

Fall 2006

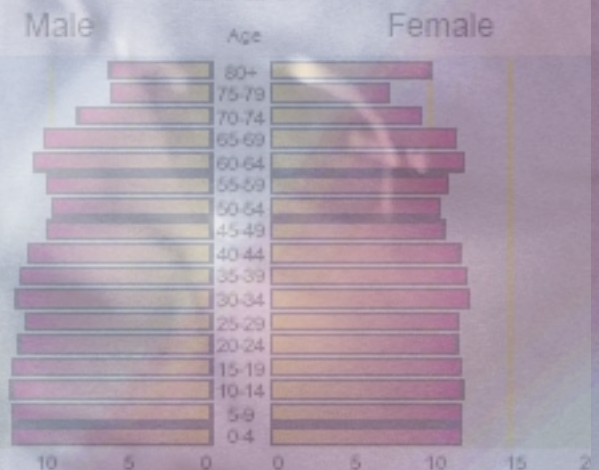
thechurchplanter

The Newsletter of Kurt Miller • National Director of Church Planting • Grace Brethren North American Missions
Issue 11



A Surprising Look at the Future

Opportunity knocks for reaching
the AGING GENERATIONS



Church
ONE Church A DAY

How is Jesus Reaching America?
by Tony Webb

Three Encouragements: The Power of The Spirit,
The Call of God & The Value of Small Things
a message from FGBC National Celebration 2006
by Dr. Terry Hofecker

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National Director of Church Planting



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Newsletter Information

thechurchplanter is the newsletter of Kurt Miller. It's purpose is to encourage and resource church planters and church planting in the Grace Brethren Movement (www.fgbc.org). Current and back issues can be found online at www.gbnam.org.

Also check out the online blog at www.thechurchplanter.blogspot.com.

If you would like to be added to the mailing list for these newsletters please write GBNAM P.O. Box 580, Winona Lake, IN 46590 or call 1-877-91-GBNAM (42626). Assistant Editor: Mike Jentes mike@thequestcolumbus.com

A Surprising Look at the Future

Opportunity knocks for reaching the AGING GENERATIONS

by Kurt Miller

Katie Couric, Diane Sawyer, Harry Smith, Pat Sajak, Vanna White, David Letterman, Regis Philbin: all television personalities still at the top of their game in an industry that, a mere 10 years ago, would have replaced them with the most attractive 'twenty-something' coming down the pike. Today, however, the entertainment and media industries (and others) are making major adjustments in their marketing plans to accommodate and reach the "Baby Boomer Generation" again. The reasons are quite simple: 1) The baby boomer generation represents the largest population of people in North America and will continue to do so for the next forty years.¹ 2) The baby boomer represents the richest population in American history with a spending power of 2.1 trillion dollars!²

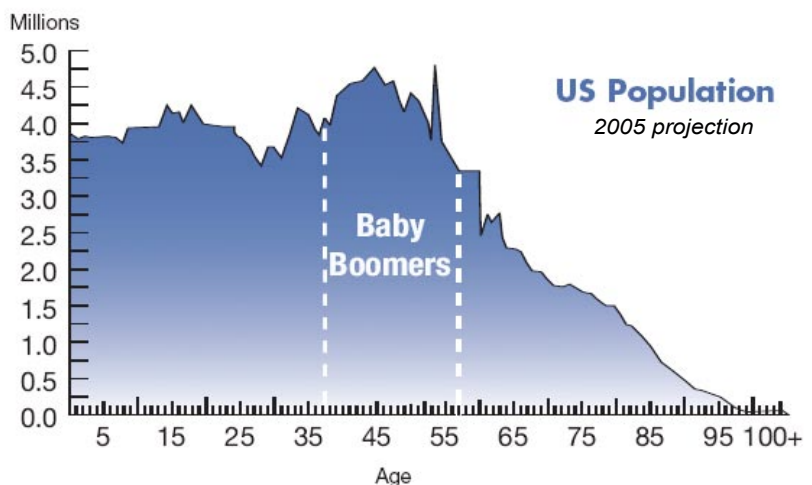
I am a baby boomer. I was born in 1949. The majority of my church-planting ministry took place in Florida, where 4.55 million baby boomers live. These two facts have probably influenced my thinking more than I realize, but for more than 20 years I have been talking about the need to retool the North American church in three areas: To reach the "strangers living in our land;" to minister to the disadvantaged and distressed (the widows and orphans in their distress) and to adjust our church-development and church-planting strategies to effectively bring Jesus to the increasing number of retiring people. Previous issues of *thechurchplanter* have addressed my first two concerns. This issue focuses awareness on the most dramatic demographic change in United States history, one which has just now started and that will not peak for 25 years: an upheaval in the demographic makeup of the North American population.

Throughout my pastoral ministry, I volunteered as a chaplain in nursing homes and ministered to older adults regularly. I was taught by my parents to give high regard and respect to older people. When the Lord assigned me to church planting in Florida, our church regularly included and ministered to the aging generation. Older people were part of that community atmosphere. When fall came, we observed an obvious increase of traffic on our highways and streets and congestion in our local shops and restaurants. The "snow-birds" were back. So dramatic was the change that we used to jokingly say that our church was an evangelistic outreach center to Ohio!

In these few pages, I want to share some significant demographic material gleaned from the United States government and industry. I also want to share some of my observations as to the great evangelistic opportunity before the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC) if we can get "ahead of the curve" and not remain, as has all too often been the case, behind it.

I conducted a workshop on this topic at the Grace Brethren National Celebration in Indian Wells, California this past July. Let me repeat a comment I made there, "I don't have all the answers. I don't even know all the questions, but I hope that I can be used in some prophetic way to bring an amazing opportunity to your attention."

My desire is for our Fellowship to become



Source: MetLife Mature Market Institute Analysis
Population Projections Program
US Census Bureau, 2000

¹ US Census Bureau ² From MetLife's Mature Market Institute (see graphic on page 7).

aware of, and respond to, this information by beginning a serious dialogue. I want to invite discussion and conversation on how to evangelize the 77 million baby boomers (26.75% of the population)³ living in the United States today, the vast majority who still do not know Jesus as their Savior! Together, I believe we can find some solutions.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The “baby boom” has been well noted, but for clarity it refers to people born in the post-World War II period from 1946 through 1964. In the same way we talk today about reaching the “postmodern generation,” evangelicals were talking about reaching the “baby-boomers” years ago.

This “baby boom” has progressed through the aging cycle. It propelled the largest percentage increase of any age group in the 1990-2000 decade according to an analysis of Census 2000 data by the US Commerce Department’s Census Bureau. People born during the early years of the baby boom (1946 through 1950) fueled a 55% increase of 50 to 54 year-olds, the largest percentage growth between 1990 and 2000 of any five-year age group in the history of the United States. The second fastest-growing group was 45 to 49 year olds which registered a 45% increase.

