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Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

CHURCH PLANTING IN WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

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Perspectives on Mission and Church Growth Strategies

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CHAPTER 1

A MINISTRY-EMBEDDED EVANGELISTIC CHALLENGE

Introduction to the Henderson Highway Church

The Henderson Highway Seventh-day Adventist Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba is a multi-cultural congregation with a current book membership of 530. There are some thirty different nationalities represented in our church family. On Sabbath, 400 people attend one of our three worship services. Our English service attendance currently averages 245. The Spanish service attracts 35. Our Korean congregation, which became an independent company this year, draws 120 for worship at a 1:00 pm service. (There are only 35 baptized members in the Korean Company. Many pre-Adventists attend. Most of these are immigrants who have come from South Korea in the last three years. In January of 2000, our Korean service averaged just 25 for worship! They now have a Korean pastor, and are looking forward to purchasing a facility of their own.)

There is good morale in the congregation. However, the English worship attendance hasn't increased significantly in several years. Since I arrived as senior pastor in August of 1999, we've been baptizing about 20 people a year. In spite of this our attendance has plateaued. Our current youth pastor came to Henderson Highway in June, 2002. Prior to his arrival, we had been without a full-time youth pastor for four years. Dave is now enjoying an effective ministry with

our teens. However, we have very few active young adults in the 18-35 year range. We don't currently have an effective ministry for this generation called "Generation X." We haven't done a good job of retaining the young adults who have grown up in the church. And we certainly aren't attracting many new ones.

The Challenge of Reaching Generation X

The need to become more relevant to Generation X is a challenge I feel compelled to address. I know there are improvements we can make which will help our congregation grow. However, I'm concerned that it will take some very radical changes in order to effectively reach unchurched Gen Xers. I'm doubtful that the Henderson Highway church will be willing to embrace the kind of change that is needed. Our Sabbath morning service is fairly traditional. We do sing some praise songs. However, the feel is still that of a traditional church.

Recently, with the blessing of our church board, we've launched a new worship service for Gen Xers. "Connections" is a worship experience featuring contemporary Christian music and drama. Our youth pastor is the primary communicator. The service is held downstairs in the fellowship room at 5:00 on Sabbath afternoons. To start out, we're only running "Connections" on every other Sabbath. It will take us several months before we can offer this service each week. (Note: Eighty people attended our first "Connections" service on November 15, 2003. Ten were guests who haven't previously attended our church!)

The Challenge of Planting Seven New Churches

A few other things need to be said about the Henderson Highway Church. Our facility is 30 years old, and is starting to show its age. We're strangled for parking. We have only 90 off-

road parking spots! (With a sanctuary seating capacity of 400, we actually should have parking for 200 vehicles.) Over a year ago, we looked at our options for future growth. I told the congregation that we either need to move, or start planting churches. Our current facility, with its lack of adequate parking, is a barrier to growth. And since few of our members are in favour of moving, we therefore need to pursue the planting of daughter churches. I've been casting the vision for church planting for several years now. In 2002 we gathered a core group of a dozen members in an attempt to plant a church in an area of Winnipeg called St. Vital. The group met seven or eight times for monthly planning sessions. We sent two potential leaders off for training to a Seeds Church Planting Conference at Andrews University. However, in spite of our efforts, the group fell apart, and church planting was put on the back burner.

So herein lies my ministry-embedded challenge. We need to plant several new churches in Winnipeg. In this city of 700,000, we have only five Adventist churches, including the new Korean company. Our combined average attendance is less than 800. Clearly we need more churches!

In many ways, the Henderson Highway Church is well positioned to plant those new churches. In our multi-cultural congregation we have several different groups which can target specific populations. Our Spanish group is eager to reach the nearly 5,000 people in Winnipeg whose language of preference is Spanish. We have a group of 20 African immigrants who are currently getting organized for the purpose of reaching out to a rapidly growing population of new African immigrants. We're also in the early stages of organizing our native members to reach out to the 40,000 natives who reside in our city.

