

## *Chapter Ten*

### **One Church – One Mission: Functioning as a “City-Church”**

**Jack Dennison**

What is the role of city-reaching partnerships in the task of discipling significant components of a city to Christ? How might the congregations and missions functioning within a given city, or community within a city, work together to bring a noteworthy measure of transformation to that city?

It is striking that, when the New Testament speaks of the church in a given city, it consistently speaks of that church as singular (e.g. Rev. 2 and 3), even though there were undoubtedly many congregations within that city. Why? It appears to be simply because God views His church as redemptive community, regardless of denomination or distinctive, as one, rather than as a plurality.

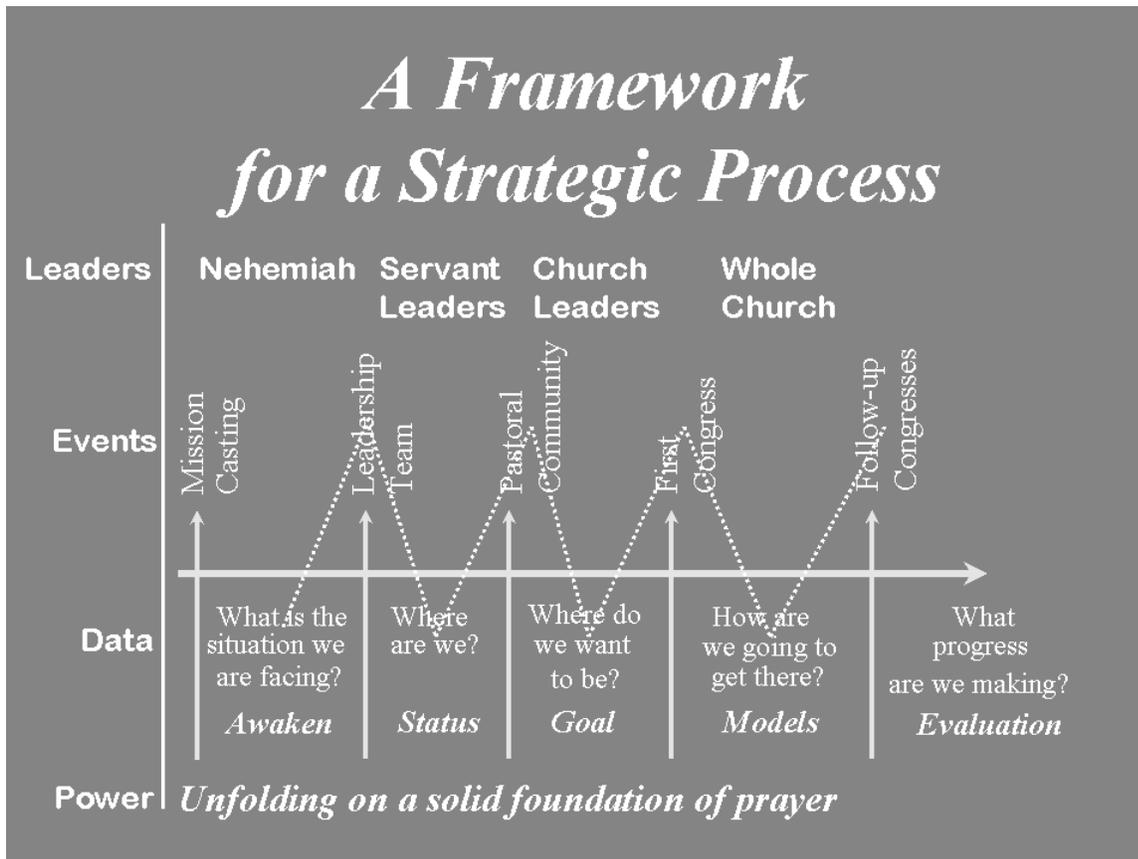
What does this mean for the Canadian church seeking to minister to the city or community in which it finds itself? It means essentially that the church must find ways of being, praying and working together, each re-building their part of the “wall” (cf. Neh. 3), while sharing and contributing to a coordinated vision of transformation as one church in the city.

A modern-day planning approach that I find particularly helpful in constructing such a strategy is called “reverse engineering.” Engineers didn’t invent this approach; we can safely say that God did, since it is consistent with the natural order of things and amply illustrated in the Bible. This planning approach simply means that you begin with the end in mind and construct your pathway backward from there.

For example, if my wife, Janice, and I are heading for the Pepper Tree Restaurant for a steak dinner, I don’t begin by finding my house on the map. I start by finding the Pepper Tree and then backtrack a route to my home.

