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Fruitful Practices in Ministry to the North American Muslim Diaspora: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Executive Summary

Fruitful Practice Research has studied practices of ministry in the Muslim majority world since 2007. Recent world events have raised the profile of ministry to the Muslim diaspora. This research reflects a study of best ministry practices (i.e. *Fruitful Practices*) among those serving in the Muslim diaspora in Canada and the United States.

The stated purpose of this research was to identify *Fruitful Practices* defined as responding to any of the following results: 1) Individuals coming to faith in Christ in North America, 2) Individual Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) being integrated into existing local churches, 3) New churches planted among MBB populations.

Highlights of this mixed-methods research project

North American Fruitful Practices Identified: As the volume of responses from those engaged in ministry with Muslims in North America were analyzed it became evident that certain characteristics led to more fruitfulness. The most notable of these characteristics include: 1) more experience, 2) overseas experience and 3) non-English ministry language. In short, increased fruitfulness among diaspora Muslims is evident wherever more experienced workers combine their over-seas experience with a ministry language other than English.

Fruitful Practices Compared (Global vs Diaspora): The use of similar survey tools allowed a comparison of responses from those engaged in a global (Muslim-majority) context vs those in North America, a Muslim-minority context. What stands out from this comparison is the broad commonality with regards to ministry approaches despite the differences in ministry context. Nevertheless, differences that do appear are related to the more open social and cultural context of ministry in North America. As a result, workers in North America feel less constrained and are freer to identify as Christians, engage in open evangelistic practices, and invite Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) to their local churches.

To What do MBBs Attribute Their Conversion: In addition to the survey responses from those engaged in ministry to Muslims, 20 interviews of MBBs were conducted and analyzed for the purposes of triangulating the results. From the interview data, MBBs attribute their conversion overwhelmingly to the combination of the three factors: 1) Experience with a local Church, 2) Input of a Christian friend and 3) The Bible – especially in their mother tongue

Common Aspects of MBB Conversion: Finally, analysis of the conversion narratives provided a description of MBB conversion in North America. Despite the uniqueness of each person's story, MBB conversion most commonly reflects the following characteristics: 1) It takes time, 2) It involves multiple factors, 3) It is fueled by a social context which allows for exploration and, 4) It results (finally) from supra-rational evidence.

This research confirms that certain approaches and behaviors can influence fruitfulness as defined herein. Local churches and ministries which adopt and adapt the practices identified and described by this research can expect to see increased fruitfulness in their ministry to Muslims in North America.

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Introduction

Fruitful Practice Research has studied practices across many dimensions of ministry in the Muslim majority world since 2007. Recent world events have raised the profile of ministry to Muslim diaspora. To address this growing need we conducted a study of best ministry practices (i.e. *Fruitful Practices*) among those serving in the Muslim diaspora in Canada and the United States. The study was conducted in partnership with the Tyndale Intercultural Ministry (TIM) Center at Tyndale University College & Seminary in Toronto, Canada, one of the world's most culturally diverse cities. It provides intercultural resources for networking, training and research. The findings in this report are the result of that mixed methods research study.

The stated purpose of this research was to identify those *Fruitful Practices* that have emerged and which appear to "promote the emergence, vitality, and multiplication of Jesus followers from a Muslim background."¹ In particular, the initial research proposal articulated "fruitfulness" as responding to any of the following results.

- 1) Individuals coming to faith in Christ (for the purposes of our research scope, we are only concerned with those who came to faith in North America)
- 2) Individual MBBs being integrated into existing local churches
- 3) New churches planted among MBB populations

A review of the data collected in light of the definition of fruitfulness noted above, has revealed that the survey was unable to confidently measure fruitfulness as described in items 2 or 3 above. Though the survey probed the periphery of integration of MBBs into existing non-Muslim fellowships the data does not sufficiently paint a clear picture of integration in any meaningful or consistent way.

Also, though the survey dealt with questions regarding aspects of MBB leadership, considering the North American pluralistic religious context we are not certain that the answers were probing MBB fellowships in particular. Furthermore, though 23% (29 out of 173) of participants indicated that their ministry involves MBB fellowships, the survey data did not clearly distinguish those starting new MBB fellowships from those working with existing MBB fellowships.

All that to say, ministry among Muslims in North America is diverse and fluid – moving from pre-evangelistic relational efforts to serious discipleship of maturing Christians. Given the varied nature of fellowship gatherings (small group, outreach events, etc..) it was not always clear what was meant or intended by planting of a new MBB fellowship or if the MBB converts actually preferred such as a new religious community or were more content to move between several kinds of fellowships involving MBBs and non-Muslims in local Churches.

