from gathering together to worship, pray, and study the Bible?
3. What have you found to be successful ways of building relationships between believers?
4. In your experience, are there certain meeting locations or times that work for MBBs to meet?
5. Tell me about some of the biggest frustrations you have had church planting in a Muslim context.
6. Tell me about some of the successes you have had church planting in a Muslim context.

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