

Saturday, October 7, 2006

Dear Nigerian friends (and a lot of others that are now receiving these letters),

Less than a month away! We're praying, planning ... and getting all of our shots, medicines and visa approvals to come to Nigeria. It seems like every day I'm hearing from one of you about your anticipation for the Church Planter's Conference. I'm also beginning to hear from pastors, planters and leaders throughout Africa who are now getting these emails. Thank you for writing. For those who haven't written yet, please do so. Introduce yourself and tell me about your ministry.

I am also sending these letters to a number of our ministry friends in America. Would you all please be praying for our conference as well as the other outreaches we will be doing during our trip November 2-14. I am trusting God for a supernatural working of His power, that He would work *"exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we can ask or imagine."*

The Importance of Qualified Church Planters

Tomorrow I fly to Wisconsin (one of the north-central states in America ... though we call it the "Mid West," it's really more in the north-central part of our country) to help train and assess potential church planters from around our country. I want to take just a few minutes in this letter to talk about why that is important.

I believe that everything rises or falls on leadership. That's true in business. It's also true in the church. Ephesians 4 tells us that God gave gifted leaders to the church to lead, train and equip people for the future. It is critical that we put the right people in the right places.

Our Call

When it comes to spiritual leadership, it is important that someone is "called" to the work they want to do. Ministry is hard ... and there are times the only thing that will sustain us is the fact that God has clearly called us to this ministry. Are you certain that God has called you? How would you describe that call? How certain is that call?

Our Qualifications

After discussing our call, we need to talk about our qualifications. What are your spiritual gifts? How have you developed them? Do they line up with what you are doing? In other words, if you are primarily gifted in evangelism, are you regularly having opportunities to proclaim the gospel either individually or in groups? If you are a teacher, do you have opportunities to teach the Word of God regularly?

In addition to giftedness, we should talk about skills that you have developed. Do you have good leadership skills? How are your people skills? Are you a detailed person who likes planning and administration? Or are you more of a visionary, big-picture leader? Are you skilled at conflict resolution? How are your counseling skills? How have you improved in your skill-set over the last year? Are you growing and developing, or have you plateaued as a leader?

Our Character

God's leaders must be men of integrity and character. There is no more important facet of our make-up than our character. Are you remaining sexually pure? I heard a statistic recently that 40% of the young men who attend Christian colleges in the United States are addicted to internet pornography. That's horrible. What about the way you handle money. Are you a lover of money? How patient are you? (That one is too convicting for me ... let's move on!) Are you regularly spending time in God's Word so that the ministry you are involved in is the overflow of your personal walk with God? How is your marriage and family? Is your wife as committed to the call of God as you are? How are your children doing? Are they spiritually and emotionally healthy and doing well?

We will be addressing some of these issues at our church planting conference. But spend some time in prayer today, meditating on what we have talked about. Come to the conference with a clean heart and a clear conscience so that you will learn all that God has for you. And continue to be his man in leading your church every day.

Workshop Time: Four Stages of Planting a Healthy Church

Okay ... let's talk about the church planting workshop. This is one of the many things I am passionate about in the upcoming conference. In fact, Ken Eze, Olu Jacobs and I will be leading one of the workshop sets on "Four Stages of Planting a Healthy Church." These four hours will take you on a journey from just beginning to talk about church planting as an idea all the way through building a healthy, reproducing church. The four stages are:

1. Dream Stage
2. Design Stage
3. Launch Stage
4. Growth Stage

In each of these stages, you will receive biblical input as well as practical strategies to get you to the next level.

You should choose to attend these workshops if you are considering planting a church, about to plant a church, in the first stages of planting a church, or if you are the senior pastor of a church that is considering beginning to plant other churches.

(We're also trying to get each of these workshops recorded on audio CDs, so you will be able to listen to the ones you were not able to attend. Our plan is also to make those recordings downloadable off Grace Global Network's web site.)

