Case Study 6

Area Impact Research

Church Survey

One of a series of practical missions research case studies

Key Words: institutional research, church survey, area survey

Abstract: Research can significantly motivate local pastors toward cooperation in saturation their area with churches. Through a citywide or provincewide consultation, information on many churches can be acquired. Follow-up interviews with non-attending pastors can complete the survey of all churches in an area. Reports and maps can be produced and presented at a subsequent meeting of local pastors which clearly identify the state of the church in that area. Plans can be made for coordinated effort in the future. Research focuses the pastors, not on doctrinal issues which tend to divide, but rather on the remaining task of evangelism, discipleship and church planting which tends to unite.

Background: The DAWN 2000 movement in the Philippines seeks promote saturation church planting. The movement's goal is to see an effective Christian witness in every barangay in the whole nation by the end of the year 2000. This goal of saturation church planting is shared by many denominations, missions and parachurch organizations.

The goal is obviously geographically oriented: "a church in every barangay." (A barangay is the smallest geopolitical unit in the country.) The list of the approximately 40,000 barangays in the Philippines was available to us along with their population and number of households. What was missing was a list of the churches and their locations. Research was called upon to identify where churches currently existed. Once that was known, it would be easy to identify the barangays that need to be targeted for church planting.

The Philippines is made up of 7,000 islands and about 60 million people. A project of this magnitude is overwhelming when viewed at the national level. But as any elephant eater knows, the only way to eat an elephant is to eat it one bite at a time. This nationwide project was divided into 73 provincial projects. Sometimes a province was divided into sub projects (a city or a group of municipalities) to make it more manageable.

The current case study, rather than being a study of one specific survey project, is a narrative of a generic research project. Research projects like the one described in this case study were done in dozens of places. This case study reflects what was learned through them.

Methodology: The methodology described in this case study was used in cities and provinces all over the Philippines. Each time it was used, improvements were made based on what was learned from the last project. This method of research relies heavily on the cooperation of a pastor's fellowship or a key pastor from the target area. The area represented by a pastors' fellowship group helped to define the geographic scope of the study. For the purposes of this case study a province wide research project will be used.

To accomplish a comprehensive survey of all the churches in a province we generally followed these steps:

1. Contact the pastors' fellowship or a key leader in the province.

2. Present the project and collect information at a pastors' fellowship.

3. Conduct follow-up interviews with all other pastors in the province.

4. Enter and clean the data from the questionnaires.

5. Analyze the data, produce the maps, pray about the findings.

6. Come up with recommendations, prepare a report.

7. Conduct a strategy conference for the province.

Step 1: Contact the pastors' fellowship or a key leader in the province. Having the cooperation of local pastors was very helpful in accomplishing this research project. The idea of gaining an accurate knowledge of the status of the church in their area was very appealing to most pastors. We found that a project like this can often catch their imagination and prompt coordinated effort like no other project.

Often these fellowships are loosely organized and are glad to have a guest speaker come and present a new perspective on pastoral or ministry topics.

We worked with the leadership of the pastor's fellowship to schedule a day when all the pastors would be together and during which we could present the survey and encourage participation in this effort to think strategically about church planting in their province.

By featuring a well known speaker we could promote good attendance at this important first meeting. This effort to assure good attendance pays off later since the more churches you get information on at this meeting, the fewer churches there are to follow-up later.

Sometimes we did not work through a pastor's fellowship but found a key leader who was willing to coordinate the survey of his province. He was asked to recruit volunteers, set up a training session (which we taught), dispense and account for the funds to cover expenses, collect the completed questionnaires and send them to us. This method worked very well as long as we got a diligent committed person as the coordinator.

Training of volunteers became very important when we used a provincial coordinator. We often took a full day to explain the project, go through the questionnaire and do role playing before sending out interviewers to their respective municipalities.

Step 2. Present the project and collect information at a pastor's fellowship meeting. Three components of this meeting are 1) a speaker of interest to the pastors, 2) presentation of the proposed survey of their province, 3) filling out of the questionnaires to begin the survey process.

After the guest speaker has made his presentation we explained the purpose and value of a province wide survey of churches to the pastors. Generally, people prefer to have more information rather than less information. This is not always true. Sometimes people resist research studies because the new information might bring to light something that reflects badly on their work or ministry. But generally, we found pastors very eager to have an accurate understanding of the status of the Church in their area.

