

## PACIFIC2NATIONS – Mission Training

### Why Plant Churches? (Nick Klinkenberg)

*Don't We Have enough Churches?*

*Good question! From a superficial overview of western nations, we have to have churches on every corner.*

France has approximately 37,500 towns, cities or villages; of these, 35,000 do not have an evangelical church. America with its countless bookshops, radio and TV stations and programs, and so many excellent model churches, still has 172 million people unreached. In fact, research done in 1993 showed that 57 denominations representing 61% of all Christian churches in the United States have seen increase or just over one tenth of one percent between 1980 and 1992. Here in New Zealand we have 4,000 church buildings but three and a half million Kiwis unreached. I think this is a real concern.

This finding surprises me, for with the huge amount of resources available to them I would have thought the church in the United States would be making strong growth.

During this time the large Southern Baptist movement grew about 0.5% and the Assemblies of God by only 1.4%. The most significant growth came from the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. They increased their congregations at an average annual growth rate (AAGR) of just over 0.1% between 1980 - 1992. In fact, Charles Chaney, the Southern Baptist Church leader, says, "America will not be won to Christ by existing churches, even if they should suddenly become vibrantly and evangelistically alive. Nor will the United States be won to Christ by establishing more churches like the vast majority of those we now have."

I believe that Chaney highlights a very valid point for us. I think of it in these terms: the church that my boys will lead will be very different to the one that I am in now.

If we are to reach these millions and millions of lost people, with the limited resources that we have, what method would be the best to employ to see these people reached for Christ? What would the Biblical model be? What are mission leaders around the world stating as the best way to evangelize?

Before addressing these questions, let's answer another one first: "What is evangelism?" William Temple, former Archbishop of Canterbury, gives this definition:

*Evangelism is to so present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that men might come to trust Him as Saviour and serve Him as Lord in the fellowship of His Church.*

Notice that evangelism is completed when folk are serving Him as Lord in the fellowship of His church. In Matt. 28:19-20 Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you..." We see that evangelism is not only the going, but also making disciples, baptizing, and teaching these new converts to 'go'. Where better than in the local church can this be fulfilled?

In his book *Breaking the Stained Glass Barrier* David Womack writes:

*There is only one way the Great commission can be fulfilled and that is by establishing Gospel preaching congregations in every community on the face of the earth.*

Dr. Jim Montgomery concurs, stating:

*A number of leading missiologists are saying that the most direct way to complete the Great Commission is to fill the earth – rural areas, cities, countries, regions and people-groups – with evangelical congregations.*

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I am sure that we all desire to see Jesus Christ incarnate in His beauty, compassion, and power and see His message spread to every small group of people throughout the world. Then no person in our country would be out of range, either in a practical or cultural sense, of the living Christ.

When we see our country in this light, we realize that we are under-churched. The goal must be a witnessing congregation in every small community so that every person in the country has the opportunity to see the Gospel lived and preached by their own kind of people in their own setting, and, should they become believers, to be further trained in discipleship.

In church-growth thinking there are many evangelistic methods. Principles remain constant but methods vary according to culture and circumstances. Yet there is one method that has superseded them all which Peter Wagner calls the “best evangelistic method under heaven”: church planting.

In *Spreading the Fire*, Wagner writes:

*The most concrete, lasting form of ministry in Acts is church planting. Preaching the gospel, healing the sick, casting out demons, suffering persecution, holding church councils and multiple other activities of the apostles and other Christians that unfold before us have, as their goal, multiplying Christian churches throughout the known world.*

In a later volume Wagner goes on to say:

*Part of Paul’s influence in the new churches was, undoubtedly, new house churches in every neighborhood. No missiological principle is more important than saturation church planting.*

Dr. Ralph Winter also provides helpful comment in this area:

*The extensive activity of starting new congregations, the care and feeding of (new) congregations is thus to me the central strategic activity to which all evangelistic methods must be bent.*

Southern Baptist leader Charles Chaney has said, “America today is not a Christian nation but a mission field...We should give attention to multiplying congregations...”

Dr. Larry Lewis, at one time president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission, expressed it this way:

*The hardest job in your life will be to convince me that we already have too many churches. When our research department tells me that we now have 172 million lost people in America, that we have more unsaved and unchurched than we’ve ever had in the history of this nation, you’ll have a hard time convincing me that the day is over when we need to begin new congregations.”*