The same approach can be applied to our question regarding the pathway to transforming our city by the dynamic presence of Christ. Once we visualize, for example, a gathering of believers committed to transforming the community within reach of every person in the city as the end point for our strategy, we can work our way back step by step to the beginning of the process and develop our plans from there.

Following this procedure, a very simplified linear diagram charting the city-reaching strategy we might offer could look like this:



Keeping the end target of reaching or transforming a whole city clearly in view, then working back from right to left, we arrive at the beginning of the principle-driven process that points to the eventual goal of city reaching.

The resulting plan depicts a linear view of the relationship between the three pathways of city reaching which include:

- leadership development
- information gathering (data)
- prayer (power).

The process begins with leadership prayer gathers and “mission casting” and at the other end continues indefinitely with follow-up “congresses” (periodic gatherings of the larger church to evaluate, celebrate and affirm plans for further progress).

At the second level, the process is punctuated by three formal events: (1) the recognition, calling out and establishment of a team of shepherd leaders, ideally perhaps in the context of a “Prayer Summit,” (2) formal commitment to reaching the city by a significant portion of the pastoral community and (3) a commitment and goal-setting event (whole-church “congress”) that engages the whole Church at the denominational, associational, regional and local church levels.

Though leadership, information gathering and prayer continue as focused priorities throughout the process, each is emphasized at certain points along the pathway.

In summary, the basic elements of an on-going process could emerge in the following manner:

1. **Mission Casting (awakening leadership)**—Church leaders are awakened to God’s love for the city, the Church’s biblical mission in the city and the current situation the Church is facing
2. **Leadership Team**—The pastoral community calls out and commissions shepherd leaders for the city-church.
3. **Research (determining current status)**—The leadership team (shepherd leaders) commission a research process in an effort to thoroughly and accurately describe a baseline picture of the current condition of the city (harvest field) and Church (harvest force).
4. **Gathering of the Whole Presbytery (pastoral commitment)**—With the results of the initial research in hand, the shepherd leaders convene the pastoral community to consider God’s vision for the city and the current reality describing the city.
5. **Strategic Planning (goals considered)**—The shepherd leaders and the pastoral community continuously seek God for a clear understanding of his goals for the city. A comprehensive city-reaching plan begins to emerge.
6. **First Congress (goals set)**—The whole Church is convened to discern God’s vision and purposes for the city and to commit to focused goals and efforts to bring about increased conversion of society and transformation of the city.
7. **Models Presented, Implementation Begins**—Priority shifts from preparing for city reaching to doing city reaching. Though implementation is now the focus, the Church continues to identify and empower leadership and regularly expands its awareness of current reality through information gathering and continues to mobilize prayer throughout the city
8. **Follow-Up Congresses (evaluation)**—The real work of city reaching begins after the first congress, with each congregation and mission developing its own goals and plans in light of the overall goals. The leadership team keeps the vision alive and prepares for the second cycle of this iterative process. At the second and subsequent congresses, evaluation is made of progress to date, adjustments are made accordingly and new goals are suggested and/or old goals reaffirmed.

Fervent, united prayer for the Church and for the city remains of course foundational to every aspect of this strategy. It is intricately linked to and envelops every stage and level of

the city-reaching process. Since prayer is part of the warp and woof of the whole, we do not include it in any one component of the process in the above diagram.

Now let's take a deeper look at each of these eight primary steps.

## 1. Mission Casting and the Emergence of an Envisioning Team

The formation of a city-reaching strategy begins, in the experience of the author, by awakening the Church to God's love for the city and His call to transform the city from top to bottom. This is what we may refer to as "mission casting." This can be quite different from vision casting. A church might have a vision for growing from 100 to 500 persons in community. However, the mission of the Church is not just to get bigger, but in fact to disciple the nations and transform our societies.

Casting the mission of city reaching includes, in most cities, significant paradigm shifts<sup>1</sup>, differentiating between strategy and tactics<sup>2</sup>, and developing a comprehensive view of what it means to transform a city<sup>3</sup> and accomplishing this through saturation church planting and the setting of other goals<sup>4</sup>.

Church leaders must first understand and make a commitment to this full mission of the city-church and not merely have a vision of something bigger, better or merely different from what they now have. Some key elements will include:

- ***External Consultant.*** This begins, in our experience, when an external consultant who is part of the worldwide city-reaching movement is invited to the city to present the challenge to an initial core of leaders. This person introduces the theology, framework, process and models of effective city-reaching projects from across the nation and around the world. CitiReach International has consultants available for this initial step.

As an example, our friend Jerry Wiles invited Bob Waymire and me to Houston in August 1995.<sup>5</sup> Jerry had arranged for several informal meetings with local leaders. At the first of these gatherings, we found ourselves sitting around a single six-foot table in the fellowship hall of a small Baptist church. This is where we first met Jim Herrington. Jim seemed like a normal, unassuming guy who sat quietly through most of the discussion. When the meeting was over, he simply got up and walked out.