Due to the lack of data to support the exploration of fruitfulness with regards to the local church experience, this report will focus its comments on fruitfulness as defined in item 1 above; individuals who have come to faith in Christ in North America.

¹ Fruitful Practices in North American Diaspora: Research Proposal, June 20, 2015.

Major findings

1) Fruitful Practices Identified

The survey of those who work with Muslims in North America probed various aspects of potential ministry practices and personal piety in an effort to identify those practices which could be shown to contribute to fruitfulness, as described herein. As a descriptive research project, we did not attempt to identify causal relationships between particular practices and fruitfulness, those who report fruitfulness in their ministry do share certain personal and ministry characteristics. In other words, despite its divine context, fruitfulness is related to behavior.

The survey respondents represented a wide range of personal and ministry demographics. To distinguish characteristics that contributed to fruitfulness, respondent data was analyzed by category, such as; gender, age, and marital status of the worker as well as ministry characteristics which included (among other things); primary language of ministry, use of orality in evangelism and visiting the mosque/commercial establishments of Muslims in the community. Those who reported fruitfulness from their ministry shared the following characteristics.

a. More experience = more fruitfulness

The idea that more experience results in more fruitfulness seems intuitively obvious. We expect to get “better” at things the more time we spend doing them. Though the survey did not probe the nature of “experience” in a detailed manner, it is understood that ministry experience includes such things as a growing awareness of cultural and religious particulars of a given people, improved ability to communicate (both verbally and non-verbally) and an increased affection for those to whom we are ministering.

For analytical purposes, we divided respondents into those with more or less than 10 years ministry experience with Muslims in North America. Table 1 summarizes that data.

Table 1. Fruitfulness more than 10 years’ experience vs less than 10 years’ experience

Ministry Experience	No. of respondents	Avg. no. of years of service/respondent	Avg. no. of converts/respondent	No. of respondents w/0 converts
More than 10 years	57	16.7	6	16 (28%)
Less than 10 years	100	4.4	4	48 (48%)

Comparing these three pools of workers among Muslims reveals the following:

- 1) Those with more than 10 years experience were more likely to be fruitful. A worker with less than 10 years’ experience is twice as likely not yet to be fruitful.
- 2) Those with more than 10 years experience have seen more fruit on average, specifically seeing 50% more converts per respondent than those with less than 10 years in this ministry.

- 3) If this data is viewed through the lens of service per conversion, the longevity of service no longer appears as a positive factor, directly influencing fruitfulness. There is some evidence that those with a longer tenure of service have moved away from direct evangelistic ministry into mentoring or other forms of multiplication. However, our data was not conclusive.

Taken together, it seems experience makes a difference in fruitfulness, though exactly how longevity influences fruitfulness is not clear. It could be related to increased cross-cultural fluency or perhaps extended time in a particular ministry context. Or it could be as simple as increased time in a given location increases the opportunity to encounter those who are further along on the path to conversion and thus, more apt to respond. It might be best to say that experience brings fruitfulness but more experience does not necessarily equate to more evangelistic fruitfulness.

b. Overseas experience = more fruitfulness

Though this research focused on ministry to Muslims in North America (N.A.), the survey collected information concerning ministry experience elsewhere to understand how overseas ministry experience might impact fruitfulness in ministry to Muslims in the N.A. context. Table 2 summarizes the data relative to this question.

Table 2. Comparison of fruitfulness of workers more than 2 years overseas, short-term worker overseas and never overseas

Ministry experience	No. of respondents	Avg. no. of years of service/respondent	Avg. no. of converts/respondent	No. of respondents w/0 converts
Never in ministry to Muslims outside NA	68	7	3	38 (56%)
Short-term outside NA	39	9	4	17 (44%)
More than 2 years outside NA	51	10	7	7 (14%)

Comparing these three pools of workers among Muslims reveals the following observations:

- 1) The first two categories, never serving outside N.A., and short-term only, have very similar levels of fruitfulness; i.e. average number of converts and percentage of those who have not seen a conversion.
- 2) Those that have served in an overseas capacity for more than 2 years have a significantly higher rate of fruitfulness than the other two categories of workers – nearly 100% greater.
- 3) Finally, not only is the incidence of fruitfulness greater for those who have served for more than 2 years overseas, the experience of reported lack of fruitfulness (0 converts) is much less than for those who only served in a short-term capacity or who were never involved in ministry overseas.

