

THE CHURCH AND WORLD OUTREACH

COMMITTEE: DANIEL G. ZIEGLER, EARL M. HOSLER, WILLIAM A. HEFFNER

The purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ for His church -- for the Bible Fellowship Church -- is that it should preach the Gospel to every creature, discipling all nations, bringing the disciples into a fellowship in which they are carefully instructed and trained to continue the discipleship process with others (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19,20; II Timothy 2:2). The Gospel is propagated by an intensive person-to-person confrontation of men with the Gospel in the community and by an extensive proliferation of the church into other communities, to the ends of the earth.

False Concepts

Erroneous concepts of the church hinder prompt and complete obedience to the mandate of the Master. The idea that all phases of the believer's life should center in the church may lead to a stagnant, deadly aloofness that spells death for outreach. Believers must cultivate relationships in the world in order effectively to go into that world, to every person, to preach the Gospel.

The view that the church is a showcase for perfect specimens of Christian virtue, with its demandingly rigid standards for new members, often more cultural than Biblical, is destructive of vital outreaching Christian witness. Rather than a showcase, the church is a nursery prepared to receive a newborn baby and lovingly feed, clothe, discipline and train that growing baby for useful life in Christ. The church is a hospital, prepared to receive the spiritually sick and dying and nurse them back to health. The church is a school where the spiritually immature and ignorant can come to be taught and trained for effectiveness as grown-up believers.

Rather than a fortress on the hill, to which the beleaguered soldier may flee as the last and only secure refuge from a hostile world, the church is a battle station, where the army is prepared and armed for battle and from which it goes into the field of combat to victory.

"The good seed are the children of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:38). Instead of a barn in which the seed is stored, is not the church a container from which that seed is broadcast over the field (the world) so that it might reproduce itself?

If the wrong idea of the church -- that of a perfection society -- prevails, then its members may glory in their ability to qualify, looking down on those "publicans and sinners" who are not as good, and settling into a smug self-satisfaction in which they do not want to be bothered. We must come to view the church as a redemptive fellowship, whose purpose it is to win the world for Christ.

The distinction between "foreign" and "home" missions is ours, not the Lord's. The same criteria for success in fulfilling the will of God applies to all of His work -- Are men being transformed through faith in Christ, and are these transformed men being formed into new, vital local churches?

Candor demands that we confess that we are not succeeding in these objectives. In a period of rapid population growth in our nation we are declining. We fail even to win those who are ours by virtue of their having been born into our member families. Dr. Donald A. McGavran states, "Where the church can grow it ought to do so." While other churches and groups are growing, and while we should be, we are not.

Where there is failure, aims and methods must be analysed, evaluated, criticized and changed. To be dissatisfied with failure is not a vice. To call into question the approaches and methods that have contributed to that failure is right. We must distinguish between Biblical doctrines, which we hold beyond question, and human methods, which may be very fallible. Nor should criticism be regarded as personal attack on those associated with the factors of failure.

In discussing similar appraisal in world mission, Professor Robert Calvin Guy points out that "it is possible to hold missionaries in high regard while asking probing questions about their theories and activities." (Art.: "Eliminating the Underbrush" in Church Growth and Christian Mission, Edited by Donald A. McGavran, p. 132). He goes on to say:

Discussion of mission policy is not remotely related to fellowship, friendship or personality. It is a simple necessity thrust upon us all by the magnitude of the mission task. Evaluation of methods of work should always be open to intelligent people. Such evaluation, even when the conclusions differ, does not involve rejection of the motives and worth of the persons involved in it. (Ibid., p. 132)

He then adds:

Administrators and missionaries in the most important business known dare not continue practicing patterns of work set years ago, especially if the degree and quality of church growth is less than may legitimately be expected. (Ibid., p. 133)

*Proposal: Past methods of Church Extension in the Bible Fellowship Church must be carefully and ruthlessly examined and judged by all of us in terms of the results produced.