That afternoon Bob and I met with another group of leaders in a situation similar to the first. Herrington showed up again. I thought this was strange since Bob and I were not planning to say anything different from what we had said in the morning session. Again, Jim sat quietly and listened.

When the meeting concluded, he invited Bob and me to meet with several key leaders from Houston's Union Baptist Association, the largest Southern Baptist city association in the country with more than 500 churches. Jim, we learned, served as their chief executive.

Following lunch the next day, he made an extraordinary statement to us as he drove us to our next meeting. "What y'all have been saying," he said in his grand, Southern drawl, "is the clearest articulation of my heart's desire I have ever heard. I could give my life to this."

- ***Envisioning Team.*** Jim and several others from those original meetings reached a new understanding of the mission of the Church in the city and formed themselves into what we have come to call the “envisioning team.” It was Jon Sharpe of Seattle, who first coined this term to refer to the group in his city that had come to an understanding of the city-reaching mission and committed themselves to casting the vision as broadly as possible.

The envisioning team is an informal group of leaders who are compelled to see the walls of the city rebuilt and are willing to make an investment toward this goal. This coming together of a few good men and women is not to be confused with the formal calling out of spiritual leaders (i.e., shepherd leaders or leader team) that will occur later in the process and which Jim clearly described in the previous chapter.

This informal team plays several primary roles. As early adopters, these John-the-Baptist types will help pave the way for the eventual city eldership or city leader team. Each member provides a relational connection with and bridge into various parts of the Christian community. The team therefore should be multi-ethnic, multi-denominational and multi-gender.

They are the ones who will initially meet for prayer, worship and some primary information gathering as they begin to see the outlines of a major, comprehensive vision for reaching their city take shape. Over the ensuing months they, with the external consultant, will then share this vision and story of city reaching with as many Church leaders as possible, typically one-to-one and in smaller groups of 20 to 40 leaders, but sometimes with groups numbering in the hundreds.

This informal group will also help pave the way for the ensuing strategy by wrestling with some of the most significant questions, developing relationships with major Church and city leaders and planning such gatherings as described in the previous chapter.

These leaders who would introduce city reaching in your situation must have the trust and confidence of others. They should be in good standing and have strong relationships with leaders of the various major streams of the Church. For it will be their ability to convene a group of pastors and other leaders who represent the ethnic, denominational and geographic diversity of the city that will make or break the process at this point.

This envisioning team can continue indefinitely in their role, but the time will soon come when they will give way to those who will be affirmed as the elders responsible for implementing the project from here on out.

## **2. Calling Out and Commissioning the City Church Leadership Team**

As the envisioning team continues to cast the vision for reaching their city, they must ask over and over, “Who speaks to the various Church streams of our community? Who has been called and anointed by the Lord to be an elder of our city? Who is equipped to lead the implementation of a city-reaching strategy?”

These questions should be asked with an open mind, for the leaders you seek may or may not be large-church pastors, denominational or paraministry leaders, Christian leaders from the business or public arenas and so on. If the question is simply asked and an honest reply sought, the true leaders of the Church will begin to emerge, because you will hear the same names over and over again.

Furthermore, we must avoid at all human cost any fleshly, administrative or organizational processes for identifying and releasing these leaders. Elections and casting lots won't do the job. The pastoral community must be assured in calling out these leaders that (1) God has called these leaders to service, (2) the timing for identifying them publicly is Holy Spirit-prompted and (3) the method used to identify them is God-directed. Having a pretty clear sense as to who they are, of course, doesn't mean they are ready to be called out by the pastoral community and released into leadership and service.

For example, in March 1998, Houston conducted its first four-day prayer summit with 175 pastors participating. Toward the end of this powerfully transformational experience and while praying about and casting vision for reaching the city, the group was focusing on the need to identify the "spiritual elders" of the city. One pastor stood and said simply, "I know there are others whom God will give us as leaders, but I know John Bisagno [of Houston's First Baptist Church] is one of them."

At this point, if the witness of the Spirit is not giving his seal of approval, it will become immediately clear through the negative reaction of the other pastors—not necessarily reacting to the individual(s) named, but to the timing or approach being taken. When this happens—as I have seen more than once—the group needs to back off and continue to pray and await God's timing and method.

In this instance, however, others immediately agreed that the Holy Spirit was affirming this brother's insight. He was giving the go-ahead to proceed. Others then said, "I don't know about everyone else, but I deeply sense in my spirit that Jim Herrington is one of them, too." This was followed by affirmation. Someone else spoke out for Doug Stringer.