As for the influence of more experience discussed above, a similar question must be raised considering this data which is simply this; Why is this the case? Why does more overseas experience with Muslims result in increased fruitfulness in ministry to Muslims in NA? Is it because overseas workers return with resources and training that make them more fruitful in the NA context? Despite the change in ministry context from overseas to NA, does increased fruitfulness suggest that ministry approach is more important than ministry context (overseas or NA)?

c. Non-English ministry language = more fruitfulness

Given the context of ministry to Muslims in North America with its dominant English language context (but not ignoring the French language of Quebec!) and the range of those involved in ministry – both professional and lay people – this research was interested in understanding to what extent fruitfulness was related to the primary language of ministry. Of the 160 respondents who answered this question, 129 indicated that their primary ministry language is English, and 31 indicated that is some other language².

The effect of ministry language on fruitfulness is summarized in the following table.

Table 3. The effect of ministry language on Fruitfulness

Ministry language	No. of respondents	Avg. no. of years of service/respondent	Avg. no. of converts/respondent	No. of respondents w/0 converts
English	129	8	4	63 (49%)
Other than English	31	11	9	2 (6%)

Comparing these two pools of workers among Muslims reveals the following observations:

- 1) Those whose language of ministry is primarily other than English have a much greater fruitfulness as noted by conversion responses (more than 2:1!).
- 2) Those whose language of ministry is primarily English have a much greater incidence of seeing no visible fruit. In fact, it could be stated that the likelihood of conversion is 30 times more likely for those whose primary language of ministry is other than English.
- 3) Those whose language of ministry is primarily other than English also have a longer tenure of service on average than those who primarily work in English.

Despite the small sample size of those using a ministry language other than English, these outcomes raise the question: which this research was not designed to answer but which are worth posing and include; Why does the primary language of ministry have such an effect on fruitfulness? ³

These results relate favorably to some of the results from the qualitative component of this project – interviews of former Muslims who converted to faith in Christ while in North America

² A total of 17 different ministry languages other than English were identified by the survey respondents.

³ For further reading on the importance of language, immigration, religious identity and conversion, we suggest Neterer 2010, Oksnevad and Welliver 2001, and Pew Research Center 2007.

(see section 3 below). In half of those stories of conversion, the MBB indicated that in some way language was an issue in their conversion. For some, a lack of capacity to speak or read English made understanding Christianity all but impossible. For others, being able to read the Bible in their mother tongue or converse with a Christian who spoke their language was critical to being able to answer their questions of faith.

Furthermore, those who did not indicate that language was an issue in their conversion journey, were either college students enrolled North American universities with a high level of English or second-generation Muslims born into an English context (school, neighborhood, etc...). Those who indicated that language was an issue in their conversion journey were all non-college bound, first generation immigrants.

2) Fruitful Practices Compared (Global vs Diaspora)

One of the goals of this project was to compare, to whatever degree possible, results with those from our research in the Muslim-majority (or FP Global) world. To do so, we used the survey questions from the 2011-13 quantitative study⁴ as a starting point. However, due to the many differences between those contexts we were only able to use a portion of those survey questions. In this FP Diaspora study, we asked 69 scaled questions about practice and priorities in ministry using a 9-point Likert scale. Of these, a total of forty-seven were either directly taken from the FP Global study or roughly equivalent to a question from that study.

The first thing that stands out is that to 36 of these questions workers in both contexts gave fundamentally the same ratings, with 34 questions given high ratings. That is to say, workers considered such practices important or very important to their ministry. This correlation of response suggests that there is a significant degree of commonality of what is considered to be effective in Muslim ministry no matter the context. Even for the 2 questions which had more of a mixed response, the patterns were similar, thus indicating common ambiguity from workers in both contexts.

As for the 11 questions that had differing response patterns in each context, the ratings were mixed. However, it is logical that workers in North America feel less constrained by their context, thus it is possible that these different response patterns reflect the changed context of ministry from the FP Global study to the FP Diaspora one.

