

## CHAPTER 3

### THE NEED FOR A CANADIAN "WHOLE NATION" CHURCH PLANTING STRATEGY

If we may conclude that it is God's priority that His church grow in Canada as in all nations of the world, and with Peter Wagner, as cited in the close of the previous chapter, that church growth includes "all that is involved in bringing men and women that do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership,"<sup>1</sup> it is essential that we ask ourselves then how we may best accomplish God's will.

#### A. Why Plant New Churches?

Reginald Bibby's book Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada, published in 1987, has stimulated much discussion and controversy.

Research by the prominent Lethbridge (Alberta) sociologist indicates that the Canadian church is seriously declining. In the years 1961-1981, for example, Canadians' identification with the mainline denominations decreased

from 41% to 32% of the national population, while various non-Christian religions grew from 2% to 7% of the population, and those holding to no religion at all grew from 4% to 7%. Only Roman Catholics experienced growth during this period, claiming the preference of 46% to 47% of the population of Canada - an increase of 1%.

Canadian evangelicals (or 'conservative protestants' as Dr. Bibby calls them), continued to hold the allegiance of approximately 7% of the Canadian population.<sup>2</sup>

This information has not convinced all evangelicals that a policy of rapid church planting needs to be our practice in Canada.

Some Canadian churchmen have, in fact, suggested that our nation's multi-culturalism and pluralism demands that various religious traditions grow up together, without attempts by any one of them to grow to represent a larger percentage of Canadians than any other religious group.

Others have suggested that there already exist sufficient Christian churches in Canada to enable all who wish to find and participate in a congregation in their locale to do so.

Still others call for the revitalization and strengthening of existing Canadian churches before additional churches are planted, causing a strain on existing resources.

Each of these positions, and others which have the

intent or effect of slowing the growth of the church, must be challenged by the evangelical church in Canada.

It is fundamentally critical that the Canadian church begin again to grow. Alan Andrews, director of the Canadian Fellowship of Evangelicals' VISION 2000: CANADA project, warned recently: "The Christian church will be half its present physical size by the year 2000 if present trends continue."<sup>3</sup>

There are seven justifications for implementing the DAWN church planting model in Canada:

1. The population of Canada is growing. Twenty-five years ago Canada's population was just under 18 million, today it is just over 25 million. During this period the majority of churches lost members or maintained the status quo. Even if all Christian churches grew at the same rate as did the Canadian population, we would only be holding our own. To increase the percentage of Canadians who hold active allegiance to Jesus Christ new churches must be planted.

2. New churches must be planted to replace dead churches. Churches have natural life cycles. As their congregations age, their neighbourhoods change, and younger families relocate in unexpectedly large numbers, older churches die. A very small percentage of Canadian churches continue to grow for more than a generation.

Additionally, statistics indicate that approximately 1% of churches close their doors in a given year; this is an acceptable fact of church life. However, each Canadian

denomination or association of churches must plant 1% of its total number of churches each year to hold firm, or 2% or more of its total number of churches annually to move ahead. Experience shows that, virtually without exception, growing denominations actively plant churches, while static or declining denominations plant only very few annually.<sup>4</sup>

Churches must also be planted to replace those lost in recent mergers. When two churches merge, the sociological arithmetic is characteristically  $1 + 1 = 1.4$ . When congregations, denominations, or organizations merge, there is *always* a net loss. New churches must be planted to replace the loss of each merged church.

3. New churches need to be planted because younger and smaller new churches tend to be more energetic, creative, and evangelistically efficient than are older or larger churches.<sup>5</sup> Churches seem to have their greatest evangelistic potentiality during their first thirty years of life. While older churches can be redeveloped, new churches generally baptize more new converts per 100 members than older churches. While there are notable exceptions, this general rule has been evident around the globe.

The same is true of smaller churches. Smaller churches tend to baptize more new converts per 100 members than do larger churches. Younger and smaller churches frequently appear to have more motivation and a greater sense of shared responsibility than more established churches.

Neither of these observations justify a more relaxed

posture towards evangelism by longer established churches. They are simply two reasons why many new churches need to be multiplied in every region of our vast land.

4. New churches need continually to be planted because Canadian society is mobile. As Canadians move into new housing developments in growing cities, and as established neighbourhoods change from one predominant ethnic group to another, evangelical churches need to be planted to reach out to them. Church growth theory postulates that mobile people are more receptive to the gospel than are static people.