And so it went until a unanimous voice of affirmation arose for the seven leaders who formed the nucleus of a leadership team for the city Church of Houston. In a wonderful display of unity, spiritual sensitivity and prayerful fervency, these seven men were called to the center of the room where 175 pastors fell on them with prayer and affirmation, setting them apart for their task. I feel the goose bumps all over my body just retelling the story.

I have found that in some cities there emerges over time leaders of such influence that they seem to be empowered with the respect and allegiance of most of the Church in that city and are entrusted with the influence of a bishop. This has been true of Joe Aldrich in Portland, Oregon, Leighton Ford in Charlotte, North Carolina, Frank Barker in Birmingham, Alabama, and others I have met along the way. For such men I sometimes use the term "bishop" to describe the relational influence the person possesses rather than the ecclesiastical authority they have been given.

Many other names have emerged to describe this team. Each one highlights a different aspect of their service. They have been called city elders, shepherd leaders, servant leaders, leader team, wisdom team, strategy coordinators and more.

Whatever you call them, and however God directs you to identify, affirm and empower them, with their emergence the city-reaching pace has accelerated and the spiritual ante

has been raised. For it will now be in the hands of this leadership team to plan, coordinate, implement and bring cohesiveness to the remaining aspects of the strategy.

### **3. Leadership Team Commissions the Research Process**

One of the first and probably most significant jobs of this newly affirmed city-elder team is to commission the research process. This is the information that will motivate and, in many cases, startle the pastors and ministry leaders of the city into action. It is the “Aha!” experience of learning that in Portland, Oregon, a mere 1% of the Hispanic population has been successfully enfolded into local congregations; that in Denver, there are fewer than 1,000 congregations, not 2,000 as was previously believed; that in Houston, half the metroplex comprises ethnic populations; that in Colorado Springs, churches that claimed to be growing rapidly by conversion growth actually are not.

It is the data about the actual condition of the Church and the city that produces what we have come to call the “Nehemiah effect.” Once the true picture is known, nothing will stand in the way of your leaders until the walls of the city are repaired.

Experience has demonstrated that when a research effort is initiated without credible and trusted sponsors, without a clear strategic purpose for gathering the information along with a clearly delineated use for the information, the project will not get far. Many of us have seen research results that, when presented, evoke a mild “Isn’t that interesting?” response from the Church leadership. Without credible sponsors and clear purpose the information may be shelved and seldom, if ever, referred to again.

It is for this reason we normally recommend that the formal research effort follow the emergence of the leadership team, who then “sponsor” the effort. The leaders must guide the Church as a whole into the development of a strategic plan that will close the gap between current reality and God’s ideal reality for the city. The constructing of this plan requires a clear, thorough and current picture of the status of the city.

This is the most technical aspect of preparing to do city reaching and therefore requires locating and commissioning those who are gifted in this area. As we have said, such people are available and can be found locally. Again, consultants are also available to help guide you through this vitally important process.

### **4. Pastoral Commitment at the Gathering of the Whole Presbytery**

With the mission of the Church in the city now understood, with a leadership team in place to move the Church forward and with the initial data collected and analyzed, the level of awareness and commitment to city reaching will have attained a new high. A growing sense of the whole Church begins to emerge. Hopefulness for increased effectiveness of all ministry mounts. What it will take to “rebuild the walls of the city” has been brought into greater focus and a shared vision has emerged. Everyone involved is now marching in the same direction and to the same drumbeat. The army of God is beginning to form on the battlefield.

So it is at this point that the leader team brings together the pastoral community in what might be called a preparation meeting. Based upon an increasing clarity regarding the current status of the Church’s work, the leader team and the pastoral community now must seek God for a clear understanding of his goals for the city and Church.

With a firm grip on reality, leaders must now determine what to do about it. The data from the research process is sifted through in a prayerful and thoughtful manner. What is God saying to us? Where is God going? How is he working in our community? What are the areas of greatest need? Why are things as they are? Answers to these and other important questions must be found, for soon major goals will be set for the city-reaching effort based on the answers.

Though there is no organization for leaders to join, no dues to pay, no vote to be taken, this is nevertheless a time for decision making on the part of the assembled pastoral community.

The key questions before this assembled presbytery are: Is God calling you to participate in a collective effort to reach this city? Does the process the leader team is suggesting make sense to you and do you believe it could lead to a substantial increase in the Church's overall effectiveness? Are you willing to spiritually and relationally commit yourself to walk this pathway in covenantal commitment with these assembled leaders?