If we paint with a broader brush, we find that the 2000 census data portrays that all those 55 years of age and older total 59 million people, or 21% of the US population. When you include the next decade of people, those 45 years old and older, it totals 97 million Americans, or 34.4% of the entire U.S. population.

The demographic data points to a wave of aging Americans. Figure 3 shows the percent change by age from the 1990 census to the 2000 census. In almost every category from 40 years of age and up there is a significant jump in percentages. Throughout history, the population of most societies has consisted of many more babies and young people rather than older people. Mortality of the human race took its effect over the years and fewer and fewer people made it to be older adults. The population structure looked like a “pyramid” with a base of young people; as the years went by there were fewer and fewer older people. In fact, very few people passed the age of 85 or 90.

However, the demographic data and projections about the future of America have changed dramatically, surprising even the most astute demographers. Today the Census Bureau, Social Security Administration and the life insurance industry are telling us we have entered an era that does not have a society with a “pyramid-appearing” population structure.

Rather, the whole population is shifting toward a majority of older adults with a smaller base of youth. Consider the Population Age Structure Comparison at the top of the following page.

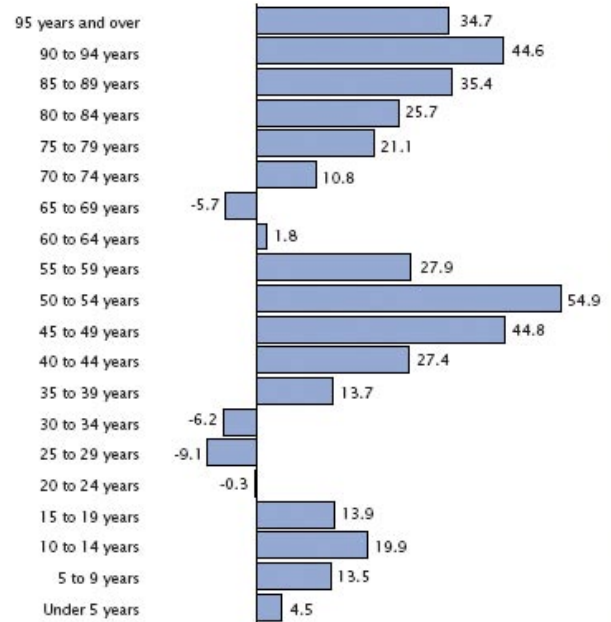
People are also living longer. After the Vietnam War baby boomers entered into the cold war era, a time of relative world peace, with few lives given in war. Additionally, advances in medical science and treatment coupled with financial prosperity have allowed Americans to live significantly longer lives. In 1900, life expectancy at birth was 47.9 years for males and 50.7 years for females. In 2003, life expectancy at birth was projected to be 74.8 for males and 80.1 for females. The Life Expectancy graph to the left demonstrates the trend over the last century.

The impact on America because of these changes in population will be broad

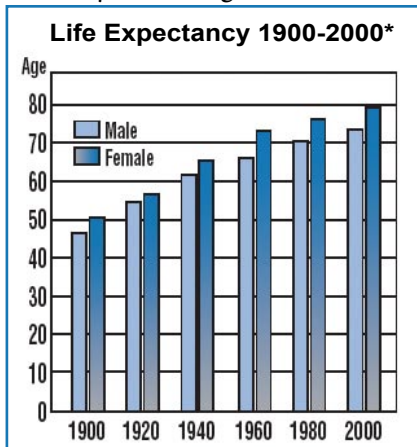
Figure 3.

Percent Change by Age: 1990 to 2000

(For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf1.pdf)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1; 1990 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, United States (1990 CP-1-1).



Population Age Structure Comparison: 1980 and projected 2025 (in millions)

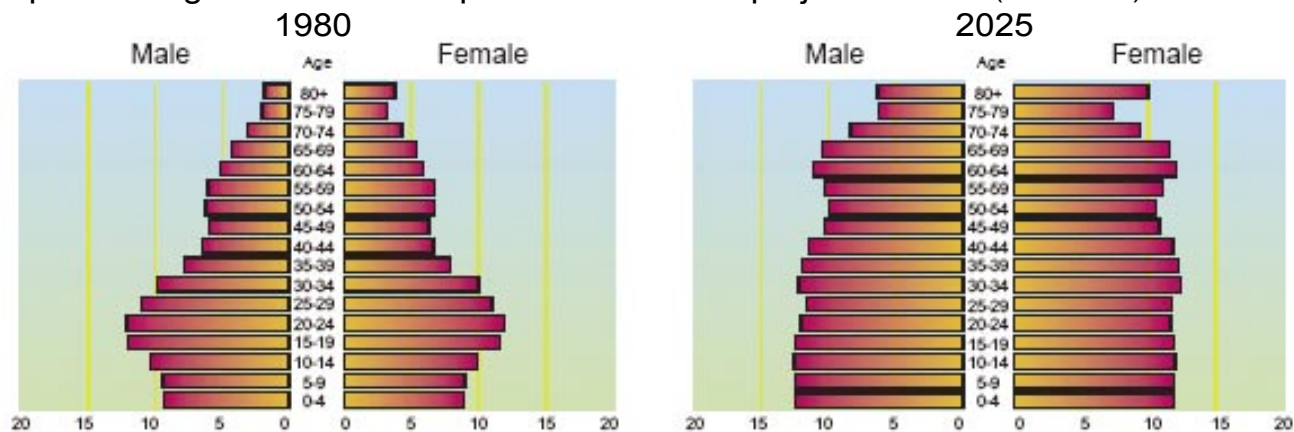


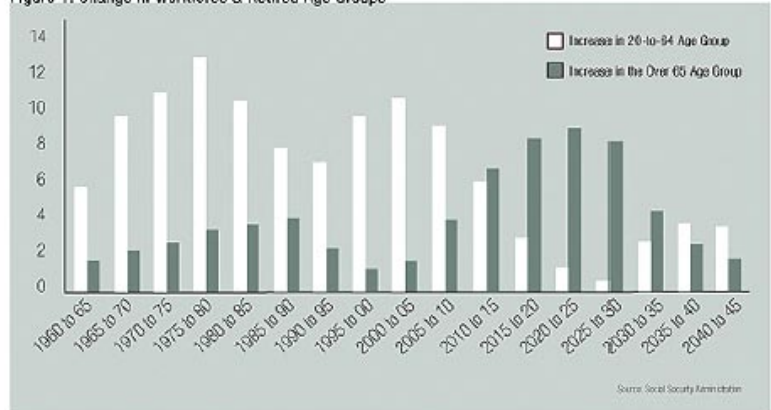
Chart from *Aging in the Americas into the XXI Century* by US Dept. of Commerce and Bureau of the Census
<http://www.census.gov/ipc/prod/ageame.pdf>

and varied. For instance, the United States Social Security Administration (SSA) has been wrestling with how to remain solvent as they anticipate the projected numbers of retired people living longer than ever before imagined. Many studies have been done and strategies discussed to address this issue with few satisfactory answers.

