

Developing and Supporting Indigenous Church Growth Conferences

Summary: This vision anticipates an umbrella organization overseeing the development of indigenous church growth conferences to be held every five years in every nation on earth until our Lord comes.

The Need: By the year 2000 there may yet be billions of persons who have not yet heard a clear presentation of the gospel in their 'heart language' from a person they trust. Many new churches need to be planted and existing churches need to be mobilized for growth.

Indigenous pastors and church planters need to be trained and encouraged in every nation. Cross cultural missionaries are often less effective than indigenous workers and in many countries find entry difficult.

Many fine organizations offer church growth conferences as they are able. Often these conferences are 'packages' with minimal flexibility in responding to the unique needs of the particular country.

There is a need for a conference in each country which focuses on that country with its unique history, needs, geography, political and religious realities and demographics.

The Concept: I believe an organization should be established which would make as its goal the development and support of indigenous church growth conferences in every nation on earth at five year intervals. In any specific nation the plan might develop as follows:

A. Preparation: Local church leaders with suitable gifts and abilities are recruited to help prepare for the conference. (Perhaps an organization already exists in a given country whose goals are similar to those of this concept and which would give staff time to the preparation of the conference.

During the preparation period accurate statistics on the number of churches, Christians, history and growth rates of the Christian movement in various segments of that country, and corporately, are secured. Hidden or unreached peoples are defined. Churches, leaders, and para-church movements particularly successful in winning the lost to responsible membership in the church of Jesus Christ in that nation are identified.

Those invited to the conference as participants would include:

- top leaders of denominations and parachurch organizations, particularly those with responsibilities for evangelism within their organizations,
- indigenous evangelists and church planters
- missionaries from outside of that country
- local pastors
- lay leaders
- seminary teachers and those responsible for curriculum development

Those invited to the conference as speakers and workshop leaders would include:

- recognized church growth leaders in that nation
- pastors of successful local churches
- leaders of successful para-church organizations
- Christian sociologists able to put into perspective and clearly communicate where the nation is in response to the Great Commission at that time and where it has been in proportion to its population growth over the past 50 years.

B. Components: Issues addressed in plenary sessions should include:

1. Statistics:

- Where are we exactly in relation to the Great Commission in our country? In relation to where we were 5 years ago? 50 years? All figures should of course be seen in relation to population growth at that time.
- Where are we in relation to other religious groups? Have they grown more in proportion to the general population or have we? Who is winning, really?
- In which regions has the Christian church been growing best (perhaps indicating a region of receptivity), and in which regions has it been growing least (or declining)?

2. Church Growth Principles:

- Key church growth principles should be taught in a least one plenary session and in one or more workshops.

3. Church Growth Methods:

- At least one plenary session should be devoted to the question, "What has been working in our country, where, and (if possible) why?"
- Effective pastors and church planters should share personally, at least in workshops.

4. Goal Setting:

- One plenary session should be devoted to suggesting which goals might be possible which would move the church closer to the fulfillment of the Great Commission in that country, and perhaps in specific regions, in the next five years.
- Perhaps a final session might include a listing of goals which have indeed been undertaken by participant organizations.

Issues addressed in workshops should include:

1. Workshop for church planters:

- Principles, methods, models.
- Where, specifically, are most new churches needed?

- The development of a prayer and communication network and perhaps an annual regional church planters conference.

2. Workshop for church pastors:

- Resources for church growth.
- Principles, methods and models for church growth.
- Church planting or 'satellites' as a church growth option.

3. Workshop for denominational leaders:

- Sharing ideas for encouraging church planting, denominational growth, and re-vitalization.
- What are growing denominations doing? What is working?
- Regional growth plans.

4. Workshop for para-church leaders:

- Means for incorporation of new believers into new or existing churches.
- Church planting as a new strategy for para-church organizations.
- Fund raising or other common concerns.

5. Workshop for evangelists:

- What is working?
- How to best incorporate new believers into new or existing churches.
- A strategy to cover all the nation.

6. Workshop on hidden peoples:

- Which are the hidden people groups yet unreached or only marginally reached in the nation?
- Who might best be able to reach them?
- What strategies might best be employed during the next five years and what goals might participants set?

7. Workshop on leadership development for youth:

- Career options for Christian youth committed to the fulfillment of the Great Commission in their nation.
- Leadership preparation means and alternatives (education and apprenticeship).

8. Workshop on urban church planting.

C. Goals to be sought during the conference:

1. **Maximum church planting** especially among hidden peoples.
2. **Maximum church growth** among existing churches.
3. **Regional conferences** (perhaps one or more each year during the following four years) with similar structure and goals as the national conference.

The national and regional conferences would be repeated each five years with reports on progress and updated goals for the five years which follow.

D. Costs: Each national and regional conference would seek to be self-supporting with speakers and workshop leaders serving without honorarium.

Question: Which organization would be most likely to adopt such a vision:
(Lausanne? AD 2000 & Beyond? US Center for World Mission? etc.)

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June, 21, 1987