## **5. Strategic Planning and Goal Consideration**

The leaders who answer yes to the above questions must now begin to nurture the vision for city reaching within their own congregations and with their congregational leadership teams. Pastors should preach and teach about city reaching from the book of Acts and share with their congregations stories of city reaching from around the country. Intercessory prayer within and between congregations can now be mobilized. Information describing the city and the section where each congregation is located can be processed and analyzed and appropriate responses considered. The possibility of collaboration with other congregations can also be evaluated. Congregational and citywide obstacles to city reaching can be identified.

With a clear picture of where we are and where God is calling us to go, we are prepared to pass through the final phase of preparation for city reaching. Common information and common goals enable the Church to mobilize and align itself as it moves in unity toward a mutually agreed-upon destination. Each member of the Body of Christ (denomination, association, local congregation, paraministry, individual believer) is now in a position to prayerfully and thoughtfully determine the part God is calling him or her to play in achieving each city-reaching goal and priority.

## **6. First Citywide Church Congress (Goals Set)**

Now that consensus has been gained for a city-reaching project, it is time to bring representatives of the whole Body of Christ together in the first citywide Church congress, where formal commitment will be made to the city-reaching process and where specific overall goals for the Church and the city will be set. Each entity will then be sent out to mobilize their respective constituencies to determine and implement their role in the overall project.

Counsel is available for planning and holding this congress, but the ingredients and outcomes are essentially those communicated in this chapter<sup>6</sup>. At the congress, the vision is presented, the nature of the necessary paradigm shifts are discussed, the research data is shared, the need for spiritual warfare and intercession is emphasized and so on.

Convening this congress is the responsibility of the leader team. By this time, the leader team has nurtured close and meaningful relationships within their group. The team has continued to grow as additional spiritual leaders from around the city have emerged and been added to the team. The vision for reaching the city has become increasingly clear as information has been gathered and as relationships with the leaders of other key sectors of community life have been established.

This forum is commonly referred to as a “congress”, for it is a meeting not merely for teaching and inspiration, but for *enacting* a project and engaging the whole Church in a citywide strategy. The invitation to come together should be extended to the entire community of Christian leaders, including pastors, paraministry, intercessory, congregational and community Christian leaders. It is estimated that by the time the Church in the city reaches this phase, approximately 30–50% of the Church will be represented in this gathering and will be committed to functional unity and city reaching. This event represents the final step in preparing to reach the city.

Commitment made to common goals. The program and speakers that will present the vision and the data relating to city reaching at this congress can be readily imagined. Everything must lead up to the climax of setting specific goals agreed upon by the assembled leaders. A city-reaching strategy without specific, measurable, numeric, time-bound goals is, by definition, not a strategy. The Body of Christ committing itself to God-given goals is the sine qua non, the essential ingredient of any citywide effort that will lead to transformation.

Some who read this will be tempted to dismiss the importance of goal setting. If you have been involved previously in unfruitful goal-setting experiences, you may well ask why this experience should be any different.

Others have said to me that all we need do is to depend on and work under the power of the Holy Spirit and he will accomplish that which he intends. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade, has written:

*It is my strong conviction that it is impossible to ask God for too much if our hearts and motives are pure and if we pray according to the Word and will of God. Remember, it is a basic spiritual principle that whatever we vividly envision, ardently desire, sincerely believe and enthusiastically act upon will come to pass—assuming, of course, that there is scriptural authority for it. It is this principle that is the foundation of praying supernaturally.*

If you have concerns about the validity of goal-setting in the context of ministering to a whole city, allow me to suggest that the city-reaching context for goal setting may be different from what you have before encountered in the congregation in which you serve. For here we are not dealing with the isolated goals of a few scattered congregations. I personally believe that God would not be at all impressed if every single one of our aggregate current goals as congregations were met. The current total of our expressed individual congregational goals is so measly as to not even scratch the surface of the challenges we face in reaching our cities.

Referring to the widening gap between the Church and the city and the need to reverse our current course, Mike Regele writes, “So what needs to happen? We need to make

decisions, strategic decisions that will allow us to actually change the trajectory of response. To put it simply, we need an adequate response to the reality of these [societal] changes.”<sup>7</sup>

Until now, the isolated response of individual congregations has been incapable of dealing with the massive issues each city faces. What is needed, and what this process produces, is a vision, a plan—goals so comprehensive that, if successful, will lead to community transformation.

Bill Bright has often said, “Small goals do not fire the vision of man.” The Lord himself challenges us to work toward the incredible outcome of making disciples of nations. The goals we are suggesting will take your city Church to a whole new level of challenge and commitment. They are bold, visionary targets that, if reached, could truly bring transformation to the Church and to the city. These are God-sized goals that God is eager for us to reach.

Actually, goals are nothing more than statements of intent. “I intend to finish writing this chapter” is a statement of my intent to complete what I have started. It is a goal I have committed myself to achieve.

