

Introduction

1) Overview

The Multiplying Church Initiative is a comprehensive church starting strategy intended to fan a Gospel brush fire across the plains of Iowa and surrounding regions

- a) by engaging equipped and motivated disciple makers to initiate and develop *Discipling* OutPosts in under-reached towns and/or people groups with view to the formation of simple multiplying indigenous churches
- b) by providing an Indigenous Leadership *Equipping* system to train laymen with basic shepherding skills for the multiplying congregations
- c) by *networking* emerging congregations together around Catalyst Churches and for global kingdom objectives.

2) Working Definitions

- a) The Discipling OutPost can be understood by seeing its component parts. *Post*: As such it is a *small group* of friends, neighbors, co-workers, and/or relatives, etc., joined together as disciples of Jesus in a Bible-centered community to discover what the implications of His kingdom are upon their lives. *Out*: It is an *out* post reflecting the missionary initiative to set up a base of operation in a new geography and among new faces, i.e., a new location or people group. *Discipling*: It will employ *disciple making* principles to move participants in an orderly fashion through four stages of development: the emerging disciple, the maturing disciple, the reproducing disciple, and the networking disciple.
- b) The Indigenous Leadership Equipping system is an informal training track to which emerging leadership from the Discipling OutPost are introduced. Its purpose is to develop and release laotic (everyday people without distinction) leaders with skills inherent to the Multiplying Church Initiative thus expanding the leadership pool and enabling the continuous multiplication of new Discipling OutPosts and churches.
- c) In technical terms, a “*catalyst*” describes a substance that increases the speed of a chemical reaction without itself being consumed by the reaction. In this strategy, a local church is the Catalyst. Two important characteristics of a catalyst transfer into the application of the term in the Multiplying Church Initiative strategy.
 - i) *A catalyst speeds up the reaction.* A catalytic church will by virtue of its meaningful participation in the Multiplying Church Initiative accelerate the rate of gospel expansion resulting in new church starts in a given locale or people group.
 - ii) *Without itself being consumed.* The catalytic church will find itself (viz. the twelve basket fulls left over after feeding the five thousand) remarkably as strong or stronger by being catalytic than by not being catalytic.
- d) The Discipling OutPost is the seed bed for an emerging indigenous church. It will have a distinctively “local” look and feel. It is a church suited for its environment because it grows up from its own environment. No external forms (buildings, programs, even preachers) are prescribed. It develops in its own time, in its own way, with its own people, and according to its own resources. Church may be in a living room, a meeting room at the library, a community center; it may be 10 people gathered in a circle of folding chairs or sitting on the floor of family room; it may do Bible discovery primarily by group inductive methods; it may use music from a boom box to sing by or it may have no accompaniment. It may also follow traditional forms and expressions. It is of the people, for the people, and by the people thus allowing it to be what it needs to be --- an Iowa church, in an Iowa town, for Iowa people.

3) Back to the Future

- a) Some focus:
 - i) The New Testament describes the expansion of the church in terms of rapid increase.
 - (1) Acts 2:47 “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” NIV
 - (2) Acts 5:14 “more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.” NIV
 - (3) Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.” NIV
 - (4) Acts 19:20 “In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.” NIV

- ii) Roland Allen in Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours (1912) wrote: "In little more than ten years St Paul established the church in four provinces of the Empire, Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. Before AD 47 there were no churches in these provinces; in AD 57 St Paul could speak as if his work there was done, and could plan extensive tours into the far west without anxiety lest the churches which he had founded might perish in his absence for want of his guidance and support."
- iii) A bit more up to date: "This church" (named in the article) "started three years ago and they have given birth to twelve other churches. They have sent out missionaries, church planters who have moved to Portland, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Paris France and are on their way to San Diego. They have sent people on short-term missions trips to ten different nations in 2002 along. The church in Milton's house has fifteen to twenty people in it." Milton, as described by the Dawn Report, December 2002, formerly owned a crack house in Southern California and is now starting in church in East Los Angeles.
- b) It is not a step into the unexplored future which holds our future; it is a return to a past experience that holds the promise.
- c) The movie, "Back to the Future" illustrates the nature of the Multiplying Church Initiative. We must get "back to the future." The following provides a rationale for Multiplying Church Initiative.
 - i) Practical rationale:
 - (1) The need for change
 - (a) Imagine a 100 year old stone edifice with 10 parking spaces towering above homes and businesses along main street and you have something of an image of church for many Central Iowa residents.
 - (b) Religion is not lacking; in fact, it abounds. Most every town is dotted with at least one of a variety of Lutheran, Catholic, or Methodist congregations. American Baptist and General Association of Regular Baptists also join the religious community. Southern Baptists are less frequent (8 churches in the 15 county North Central area and 9 churches in the 17 county South Central area). There are other religious groups beside but typically in very small numbers across the area.
 - (c) While there is not a lack of congregational presence in most of the small towns, anecdotal evidence indicates that there is a lack of evangelical witness. A native Iowan might live a lifetime in one of the communities and never hear a clear gospel presentation. Indeed, some who have been linked to church their whole lives, don't know Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. Relationship with God is not part of their vocabulary. Religion is!
 - (d) Consequently, the younger generation is checking out! They have had enough of religion. What is often left in the wake are dying congregations with nothing much of "good news" to share and a mostly disconnected generation of younger adults with nothing much to hear.
 - (e) Statistical evidence is compelling! According to Research of the Glenmary Associates the number of existing congregations leaves 52.5% and 32.5% of the populations in South Central and North Central Iowa respectively claiming no religious affiliation whatsoever --- 235,335 people in South and North Central Iowa admitting no religious affiliation. Three counties, Worth, Winnebago, and Monroe, have fewer than 7 evangelical adherents per 100 people in the population.
 - (f) Meanwhile, the 8 Southern Baptist affiliated churches in the 15 counties of North Central Iowa and the 12 churches in the 17 counties of South Central Iowa (95 churches in Iowa) have maintained a fairly flat line for years in terms of number of churches. Very little is or has been happening with existing patterns and practices to even modestly impact the number of new congregations in the state.
 - (g) Repeating things the same way and expecting different results according to Mr. Einstein is insanity.
 - (2) Every Day Issues
 - (a) Iowa is constantly battling the issue of **leadership** for its churches. A number of factors play into that including its northern location, extreme weather, low pastor salaries, limited economic strength, and general ignorance of the Southern Baptist