Of note, in the questions which yielded different results in this FP Diaspora study from the FP Global study is the apparent common approach shared by those engaged with Muslims in North America when it comes to discipleship issues and process. Not only was commonality of approach evident but this stands in contrast to the divergent approach to discipleship among those engaged with Muslims globally. The question raised is... is this common ground a reflection of actual common practice across a range of differing ministries and local churches, or is this apparent common ground the result of a narrow band of responses gathered from those who have similar practices or perhaps the fruit of particular training and resources which are widespread in North America and which shape discipleship practice? Likewise, is the divergence of practice in regard to discipleship from the FP Global study a better reflection of actual practice among a vast array of ministries scattered globally?

⁴ An executive summary of that report is available by request from info@fruitfulpractice.com.

3) To what do MBBs attribute their conversion experience?

Together with the survey that was circulated among those who are engaged in ministry with Muslims, interviews were recorded with 18 former Muslims who experienced conversion to Christianity while in North America. From the information shared in these conversion narratives it is then possible to correlate fruitful practices on the part of the worker with those elements that the converts describe as significant to their conversion process.

Interestingly, similar research conducted among Muslim immigrant converts to Christianity in France reveals similar results⁵, suggesting the conversion journey for Muslim converts in the West in general, may follow a common path. Table 5 below summarizes the top results of factors noted by Muslim converts in their conversion journey.

Table 4. Factors Associated with Conversion

Factor	FP Research North America	CMB Research France
Experience with Local Evangelical Church	76%	70%
Christian Friend	76%	53%
Bible	82%	34%

Note: FP = Fruitful Practice; CMB = Christians of Maghrebi Background

The survey circulated among those engaged in ministry to Muslims revealed that only 23% work with MBB (Muslim Background Believers) fellowships. Meaning, more than 3/4 of those who work with Muslim converts do so in the context of a “western”, non-Muslim background convert church. This result is not unique and appears as well in Western Europe.⁶ Here, as in North America, local “western” non-Muslim background churches should prepare themselves for what it means to provide an adequate welcome and orientation to the Christian faith for Muslims who may attend as part of their faith journey.

What is significant to note, however, is that despite the lack of contextual preparation by these churches for Muslim visitors (i.e. lack of conservative dress for women, use of wine in communion, non-adaptation of language for those who do not understand English, etc...), Muslims continue to indicate that a visit to a local church played a significant role in their conversion.

One woman described her first encounter with the Church like this:

“We moved to Canada that was a start. The first weekend, my niece, she used to live here, she is in Vancouver with her husband we went to First Alliance church

⁵ See Kronk, Richard. *Christians of Maghrebi Background and the French Evangelical Protestant Churches: The Role of Social, Cultural and Religious Values in Conversion and Affiliation*. PhD Dissertation. Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgium. 2016.

⁶ Ibid.

– with zero English. I didn’t understand I didn’t understand. Now, what? But I felt very confident and very peace[ful] when I sat there.”⁷

Second to the impact of a local church is the influence of a Christian friend on the conversion process for a Muslim. One participant⁸ described the influence of a Christian friend like this:

“Um when I went to college, I met [Daniel] there. We got into a debate of you know what’s right. He brought me a Bible and started reading to me out of John. I brought him the Qur’an. I didn’t know where to start but I was telling him that was the truth. Um he started you know reading to me out of John and he was explaining stuff to me and I didn’t feel I needed an explanation because I actually understood what he was reading. Um he started praying with me over the phone even though I didn’t truly believe 100% at the time I you know listened and I allowed him to preach to me I was very open minded about it. And then you know it came to the point where I couldn’t deny that that is the truth.”

Finally, the fact should be considered that over three fourths of interviewees reported reading the Bible as a significant part of their conversion journey. This should not surprise us, because as Evangelicals we believe the Word of God to be alive and powerful, yet, it might surprise many who have assumed that Muslims will not read the Bible. North American Christians offering the Bible to their Muslim friends could result in more fruit.

4) Common aspects of the MBB Conversion Experience

a. It takes time

The MBB participants in this research frequently refer to their spiritual journey in terms of years; years to slowly disassociate themselves from Islam and then years to slowly grasp the essentials of Christianity to be able to make a coherent comparison of the two faith traditions. Once the potential convert becomes convinced at the cognitive level that Christianity is “better” than Islam, the potential convert must wrestle with the possible (and assumed) social and religious consequences of conversion which, from the point of view of Islam, is considered apostasy. But if the assumed consequence of conversion (the cost) is so high, then how and why do some Muslims make the move to follow Christ? The obvious answer, or at least partial answer, is the pluralistic North American context, which provides a natural segue to the next aspect we will explore.