“For reasons I do not fully understand,” writes Peter Wagner, “some power is released through setting positive goals that otherwise remains dormant. But although I cannot explain it as well as I wish I could, it is a biblical principle that God seems to honor. Goal setting is the modern equivalent to the biblical concept of faith, without which it is impossible to please God” (see Hebrews 11:6)<sup>8</sup>.

A common goal provides a clear statement of the outcomes we mutually seek. Goals enable each diverse part of the Body of Christ to determine for themselves the role they will play, the pathway they will walk and the methods they will employ in contributing to the ultimate fulfillment of the task at hand. Once the destination is clearly described, appropriate responses from all levels of Church life can be made.

What church-planting and transformational goals do we need? Determining how many churches are needed is the single most significant city-reaching goal and the most easily quantifiable. It is also the goal that most readily identifies the project and keeps all the congregations and ministries focused on the one primary activity that will lead most directly to the transformation of the city. The congress delegation will want to set overall church-planting goals for the city. This goal can then be broken down into segments, such as how many come-to churches can be transformed into go-to congregations, how many new churches are needed in each section of town, how many in each ethnic and language enclave and so on.

Community transformation goals are more difficult to identify and quantify. Based upon an increasing clarity regarding the current status of the Church’s work, the leadership team and the pastoral community continuously seek God for a clear understanding of all his goals for the city and Church. As the pain and suffering of the community becomes increasingly clear, as relationships are established with community leaders within the city’s subsystems and structures and as the spiritual dynamics behind the visible plight of our cities is better understood, transformation goals will become more apparent and solutions will become more clear.

***Gaining goal ownership.*** Establishing goals that will be readily accepted and enthusiastically pursued is crucial to the process. Good goals are those which preserve a

healthy balance between being challenging on the one hand, but existing within the realm of reality on the other. Goals that are too easily reached, that require no significantly greater effort than is already being made, accomplish little if anything. Goals that are set impossibly high are equally ineffective as they quickly produce discouragement that leads to even less effort than before.

In working with data and goal setting in dozens of nations around the world, research specialist Roy Wingerd of Dawn Ministries has summarized four basic approaches to setting healthy goals which are more easily quantifiable.

**One** approach is to set a goal simply by faith. An example would be to say we believe we should double our number of congregations within five years. This works well if it truly comes from the Lord through prayer and if it is accepted and affirmed by all participants.

A **second** approach is to set a goal based on the growth of the Church in the previous five to ten years. Research in the Philippines, for example, indicated church growth was at about 5% AAGR (Average Annual Growth Rate) in the prior decade. The same research revealed just how responsive the people of the Philippines were to the Gospel, so that a doubling of that rate to 10% annually seemed reasonable, yet challenging. The Church has kept close to that rate for more than a quarter century.

A **third** approach is to set a goal based on a predetermined measurement standard, such as one church for every 1,000 members of the population by a certain date. This needs to be further broken down to one per 1,000 for every segment of society by neighborhood, ethnic group and so on, as we have mentioned.

A **fourth** approach is to set an overall goal based on the cooperation of all churches. That is, each local church or cluster of churches sets its own goal(s). When these are added together, they become the overall goal. Since in no case will absolutely every denomination or local church be involved, a conservative estimate of what the expected growth of these groups might be is added into the overall goal.

National, regional, denominational and citywide goals have been set all over the world using one or more of these criteria. Usually, there is a combination of them employed.

In a recorded interview, Lynn Green, YWAM Director for Europe, Africa and the Middle East, related how the national goals were set for the Challenge 2000 project in England:

*After the initial research was completed, our newly-appointed steering committee met for several days of prayer and fasting to determine what the Lord was saying to us about a national goal.*

*Ultimately, we concluded that the Lord would have us trust him for 20,000 new congregations by the end of the decade. As we thought about that, we realized many more people would come to know the Lord and come into our churches. With this many new congregations, we determined that those attending church would make up about 20% of the population. For us, this was a big step of faith in a country where the Church had been in decline for many decades.*

*To test whether we were hearing from the Lord, we shared this goal with no one. Then, at the congress itself, we sent the various denominational groups off by themselves to seek God, to strategize and to make some faith commitments. How*

*many churches did they feel their denomination should plant in the next eight years?*

*After the denominational streams met together and reported back, we added all their individual goals and discovered they totaled just over 20,000! We realized that God had put his stamp of approval on the strategy.*

*So we developed the goal statement: There would be 20,000 new churches and 20% of the population attending church by the end of the 20th century—a 20/20 vision.*

Who will be first among our needy cities? At this writing, few North American cities have reached this congress milestone, though several are near it. So our anticipation for how this event will be conducted must be informed by our global experiences. Scores upon scores of such congresses have been held for whole nations and for hundreds of provinces and cities all over the world. For many of them, such as the Philippines which completed its seventh congress in 1998, a national congress has been held every two or three years. Each follow-up congress provides the setting to update progress, realign goals, identify top priorities, present highly effective models for ministry and readjust and recommit to the task at hand.