Look, for example, at the change in the “Workforce” and the “Retired” groups in the chart below (Figure 1). As far back as 1960, the American economy has benefited from strong growth of the 20 to 64 age group, historically considered the primary source of labor. Starting around 2010, a demographic shift will begin, resulting in a large increase in the 65 and over age group and a decline of the 20 to 64 age group. By 2015, the 65 and over age group starts to grow at a faster rate than the 20 to 64 age group to the point that in years 2015-2030 the shocking reality exists that the retired population will be significantly disproportionate to the workforce.

The question is already being asked, “Who is going to do the work”? Will the boomer work longer? Will we have a major shortage in the workforce? What will happen to America’s economy? The number of retired people will continue to grow and there have not been nearly enough people born to replace them in the work force. Exasperating the situation is the fact that the North American birth rate continues to shrink.

Figure 1: Change in Workforce & Retired Age Groups



FURTHER THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS

The Boomer generation is bringing its collective influence to the American culture with millions of people and trillions of dollars. Their sheer mass and spending power make this generation the most powerful in U.S. history. This generation has been characterized by a focus on sex, money and power. They brought fast food, franchises, computers, the world wide web and MTV to the world. They mastered the epicurean way of life and most have given little thought to what will happen when they die.

Will this change? I don’t know. But I do know that they are beginning to enter one of the primary transition periods of life: retirement. They will spend billions every year to live longer. But death will loom larger in their minds as they grow older. We must not miss the long-term implications and opportunities of this issue. We have 25 to 40 years to reach a huge population of Americans who are living longer, are working longer and have the most available ‘spendable’ income of any group of people in the history of the world. This group will start to decline slowly in about 25

³ 2005 US Census projections numbers taken from *A Profile of American Baby Boomers* by MetLife’s Mature Market Institute. Figure 1 SSA [Social Security Administration] * These charts from *A Profile of American Baby Boomers* by MetLife’s Mature Market Institute.

More>>

Ranking of Older US Population to Country Populations for 2000

1	China	1,268,853,362
2	India	1,004,124,224
3	United States	282,338,631
4	Indonesia	213,829,469
5	Brazil	175,552,771
6	Russia	146,709,971
7	Pakistan	146,342,958
8	Bangladesh	130,406,594
9	Japan	126,699,784
10	Nigeria	114,306,700
11	Mexico	99,926,620
>>	USA (only 45 yrs.+)	96,944,389
12	Germany	82,187,909
13	Philippines	79,739,825
14	Vietnam	79,060,410
15	Egypt	70,492,342
16	Turkey	65,666,677
17	Ethiopia	64,690,052
18	Iran	63,273,255
19	Thailand	61,862,928
20	United Kingdom	59,522,468
21	France	59,381,628
>>	USA (only 55 yrs.+)	59,266,437
22	Italy	57,719,337

World Populations for 2000 from www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/idbrank.pl

Continued from page 5>>

years. Will we respond to the opportunity to win them to Jesus Christ?

As we recognize the size of this opportunity, we must compare the population globally to get our heads around it. In sheer numbers, the aging population in America is larger than all but 12 countries in our world (See graphic to the left). A huge mission field exists right within our reach!

Within the church the tension of this shift is becoming all too obvious. Conventional wisdom in the church has typically said, "We need to reach younger people because they are the future of the church." The argument has been made to restructure churches to appeal to those less than 30 years old, even less than 20 years old, and right down to the children.

Historically this made sense. The Builder Generation (the generation that lived immediately prior to the Boomer Generation) was the base that the rest of the population rested on. But that base has changed. It has shrunk and there is fear that the country is now teetering on a small and fragile population and economic base. Many of the early boomers are feeling left in the dust of the rapid changes being made in churches who have a zeal to attract younger people (the smallest demographic). They are asking the question, Why are we being ignored, isolated or even dispossessed from our churches? We are the ones who built these churches and we are the ones still paying the majority of the bills. Whether this attitude is right or wrong is part of the dialogue. It is my contention that these and other

difficult scenarios will continue to confront the church for the next several decades. It may be possible for the Baby Boomer to say, "The future of the church is with us." And, the simple demographics would appear to support that theory. They are the majority population. They have the money and the spending power to go with it. However, the question must be asked, "Will they do it"? A variety of recent polls and research seem to indicate that the boomer generation has been one of the least evangelistic generations, is less inclined to attend church regularly and to read their Bibles daily. The actual number of Boomers who are members of a local church has shrunk dramatically and the total number of churches in America is declining at an all-time record rate.

Outside the church, there has never been a larger population of people at our doorstep who are in need of Jesus' love. At a time when many Grace Brethren churches are "at risk," would we feel free to grant some of these churches permission, even give them encouragement, to assume responsibility to primarily evangelize their peers and not to worry so much about

reaching young families? Would we be delighted if a church decided to primarily target the retiring people in their community? Would we be excited and praise the Lord if a church de-