Once this presentation was made and there was agreement on the value of proceeding, we passed out the questionnaires and explained how to fill them out.

Figure 1

DAWN Survey Form

Date:_____ Interviewer:_____

Name of church or organization:_____

Denomination:_____

Type (check one): ( ) church   ( ) para-church   ( ) school

Street number and address:_____Purok/Sitio:_____

Mailing Address (PO Box):_____

Barangay name (and number if any):_____

Municipality:_____ Province:_____

Worship Language:_____Year of founding:_____

Pastor's name:_____

Type of meeting place:

      ( ) church: native materials   ( ) home

      ( ) church: wood   ( ) school

      ( ) church: wood/concrete   ( ) office/store

      ( ) church: concrete/brick   ( ) other_____

Average Sunday worship attendance: Adults_____ Children_____

Average Sunday School attendance: Total_____

Is the Pastor funded from outside the church? ( ) yes   ( ) no   ( ) partially

Are you planting a church in another barangay?   ( ) yes   ( ) no.   if yes, where?

   barangay, municipality, province   how many attend now?   leader's name

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

Are the people in your area responsive to the gospel? Scale value: _____

   Question: What is the attitude of the people in your area to the Gospel?

      5 - eager to accept the gospel, very open and receptive

      4 - somewhat open, mildly responsive

      3 - indifferent, not responsive but not opposed either

      2 - somewhat closed, mildly opposed

      1 - hostile towards Christians, firmly against

Are there any other Protestant churches in your area? (add names to lead sheet)

Before the day of the conference we prepare the materials we needed to survey the pastors. The form that we used is found in **Figure 1**.

Here is a brief discussion of each of the items on the questionnaire.

- **Date** - The date the form was filled out.

- **Interviewer** - The person conducting the interview.

- **Name of the church** - Full name without abbreviations. Sometimes we heard several names for a church. We tried to use the name of the sign if there was one.

- **Type** - Churches were of primary importance in this survey but we also acquired information on para-church organizations. Often the question arose, what is the definition of a church? For our purposes, if those we were interviewing called their group a church, then we called it a church. Sometimes this was stretching the meaning of a church a little. For example, we found some churches that reported an average of five in attendance on Sunday mornings.

- **Denomination** - It was important to get the specific denomination. "Baptist" is usually not sufficient to identify the denomination. Even "Fundamental Baptist" is not sufficient. We worked hard to get the exact denomination but still have many churches with an ambiguous denomination.

- **Street number and address** - Of the church itself. We also asked the pastors to sketch a map of the location of their church on the back of the interview form.

- **Purok/Sitio** - This was an area within a barangay. It is not always used. If it was used in the barangay where the church was located, we got that information.

- **Mailing address** - Often churches would have a PO box or some mailing address different than the street where the church was located.

- **Barangay** - The Philippines is made up of 14 regions, 73 provinces, about 1,450 municipalities, and about 40,000 barangays. The national goal was written in terms of barangays so this was a very important piece of information. We found that sometime barangays had been renamed. This can cause major headaches later. If we discovered that this had happened, we tried to get both old and new barangay names.

- **Municipality** - Name of the municipality where the church is located.

- **Province** - Name of the province where the church is located.

- **Worship Language** - Name of the language most often used in worship. If more than one language is used we wrote down the names of all language in order of prevalence. If there is a specific dialect we recorded it also.

- **Year of founding** - The year the church was organized. This is essential for estimating growth rates. (See case study #2 in this series for a description of how to estimate growth rates from founding dates.)

- **Pastor or leader's name** - The full name and title of the senior pastor or leader of the church or group. If a church didn't have a pastor but had a lay leader of some kind, we recorded the lay leader's name and title.

- **Type of meeting place** - This question was asked to give us a rough measure of the financial condition of the church. We assumed that a church that met in a building made of concrete and brick had more financial resources than one that was meeting in a home or school.

- **Attendance** - We wanted the number of adults who attend that church for worship on Sunday. If there is more than one worship service on Sunday Morning, then we added the attendance figures together. If there is one in the morning and one in the evening and the same people come to both, then we took the attendance of the larger service. Children's attendance reflected the number of people under 13 years of age. The sum of the adults and the children was the total attendance. Sunday school attendance included both children and adults.