Though we recognize seminars and conferences abound, pastors and other leaders will come to a congress, we have learned, if they are made aware of two things: (1) There will be in-depth and accurate information about the real situation of the Church and the society and (2) there will be opportunity given to unify the whole Church around a process leading to transformation of the society.

## **7. Models Presented, Implementation Begins**

With the holding of the citywide Church congress, priority now is shifted from preparing for city reaching to doing city reaching. The Church is ready to put its full effort into doing what it has now determined needs to be done.

With the holding of this first congress, it is now up to each stream of the Church, each collection of denominational churches, each local congregation and each paraministry to set its own goals and develop and implement its own plans that will in aggregate achieve the citywide goals that have been set by the congress. Now the Church is functioning in unity—not by each part giving up its own calling and distinctive, but by all focusing their ministries toward common goals. Each entity grows and then transforms its part of the harvest field in concert with all others. A systematic, comprehensive harvest is now taking place. No longer preparing for battle, the army of God is going to war.

As each congregation, fellowship of churches or group of denominational churches is carrying out its growth plans, it can also keep its eyes open to what the Lord of the harvest is doing in other parts of the field. That is, we can take a look at other churches that are experiencing significant rates of growth and effective ministries. We can go to these churches and find out how they are growing (conversion, transfer, biological), who is coming (married couples, Gen X, boomers, young families, singles, etc.) and what effective means and methodologies they are employing.

These models are continually presented to the Church at large as examples of faithfulness (doing the right things) and effectiveness (doing the right things well).

Congregations and congregational leaders become the mentors and guides to others for implementing effective models for reaching or impacting various people groups, social needs or systems and structures within the city. Everything we need to reach the city is already in the city. We must ask and keep on asking. We must seek and keep on seeking. We must knock and keep on knocking. If we do, we will find all that we need to bring about a dynamic change in the communities in which we live.

In addition to various individual efforts toward now-common goals, any number of cooperative efforts and tactics can be implemented that enhance the growth and transformation aspects of the strategy. These may include some of the following:

- In most cities, many a church will need help revitalizing and refocusing the congregation on its biblical mission in the city. Congregations from various denominations might decide to participate together in a mentoring process to help re-establish their congregational health using the expertise of a paraministry experienced in this area.
- Churches in a particular geographic region of the city may identify a common problem, opportunity, unreached people or community need that they can work together to address. This level of collaboration will enhance overall effectiveness and avoid duplication of effort.
- The broader Church in the city may be led by its leadership team to adopt a citywide initiative that is deemed timely and appropriate to the needs of the city.
- Congregations, regardless of denominational affiliation, may discover more effective ministry models and approaches from others who have demonstrated effectiveness in certain areas.
- Congregations may choose to act independently from other church groups in meeting various high-priority needs such as planting a church within a nearby ethnic group, initiating a literacy program or developing an evangelistic ministry for a high-risk group of individuals.
- Systemic issues such as advocacy, justice, or community development might be the focus of a broad based collaborative effort.
- Several congregations could partner to serve the identified needs of the local school district, social services, health care or law enforcement agency by providing volunteer help.
- Others may join in launching a strategy within the city to establish houses of prayer throughout a particular neighborhood.

The possibilities are endless!

## **8. Follow-Up Congresses and Repetition of the Process (Evaluation)**

By now it must be clear that city reaching is a multi-year, iterative process. Developing solid and meaningful relationships, encouraging the Church to make major paradigm shifts, taking time to gather and evaluate a mass of data, rallying as much of the Church as possible into a citywide congress—all these things take time, persistence and energy. The task is much more Herculean than a single or series of citywide crusades or house-to-house distribution campaigns!

After many months of preparation leading up to the first congress, the real work begins. The vision must be kept alive. This will require frequent communication through small groups, continuing research, publishing progress reports, providing answers to those participants experiencing roadblocks and then preparing for the next iteration of the process.