BABY BOOMER STATISTICS comparing the decades

Younger Boomers Born 1956-1964

Older Boomers Born 1946-1955

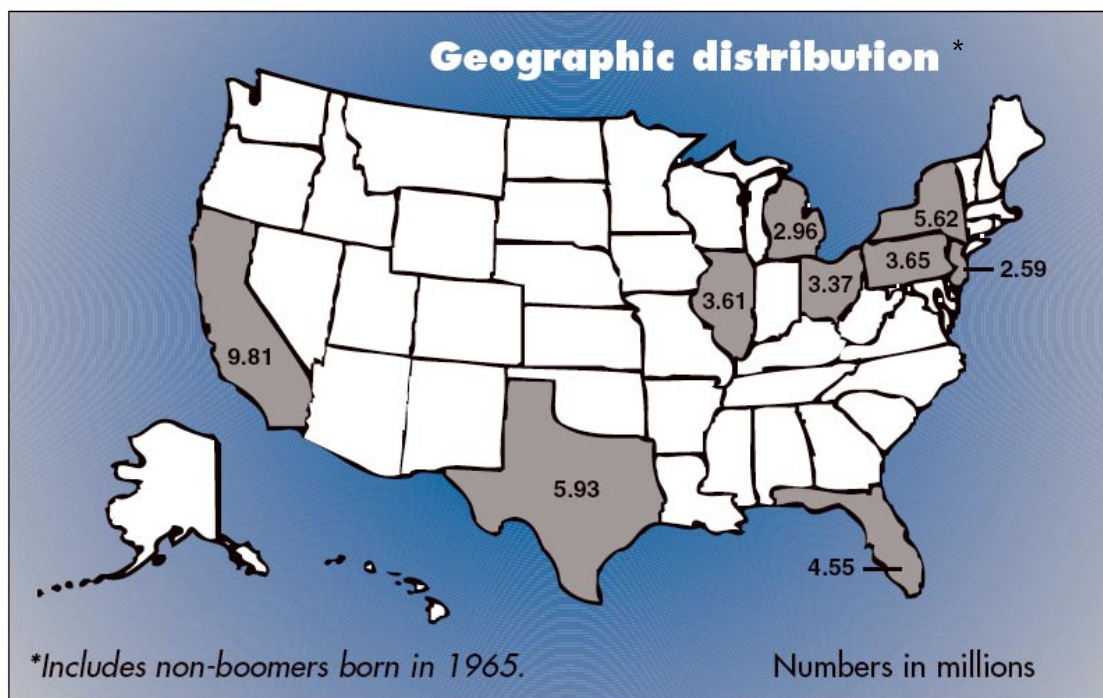
• Estimated Spending Power	\$1.1 Trillion	\$1 Trillion
• Total number of households	23.9 million	21.9 million
• Average number of people in household	3.3	2.7
• Avg number of children under 18 in household	1.3	0.6
• Average number of earners in household	1.7	1.8
• Annual average household income	\$56,500	\$58,889
• Annual average spending per household	\$45,149	\$46,160 *

cided to relocate into or near to a retirement community? Would we be thrilled to see church planting take place in planned communities or condominium complexes built for the “over 55” crowd?

I’m not suggesting that we cease developing churches targeting younger people, but I am suggesting that it ought not to be an either/or decision. While we plant churches to reach young families, we should also consider planting churches exclusively for older people too. And, we should encourage many of our existing churches with an average age over 55 to get to work reaching the people they failed to reach while growing up. There are plenty of Baby Boomers who need the Lord and they have lots of money to pay the bills!

The Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches is perfectly postured to reach the baby boomer. The majority of our churches are ‘smack-dab’ in the middle of the major concentrations of retiring boomers. The largest regional concentration of baby boomers live in the Northeast and Midwest, with 7 million living in Pennsylvania and Ohio alone where the vast majority of Grace

Brethren churches are located. Will we rise to the occasion? God is the author of demography. He determines the times and the seasons of people and nations. He has chosen to bless America with good health and prosperity in order that people will live longer and have a longer time to seek and find Him. Imagine with me the global implications if Grace Brethren people in America took seriously the challenge



to evangelize and make disciples of the 97 million people, 45 years old and up, unleashing the vast coffers of resources being held by them for the Kingdom of God. We have about 25 years to do it. Will we? I think we are here for such a time as this. Δ

CHECK IT OUT YOURSELF: websites for further information on Boomers and the Aging Generation

Aging in the Americas into the XXI Century by US Dept. of Commerce and Bureau of the Census
www.census.gov/ipc/prod/ageame.pdf

A Profile of American Baby Boomers by MetLife Mature Market Institute®
www.metlife.com/WPSAssets/18827370211149688405V1FBoomerProfile6206.pdf

National Institute on Aging www.nia.nih.gov

Administration on Aging- US Department of Health and Human Services www.aoa.gov

Age Lab by MIT <http://web.mit.edu/agelab>

Living Longer, Working Longer: The Changing Landscape of the Aging Workforce – A MetLife Study. MetLife Mature Market Institute®
http://web.mit.edu/agelab/news_events/pdfs/longevitystudy.pdf

A Profile of Older Americans: 2005 by Administration on Aging
www.aoa.gov/PROF/Statistics/profile/2005/2005profile.pdf

An Aging World: 2001 International Population Reports by US Department of Commerce and National Institute on Aging
www.nia.nih.gov/NR/rdonlyres/A69F17DC-3B7D-4C3C-A90A-96CACE6E7EDF/0/agingworld2001.pdf

* These statistics and charts were taken from A Profile of American Baby Boomers prepared by MetLife’s Mature Market Institute.

ONE Church A DAY

by Tony Webb

Jesus Christ's plan to penetrate all cultures with His gospel is His church. We should not be surprised to see Jesus do amazing things around and about His church!

Years ago I came across an amazing passage of Scripture about what was happening in the early church. In Acts 16:5, I read: "So the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number daily" (NASB). As I pondered and studied this passage, I realized that grammatically, this is a single subject – "churches" – with a compound verb: "strengthened in faith" and "increasing in number daily." So Luke was making a profound statement about the expansion of His church—the churches were increasing daily!

I believe that Jesus was birthing one church a day (at least one per day, most likely more) at this time in Asia Minor! I see in the Gospels and the book of Acts how God had prepared the soil for such a movement of church expansion. From Jesus' feeding the 5,000 men (adding to this women and children), to the table of nations in Acts 2:9-10 (listing the "regions" in Asia Minor that heard) being impacted by Pentecost, to Paul's missionary journeys—we see how God prepared the soil for an incredible church multiplication movement!

What about today? What about in our regions? How prepared are we for such a church multiplication movement? Expansive church multiplication movements are documented all around the world, except in America.¹ America is seeing 3,300 churches a year close in America. On the flip side, we are planting 3,660 churches a year² (so we are seeing "ten a day" in America!). This is across a scope of nearly 300,000,000 people.³ Do we believe Jesus can do this increase of a church a day again in the region where we live? Are we desirous to beg God for a "one a day" church multiplication movement in our region or cities?

As we think about this idea, we ought to begin by asking God about soil preparation. In examining the "one a day" increase in churches in Acts 16, we saw God preparing that region for fruitfulness. We need to ask

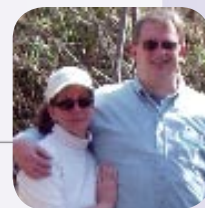
ourselves, "What am I doing to be a part of God's soil preparation work?"

One of the answers to this question is prayer. Prayer is powerful soil prep! There is a plethora of ways to pray. We should do what Jesus puts on our hearts to do. Here's one suggestion of a way that has been successful—prayerwalk a community. Maybe it's your community; maybe it's a new place where you want to see a church start. A prayerful ministry of presence is life changing! There is no wasted effort when we consider what it takes to prepare soil for receiving the gospel!