b. It is fueled by a social context which allows for exploration

Many countries, from which the immigrants in this research emigrated, are officially Muslim states for which Islam is the official religion. And even in countries where religious freedom is enshrined in law, Muslim society effectively prohibits conversion to another faith. In contrast, the religious context of North America can be described as a pluralistic religious economy in which a wide range of religious options are available (Stark and Finke, 2000). Furthermore, the individual inhabitants of North America are, by constitutional mandate (whether citizen or not), free to align themselves with the religion of his or her choice – or not at all. It is not hard

⁷ CC-F-1-LG, interview 05/01/2017

⁸ UD-F-3-RK, interview 07/06/2017.

to see how this pluralistic religious context would play a significant role in conversion for people of Muslim background.

c. It involves multiple factors

Each of the MBBs interviewed described their journey to faith in Christ in terms of multiple factors each of which contributed something to the eventual conversion from Islam to faith in Christ. This is a refreshing reminder of what we already intuitively know about conversion and a rebuke to contemporary Evangelical culture which often reduces conversion to a transaction. Though each conversion narrative was unique and personal, certain common elements and patterns emerge when they are studied together.

For simplicity sake, we can categorize the factors into three domains: environmental factors, relational factors and supernatural factors. The environmental domain includes such things as the religious context and climate of the society (village, city, or country) of the individual as well as the political and educational openness to other faiths. The more conservative and restrictive the environmental domain, the more challenges there are to conversion. The relational domain includes such things as, familial structure and ties and the relative devotion to the faith of the social circle surrounding the potential convert. The more intensely religious and conservative the relational domain, the more difficult it is for the potential convert to explore an alternative faith and make the move to convert. The supernatural domain includes such things as dreams and visions, miracles and other types of extra-rational phenomena. The more frequent are the experiences of the supernatural domain, the more readily the idea of conversion is accepted.⁹

When describing their conversion journey, MBBs cite factors that are drawn from each of the domains: environmental, relational and supernatural, thus making it clear that conversion is a multi-faceted process.

d. It results (finally) from supra-rational evidence

Considering the complexity of moving from one faith to another begs the question, “What does it finally take to convince the person to make the move?” Though we can argue theologically about the “call” to repentance and/or the move of God towards an individual as a result of His election which secures their salvation sooner or later, the fact of the matter is the potential convert effectively knows nothing of all this. For him or her, conversion is, to some degree, the end or outcome of a journey of which they may not even be conscious. The participants in our study commonly described their faith journey as filled with uncertainty, instability, conflicts and challenges which don’t seem to be related or contributive to any certain end.

Despite the search for answers, the potential converts do not exactly have in mind what they are searching for in particular. However, at some point, often unanticipated, the individual undergoes some experience which convinces them that the Christian faith is “better” and that conversion is worth it, despite the costs, real or perceived. This convincing experience, or supra-rational evidence, may come as a dream or a vision, as answered prayer or miracle, or simply the awareness of having sufficient answers to their questions. One participant¹⁰ described it this way,

⁹ See Appendix 3 for a summary of the range of factors which were cited by the MBBs who participated in this research as significant to the process of their conversion.

¹⁰ CC-F-1-LG, interview 05/01/2017

“[I was] in a Christmas party banquet at First Alliance Church and one guy was sitting at our table and I turned to him and I and I asked him... “What’s your name?” He said, “I am pastor [Brahami], [Karim Brahami]. And I said, “Wow! I am talking to somebody that can answer my questions. To tell you the truth I have maybe a thousand questions! The first question I asked was, “Why do you guys calling Jesus as the son of God?” The first thing he said is, “You know this is very deep, and we need more time for me to explain it.” But then he started to explain. I can’t even remember what he said to me, but I just suddenly saw somebody open the web from my eyes and I didn’t have any other question. Nothing! It was gone.”

Another participant¹¹ described her experience like this:

“I came to the meeting [at the church] and I listened to some songs. And I felt something just opening in my heart, and I start to weep. And I started to listen to the word of God and [the song] was really touching me. And the song was saying, “Come all ye who are weary. And I will give you rest.” ... And only one statement that really made such difference that day is “if you really need God, ask God with your own simple language and start to talk to him. And God is accepting you regardless of whatever sin and whatever you’ve done”. ...And then the second meeting I attended, it was after that Friday, and at that meeting I heard that God is with us and that he would never leave us! ... And I felt for the first time that I’m among family, and among people who they really love me. And then afterwards...there was a meeting on Wednesday. It was a prayer meeting and after that meeting the pastor came and said I would like to pray with you. And that night, real miracle happened with me.”