There are no quick fixes, no overnight solutions. For the microwave chef who expects instant results, city reaching will not meet their need for immediate gratification. Stephen Covey reminds us of the lesson from the Chinese bamboo tree that “is planted after the earth is prepared, and for the first four years, all of the growth is underground. The only thing visible above the ground is a little bulb and a small shoot coming out of it. Then, in the fifth year, the bamboo tree grows up to eighty feet.”<sup>9</sup>

City reaching involves a repeating cycle that will continue until the Lord comes to give us his day of rest. When the first round of the strategy is complete, there is need to revisit each phase. Leaders are called to other cities and new pastors come to town. The temptation to fall back on mere tactics is always there. Data once gathered is quickly out-of-date and in need of upgrading. Goals that were set must be evaluated to determine if and why they were reached or not reached. New models of ministry are constantly emerging that give hope for greater progress. And, of course, we must regularly evaluate just how far we have come in transforming the city. Each two- to three-year cycle culminates with another citywide Church congress, where a new round of effort begins.

This is the challenge of city reaching. But if you are willing to build the foundation well and persist in the process, the rewards will be beyond imagination and well worth the years of preparation.

### **Power for the Task**

Most of the pastors and leaders I have met with over the past five years desperately want God to visit their cities. Equally compelling to them is the desire to experience the functional unity of the first-century Church presented so graphically in the New Testament. Given a reasonable road map to follow, most will enter the pathway without hesitation. All that has been needed is a clear picture of the destination, an accurate and up-to-date description of where we presently are and mile markers along the way that help us maintain our bearings and keep us on track.

The dynamic strategy I have presented in this chapter is not a passing fad. We are not field-testing some new idea to see if it will work in our setting. I have presented a strategy with demonstrated effectiveness in more than 140 nations. I believe it represents a 21st-century contextualization of possessing the land of Canaan.

I am convinced this strategy embodies the paradigm and approach of the first-century Church, to whom the Great Commission was given, for the 21st-century Church, through whom the Great Commission will likely be completed.

It is time to enter Canaan and possess the inheritance given the Church by the Son on Calvary. The Church is our nation’s only hope. If we do not have the answers to the plight our cities face, then there are no answers. But because of God’s love and by the power of his Spirit, we can reach our cities for Christ. And since we can, we must!

As we have suggested, some readers might be tempted to dismiss the importance of research, goal setting, congresses, even the whole idea of developing a unified strategy.

“What we really need,” you may be saying, “is intercession, the breaking of strongholds, revival and the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit.” We deeply agree! Unless the whole process is under the control of the Spirit, if we don’t break the power of Satan, if each aspect of the strategy is not supported by fervent prayer and intercession, if the Church is not awakened from its slumber, then all our efforts will be to no avail.

### **The Book:**

This chapter is from the author’s book: [City Reaching: on the Road to Community Transformation](#). William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA., 1999. Dr. Dennison’s book is available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

### **For Further Reading:**

Bakke, Ray. *A Theology As Big As The City*. Downers Grove: Ineter Varsity Presss, 1997.

Dawson, John. *Taking Our Cities for God*. Lake Mary: Creation House, 1989.

Haggard, Ted. *Primary Purpose*. Lake Mary: Creation House, 1995.

Linthicum, Robert. *City of God, City of Satan*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.

### **For Reflection and Action:**

- Who is the key leader in your city or community with the ability and vision to lead a broad city-reaching partnership? Has this person been publicly acknowledged?
- Some will suggest Dennison’s model is too complex or takes too long to complete. Given every model will have it’s critics, what % of local leadership participation do you believe is adequate to take the “next step”? What do you think is the next step in your setting?
- If your city is too large to impliment this model as a single process, what are the natural geographic divisions which might be considered for more manageable partnership sizes?
- Many city-reaching partnership leaders have observed that it is easier to gather leaders to pray for city than to set and pursue practical redemptive goals. How do you think this common divide between the “spiritual” and the “practical” can best be bridged?

You may also wish to contact Dr. Glenn Smith who coordinates the “City/Community Transformation” track of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada’s “National Evangelism Partnerships” at (514) 878-3035 or [gsmith@direction.ca](mailto:gsmith@direction.ca)

### **About the Author:**

Dr. Jack Dennison has served as founder and president of CitiReach International, an agency committed to fanning the worldwide flames of city reaching. A former missionary,

seminary professor and local church pastor, Dennison suggests that the cities of the world have moved to the forefront of global mission. Jack and Janice Dennison live in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

---

### Chapter Notes

<sup>1</sup> Developed in chapters 3 and 4 of Jack Dennison, City Reaching: on the Road to Community Transformation. William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA., 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Developed in chapter 5 of Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Developed in chapter 6 of Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Developed in chapter 7 of Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Dennison's speaks from his American experience. We trust the day will come when Canadian authors too will have access to broad Canadian experience. (Editor)

<sup>6</sup> More fully of course in Dennison's complete book.

<sup>7</sup> Mike Regele, Death of the Church, p. 197.

<sup>8</sup> C. Peter Wagner, "Why Body Evangelism Really Works," *Global Church Growth*, May/June 1983, p. 271.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Covey, First Things First, p. 265.