world to the mission field in their breadbasket. Regardless of the cause, however, pastoral leadership remains a “moving” target in Iowa leaving churches with a continuous up and down cycle of transitional leadership. In addition, leadership tends to be from distant places, in many cases, Southern states where the culture of church, especially traditional church life, is radically different from day to day practices on the new work arenas of Iowa. Consequently non-Iowan pastors transplanted into the state may spend several years frustrated with their inability to get things to be “like it was back home” and finally give up and go “back home” in defeat, starting the leadership crises all over again. Conclusion: we need desperately to develop Iowans --- who know the cold, and the culture, and the people---for work in Iowa.

- (b) Money! If you have it, everything is lovely. But in Iowa, there seems never to be enough! **Funding** for traditional professional church planters “support” is continually strained. One reason is the general limitation on funding for the work. Funding limitations cannot measure up to the potential for new work around Iowa, or elsewhere for that matter. Furthermore, Iowa budgetary matters are exacerbated by the fact that many Iowa churches are small; thus, the in-state dollar resources are minimal, as well, reducing even further the potential for funds. In addition, mission pastors often live in a high-pressure world of phased-down income (over several years of starting a new congregation) affecting their family, their attitude, their hopes, and earning power. Not uncommonly, the end of the phase-down signals the end of the mission pastor’s stay if for no other reason than he can’t afford to stay any longer (especially if the church has not grown to a level of self-support). The mission pastor knows, after all, that he could be paid a lot more elsewhere than the two nickels that he can rub together on mission supported funding. Question: should kingdom expansion be so tied to the dollar that it is tripped up by financial limitations? It certainly does not appear that the work of the New Testament was hindered in that way. Churches were planted freely far and wide. Clearly the absence of large budgets never caused a restriction of the missionary dream. Conclusion: We need to free ourselves from dependency on external funding and implement a self –supporting model of church starting.
 - (c) Our “**church planting**” language is confusing. “Church planting” connotes an image which is at best inadequate, viz., what most people envision when they think of church, i.e., “steeple and choir and pews and committees.” Following that image to its logical conclusion, church planting then is dropping all of those items and many more like them onto a plot of ground with view to it becoming “church.” Quite literally, “planting” church. To the average church member in Iowa, it is simple enough to conclude in light of the image, “our congregation is certainly not ready for church planting; we couldn’t do all of that even if we wanted to.” Of course, the emphasis is wrong. We don’t plant churches --- at least not like most people envision and talk about church. What we plant is gospel seed in the hearts of individuals who are given an opportunity in a disciple making relationship to develop and mature into full blown saints. Conclusion: the focus on planting churches would involve more churches and achieve increased results if it were expressed in more do-able terms.
 - d) The Great Commission: What greater clarity do we need than the marching orders Jesus gave to his disciples. Go make disciples Matthew 28:19-20
- 4) Disclaimers
- a) Not perfected. This strategy’s development is still in process; still learning; both the model and the presentation of the model will have rough edges.
 - b) Not the writer’s intent to make any body mad; opinions strongly felt but not widely communicated may have a sharper edge than necessary; This writer is on a journey just like you and just trying to get somewhere that looks like effective kingdom work
 - c) Not exclusive of other methods of starting or doing church though the writer will talk specifically about this strategy and make comparisons to others.

- d) Not simply how-to training; it is important to understand the principles of the strategy and connect the dots in the way most appropriate for a given ministry setting
- e) Not a kit or a program; you will have to think, innovate, respond to the uniqueness of your situation; you will need to depend on the Spirit of God to guide you.