Conversion takes time, it involves multiple factors, it is fueled by a context which allows exploration and it is finally realized when the individual is convinced through supra-rational experience.

Recommendations

The driving purpose behind this research effort was the search for fruitful practices which could be identified and recommended for implementation by local churches and ministries located in North America who have an interest in ministry to Muslims. Though the survey results were inconclusive with regards to those practices which led specifically to the founding of MBB fellowships or the explicit integration of MBBs into local non-MBB congregations, it is clear from the survey data and confirmed by the conversion narratives, that Muslims are coming to faith in Christ in North America, that some of these are finding a long-term home in a non-MBB congregation and that still others are part of (at least some of the time) an MBB fellowship which allows them to express their new Christian faith in a much more familiar social and cultural context.

Despite the limitations of this research effort, we feel confident to make the following recommendations for improving ministry to Muslims in North America.

¹¹ CT-F-4-PS, interview 12/02/2016

- 1) The most significant effect on fruitfulness, particularly on conversion response, appears to be associated with ministry in a language other than English (refer to section 1C and Table 3 above). Most Muslim immigrants and refugees arrive with limited English fluency, so the opportunity to explore the Christian faith in their mother tongue is critical. Even for those for whom English fluency is not an issue, the processing of religious ideas is significantly influenced by the capacity to understand and process deep concepts in a familiar language.

Considering this impact, it seems prudent that local churches and ministries could improve their fruitfulness significantly by including language study for those engaged in ministry to Muslims from their organizations and local churches. Whereas language study is an expected obligation of ministry overseas, it appears that it should also be given greater consideration for ministry in North America.

- 2) A second leading indicator of fruitfulness was the impact of long-term service in an overseas, Muslim-majority context. Whereas short-term ministry in a Muslim-majority context can be beneficial by introducing particular social and cultural issues, this research demonstrates that long-term experience is foundational to increased fruitfulness.

It would be beneficial for local churches and ministries to engage the services of those who have served in long-term, overseas Muslim-majority contexts. The accumulated set of skills, resources and approaches gleaned in these contexts makes a difference in more fruitfulness – even in North American non-Muslim-majority contexts. This could be either as workers, or possible as consultants who help coach and upgrade the skills of those who lack extensive ministry experience with Muslims.

- 3) A third boost to fruitfulness is the effect associated with the availability of the local church to welcome Muslims to their weekly services and special events. Given the impact of these “unprepared” local churches on the conversion of Muslims, the question must be raised as to the potential for even greater impact of local churches which prepared themselves and perhaps even focused particular resources and took particular initiatives to reach their Muslim neighbors. Such preparations might include; maintaining a stock of Bibles in translations that reflect the languages of the ethnicities in proximity (see item 4) below), extending hospitality to newcomers which maximizes relationship building, providing social services (English language, home-work help, citizenship classes, etc...) to assist Muslim immigrants or refugees, and hosting good-neighbor events which include invitations to the local mosque.
- 4) Related perhaps to item 3) above, is the effect on fruitfulness associated with access to the Bible in the mother tongue of the potential convert. As discussed in section 3 above, most Muslim immigrants or refugees have limited fluency in English and need to process deep issues associated with identity and faith in their own language.

Considering this evidence, local churches and ministries could see increased fruitfulness among Muslims by keeping a stock of bibles in various languages which reflect the major ethnic groups in their vicinity and then making them available to those who attend a weekly service of special event.

Conclusion

Waves of immigration to North America since the early 20th century has resulted in large and increasing populations of Muslims from across the globe in most medium to large cities in the US and Canada. This research confirms the anecdotal evidence that Muslims are converting from Islam to Christianity and either joining non-Muslim congregations of all denominations or founding MBB fellowships which better reflect their social and cultural context.