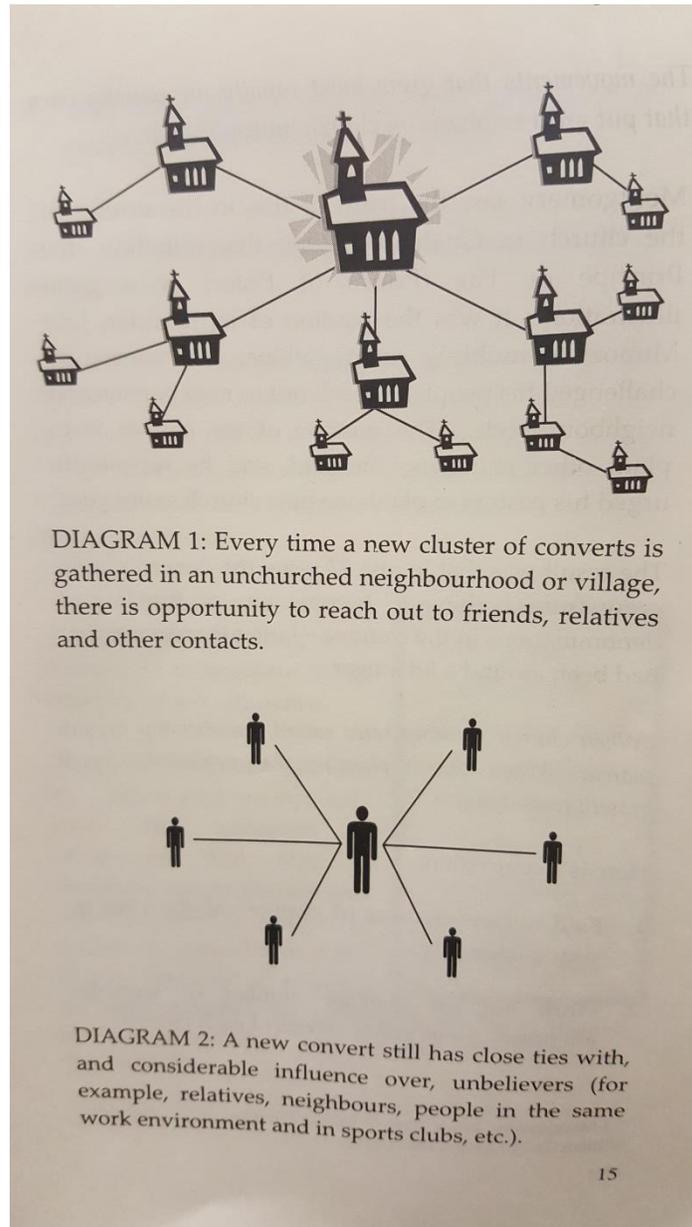
My thoughts exactly; most countries – particularly western nations – have huge populations who have no clue who Christ is. There are millions of people – even in a small country like New Zealand! – who have no personal relationship with Him. Let me expand on the quote from Wagner earlier in this chapter: *I am convinced that the best long term evangelistic method under heaven is the planting of new churches – dynamic communities of faith where believers do life together and reach their world for Christ. Dennison expresses it this way: “I am convinced it (saturation church planting) is the single most important goal we can achieve in bringing about the completion of the Great Commission in this generation.”*

In fact new congregations are the life-blood and cutting edge for any movement. Each new church is seed planted that yields 30- fold, 60-fold or 100-fold increase.

It needs to be noted that every church health/growth principle is realized and needed in church planting.

There are many principles, yet for me they are somewhat summarized in the excellent material from Fuller Evangelistic Association entitled “the characteristics of a reproducing and growing church”

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*The movements that grow most rapidly are usually ones that put great emphasis on church multiplication.*

Montgomery saw the truth of this in his studies of the church in Guatemala. One denomination, the Principe de Paz (Prince of Peace) is a good illustration. It was the passion of its founder, Jose Munoz, to multiply congregations. He constantly challenged his people to reach out to new barrios and neighbourhoods. "The mission of the church is to plant other churches," he said, and he repeatedly urged his pastors to plant one new church every year.

The result was that in just 27 years the denomination grew from nothing to become one of the largest denominations in the country – larger than many that had been around a lot longer.

*"When church planting rates soared, membership growth soared. When church planting was neglected, church growth rates declined."*

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Here is a suggestion:

1. Find out the number of evangelical churches in your community;
2. Work out the average number of worship attendees in the morning service of each church.
3. Add these up and take this total away from the people in the community as a whole.

There you have an estimate of how many are lost in the town/city.

That's a lot of people, isn't it? In many cities and towns in the western world you will find approximately 90% of people are bound for a Christless eternity – for Hell. We must reach them. It is a command, an imperative. Jesus tells us to do it; there is no option.

I am absolutely convinced that the greatest long term method of evangelism is the planting of new churches.

When we lose our vision for the commission we not only move into remission as individuals, but also as churches, and it follows that whole movements begin to decline. If your church is not in the business of planting daughter churches, the question is not, "why should we be involved?" but "how can we do it to the best of our ability?"

Reflections:

*"The church that my boys will lead will be very different to the one that I am in now."*

1. What do you think the author is saying with this statement? Do you agree?
2. After reading this chapter why do you think we need to plant more churches? What are you able to do about it?
3. Ponder the author's final question: "How can your church be involved in church planting (i.e. reaching the lost)?"
4. What is God saying to you regarding church planting?