Conversion of men and establishing of churches depend on successful sowing and reaping. In this case the seed is "the word of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:19). This seed must be sown widely if there is to be a substantial harvest. We must find ways to bring the Gospel effectively to large numbers of people rapidly. This is more easily accomplished in our day than ever before. The Lord has promised a harvest to those who sow in concern (Psalm 126:5, 6). But reaping must follow sowing. Jesus called for prayers for reapers when the fields were ripe for harvesting (Matthew 9:38). In present day America it is likely that there has been far more sowing than reaping and that, like the disciples of old, the Lord is calling the Bible Fellowship Church "to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored and you have entered into their labor" (John 4:38 RSV).

*Proposal: The Bible Fellowship Church should examine ways to use mass media, cooperatively, economically and effectively, for sowing and reaping. Can we use on a large scale such means as radio, television, newspapers, highway signs and others?

Church Planting

Successful church planting and growth may be expected by Spirit-filled, New Testament believers and churches if the laws of church growth are observed. We cite four of them here:

I. The Law of Natural Growth

This law tells us that the church, as a living organism, will grow if it is healthy and vigorous and that it will spread through cellular division, and we should expect it.

In the local church spiritual health and vigor demand that all members understand, believe and practice the universality in the church of the obligation to witness. They must be taught and trained for natural, Spirit-led witness in common contexts of life.

***Proposal:** Each church must carefully define its area of influence and potential "every creature" evangelism. It must develop suitable programs to reach that area completely with the Gospel, motivating and using its total membership in a perpetual program of personal, community evangelism.

Where churches are sick or neurotic or ingrown, genuine spiritual renewal through the Word is needed. Where they are backward or stunted, rigorous programs of training must be pressed. In some cases the sickness or stunting may be so severe as to be hopeless, in which cases further investment of money and manpower are not warranted.

Growing churches should also have a developing sense of concern for contiguous communities. Every church should grow toward the point at which it should, by natural division, reach into those needy communities nearby. This is the "mother church" or "branch church" concept of church planting. The church should have a good idea where that point is. To go beyond it is to decrease in efficiency and effectiveness in developing mature believers and in reaching the unsaved.

***Proposal:** Local churches should carefully and selflessly evaluate the advisability of allowing and planning for expansive growth without division. They should prayerfully establish priorities. It is questionable stewardship to build costly new buildings to be used for only one or two hours a week, when alternate programs could make better use of existing buildings which are adequate in location and structure. (For example, two worship services or split sessions for the Sunday school may be right when new construction may, in the face of needs elsewhere, be wrong.)

***Proposal:** Each local church periodically should thoroughly survey surrounding areas for potential branch locations --- especially considering the concentrations of present members in those areas. Steps for beginning to reach these communities should be devised which could culminate in new churches there. The possibility of lay preachers and of sharing a pastor (circuit) for a time should receive positive consideration.

An example of this natural growth of a church is the Iglesia Interdenominational, with headquarters in Portales, Mexico City. It has more than 8,000 members within the city itself and several hundred churches and preaching points throughout Mexico. This intensely organized church in Portales, under

the leadership of a group of lay pastors, has a job for every member, with special concentration on visitation and invitation of people to the church, and with constant follow-up and a "big-brother-in-Christ" program to guarantee the spiritual training and growth of new members. This church, despite its origin in one of the poorer sections of Mexico City, appeals increasingly to a higher class of individuals, with the result that its leadership is of unusual quality and its potential ministry almost unlimited. (Ibid., p. 97)

II. The Law of Concentration

Growth according to this law would take advantage of a concentration of families in a particular area where a church might be planted. Ours is a mobile society. People from various churches are on the move. If a few families, perhaps from several churches move to one area they might form the nucleus of a new church.

*Proposal: Efforts should be made to determine why we lose so many of our own people when they move to other areas reasonably near another Bible Fellowship Church.