The most important factors derived from the results of an extensive survey of those who are engaged in ministry with Muslims and stories of conversion of Muslims include:

- 1) More experience in ministry with Muslims
- 2) Overseas ministry experience with Muslims
- 3) Ministry to Muslims in a non-English language

Furthermore, when MBBs tell their stories, they most often mention the following items as significant to their conversion:

- 1) Contact and experience with a local church
- 2) The input of a Christian friend
- 3) The chance to read and study the Bible (especially in their own language)

Considering the above information, local churches and ministries in North America could improve fruitfulness in their ministry to Muslims by:

- 1) Pushing for ministry to Muslims in the non-English mother tongue of the Muslim community in question.
- 2) Making use of the experience of those engaged in long-term, overseas ministry to Muslims. This could be done by engaging those experienced workers who have returned to North America or through cross-training and cross-resourcing local ministries with those of experienced workers in Muslim-majority contexts.
- 3) Prepare for Muslim visitors to weekly services and special events. Provide special welcome, biblical materials and encourage (train) people to develop long-term relationships with the newcomers.
- 4) Maintain a stock of biblical resources in the languages of the ethnic communities within reach of the church and local ministry and actively engage in making these resources available.

Hopefully, you have found this report helpful and enlightening. The FP research team is still looking for qualified missiologists who are willing and able to invest the time to produce these kinds of in-depth studies. If you, or someone you know, might be interested in working with the Fruitful Practice team on this type of research, please contact us at info@fruitfulpractice.org.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Team

The research team was led by Gene Daniels, *D. Lit et Phil*, the Director of Fruitful Practice Research. Gene has served in Muslim world ministry since 1997 and is published widely. After spending 12 years in Central Asia as a church planter, he now focuses on mission research and training in various parts of the Muslim world. His doctorate is in religious studies from the University of South Africa.

The data analysis effort was led by Rick Kronk, *PhD*. Rick spent 16 years in church planting ministry among Muslim immigrants in France, and has now returned to the US and serves as professor of missiology at Toccoa Falls College. In addition to teaching, Rick is involved in research and publishing materials concerning Muslim conversion in immigrant contexts. His doctorate is in Missiology and Religious Studies from the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in Leuven, Belgium.

The Canadian effort was led by Mark Chapman, *PhD*. Mark is Associate Professor of Research Methods at Tyndale University College & Seminary. He is also the Lead Researcher for the Tyndale Intercultural Ministry (TIM) Centre. His current research explores the relationship between Christian churches and newcomers to Canada.

Mark was joined by James Watson, *PhD*. He is an instructor at Tyndale University College & Seminary in Toronto, Canada. James has ministered in multicultural neighborhoods, consults with congregations and leaders across Canada and has been involved in research exploring how the church serves immigrants. James doctorate is in Intercultural studies from Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

Appendix 2: Research Methods

This was a mixed-methods research project, it included quantitative and qualitative data collection. The project was designed to compare, contrast, and expand upon the Fruitful Practices studies undertaken in 2007 and 2011-13 in the Muslim Majority world¹². Due to the many similarities between this and our previous research, this project used those findings as a starting point. This was done for several reasons, to root this new project in the existing FP data and literature for a degree of comparability. However, significant differences in context required us to change the research in several ways; the three most important were:

- 1) The quantitative questions which were reused were reframed to move away from a focus on teams in the first study to individual ministry which is better representative of the North American context.
- 2) Participation in the qualitative module was changed from gospel workers in the previous research, to MBBs who came to faith in North America in this study.
- 3) The focus of the earlier studies was on the fruitfulness the churches being planted. In this study, we looked at, a) individuals coming to faith in Christ, b) MBBs being integrated into existing North American Churches, and c) new churches planted among MBB populations.

The study was conducted with two dimensions, quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative Research Tools and Approach

The quantitative component of the study was a survey designed to measure self-perception of a representative sample of Christian workers among diaspora Muslims. It was a modified version of the

¹² Please contact info@fruitfulpractice.org for findings from those studies

research instrument used in our research project in the Muslim majority world¹³. The goal was to measure the degree to which previously identified Fruitful Practices are part of ministry in the diaspora, and to discover new FPs in this ministry context.

The instrument consisted of 93 survey questions. Other than questions about the respondent and their ministry context, the questions all used a 9-point Likert scale. Some of the questions are asked in terms of the respondent's actual ministry practices, with end points of the Likert scale anchored at "I never practice this" and "I normally practice this" (where "normal" is defined in terms of doing something at the appropriate time, not continually). Other questions are asked in terms of priority, the Likert scale moving from "very low priority" to "very high priority." The remaining questions seek the level of agreement of the respondent with a statement. There are also spaces for workers to add any thoughts or insights into their ministry they feel were not captured in scaled questions. The use of a 9-point Likert scale allowed us to sharpen the definition of some terms, move from binary (or other limiting) answer choices to scaled answers, and in general to enhance the possibility of rigorous statistical analysis. It was conducted in English only.