5. Different kinds of people and people groups require new and different kinds of churches to meet their diverse needs to win them for Christ.

Yuppies will best be won by churches composed mostly of yuppies seeking to win them. Blue collar workers will best be won by churches composed mostly of blue collar families seeking to win them. The Canadian rock generation will best be won by churches composed mostly of persons won out of that rock generation seeking to win them. For each kind of person in a community there must be a church which can understand, target, win, and assimilate that kind of person or group. No single church or single kind of church is able to win all varieties of people within its reach.

New churches with personalities and styles of ministry designed to reach specific groups of people need to be planted in every community to effectively evangelize our

great nation.

6. Many new churches need to be planted because Canada is rapidly becoming a nation of smaller, self-aware, ethnic groups. According to the 1986 Canadian census 3,908,150 people, or 12.2% of the national population, was composed of first generation immigrants. Immigration legislation eliminating race and nationality regulations in 1967 along with the new refugee legislation in 1988 (Bills C-55 and C-84) had the continuing effect of increasing the number, size, and kinds of ethnic and religious groups in Canada. The resulting needs and opportunities for church planting are urgent and immense. There is a great challenge facing the E-2 and E-3 bridging strategies into new languages and cultures, but the evangelical church must rise to the task.

7. New churches must be planted because no existing church may allow itself to remain a dead-end link in what Christ intended to be an ongoing reproductive chain.

People become Christians primarily through personal relationships with Christians who are a part of a nearby local church. The most direct way to complete the Great Commission is to fill all the earth - Canada, our cities, suburbs, slums, rural areas, regions, and groups - with evangelical congregations.<sup>6</sup>

#### B. The "Discipling a "Whole Nation" (DAWN) Church Planting Strategy

How can we accomplish the objective of establishing the

evangelical congregations required to give each person in Canada an opportunity to hear, see, and respond to the gospel?

The most straightforward method is to help Christians in Canada, or in any given nation, identify the regions and cities where new evangelical churches are most urgently needed for the accomplishment of the Great Commission and to pray and work together towards the planting of these churches. Due to greater cultural familiarity this work is most effectively accomplished by national and regional denominations and para-church groups indigenous to the nation working in harmony and cooperation rather than by visiting Christians from other lands. Christians from other lands may best function in prayer, consultation and support roles.

A simple method towards such a cooperative evangelism through church planting venture has been developed in practice by James H. Montgomery. During his missionary years with Overseas Crusades in the Philippines a national objective of establishing 50,000 new churches, one for each of 50,000 barrios, was cooperatively established.<sup>7</sup> In the decade preceding the implementation of this cooperative church planting strategy (1964-1974) the decade growth rate (DGR) for newly organized churches stood at a modest 18%; in the five years following, that growth figure rose to an astonishing 154% (DGR). Not surprisingly, significant growth in new communicant membership followed. In the decade before

the implementation of this national strategy the growth of communicant membership in the church stood at 73% (DGR) nationally; in the five years following, this figure rose to 171% (DGR) in the 12 major denominations of the Philippines. When comparisons between participating and non-participating denominations are made the effect of this strategy is shown to be even more startling.<sup>8</sup>

Similar mission projects in other nations under the acronym DAWN (Discipling a Whole Nation), first suggested by Donald McGavran, followed. In Guatemala, a goal of reaching 50% of that nation's peoples to become evangelical Christians was cooperatively set in 1984.<sup>9</sup> In El Salvador a congress in 1987 set national goals at reaching 30% of the population by 1990 and 50% by 1996. In 1985 Christians in Zaire set church planting goals of 70,000 new witnessing congregations. In Indonesia, a "One, One, One" program has been developed with a goal of establishing "one church in each one village in one generation."<sup>10</sup>

In 1989, James Montgomery writes: "Leaders in such countries as Japan, India, Ghana, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Canada, Finland, Spain, South Africa, Bolivia and a growing number of other nations have either committed themselves to similar programs or are seriously considering them."<sup>11</sup>

What are the components of developing and implementing such a strategy?

Montgomery identifies several essential components:

1. Gather one or more "World Christians"<sup>12</sup> with a missionary vision and commitment for reaching their nation for Christ. Such a key person James Montgomery terms a "John Knoxer" who will pray with John Knox of Scotland: "Give me my country or I die."