- **Pastor's support** - This item asked whether the pastor's salary and financial support came from outside the church or not. If he received all of his or her support from other sources (denomination, mission, or overseas) then "yes." If he received some of his support from the church, then "partial." If this question offended the pastor, we did not insist on getting an answer to this question.

- **Daughter churches, outreaches, mission points, preaching points** - We were interested in outreach efforts to start daughter churches. Outreaches that were nurture bible studies or feeder bible studies for the mother church were not included.

- **Responsiveness** - On the bottom of the questionnaire is a responsiveness scale indicating the level of responsiveness of the people to the gospel. This is a very subjective measure but we asked for the pastor's opinion and recorded it in the blank.

◆ **Additional leads** - Names of other pastors who weren't in the meeting. It was crucial for us to get information on every church in the province. These names provided leads for the follow-up study.

The actual filling out of the forms takes only a small portion of the time and we usually did it last.

Step 3. Conduct follow-up interviews with all other pastors in the province. After this meeting was over we began putting the information into a database program designed for this survey. We used R:Base because of its ease of use and it's ability to do cross-tabulations (frequency counts by two categorical variables.)

Of particular interest at this stage was compiling a list of churches and pastors that were not at the pastors' fellowship meeting. These were grouped by geographic areas so that we could go out and personally interview them.

We used the same form to interview the additional pastors. We also asked them to identify any other churches nearby so we could follow them up also. In asking the pastor about other churches we had to make it very clear that we wanted to know about ALL other churches, since the natural tendency is to think of churches that are similar to one's own church. So we said "Do you know of any other churches of any type; mainline, fundamentalist, charismatic, liberal, or Pentecostal, nearby?"

We occasionally met pastors who did not want to cooperate with our interview. In such cases, we suggested that the interviewers put away the questionnaire form and just chat with the pastor about his church. After leaving that pastor, the interviewer could record some basic information (the name of the church, the location, the denomination, the size) so that the church could be included in the survey.

This survey was not a street to street nor a barangay to barangay survey. Instead it was a church to church survey. Since we asked about other churches everywhere we went, we soon began to get leads for churches that we already knew about. Eventually, every lead we got was for a church we knew about already. When that happened we assumed that we had surveyed all the churches in that area.

Once we were satisfied that we had collected information on all the churches we moved on to step 4.

Step 4. Enter and clean the data from the questionnaires. Often we found that there was some cleaning up of the data to be done in order for the analysis to come out clearly. For example, sometimes barangays had been renamed in the recent past. Some pastors would report the old barangay name, some the new. It was the same barangay but unless one of the names was changed, it would look like two different barangays in any analysis that was done.

Correcting misspellings or standardizing a variety of "correct" spellings (Sto Tomas = Santo Tomas = Sto. Thomas, etc) was done at this stage.

One of the most time consuming parts of cleaning up the data was the elimination of duplicate entries for churches. These occurred for a number of reasons.

* Data was entered on a church that was already in our database.

* Data for a new church came from the new church itself as well as the mother church.

Sometimes it was difficult to tell when two entries were for the same church. It was essential for us to eliminate these duplicates to avoid misrepresenting how many churches were present in the give area.

Step 5. Analyze the data, produce the maps, pray about the findings. Based on the data from the questionnaire, we produced a summary table that helped us identify and distinguish highly churched municipalities from unchurched areas. See **Table 1.** We produced a directory of all the churches. A partial example is shown in **Figure 2.** We produced a map of

Table 1

Summary of Population and Churches by Municipality

Municipality	projected population	number of churches	pop/ch ratio	average size	percent Christian
Santa Rita	30,200	1	30,200	35	0.29
Minalin	32,000	2	16,000	10	0.16
Floridablanca	63,200	4	15,800	30	0.47
San Simon	27,700	2	13,850	55	0.99
Arayat	66,000	6	11,000	33	0.75
Santo Tomas	31,800	3	10,600	300	7.08
Apalit	60,600	6	10,100	85	2.1
Angeles City	252,000	28	9,000	209	5.81
Macabebe	53,400	6	8,900	40	1.12
Bacolor	61,600	7	8,800	106	3.01
Masantol	39,600	5	7,920	80	2.53
Porac	63,600	8	7,950	165	5.19
Mabalacat	105,000	14	7,500	83	2.77
Lubao	92,300	13	7,100	86	3.03
Total	979,000	105	9,300	114	3.06

the whole province showing the density of churches in the different municipalities of the province. We also produced maps of municipalities showing barangays and church locations. See **Figure 3**. These were the primary products of the research effort.