*Proposal: The Church Extension Department should establish a file on recent and projected moves of people from our churches. All moves should be reported by all churches, so that concentrations might be spotted and new churches formed where possible.

*Proposal: Areas to which it might be anticipated that Bible Fellowship families may move fairly frequently in future years should receive preferential consideration for church planting in order to conserve these families.

*Proposal: Each Bible Fellowship Church pastor should make himself available for ministry to a small concentration of believers who are remote from any Bible Fellowship Church.

*Proposal: People should be strongly encouraged to consider new churches and their opportunities before they plan their moves, so that they might share the excitement and joy of helping in new church planting.

III. The Law of Receptivity

Population fluidity and the continuing development of vast new areas of housing create great opportunities to reach large numbers of people who will be especially responsive. When they are uprooted and move to a new home, people naturally look for spiritual help and for a new church home. A high percentage of those moving into new housing developments are young couples, who are open in terms of a new start in marriage or concern for the welfare of their young children.

To quote Professor Guy again:

If church growth possibilities are to be fostered the administrator must direct his resources to the places of greatest harvest. This principle underlies all mission activity. Money is given to missions because Christians are convinced that God has prepared a harvest. Men are appointed as missionaries because God leads them into the fields that are white. Searching for responsive fields and committing

maximum resources to them is perhaps the most significant act of the administrator. (Ibid., p. 199)

*Proposal: The Church Extension Department should study population trends and be aware of projected housing developments. It should seek to establish new churches in such growth areas, which can expand as the area grows in population. Careful consideration should be given to early purchase of land and possible use of attractive temporary types of building at the start.

*Proposal: Time-tables and check points should be established to evaluate the progress of new churches in growth areas. Where progress is not satisfactory, indicating that the community is resistant, the work should be abandoned in favor of other areas that need the message. The recent decision at Binghamton was valid.

IV. The Law of Spiritual Need

The Bible Fellowship Church cannot ignore the great masses of people in older, inner-city areas which have been abandoned by many churches and where overwhelming spiritual need is obvious and impelling. A crying awareness of their darkness and emptiness by many of these should constitute for us a Macedonian call to "Come over and help us."

Each of the preceding three laws of church planting -- natural growth, concentration and receptivity -- while presupposing some measure of the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit, would generally work naturally, even for liberals or the cults. The law of spiritual need assumes almost entirely the supernatural working of the grace of God. Inner-city work may be complex, difficult and slow. But success would be very rewarding.

Effectiveness in the inner-city would demand uniqueness in program and methods.

*Proposal: The Bronx seems to be the most needy borough in New York City. Plans should be formulated for a team ministry in the Bronx, composed of three couples -- one mature man with considerable pastoral experience, preferably in urban churches, who is willing to study and experiment, a young man with vision, enthusiasm and drive and one man who is able in the Spanish language (possibly a foreign missionary who might see in this opportunity as great a challenge as any in the world). Each couple should anticipate at least a five-years' commitment to this ministry. The objective would be the formation of three local churches that could grow up together in fellowship. The team should, as they proceed, meet together often, at least twice weekly, and work together closely. They should apply themselves creatively to the formulation of principles and programs for successful planting of these churches, which should be truly indigenous churches.

*Proposal: A Summer Seminar on Inner-City Evangelism should be instituted to bring students into the area to study and work in the establishment of the inner-city churches. This would bring in much needed manpower and would as well offer college credit in conjunction with Berean Bible School.

In developing a church planting program in accord with the laws of church planting there should be flexibility as to approaches in starting and perpetuating churches.

*Proposal: We should not rule out, but should encourage and provide for varied practices and approaches, where they are needed, such as branch Sunday schools, home Bible study and prayer groups, lay and part-time pastors, men continuing in active pastorates beyond the retirement age if they are able and willing, student pastors, future formation of new circuits --- all in view of the enormity and urgency of the task.