May we not be the people who "demand" only certain results relating to church planting. I'm thinking here of the truism we cling to in personal evangelism—that each person needs to hear the gospel seven times before they receive it. Maybe God "works" the same way in church planting. Maybe "one-hit" or "drive-by" prayer efforts aren't enough. Perhaps we need to pray a certain amount, prayerwalk a few miles; circle a community seven times, or support efforts that lack glamour, but are crucial to the Lord's preparation of the soil.

Our desire and our prayers should fall in line with our Jesus. He is working on building His Church through local churches. May we pray and work toward seeing Jesus increase local churches in number daily in our regions and cities. One Church A Day! Δ

Tony and his wife Cathy have served at Southwest Grace Brethren Church in Grove City, OH for 15 years. Tony is also part-time with the VisionOhio Church Planting Operations Center.



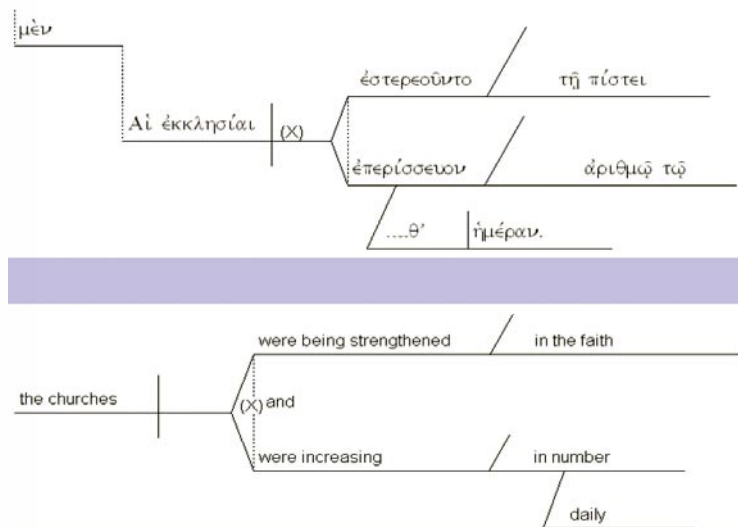
¹ Church Planting Movements by David Garrison. WIGTake Resources © 2003, p. 35ff.

² Statistics from David T. Olson—"Quick Facts about the American Church" © 2006 www.theamericanchurch.org

³ CIA World FactBook. The population of the United States is listed as 298,444,215 (July 2006 est.) <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/us.html#People>

IT'S IN THERE >>>

In case you are wanting to see where “one church a day” comes from in the Biblical text, here is the diagram of the last part of Acts 16:5. The Greek is on the top and English translation at the bottom. You can see that “churches” were increasing in number daily!



QUICKFACTS about the American Church

Fact #1 The Lowest States in the percentage of the population attending a Christian church in 2000 were:

1. Utah
2. Nevada
3. Maine
4. Idaho
5. New Hampshire

Fact #2 The Highest States in the percentage of the population attending a Christian church in 2000 were:

1. Louisiana
2. North Dakota
3. South Dakota
4. Alabama
5. Mississippi

Fact #3 The only state to grow in church attendance faster than population growth from 1990 - 2000 was Hawaii. The other 49 declined.

Fact #9 3,200 churches close their doors each year.

Fact #10 3,660 new churches are started each year that survive.

Fact #11 There was a net gain of 4,600 churches in the United States from 1990 - 2000.

Fact #12 While there was a net gain of 4,600 churches from 1990 - 2000, to have kept up with population growth there needed to be a net gain of 38,802.

Fact #13 Assuming that the existing church rate stays the same, the American church would need 3,300 additional new churches every year to keep up with population growth.

Fact #14 The United States church planting rate is one half of what it was in the 1950's.

Statistics from David T. Olson—"Quick Facts about the American Church" © 2006 www.theamericanchurch.org

Three Encouragements: The Spirit, What God Wants & Small Things

by Dr. Terry Hofecker

An edited transcription of the message "Not by Might, Nor by Power" delivered by Dr. Hofecker at the July 2006 FGBC National Celebration in Indian Wells, CA.

I'm absolutely convinced that our bravest, our toughest, our least celebrated pastors and churches are our only hope for the future. I pray for you pastors and churches—willingly. When there is opportunity—I sacrifice for you. For the most part, you live in a culture that says "bigger is better." And "if you are small, there is something wrong with you, something has gone off track somewhere." I don't believe it's true.

Since I feel called of God, to bring a message that appropriately honors—and hopefully challenges and encourages—the real heroes, the real hope of our denomination, where can I find a biblical analogy?

As I prayed about this, I ended up turning back the pages of history twenty-five hundred years and turning the pages of my Bible back to the end of the Old Testament, to the next to the last book of the Old Testament, the book of Zechariah, chapter 4. In this passage, we are going to come across a familiar verse. I want you to keep it in its appropriate context, because I've heard it dozens of times to launch new ministry initiatives, evangelistic campaigns, and building programs. And that is not the context in which it was given. It wasn't given to great leaders attempting great things with fantastic amounts of resources. It was given to one man, standing knee deep in weeds and ruins, who after twenty years could not get one building project accomplished.

Zechariah 4:1-5 Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. ²And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lamp stand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. ³"Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." ⁴So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?" ⁵Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."*

Zechariah is Hebrew apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature communicates through highly symbolic visions and dreams. Zechariah is filled with these very challenging to interpret passages.

What did the angel reveal? We would call it a menorah. That seven-branched lamp stand with olive oil lamps upon it that is now the symbol of Judaism was an important part of the furniture of the tabernacle and the temple.

This one is a little unusual, however, because not only does it have the seven branches and the olive oil lamps but those lamps are connected by pipes or channels to a reservoir or bowl. That means that as they burn they will be fed from this giant bowl. Olive oil—the petroleum, the electricity of the ancient world—will flow into them and they'll stay alight. Not only that, besides having this bowl there, this bowl is apparently fed by two olive trees; one on the right and one on the left. So not only do you have a reservoir keeping this going, but you are always connected to a renewable source of fuel. Today a better picture might be a series of electric lamps and a large cable going back and plugging into some kind of hydro-electric dam or a nuclear power plant. It's a picture of unending energy—limitless power!



Since Zechariah did not have me to explain it, when asked, "*Do you know what these are?*" He answered, "*No my Lord.*" So in verse six, the angel explains what it is.

"So he answered and said to me: 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts.'"

Sometime around 538 BC, a tired and distinguished looking Jewish gentleman, topped one of the hills surrounding Jerusalem and looked down upon the city. The city that he looked down upon wasn't the sprawling modern city of today. It wasn't the sturdy ten-acre fortress of David's day. It was a tangled mess of overgrown ruins with a few tiny houses scattered in it. It had to be a shock for him.