Figure 2

Directory of Churches and Outreaches.

Name and address	Denom	Barangay	Language	Type
Grace Christian Mission Sitio Boso-Boso	Baptist	Capalangan	Tagalog	church
Wesleyan Church Bagong Nayon II, Cogeo	Wesleyan	Canisala	Tagalog	outreach
Mt Zion Foursquare Church 20 Imelda, Langhaya	Foursquare	San Juan	Tagalog	church
Jesus is Lord Fellowship Marcos Hi-way, Sitio Kamias	JIL	San Vicente	Tagalog	church
Sumulong Baptist Temple Sumulong Highway	AFBCP	Tabuyoc	Tag/Eng	church
Door of Faith Church #104 Adelina Street	DoF	Tabuyoc	Tagalog	outreach

The whole process of the survey was committed to the Lord through prayer. Proverbs 16:3 "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." We depended on the presence of the Holy Spirit guide us in conversation with the pastors. We asked God's help in discerning the state of the church in the province too.

Step 6. Come up with recommendations, prepare a presentation. The analysis will generally highlight specific areas that are relatively unchurched. Since the national DAWN goal was geographic in nature, unreached barangays were the main output we were looking for. But through the use of worship language we were able to identify different groups based on language. If information on population by language had been available then relatively unchurched language groups could have been identified as well.

In the broadest context, the recommendation was to focus church planting efforts in areas with lots of people and few or no churches. The maps and tables made it very clear where these areas were.

We generally gave away copies of the summary tables and maps to each of the participants. Transparencies were very helpful for making the presentation to the whole group.

Figure 3

Municipality Map showing barangays and churches

* indicates approximate location of a church
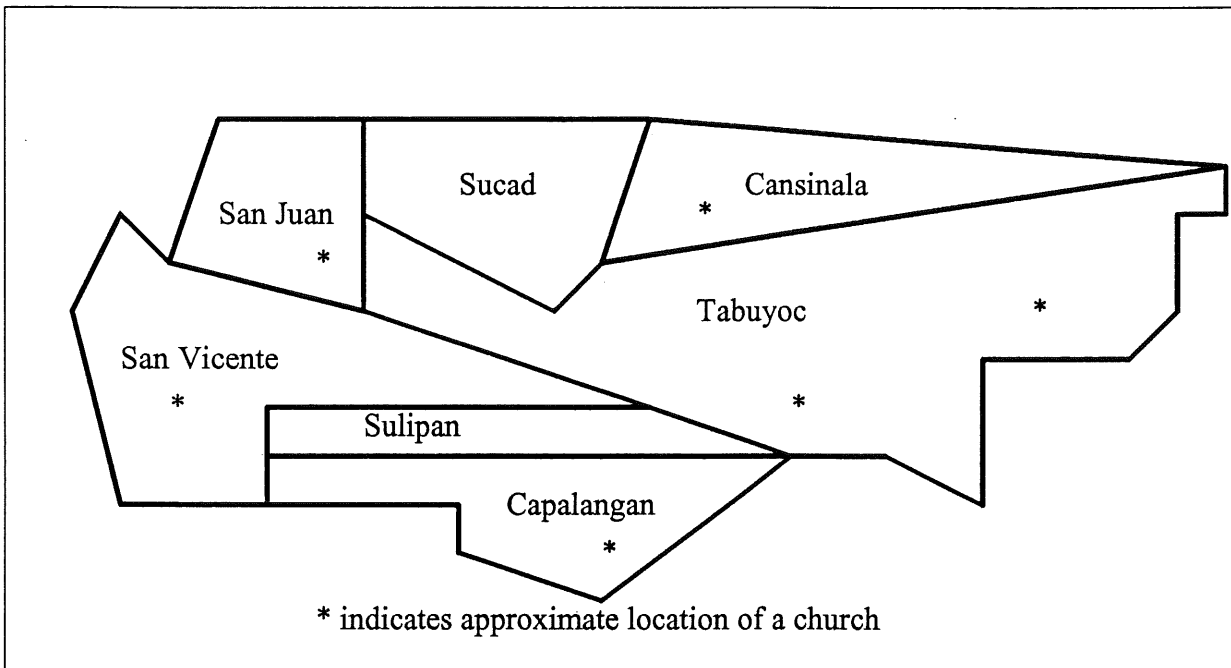
Step 7. Conduct a strategy conference for the province. Once the report is ready, a meeting with the pastors' fellowship is called. A variation on this is to host a three or four day conference for pastors in the province that would feature sessions on evangelism, discipleship and church planting as well as the status of the church in the province.