My goal is to plant seven new churches in Winnipeg by the end of 2011. This would place

a Seventh-day Adventist Church in every part in the city. We currently have churches in Charleswood, the North End, North Kildonan, and St. James. The seven new churches are needed in or near the following communities: Downtown, Fort Garry, Lindenwoods, St. Boniface, St. Vital, Transcona, and West Kildonan. This 7-11 vision (seven new churches by the end of 2011) is admittedly ambitious. But by the grace of God, I will lead my Henderson Highway congregation to do so. My purpose is to reach the unchurched. There are nearly half a million of them in Winnipeg! Our traditional Adventist churches aren't reaching them. I'm convinced that new purpose-driven churches will.

CHAPTER 2

APPLICATION OF CHURCH GROWTH PRINCIPLES

The church growth movement has provided us with numerous lists of church growth principles. These lists almost always bear a resemblance to the one created by Donald McGavran, the “father” of the church growth movement. As I discuss the application of church growth principles, I’ve used McGavran’s list as a basis from which to work. I’ve added to it the principle of evaluating for growth.

Pray for Growth

God is the one who makes churches grow. If we really want to see the lost won to Christ, we must pray that God will use our church to make a difference. The prayer of faith will unleash the power of the Holy Spirit in our church. We can do nothing without the power of God. We are totally dependent on Him! As the Lord states in Zechariah 4:6, it is “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.” We need to pray for our members, that they will truly internalize evangelistic values. Lost people really do matter to God. Each member must pray daily by name for unchurched friends and family members. Mark Mittelberg advocates making what he calls an “impact list”¹ of three people you hope to reach for Christ, and for whom you will pray daily.

¹Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 72.

Preach for Growth

The preaching schedule must be built around the five purposes of the church: evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service.² Health is produced by balance. And a healthy church is a growing church. We therefore need to plan our sermon material in such a way that we address all five purposes over the course of the year. We can then preach toward the various life commitments worshippers need to make: to membership, to maturity, to ministry, and to mission.

Our church strategy will strongly influence our preaching. If our worship service is designed to be seeker sensitive, this will influence what we preach on, and how we present it. Sermons will need to address felt needs in practical, helpful ways. They will need to be interesting and delivered with passion.

Regardless of the sermon topic, each message needs to be Christ-centred. Jesus is the one who transforms lives. Seventh-day Adventist preachers need to be the most Christ-centred preachers around!

We also need to preach a vision-casting sermon every month. Rick Warren has found that “vision and purpose must be restated every twenty-six days to keep the church moving in the right direction.”³ As the leader of the church, the pastor is to be the primary vision caster.

Train for Growth

Growing churches have a well-equipped, well-trained army of dedicated lay people actively engaged in ministry for God. Specific training is needed for specific groups. We need to

²Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 119.

³Warren, 111.

train leaders how to lead. We need to train those with the spiritual gift of evangelism how to best use this gift. We need to train church officers how to effectively perform their roles. We need to train lay church planters how to plant churches. We need to teach the purpose driven church model to those who will lead the new churches. Classes are good, but the most effective training is “on-the-job” training. (Tell them how to do it. Show them how to do it. Help them do it. Watch them do it. Release them to do it. Then have them train another person to do it!) Each leader in the church needs to apprentice and mentor someone who will replace her. There is no success without a successor! Multiplying leaders is essential for church growth! John Maxwell said it best, “To add growth, lead followers—to multiply, lead leaders.”⁴ He calls this the law of explosive growth.

One of the most vital leaders in the church is the evangelistic point person. Identifying, empowering, and training this person must take top priority. (We could never run a solid Sabbath School program without a Sabbath School leader. Why do we think we can run an evangelistic program without an evangelism leader?) Mark Mittelberg indicates that this individual needs to partner with the senior pastor to champion the cause of evangelism in the church. She must own and model the values, instill the values in others, and empower additional evangelistic leaders. It is the role of the evangelistic point person to equip every believer for witnessing, build a diversified evangelistic team, and innovate high impact outreach events and ministries.⁵ This point person cannot have any other responsibilities in the church. The leading of the church evangelistic

⁴John Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 205.

⁵Mittelberg, 142-144.

thrust is to be her sole focus.