I can promise you that this will be *incredibly practical* ... you will receive many specific ideas. You'll hear from me about what is working in America. You will hear from Ken and Olu about how they have planted growing, reproducing churches in Jos and Jalingo. Getting their input and perspective about church planting in Nigeria is probably going to be the highlight of this workshop series. I love and respect those two men so much. Along the way you will hear a lot about their "Vision of One Thousand," to plant one thousand growing, healthy, evangelical churches throughout Nigeria.

Finally, I would like to include in this letter an article by Phil Stevenson entitled "A Church is Born." I think you will enjoy his perspective ...

A Church is Born – by Phil Stevenson

I have not always been a fan of church planting. My background was in the "mega" church. I was brought up in one and most of my ministry was in one. My early ministry drive was to gather as many people in one place at one time for the glory of God. I enjoyed the environment of the large church, and I still do, but I have discovered that it is much easier to reach the majority of lost people through multiple churches.

This was driven home to me as I saw the number of homes being built in Northern California where I live. God helped me understand that these people needed churches in their communities to reach them. Churches of all shapes, sizes and personalities were needed to meet the growing need.

C. Peter Wagner has stated that the most effective evangelistic methodology is church planting. And I have discovered that the most effective methodology of church planting is parenting new churches. Established churches need to incorporate into their evangelistic strategy the parenting of reproducing churches.

I have taken this to heart. Over the past nine years, I have led two churches. During that time, these two churches have had a hand in parenting nine new churches. These new churches have been parented using a variety of parenting methods. Each of these new churches has a unique ministry. There is a need for all kinds of churches, of all sizes, to parent all kinds of churches in order to reach all kinds of people.

*I want to address a myth about church parenting: the myth of attendance. It is the idea that only churches of certain sizes are able to parent churches. All churches need to be open to the opportunities to parent. It is not so much the size of the church as it is the size of the church's heart. It is more about health than size. In fact, healthy churches naturally reproduce. Christian Schwartz in his book, *Natural Church Development*, states, "Hardly anything demonstrates the health of a congregation as much as the willingness--and ability--to give birth to new congregations."*

Check your health, not your attendance sheet. Check your heart, not your numbers. Nothing can grow indefinitely. An elephant gets to a certain size and stops. A mouse grows and it stops. They are not the same size, but they are healthy. The only hope for the continuation of a species is not for a few to grow large, but for all to multiply. The same is true of churches. A few growing larger will not meet the need, but all multiplying can help sustain the species.

In 1980, when my wife and I were expecting our first child, we attended Lamaze classes. These interactive pre-parent gatherings provided us tools that would enhance our ability to give birth to a healthy child.

We were told about the phases of the birth process. We were given instruction in dealing with each step of the labor. They provided ideas as to what to take with us to the hospital. We were told to map out the most effective path to the hospital. Giving

birth was a process. We needed to have a plan.

Parenting a healthy church is a process too. I want to share the Six Phases of Parenting. Awareness of these phases will provide practical tools to not only parent, but to perpetuate a parenting movement. I will list each phase with a brief description. Below each phase will be several key areas to consider in fleshing them out.

DREAM: This involves capturing the vision. This allows God to implant the idea of participation in a parenting movement. It is the realization that God's Kingdom is bigger than one church in one location. It is the dream of having a regional impact.

Pastors, many of you will not even entertain the possibility of parenting. You have made up your mind that it is not for you. You believe God has called you to build a large church, not plant many churches, as if the two were mutually exclusive.

Truthfully, church parenting is not optional if you are an evangelistic church. If church planting is the most effective methodology of evangelism and if you have a heart for lost people, why would you not incorporate parenting into your evangelistic strategy? The bottom line is that most pastors do not parent because of selfishness. They don't want to release resources (people, finances) God has entrusted them.