2. Gather and analyze the initial results of national research. This research should be complete enough to show

- a) the strengths and weaknesses of the church in various regions and among various people groups in the nation, b)
- how fast and effectively the church has been growing in its various branches, c) which methodologies seem to be producing the best growth, and most importantly, d) how rapidly the Church might expect grow in the coming years.

The most helpful tool for gathering the basic elements of data is the Church Growth Survey Handbook.<sup>13</sup>

3. From the findings of this research, develop a prophetic message to challenge and encourage the church and its leadership. If this prophetic message takes the form of a book, at least several chapters should be written by nationally recognized church leaders. This publication should be distributed as broadly as possible for several months before taking the next step.

4. An initial rally should be held to share and discuss the results of the gathered research and its prophetic message. The primary purpose of this rally is to seek broad national commitment to the objectives of a DAWN project. It is vital that key leaders from every evangelical denomin-

ation, mission agency and parachurch organization across the nation attend.

5. Gather a national task force to prepare a full DAWN congress. This task force would choose to that end an executive director, a name for their national DAWN-type project, then raise the finances and plan for the first national public DAWN strategy gathering.

6. The purpose of a full DAWN congress is to set national measurable growth objectives which have the prayer support and practical involvement of every evangelical denomination and mission agency in the country. In some cases the research and prophetic message will suggest an appropriate objective and strategy that the whole congress can agree on. In either case, each denomination and mission agency sets public individual intermediate goals towards the national objective.

One way the setting of this national goal may be dramatized is to write out the commitment and goal on a large parchment and have every delegate or denominational leader publicly affix their signature.

7. After the congress individual denominations continue their work towards accomplishing their selected portion of the national effort and the national committee continues its task of encouraging, gathering research, facilitating prayer and communication. Plans are also made for the next national congress to check on progress, share victories, and plan the next steps towards the accomplishment of the Great

Commission.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Montgomery's statement of purpose for the DAWN movement is "to see saturation church planting become the generally accepted and fervently practiced strategy for completing the task of making disciples of all peoples in our generation."<sup>15</sup> He writes in the Missions Frontiers bulletin: "...many are begging to see that this approach - what we call the DAWN strategy - is the best plan we have available to us at the moment."<sup>16</sup>

#### C. A "DAWN Movement" for Canada

A number of Canadian evangelicals also shared a vision for such a "DAWN movement" for Canada. The inspiration was drawn from Dr. Montgomery's work and, independently, from the Holy Spirit as God worked directly in human hearts. This movement is now well underway.

Arnell Motz, formerly on Overseas Crusades staff with James Montgomery and currently executive director of Outreach Canada, proposed the DAWN concept to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada which adopted a version of it as a project of its National Task Force on Evangelism in October 1987 and appointed a national steering committee. The name "Vision 2000 Canada" was chosen for the movement to focus on its goals for the year AD 2000. A flow chart of the organizational structure they devised may be found in Appendix 1.

The "Vision 2000 Canada" statement of purpose chosen was:

"Vision 2000 Canada seeks to serve the body of Christ in evangelism so that every person in Canada will have the opportunity to see, hear and respond to the gospel by the year 2000."

The Vision 2000 Canada steering committee, under the leadership of Alan Andrews of Navigators Canada and Dr. Artaj Singh, a medical doctor who took a one year leave of his practice to help build the organizational structure, convened an initial strategy group conference at Geneva Park near Orillia, Ontario April 5 - 7.

Strategy groups were commissioned in the areas of prayer, research, urban strategies, rural and semi-urban strategies, equipping for outreach, and proclamation and media. Later a strategy group focusing on youth was added.

Following further meetings of the National Task Force on Evangelism and the Vision 2000 steering committee (September 1988), a second Strategy Group Conference (April 1989), and followup meetings of the National Task Force on Evangelism and the Vision 2000 steering committee (September 1989 and February 1990), a Vision 2000 Canada National Leadership Consultation on Evangelism was held in the nation's capital in May 1990 with 750 to 800 evangelical leaders from 40 denominations and para-church groups attending.