Since we need to train every church member how to witness for Christ, we need to conduct an ongoing witnessing training program. One of the best is Mark Mittelberg's *Becoming a Contagious Christian*. In it, Mittelberg helps people identify their personal evangelistic style. He lists six styles: confrontational, intellectual, testimonial, interpersonal, invitational, and serving.⁶ Mittelberg claims that when people understand their God-given style, it liberates them to share their faith with others in a way that feels natural to them. This takes the fear out of witnessing! We need to train our members how to enjoy meaningful relationships with unchurched people. Research done at Fuller Theological Seminary revealed that 67% of unchurched people would attend church if invited by a trusted friend. The problem is that most of our church members have no unchurched friends! We must never forget that the most effective evangelists in the church are not the ones who know our doctrines best. The most effective evangelists in the church are the people who are the most friendly.

In all our training, we need to strive to instill the core evangelistic values in the hearts of our people. (Willow Creek's seven evangelistic values are as follows: people matter to God; people are spiritually lost; people need Jesus; people need answers; people need community; people need cultural relevance; and people need time to make their decision for Christ.⁷) Training that is focussed on behaviour alone will fall far short of creating a growing church. People will do what they value. So how does a pastor instill these evangelistic values in his people? How does he get his members to own the values? Here's a list of suggestions:

⁶Mittelberg, 158.

⁷Mittelberg, 60, 61.

take members along on evangelistic visits; model friendship evangelism; mention the values often in sermons; print the mission statement on the bulletins; put up banners and posters around the church; talk to people about the values on pastoral visits; emphasize the values in elders meetings & board meetings; keep evangelism as the first item on each board meeting agenda; feature in worship services testimonies from people who have brought their friends to Christ; have each small group leader ask those in the group, “In what ways did you share your faith this week?”; highlight the values at baptism services; bring members into the baptistry when their friends are being baptized, and praise them for sharing their faith; use the newsletter for vision casting; set aside one day a week to take leaders to lunch, and use this time to cast the vision; constantly remind all church leaders that our purpose is to bring unchurched people to Jesus.

We also need to train our members how to order their personal lives. One of the big reasons people aren't more actively sharing their faith is because they're so busy that they don't have time to nurture friendships with unchurched people. Our member's schedules are maxed out, and they're tired. They have no time and no energy. We need to teach them how to live with purpose. Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, is an excellent resource for this training. We need to teach our members how to differentiate between the urgent and the important. We need to show them how to choose between the good things and the best things.

Program for Growth

To be effective, the church program must be formed around the five purposes of the church. Any program that doesn't fulfill one of these purposes should be killed. First, we need to schedule several high-impact outreach events throughout the year to attract the unchurched.

Christmas and Easter, for example, are great times to do this. We need to plan events of varying intensity: low-intensity (for those we're hoping to start on their spiritual journey), mid-intensity (for people who need to be moved along in their spiritual journey), and high-intensity (for those who should be ready to make a commitment to Christ and the church).⁸

Secondly, we need to plan inspiring worship experiences which are safe for the unchurched. Our members won't bring their unchurched friends to our services unless we consistently offer high quality, seeker sensitive worship experiences.

Thirdly, we need to provide a network of small groups in which our members can mature spiritually. In these groups people will experience fellowship, personal care, and a strong sense of belonging. These groups also become evangelistic units, where friends are loved into the church.

When it comes to programming, we must always remember that effective evangelism is not an isolated event. It must be an ongoing process. We need to build into our church program numerous ongoing pathways by which people can come to Christ and the church. Studies have shown that growing churches have nine or more such pathways. We need to ensure that we have at least one pathway for every age level: children, youth, young adults, adults, and seniors.

Invest Time for Growth

It took Jesus a year and a half to recruit the disciples, and two years to train them! We need to be patient. When we work at building a healthy, biblically-functioning church, God will give the increase. But we ought not to look for the quick fix. Pastors looking for significant church growth need to be willing to commit many years to one congregation. Most of the mega-

⁸Mittelberg, 221.

churches today have pastors who have served in that congregation for their entire lives! Often we overestimate what can be done in a short time frame, and underestimate what can be accomplished over the long run.

Work for growth

Church growth is hard work! It is true that pastors need to work smarter, not harder. Yet at the same time we must have a good work ethic. Many times church members take their cue from the pastor. If the pastor is working hard, they're inspired to work hard for God also.