He was the grandson of a king of Judah. Although he was the grandson of a king of Judah according to Matthew 1:12, both his father and he had been born in Babylon and consequently had never seen the holy city—the capital of his people and the place where true worship to the Lord should be carried out in obedience to the sacrificial laws of Moses. It had to be disappointing.

I am convinced that within hours of his arrival, Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Jeconiah, probably made his way to the Temple Mount. The formation of archaeological sites has not changed. The physics of it and the climate over there hasn't changed over the centuries so we can pretty much tell what he would have seen after

*Scripture Texts in this article are in italics and from the New King James Version.

those many decades of abandonment. When a building is ruined, very quickly gravity brings down the walls to six feet high or less. The rainy season brings in alluvial wash. The dry season brings in blowing dust. After only a few years, seeds have come in and taken sprout and there are weeds and brambles.

So Zerubbabel, somewhere in those first hours or days back, strolled to the place where God promised there would be a testimony to Him. The place where God had promised there would be His house. The place where God had promised there would be worship of Him. But he found himself standing knee deep in weeds and ruins.

He poured his heart into re-gathering his people. And yet with thousands of returnees, and the permission of the Persian government, twenty years later when Zechariah writes the book the temple is still not finished.

In those early days, he must have dreamed that it would be simple. He must have dreamed that surely God would be with him. As he responded to this sacrificial call, to leave all the comfort of the center of civilization of its day—in the Euphrates valley and the Persian empire—and to come here; to this distant province of Judea, he must have thought, “Surely the Lord will be with me. Surely His hand will be there. This will happen!” So, after twenty years, you can imagine how he felt and how much he needed this word that says,

“Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts. ⁷ ‘Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of “God bless it! God bless it!”’ ⁸ Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying: ⁹ ‘The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. ¹⁰ For who despises the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.”

I would like to offer you, from the passage that we are looking at today, three encouragements about following the call of God, about the power of faithfulness. These are three encouragements that we all need as we face some of the superficial aspects, comparisons and measurements of 21st-century American Christianity.

The first is there in verse 6 where we read, *“Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts.”* It is not about your strength. It is not about my strength. It is all about the Spirit of God. If He doesn’t show up—all of this technology, all of these gimmicks of modernity that impress so many people in our big-box, retail, Christian Wal-Marts is hollow and shallow.

Satan has maneuvered smaller churches into attempting at times to be “slave’s flatteries” to these big-box, super-churches and mega-churches. But the real power smaller churches have is in the intimacy of fellowship, in the immediacy of discipleship, in the power for pastors to expose their lives openly and deeply to people around them. It is the power of faithfulness. It is the power of authenticity. It is the power of the anointing of God’s Spirit and making a welcome place for people who would otherwise be rejected and unaccepted.

It’s not about your strength or the depth of your talent or the wisdom of your strategy. It is all about the substance of God’s Spirit.

Now you can’t buy “Spirit-in-a-box.” You can buy “church-in-a-box” if you have the tens and tens of thousands of dollars to do it. But you really can’t buy “Spirit-in-a-box.” He is delighted to be invited. He is delighted to come. And you know, He is not nearly as discriminating as the average American church shopper.

He doesn’t only seek out the churches with glitzy promotion. He doesn’t only seek out the churches with tens of thousands of dollars spent on church programming. The Holy Spirit is pleased to show up, to manifest Himself, to work in the smallest and most intimate of environments.

It’s not about the strength we are able to bring to bear on anything. It is about the Spirit. In the most impossible situation—where we are standing knee deep in the weeds of people’s problems and the ruins of other pastor’s poor choices and failures, and maybe even a few of our own—the Lord says, *“It’s not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit.”* We can’t replace the Spirit with technology. We can’t replace the Spirit with the latest trend. We can’t replace the Spirit with the latest gimmick. We can’t really do without Him.

One of my favorite events of recent church history is the Welsh revival of 100 years ago—a remarkable event. It even affected the behavior of the ponies in the coal mines that were used to move coal. Because so many of the miners were transformed, the ponies were no longer doing what they were told without cursing, anger and profanity. New ponies had to be brought in and trained. A revival that began in the small, rural churches of Wales left a lasting impression for decades worldwide.

It’s not about the strength of your ministry as measured in human terms. It’s about what the Spirit desires to do through you, through a man or woman surrendered to Him. This is the Word of the Lord to Zerubbabel as you stand there knee deep in the ruins; as you stand feeling hopeless in the weeds; as you stand there after twenty years being frustrated in your plans; *“It is not by might, it is not by power but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts.”*

“Who are you O great mountain?” That’s the second encouragement I want to bring to you. It’s not about what is possible, but what God wants.

There is a lot of debate among scholars about what this “mountain” is in verse 7. “Who are you O great mountain?” Is it literal? Is it metaphorical? Is it apocalyptic? I mean is it literally referring to Mount Moriah and all the work that has to be done there? Is it somehow referring to the transformation of the Kidron Valley and the Mount of Olives and all that has to take place there in the apocalyptic promises of the Old Testament? Or is it metaphorical? Does it refer to the challenge that is in front of Zerubbabel?

“Who are you O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel (not in some apocalyptic day, but before Zerubbabel) you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’” or with shouts of “God bless it, God bless it.”

If the cornerstone is the first stone laid in the building of any ancient structure, what is the capstone? It is the last. The last stone will be laid and the people will celebrate. People are like that. They want to celebrate the completion not the process. They are so focused on the product and enjoying that which is final. We struggle with this whole message of faithfulness and how God delights in the process more than the product.

But here Zerubbabel is told that in his impossible situation there is the promise of God that whatever God has appointed him to fulfill will be brought to completion. And that which seems impossible will be done.

It is not about what is possible in our lives or what is reasonable or what is practical, but it is always about only one thing—what does God want. We need to rediscover that powerful, subjective call of God.

I don’t know if there is any hope for us as Grace Brethren if we don’t discover again that as human beings we are logopathic creatures. We are not just cognitive beings. We are not just thinking beings. But we are a logo-pathic whole. We are beings of both logic and passion. And God uses both of those to lead us. God uses both of those to call us. There is a sense that whatever we are doing should be something we believe is not just logical, but is written on the tablets of our hearts. That God has called us to do it.

It is worth revisiting on a regular basis asking God, “Am I called to do this? You don’t realize how this seems absolutely impossible. This seems insane. I have people already telling me that it’s unwise. Is it what YOU want God?”

It’s not about our strength, but the Spirit. It is not about what is possible, but what God wants.

Verses 9-10 “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it.

Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. ¹⁰For who despises the day of small things?