The basic research component for the Vision 2000 Consultation, to which the research documented in this dissertation contributes, was gathered in a book edited by the research strategy group chairperson, Arnell Motz, and is

titled Reclaiming a Nation: The Challenge of Re-Evangelizing Canada by the Year 2000.<sup>17</sup>

The first of a number of regional Vision 2000 Canada conferences was held April 4-6, 1991 in Richmond, British Columbia with 500 lay and clergy leaders attending. Denominational goals and objectives are now being gathered and collated by Vision 2000 Canada executive director, Dr. Don Moore. A followup mid-decade national leadership consultation is being planned for Ottawa in 1995 to evaluate progress towards national evangelism and church planting goals set in 1990, to receive updated research, make course corrections and seek God's guidance and power for the task remaining.

#### D. How 'Christian' is Canada?

In 1864 as our fathers of Confederation gathered to write the original Canadian constitution, the British North America Act, Sir Leonard Tilly came down from his morning devotions and said: "Men, if we are forming a nation without God then we will fail."<sup>18</sup> He then proposed a motto for Canada based on Psalm 72:8 which is inscribed on the seal of Canada, our coat of arms, and on the stone arch leading into the parliament buildings.

The Christian Church lived and worked in Canada before the confederation of this nation in 1867, and indeed, from the landing of the first Europeans upon our shores centuries before. This historic precedence perhaps led most Canadians

to consider Canada a Christian nation.

That expectation however, if it ever was held, is hardly reasonable today.

Canada has seen a decline in the percentage of evangelical Protestants from 22% of her population in 1901 to a figure variously estimated at 6.5%<sup>19</sup> or 7%<sup>20</sup> in the late 1980's. Total weekly church attendance dropped from 66% in 1946 to 33% in 1986.<sup>18</sup> During that same decade Canada was removed from United Nation list of officially 'Christian' nations. Canada removed its historic Christian motto from the new 'patriated' constitution framed that same decade.

#### E. The Need For Renewal

In light of the numerical and spiritual weakening of the church of Jesus Christ in Canada in recent years, one might ask whether the evangelical community has the necessary vitality to engage in the needed program of church planting. The background of the book of Acts in which we see such encouraging church growth and reproduction is indeed one of great spiritual vitality, largely lacking in the contemporary Canadian church.

Must we then wait for a return of spiritual vitality before we may vigorously begin to plant new churches?

No, we must rather engage in a program of spiritual renewal simultaneously with church planting. The emphasis on church planting can in fact awaken the church to its need for spiritual renewal. Also, as a church engages in new

church planting, frequently its people experience the renewal they seek as begin to pray for growth, share again their faith story at a personal level, and are drawn into leadership positions which stretch them to new levels of trust in God.

It is vital that we pray the Lord of the harvest both for the harvest and for a spiritually renewed Canadian church empowered and equipped to be sent out to evangelize and gather converts into new churches.

#### F. Dispelling the Fog

Yet a fog hangs over the eyes of many Canadian Christians today, a fog which Donald McGravan sought earnestly to dispel. His challenge is relevant to us: "those who believe that a chief and irreplaceable purpose of Christian mission is to proclaim Christ and to persuade men to become His disciples and responsible members of His Church should systematically dissipate the fog that envelops the missionary enterprise."<sup>21</sup>

Canada is changing. Our nation is rapidly becoming an new and, in some ways, less friendly environment within which the evangelical community must find its place in this last decade of the millennium.

If we are to act effectively and dramatically, we must see with prophetic clarity. We need to understand that:

1. In the 1981 Canada Census 90% of Canadians claimed a Christian affiliation. This figure dropped to 86% (47%

Catholic, 39% Protestant) in 1987.<sup>22</sup> Yet in 1989 only 9% of Canadians could be found at worship in a local church on any given Sunday.<sup>23</sup> By extension, perhaps 23% of Canadians could be considered "active" participants in a Canadian Trinitarian church.<sup>24</sup>

2. Approximately 16.6 million Canadians (63% of a Canadian population of 26,247,800 as of July 1, 1989), are nominal Christians: that is, are those who claim to be Christians but are not responsible, participating members of Christ's church.
3. Another 3,688,000 Canadians (14%) consciously consider themselves to be non-Christian. The number of those adhering to traditional non-Christian religions grew from 2% to 7% of the population from 1961-1981 (1,844,000 persons). The number of those holding no religion, primarily self-conscious secular humanists, grew from 4% - 7% of the population from 1961-1981 (also approximately 1,844,000 persons).<sup>25</sup>
4. In total then, including those who are unchurched nominal Christians and those who are non-Christians, 77% of all Canadians remain functionally unreached by the gospel of Jesus Christ.
5. Only 16% of Canadians aged 19 to 24 currently attend church. If statistical trends continue, 95% of Canadians will be unchurched by the year 2000.<sup>26</sup>
6. Accurate statistics regarding the growth of the neo-Hindu New Age movement in Canada are yet lacking in the above

representations.