Survey data was collected for 12 months, October 2016 to September 2017 through the professional services division of Survey Monkey. Participants were recruited through several overlapping mission networks: Vision 5:9, Coalition of Ministries to Muslims in North America, Canadian Network of Ministries to Muslims, and others. Our survey received 173 valid survey responses, 45 in Canada and 128 in the United States¹⁴. Respondents were 68% male, 32% female, and 80% married.¹⁵ Participants ranged from those in full-time ministry with Muslims (26%), to part time involvement with Muslims (32%), to bi-vocational ministry (29%) and the occasional volunteer (13%)¹⁶. We believe this sample is a better reflection of the ministry workforce in North America than if we had limited ourselves to those in "professional ministry."

Qualitative Tools and Approach

The qualitative research module consisted of twenty in depth, semi-structured interviews with Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) who came to faith in Christ while living in North America. The interviews were conducted with a standard protocol, recorded for accuracy, and transcribed for analysis. Since the survey was answered by workers, this part of the research was designed to bring in a vitally important and different perspective—that of converts themselves.

Analysis of this qualitative data was coded by Dr. Kronk for thematic concerns. Our team then moved to mixed methods analysis by considering the various ways that these codes related to both the findings from the quantitative research and the major findings from previous Fruitful Practice studies.

Limitations

As for limitations to our findings, there are a few we wish to recognize:

1. **What is the Fruit of these ministries?** Our primary definition of "fruit" was three-fold: a) any Muslim background person who has come to trust Christ as Savior while living in Canada or the United States, b) any regular gathering of converts of Muslim background as an expression of the Church or c) any intentional integration of an MBB into a non-Muslim convert church.

¹³ An explanation of that project and its major findings can be found at http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/26_3_PDFs/26_3FruitfulPracticesList.pdf.

¹⁴ Five respondents did not answer this question about country of service which suggests they may be serving in both.

¹⁵ Neither gender or marital status had any statistically significant impact on ministry fruitfulness.

¹⁶ This was done to better reflect the many kinds of Christian workers engaging in Muslim diaspora ministry.

However, due to many factors our data only addresses the first part of that definition in a significant way.¹⁷

2. **The *etic* verses *emic* question.** We understand that the perceptions of workers, the *etic* perspective, and those who they lead to Christ may be very different. Workers are often unaware, or do not fully understand, the social, psychological, spiritual, and other factors that played a role in the faith formation of an MBB. That is why we included qualitative research with MBBs, to include at least some of the *emic* perspective. However, they too may be unaware of those things that workers were trying to practice with intentionality. Thus, the need for both perspectives.
3. **Our findings are *descriptive*, not *predictive*.** By this we mean that our findings should not be viewed as a methodology for church planting, but rather a picture of what God has been doing. We encourage workers to reflect on their own ministry in light of these findings rather than simply attempting to repeat the practices of those we studied.
4. **And finally, there is always the “God factor.”** We will never fully understand the sovereign, loving intervention of God and the *kairos* moments by which he sometimes works in the world. We would never attempt to be so arrogant as to “explain” these wonderful moments.

We kindly request that other researchers and writers contact us before using our findings, and especially before referring to them in published form. This will help ensure that the most up-to-date analysis is used (as in any research project report, errors will inevitably be found and corrections needed) and open the door for exchange of insights and ideas that may help us move even further forward with our missiological insights and ministry application stemming from this work.

Appendix 3. Factors that Contribute to Conversion

Factor	% of Converts for whom this is significant
Environmental Domain	
Opportunity to explore other faith traditions	100
Time to process	100
Crisis/Tragedy	50
Disagreement with Islam	33
Family example (positive or negative)	11
Relational Domain	
Church experience	78
Christian friend	78
Ask lots of questions	67
Bible study (with others)	67
Love/Affection	39
Practical help	33
Kindness/Compassion/Generosity	28
Christian Spouse	22
Prayer (for others)	17

¹⁷ Survey question Q13 asks, “Realizing that your ministry is a gift of God, if we were able to talk with MBB followers of Jesus who know you, how many of them would say that your life and witness had played an important part in their coming to faith in Jesus?”

Christian family member (not spouse)	17
Humility	11
Lack of criticism of Islam	6
Supernatural Domain	
Bible reading (personal)	83
Media (TV, internet, film, etc..)	33
Prayer (for self)	33
Miracles/Answered prayer	28
Dreams/Visions	17