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## Mission Plants 2000 Churches

World Christian Ministries Newsletter

June 28, 2007

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### Mission plants 2000th church

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Steven Loots, right, founder and director of HIM, told WCM this week he knew they had planted the 2000th church last year, but did not know how much they had surpassed that figure until all updated reports were received this month at his South African office. Then he realized that HIM had actually planted 2079 churches by the end of 2006.



"We probably have 2300 now," Loots added, "since we average three to four new churches every day."

Loots said the most exciting part of the result is that 700 churches are in Mozambique, with at least 409 being among the Makua (African spelling, also known as Makuwa), a people group that is 93% Muslim and considered one of the largest unreached groups.

Loots started the ministry in 2000, and planted 29 churches the first year. The figure has doubled every year since.



### Hub-church method

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The key to the multiplication of churches is the hub-church method of planting churches, a plan pioneered and developed by Loots. In this plan, a trained pastor agrees to plant a church in a strategic location. He is supported by the ministry on condition he

enlists and trains 10 other key people from surrounding villages.

Photo shows congregation with bricks ready to build. The congregation has since become a hub church.

Each of these, in turn, pays for his or her three-year training by planting one church per year of training. So after three to six years, 40 churches are planted in a particular area gathering up to 10,000 new believers—all in addition to the hub church.

Localized training is the key. Each trainee attends training at a hub church in his area that is no more than a day's bicycle journey away. Each trainee takes classes one week out of every five, completing a 30-unit course in five years.

"This not only trains the preacher but provides him with material for fresh messages each week," said Loots. The result is that the congregation is disciplined as the preacher is trained.

Loots said that too often in the past, men were taken from rural villages to training centers in the city, and after getting used to city life, they did not want to return to rural villages that lacked electricity, running water, sanitation, and educational opportunities for their children. The hub-church training avoids that pitfall.

### Appropriate training implemented

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Loots uses a curriculum developed by Johan Gous, another South African. Gous worked with Brother Andrew of Open Doors several years before beginning Timothy Training Institute and its subsequent curriculum. Loots calls his adaptation Harvesters Bible School. Gous is now Africa Director at Hope Builders International near Afton, Virginia.

[Photo shows earlier training session in Malawi.](#)

"One of my goals was to keep the curriculum on a level that those with only high school education or less could use," Gous told WCM. He said those who later tried to elevate the academic level of the training lost clients and eventually ceased operations.

Another factor in the success of the endeavor is that no one is denied for lack of ability to pay; trainees "pay" by planting churches. But this requires finding support.

### Modest support brings results

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Local village pastors taking the training are sustained by their local congregations and by their own part-time trades or farming. So the training does not violate the principle of indigenous support.

Hub churches and the trainers must have outside support. "This should be viewed as a missions outreach program," Gous said, "not merely as a local church program."

It costs about \$250 per month for about six years to support a hub-church trainer and supply materials for the trainees. Each trainee is given a Bible and a bicycle.

In addition, a substantial hub church structure costs about \$15,000 to build. Village churches are constructed entirely by local congregations by whatever means they have available—though on rare occasions, a vigorous local church may become another hub.

The cost is nominal, considering each hub church will plant 40 churches with 40 trained pastors and include between 4,000 and 10,000 believers.

## Success begets need

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Loots said that the success of his church-planting efforts has actually resulted in a tremendous need.

"The Bible does not command us to plant *churches*," he said; "It commands us to make *disciples*. You can't make disciples without Bibles."

Therein is the crux of the matter. HIM's churches report they have 150,000 people who are literate and want a Bible, but do not own a Bible of their own. Loots said he knew of four churches in one southern African country that shared one Bible among them. And if that is shocking, Loots adds there are 200 million Bible-less Christians on the African continent.

Loots does not fault the Bible translation societies. "These wonderful organizations are addressing this challenge," he said. "Moreover, many people speak a second language that does have a translation. While it should be our goal that every believer has the Word in his or her heart language, access to a second language does help."

The main reason for lack of Bibles, according to Loots, is the prohibitive cost. Local-language translations can run from \$5 to \$20. Loots says it costs an average of \$14 to get one such Bible into the hands of a local believer on the field. That's partly because local-language translations are often printed in small quantities. Then they must be trucked in personally to rural locations hundreds or thousands of miles away.

"There are no Bible stores in the jungle," Loots quips.

Fourteen dollars may be a nominal cost for an American, and is even achievable for someone working at minimum wage. But it would take an entire month's earnings—and sometimes a year's income—for the typical rural African.

## Bibles for Believers

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Loots thought at first he could get help from existing organizations, such as the Gideons. But he soon learned that their charter commissioned them to distribute Bibles only for evangelistic purposes. They could not use funds to give Bibles to people who already were believers. To publicize the need, Loots founded [Bibles for Believers](#).

"The need will only increase," Loots warns. "The prayers of the church around the world are being answered. God has prepared Zambia, Malawi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other southern African nations for such a time as this.

"There is a potential of planting between 30,000 and 50,000 new churches in southern Africa. Everything is in place. All we need are partners to help us make it happen—to help us train a pastor for every new church, and to provide a Bible for every new believer."

## Contact information

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Persons in the U.S. who want to learn more about HIM or provide support should e-mail [Africa@Hope-Builders.org](mailto:Africa@Hope-Builders.org) or call Hope Builders International at 540-456-7300. Steven Loots can be contacted by e-mail at [easy2rem@mweb.co.za](mailto:easy2rem@mweb.co.za).

## Relevant Websites:

Hope Builders International [www.hope-builders.org](http://www.hope-builders.org)  
Harvesters International Ministries [www.mission.co.za](http://www.mission.co.za)  
Bibles for Believers [www.biblesforbelievers.org](http://www.biblesforbelievers.org)

God bless,

*John Lindner*

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#### Contact Information

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