Personnel

One of the keys, perhaps the major one, to successful church planting is pastoral leadership. Men of maturity, who are gifted for this work must be sent into this ministry. New, young men should not be arbitrarily ruled out, but we must recognize that the rigors and demands of this work call for men who are proved pastoral leaders, who have ability graciously to work with people, applying sound principles with vision and persistence, so as to train people and build a solid foundation. Two recent arrivals in Staten Island for church planting, one United Presbyterian and the other Southern Baptist, are middle aged men, very capable, who have successfully pastored new churches in other communities before coming to New York.

*Proposal: We must abandon once for all any thought that the function of the Church Extension Department is to train men. Pastors must get their training elsewhere. The Church Extension Department is in the business of planting and developing churches only.

*Proposal: The Church Extension Board must have freedom to call qualified men and offer them adequate salaries ("The laborer is worthy of his hire," Luke 10:7) so that new churches might have the best men we have to offer them.

*Proposal: We must dismiss all thought of inferiority and stigma for Church Extension pastors, a vestige of the past. They should have equality of status with other pastors and the same respect and honor accorded the foreign missionary.

Denominational Priority

As a church we need to ascribe unreservedly to the work of Church Extension first priority. Nothing should take precedence over it --- school, conference center, foreign missions, camps or Home. We must realize that all other denominational projects and programs depend for their success and development on church growth. As our constituency increases, support for these programs will grow.

*Proposal: Commitment to the priority of Church Extension must result in a complete reversal of present practice. Instead of the larger, stronger churches, the baby churches must receive preferential treatment. This is not a call for paternalism, which frequently results in stunting, but genuine concern and deference. Who could think of wrapping oneself warmly in a blanket in zero weather while his baby sister was exposed, naked to the elements?

*Proposal: The Church Extension Board must develop and publish minimum standards for churches to qualify and develop as standard churches. Any real church under the Department should have full membership in Annual Conference through a Delegate and should participate in pulpit supply, with counsel from the Department.

*Proposal: The Church Extension Board should develop a philosophy and strategy of church planting that is thoroughly spelled out. They should be in touch with such significant contemporary developments as Evangelism-in-Depth, the recent Wheaton Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission, the current World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin, writings on church growth, the indigenous church concept, thinking in the theology and practice of evangelism, and the programs of church planting and development of other churches. All of these should be studied in relation to our own growth and progress, which should be carefully noted and charted. The Board should present to the Annual Conference plans for reorganization of the entire Church Extension program in line with this philosophy and strategy of church planting.

The success of other churches in our territory should give us both consternation and hope. In the years 1956 to 1966 the Conservative Baptist Association of New Jersey invested approximately \$40,000.00 (the equivalent of our giving for Church Extension in one year) in church planting. All of this has gone toward the support of two men who came to New Jersey, when they were in their thirties, with good qualifications and experience in church planting. They receive a salary of \$6,000.00 per year. In the decade they have had 9 new churches opened, of which 8 are now self-supporting. All of these achieved self-support within three years after inception. These 9 churches, which received \$40,000.00 have in that same period given \$60,000.00 to missions.

Goals

Melvin L. Hodges could have been speaking pointedly to the Bible Fellowship Church when he says:

In a hard and difficult field where the churches are bogged down in indifference and inertia and the program is not moving forward, my recommendation would be that the first emphasis be a spiritual one. We need Christian theology in action. Let us seek a New Testament climate and New Testament power. Let us organize prayer campaigns for revival as the first step for all-out evangelism and expansion in church growth. (Ibid., p. 39)

*Proposal: We must marshall denominationwide, consistent, genuine prayer for evangelism and church planting from the grass roots up.

*Proposal: In view of preparatory steps taken in recent years in re-defining our faith, order and government -- which should provide a good foundation for effective outreach --- and with implementation of valid priorities and methods we should, in faith, expect and anticipate solid growth in the next decade. May we pray for 20 new churches in 10 years? And if that happens, by the grace of God, should we not expect a net gain of at least 2,000 members in that decade as a result of renewal and evangelistic thrust?