I encourage you to take the following steps:

- *Take a day away and ask, "What, if anything, does God want you to do in the area of parenting?"*
- *Prayerfully read through the book of Acts and write down Holy Spirit impressions*
- *Read books on parenting and planting*
- *Act on what God gives you*

DRAW: This involves catalyzing the vision. This helps get others on board. It is gaining congregational ownership for the dream. As the leader goes, so goes the church. If you catch this dream, God will help you bring the people on board. Will there be resistance? Absolutely! But remember, most resistance is simply a cry for more information.

- *Make a list of key leaders to share the dream with*
- *Share your dream with district and denominational officials*
- *Develop a plan to bring the congregation along with you*
- *Begin work on a "Parent Church Action Plan"*
- *Pray for the planter God may want to bring on as a partner*

Let me address the finding of a planter. They don't grow on trees, but there are some arenas you can explore. Potential planters might be youth pastors, assistant pastors in larger churches, senior pastors of growing churches who are open to a new challenge, laymen who are seeking early retirement to invest life in more meaningful endeavors.

DEVELOP: This crystallizes the dream. It involves fleshing out the vision. This

is the process of moving the dream from an idea to an action. A friend, Dr. Larry McKain, has said, "A dream without a plan is a wish." Here you move from wishing for it to happen to witnessing it happening.

- *Determine the model of parenting you will employ*
- *Attend training that will help in developing your plan (I recommend, New Church University, Parent Training Track. You can find more information at www.newchurchspecialties.org)*
- *Refine the plan as needed*
- *Insure the planter has a coach and is sent to training*

DEPLOY: This is celebrating the dream. It is sending out the planting team. You lay hands on them. You are sending a team to a mission field. Bless them as they go.

In deployment, timing is everything. It is always better to do this right, rather than fast. Once the dream has been caught, it may be years before you plant your first church. The key time frame is when the planter is on location. Once you have a planter in place it will be anywhere between six to eighteen months before the launch team may actually be sent out.

How do you know it is time to send the team out? Here are key considerations:

- *Has the planter developed a workable action plan?*
- *Are the finances in line to make this happen?*
- *Has there been an adequate core recruited? (A good core is 20-50 children and adults)*
- *Are the people asking, "When are we going to do this?"*
- *Has a location been found to begin the new church?*

When the time comes to send out the team, make it celebrative and full of joy! It is a party celebrating new life, not a wake mourning lost members.

DETERMINATION: This involves caring for the dream. The parent church(es) are the caretakers of the multiplication movement. The parent must remain healthy. In this phase, a recovery strategy must be implemented. The first aspect is stabilization. The parent church must recognize the need to stabilize financially, spiritually, emotionally, numerically (if a core team was invested) and relationally.

- *Evaluate the health of the parent*
- *Identify areas that need to be stabilized*
- *Build depth in the people*
- *Get regular reports from the daughter church*

It will take a church six to twelve months to recover from parenting a church. However, just like in physical childbirth, the healthier the mom before the birth, the faster the recovery time.

DESTINY: This involves catapulting the vision. It is having a heart to regularly participate in parenting endeavors. It is taking more territory for God than ever imagined. It is not only parenting regularly, but it is encouraging others to participate as well.

- *Look for other parenting opportunities*
- *Build parenting into your yearly budget*
- *DREAM over and over*

A healthy church should be capable of reproducing every three to four years. It is through healthy reproducing churches that we will see whole territories taken for the glory of God and the Kingdom will be expanded.

Bible Study: Jesus' Job Description – Luke 4

One of my favorite sermons to present in churches is about Jesus' job description in Luke 4. Jesus knew exactly why He came to earth. He knew exactly what God had called Him to do. And He preached a sermon on it one day in the synagogue. Luke 4:14-30 records the content of that sermon, as well as people's response to it. I have written this out for you in the form of a Bible study, not only so that you will benefit from its content, but also so that you may be able to teach it to other people.

As always, I am praying for you. Please keep us in your prayers as well. All of us from America are looking forward to being with you.

In the service of the King,

Henry Oursler