7. The 1989 Canadian Gazetteer lists over 23,000 communities in Canada, many of them without an evangelical church presence.
8. With a net growth rate of 3% annually, 112 nations in the world have a higher evangelical growth rate than does Canada.<sup>27</sup>
9. With declining church attendance and the resulting national decline in biblical literacy and in biblical convictions, Canadian Christians in the last two decades have been losing most moral battles; such as seeking restrictions on abortion (there are currently none), prayer in schools, controls on Sunday shopping as a "day of pause", and the like.

The need for a "Discipling a "Whole Nation" (DAWN) church planting and growth strategy in Canada has never, in the history of its European settlement, been greater.

#### Endnotes:

- 1 C. Peter Wagner. Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church (Ventura, Calif: Regal Books, 1984), p. 106.
- 2 Reginald Bibby. Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987), p. 47.
- 3 Alan Andrews. "Vision 2000: Canada" lecture to church leaders, Toronto, Ontario, September 1988.
- 4 Lyle E. Schaller, "Commentary: What are the Alternatives?" Understanding Church Growth and Decline, Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, eds., (New York,

- Pilgrim, 1979), pp. 35-352.
- 5 Phillip Barron Jones, "An Examination of the Statistical Growth of the Southern Baptist Convention," Understanding Church Growth and Decline, p. 170.
  - 6 Jim Montgomery. The Principles and Practice of DAWN: A Growing Movement for World Evangelization (Pasadena: Dawn Ministries), p.8.
  - 7 James H. Montgomery and Donald A. McGavran. The Discipling of a Nation (Milpitas, CA: Global Church Growth, 1980).
  - 8 Ibid, pp. 174-175.
  - 9 James H. Montgomery. God's Hour for Guatemala (San Jose, CA: Dawn Ministries, 1986).
  - 10 James H. Montgomery. DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1989), p. 17.
  - 11 Ibid, p. 18.
  - 12 C. Peter Wagner. On the Crest of the Wave: Becoming a World Christian (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1983).
  - 13 Bob Waymire and C. Peter Wagner. The Church Growth Survey Handbook (Pasadena: Global Church Growth, 1983).
  - 14 Montgomery. DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go. Chapters 14 and 15.
  - 15 "Dawn Report: Covering the 'Discipling A Whole Nation' Movement", Box 40969, Pasadena, CA: Dawn Ministries.
  - 16 James H. Montgomery. "The Challenge of a Whole Country." Mission Frontiers Volume 9, Number 7 (August 1987): p. 6.
  - 17 Arnell Motz, ed., Reclaiming a Nation: The Challenge of Re-Evangelizing Canada by the Year 2000 (Richmond, B.C.: Church Leadership Library, V7A 4X9, 1990).
  - 18 Ibid, p. 13.
  - 19 David B. Barrett and Frank Kaleb Jansen. "The World in Figures," Lausanne II in Manila, International Congress for World Evangelization, July 11 - 20, 1989, Congress Notebook, 13-23.

- 20 Bibby, p. 47.
- 21 Donald McGavran. Understanding Church Growth (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), p. 82.
- 22 Bibby, p. 47.
- 23 Based on the research of this dissertation which found 21,543 churches in Canada. Allowing for an average of 140 persons actually participating in a worship service during the course of one week, our projection of 9% of the Canadian population at worship per week would seem generous.
- 24 Based on a multiplication of 2.5, commonly agreed to be an approximatization of the factor by which those actively involved in a local church is in fact larger than those who may actually attend worship during a given week.
- 25 Bibby, p. 47.
- 26 Vision 2000 Canada Update newsletter, August 1989.
- 27 Barrett, Lausanne II Conference on World Evangelization, Congress Notebook, section 13.