Many of you know that verse 10 is a rhetorical question. The answer should be obvious.

Who despises the day of small things? The Scripture rhetorically says—no one! It would be insane to despise the day of small things! Reality is all about living through the day of small things. It is about taking a handful of seed and toiling tirelessly in the sun planting that seed. Burying it. Giving up on it. Having it be hopeless. Watching it sprout as tiny little stalks of green—a bare green fuzz, not even a carpet upon that soil. That’s life. It is a very difficult life when you lived in an agricultural subsistence society where if that didn’t come to fruition, your family would starve.

But nobody despises the day of small things appointed as part of the substance of life because that is life!

I suppose verse 10 has been a rhetorical question until mid-twentieth century America when somehow or other—because of influences of our secular culture—the church

Who despises the day of small things? The Scripture rhetorically says—no one!

began to believe that only bigger is better. Who despises the day of small things? Secretly the majority of the people who sit in North American chairs and pews. They despise the day of small things. The only measurement they’ve ever been taught by their culture and from most of their churches are the nickels and noses of numerical growth and not the substance of spiritual reality or the challenge of wrestling for true character and redemption of broken lives. They only care about the superficial measurement of how many people fill some chairs or pews and how much money flows from them to some account so that checks can be written out. Mostly they go back to putting more people in those chairs so that more checks can be written, so more people can be in those chairs, so more checks can be written. It’s a vicious cycle of self-service and not sacrifice.

You realize we could make a solid biblical argument for saying that as a Fellowship of Churches we should have an established salary that would be adequate for a leader of a congregation—solo pastor, senior pastor, or someone leading any congregation in North America. Then it wouldn’t matter what size the church is, but rather how much we give that man and his family to survive. There

could be solid biblical arguments made for doing just that. But I won't hold my breath.

In North America we secretly want financial incentives for the churches to get bigger. We want there to be ego incentives for the churches to get bigger. Because in the end what we want is bigger churches. We want more nickels and we want more noses. And we'll do almost whatever trick it takes to get them.

Yet while we pursue all this, I am convinced that there is this amazing band of faithful men and women who hear the call of God and go and attempt to do difficult things, with difficult populations, in difficult places. And while nobody is overt about it, there is the subtle message that while they are pursuing the call of God—they are really not successful.

I've personally never seen a measure of success in Scripture that goes beyond obedience and faithfulness to God. I've never seen the Scriptures hold out any other standard than to hear what God says and be faithful in

So the Spirit of God rejoices to see what—“...*the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.*” You all know what a plumb line is. It is used to get a vertical. Even to this very day, you hang a heavy weight at the end of a string and you hold it up. Sometimes you have a frame brace so that you can hold it. And when you let it hang there and it finally comes to rest, through the power of gravity you have a perfect vertical line to use for construction and surveying.

It strikes me that what the Lord delights in comes in great contrast to what the people celebrate in verse 7. The people in verse seven celebrate the product. The Lord celebrates the process. It is Zerubbabel engaged in that seemingly impossible task of building a house of the Lord in the midst of weeds and rubble that the Lord delights in! The Lord is impressed with this because He knows that takes faith.

Any fool can show up at a mega-church with a staff and a budget and computers and equipment—and, trust me, many fools do. But the real heroes of our faith are

I've never seen the Scriptures hold out any other standard than to hear what God says and be faithful in following it. That is the biblical definition of success.

following it. That is the biblical definition of success.

And by that definition, my heroes—who are leading ministries of 300 and under—their families and their flock; those people, those brave heroes are powerfully, powerfully successful.

It is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit. It is not about what is possible, but about what God wants. It is not about the superficials and the gimmicks, but about real substance.

We've all drunk deeply at the well of our culture. We've heard them say to us that things are accomplished through the strength of modernity and strategy. We've heard them say you've got to be rational and reasonable about what you are trying to do. We've heard them say that bigger is better. And we have believed it.

What about the real heroes who get up everyday and go do it, even though they are subtly receiving messages that it's not significant? It's so much like Satan to be able to turn the way God looks at things “upside-down” and then to have us look at in the opposite way.

What does it say in verse 10? “*For these seven rejoice to see...*” What are the seven? They are the eyes of the Lord. Very often that is a Hebrew way of using the plural to express majesty and very often used of the Spirit of God.

those men and women, who contrary to the message of our culture, do not despise the day of small things. They delight, as the Lord delights, in the process and not in the product. They measure things by substance and not superficiality and shallowness.

You are our backbone churches—you men and women who are so courageous to do this—even though your Christian culture is subtly sending you messages that it isn't significant. In a recent Christianity Today, Mark Galli wrote these words, “We too easily imagine that growing numbers are an infallible sign of faithfulness. We are confusing righteousness with arithmetic.”

You men and women that resist this disempowering, cultural definition of success are the real hope and future of our Fellowship. God does not despise the day of small things. God delights in the people that are faithful in the process. And the backbone of our Fellowship will always be the men, women and children who make up our backbone churches. I admire what you do—with all of my heart, all of my soul and all of my passion. We need to constantly support and encourage one another. We need to constantly ask not who owns it, but who needs it. Thank you for all you do. Δ

Dr. Terry Hofecker is Senior Pastor at the Northwest Chapel Grace Brethren Church in Dublin, OH

How is JESUS Reaching America?

by Tony Webb

Jesus said, "I will build my church." (Matt 16:18). For the last 2,000 years we can look historically at what Jesus Christ has done in expanding His Church. What is so wonderful for all of us today is the unique privilege we have to be a part of Jesus' work in building His church – today! As He is still building His Church so we can observe some cues about how Jesus is doing His work here in America. .

When we observe the Church in America by looking at the local churches in our country, we can get some handle on how Jesus is reaching America. 85% of local churches have attendances of less than 250 people. Another 10% of local churches in America have between 251-400 people in attendance. So by observation, we can see that 95% of the local churches in America are 400 or less.*

So it would seem obvious that Jesus' plan to build His Church involves smaller churches reaching Americans in an American culture! We like to call them "backbone churches." These churches are smaller numerically and maybe even unnoticed in our church culture. They are often strapped financially and unsure of themselves relating to vision, but Jesus is deciding to use these churches!

We can more easily connect with Jesus Christ's amazing plan for reaching America as we observe these "backbone churches." Jesus' only plan is to multiply disciples and churches!

I desire to be a part of the expansion of backbone churches that are passionate about sharing Jesus Christ.