This was the most exciting part of the process. Solid information on the condition and location of the church was now available. The pastors were always very interested to see the results, to see their church on the map and in the directory, and to see which areas still needed a church to be planted.

One of the sessions was devoted to presenting the information. Another was devoted to strategic planning by the pastors. We arranged for pastors from the various municipalities to gather and pray, talk and dream about how to effectively reach their municipality. The networking and discussions often led to commitments to plant churches in barangays with no church. Sometimes pastors agreed to combine the resources of their churches to reach out to an unchurched barangay.

To facilitate this strategy session we asked the pastors to gather by municipality and to go through the following steps:

1. Have everyone introduce themselves and say a brief word about their church.

2. Scan the directory for their municipality for errors and omissions. Mark the corrections to be turned in later.

3. Together, brainstorm about why certain barangays don't have a church and what might be done to get a church started there.

4. Make a commitment of some kind, either to plant a church, to pray for others planting a church, to cooperate with another pastor in starting an outreach, etc. Typically, we asked each pastor to "Adopt a barangay."

5. Pray together for the lost souls of their municipality.

Evaluation: Our overall evaluation of this model is very positive. We continued to use it repeatedly, refining it each time.

Some of the items that we believe contributed to the success of these research projects are:

1. Often the pastors had heard of the national DAWN 2000 movement.

2. The survey was short (one page).

3. The pastors would benefit from the results, it wasn't just for denominational and mission leaders.

4. Local pastors were involved in the project from the start.

The brevity of the report was something we wrestled with. It would have been great to ask some deeper questions to learn more about factors of growth or non-growth. But our mandate from the DAWN 2000 committee was clear: where are the churches, which barangays have no church? The need for simplicity, considering the vast area and population we had to survey required the shortest form possible while still getting all essential information.

We chose to ignore church membership in this survey and focus exclusively on attendance. We still believe that attendance is the better measure of church health. And membership is defined differently by different groups. It would have been valuable to get both figures. Having both figures along with the definitions of membership for the denominations could have yielded some very interesting information on church growth.

The results are of course highly dependent on the quality of the data. Hence it is very important to carefully educate the interviewers about what the purpose of the survey is. It is important to train them thoroughly before sending them out to interview pastors. We found that the fewer the number of researchers, the better was the quality of their data. Perhaps because it is easier to monitor and coach a few, higher quality people, than a mass of people who are more diverse in their abilities.

Impact: The information from these surveys has stimulated the church in many powerful ways. Many times as we presented the report on a province or a city, the pastors' attention would be riveted on the map of their municipality. Discussions and comments could be heard as the pastors began to see their community in a way they never had before.

Information about provinces which were surveyed early in the process was available to church leaders and it had an impact. We discovered early that provinces in the Eastern Visayas and in Bicol were very unchurched. There were scores of barangays and many entire municipalities which had no church at all. Only a few months after presenting this information at a national pastors' conference, we began hearing of churches and missions who were targeting those very areas for mission trips and church planting projects.

Because of the great need of churches on Samar Island in 1990, only 42 on the whole island of more than a million people, pastors' conferences were held and a Sports Ambassadors tour was planned to assist local pastors and church planters in spawning new churches in unreached barangays. By 1992 there were 89 churches! Now their great need is leadership training!

The release of this information has also drawn the whole church together around the task of evangelism and church planting. Church leaders have worked together more successfully in part due to the focus brought by the information on unreached communities.

Denominational leaders use the maps and tables to strategize about where to deploy their church planters.

This project has yielded very significant help in planning strategies for church planting and evangelism in the Philippines.