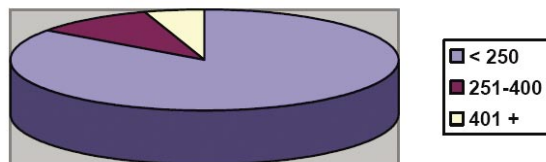
Micropolitan Church Planting

You can find out more about what is happening in the Micropolitan Church Planting Initiative by checking out our link from this website: www.churchaday.com

Prayer is key to what we do. We have two prayer networks going in Ohio. One is associated specifically with our Micropolitan Movement. Our Micropolitan prayer coordinator is Pastor Tim Ruesch. Please contact him at: truesch@churchaday.com to share in the privilege of praying for God's work among smaller communities.

Through our VisionOhio Church Planting Operations Center (www.visionohiogbc.org) we have another prayer initiative. The contact person is Jamie McClary who you can reach at jmccclary@visionohiogbc.org. Please join us in preparing the soil for a multiplication of churches in Ohio!

of Churches by Attendance in America



85% of churches have an attendance of 250 or less.

10% of churches have an attendance of bet. 251 and 400.

5% of churches have an attendance of 401 or more.

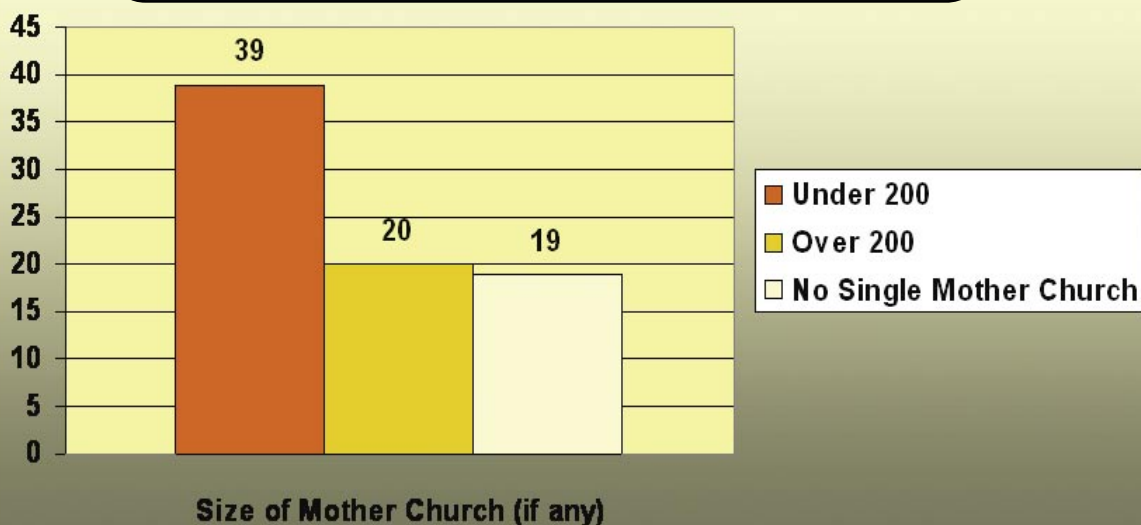
*These statistics are from *One Size Doesn't Fit All* by Gary L. McIntosh, Fleming H. Revell Pub Co, 1999, p. 17.

This desire has led me to the point of re-examining our work to focus on our smaller communities. I need to look at the mission field around me. In Ohio, 50% of our people live in smaller, non-metropolitan areas. We now call them Micropolitan areas (thanks to the sociologists). I have a huge heart for these people and communities. It will most likely take smaller churches to reach these smaller places (see more in the Micropolitan box).

Paul told Timothy to guard carefully the "treasure" (*paratheke*) that is in him and placed in him through the Holy Spirit – 2 Timothy 1:12-14. That "treasure" is something of great value – a greatly valued commission. What Jesus has commissioned to us – explained to us in Matthew 16 and 28 – is the expansion of churches.

The vision we carry about church planting is key to explaining our way and expanding our effort. Vision, a picture of a preferred future, helps us change habits that we need to change. It helps guide us in taking risks that we need to take to see more people come to know Jesus Christ and more churches get started.

I want to end with a look at our Grace Brethren family and ask "What can the "backbone" church really do?" Here's the real story of our backbone churches and church planting. Of the 78 churches planted through GBNAM involvement in the decade from 1994-2004, 39 of them were "mothered"

**GBNAM****Mother Church Data**
for Church Plants 1994-2004

One of the key components of the GBNAM strategy is that **churches would plant new churches**. So GBNAM has been collecting data since 1994 on what kinds of mother churches are initiating the planting of new churches.

NOTE: The "No Single Mother Church" category is represented by churches that were initiated by a solo church planter, as a district project or by GBNAM.

into existence through churches that had attendances of 200 or less! That means that 50% of the new churches started in conjunction with GBNAM were "mothered" by smaller churches as well! (See the graphic above for that data about Mother Churches for church plants.)

So what can the "backbone" church do? A whole lot! Praise to Jesus who's building His Church! Δ

Like what you're reading???

You can help support the production of this newsletter. Feel free to make a donation to GBNAM, PO Box 580, Winona Lake, IN 46590-designating the gift for "**thechurchplanter**."

Does Your Employer Offer Matching Gifts?

Many corporations will match financial gifts made by their employees to 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations. Under such a program, if an employee were to donate, for example, \$1000 to GBNAM for support of the printed version of **thechurchplanter**, the corporation would match it with another \$1000 donation to GBNAM. This is a unique and effective way to expand your giving to GBNAM. Check with your employer to see if such a program is offered.

thechurchplanter

the newsletter of Kurt Miller
National Director of Church Planting
www.thechurchplanter.blogspot.com



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Check out the BLOG:
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North East GBNAM Assessment Center January 18-20, 2007



GBNAM Northeast will host its sixth Church Planter Candidate Assessment Center in Pennsylvania on January 18-20, 2007. The Center is a tremendous resource tool in assisting potential church planters evaluate their calling, ministry behavior, personality profile, leadership style, communication skills, strengths and weaknesses in respect to church planting.

The overall goal is to assist each candidate to honestly evaluate their gifts and abilities regarding suitability for church planting. Candidates build relationships with assessor (pastors from the region) and begin to build a network of their greatest church-planting resource... other church planters.

Those who have participated in the assessment center have benefited greatly from this assessment process and highly recommend it to others. Many say the experience has been so positive that they would not consider starting a church without the assessment. The Northeast has a trained, quality assessment team. Several assessment resources are used during the process. A comprehensive composite rating is compiled for each candidate with helpful recommendations for practical application.

RU interested in Church Planting? Do you have an individual or couple in church that have interest in church planting? The assessment center is a vital beginning step in helping people identify a calling to church-planting. If you are in the NorthEast contact GBNAM career missionary Jim Snaveley (jksna@kcnet.org) if you want to recommend someone to this assessment.