Plan for Growth

If we fail to plan, we plan to fail. Every effective church has a strategy. Willow Creek has a seven-step strategy: (1) build relationships with unchurched people; (2) share a verbal witness; (3) invite your friends to outreach events where they'll have the opportunity to receive Christ; (4) invite them to begin attending the believer's service; (5) urge them to join a small group; (6) help them identify their spiritual gifts, and get involved in ministry; and (7) provide support as they reproduce themselves by building relationships with others, and leading their friends through the same steps. This is basically a church-supported friendship evangelism strategy. And it works!

We Seventh-day Adventists need to rethink our evangelistic strategy. For years our primary strategy has been to hold public evangelistic meetings. In recent years, however, we've had to spend more and more advertising money to draw an audience. I believe the reason why we're attracting fewer people today is that our marketing approach usually targets those who have a keen interest in Bible prophecy, ie. mainly Christian people. Back in the nineteenth century, when the majority of Americans were Christians, the prophecy approach brought in the

crowds fairly well. However, today, by targeting people who have an interest in Bible prophecy, we're targeting an increasingly smaller segment of the population.

Budget for Growth

There are several important issues here: facility, ministries, staff, and church planting. Regarding the facility, whether a congregation rents, or owns a place of worship, the facility needs to be representative. Ron Gladden says it this way, "Unchurched people will not attend a church that is less attractive than their homes."⁹ Adequate off-road parking must also be available. The rule of thumb today is one parking space for every two seats in the worship centre. When purchasing property, congregations need to consider how large they want their church to grow. You'll need one acre of parking space for every 80-100 vehicles.

Regarding ministries, it must be said that people are more important than programs and property. Investing funds in reaching and developing people is always the best use of money. Evangelism and discipleship ministries must both be strongly funded. Where you spend your money indicates what your priorities are. Growing churches allocate at least 10% of their annual budget for evangelism. We must also ensure that our members are well provided for. Quality nurturing ministries, including children's and youth ministries, require solid funding. We must encourage faithful financial stewardship to ensure that the local church can operate strong programs for both outreach and spiritual growth.

Regarding the issue of staffing for growth, we face some challenges in the Adventist system. There is a need to put staff in place in order to bring about growth. And this creates an

⁹Ron Gladden, *The 7 Habits of Highly Ineffective Churches* (Lincoln, NB: AdventSource, 2003), 24.

interesting dilemma. Without the staff you don't get the growth. But without the membership / tithe base, you're hard pressed to obtain the staff. In this area, congregationalist churches that hire their own pastors seem to have an advantage over churches that have their pastors provided by a higher governing body. In the Adventist system, where the local conference is the hiring body, it is often very difficult to obtain an adequate number of salaried pastors to staff churches for growth. Most larger Adventist churches are staffed for maintenance at best. Often they are staffed for decline. In the Adventist system, the tithe from the larger churches actually "subsidizes" the smaller churches in the conference. This is a definite growth barrier for larger Adventist congregations. On the other hand, in denominations where local churches retain their own tithe, and hire their own pastors, congregations have the option of easing a staff person into a budget. The staff member is first a volunteer. But then as the membership and resources increase, he receives a partial salary, and eventually a full salary. This usually necessitates having a second job during the first few years of ministry. In the Adventist system we need to find some creative options for adding staff to facilitate growth.

Budgeting for church planting, must become a greater priority in Adventist churches today. Most congregations are far too short sighted to allocate significant funding for starting other churches. Pastors need to lead their congregations to understand that financing church planting should be one of the highest priorities in the management of God's money. Why? Because it is the most cost-effective evangelism going! (The long-term "return on investment" is far greater than that of conducting large evangelistic crusades.) Local Conferences need to consider redirecting some of their evangelism funds into church planting. Ron Gladden proposes that conferences track the tithe coming from new church plants, and use this money exclusively

for funding other church plants.¹⁰ Not a bad idea! The money is in the mouth of the fish! Aubrey Malphurs suggests that in addition to receiving funds from the mother church, the denomination, and the core members themselves, church planters should also consider these potential sources: interested friends and acquaintances, other sponsoring churches, and the sale of existing properties and facilities.¹¹ Church planters may also be willing to serve voluntarily, or become bi-vocational workers.

Adapt for Growth

Our society is constantly changing. If we are to be effective at turning secular people into fully-devoted followers of Jesus, we must stay current. This doesn't mean we have to become like the world. It just means we have to understand how secular people think, and what their perceived needs are, so that we can adapt our methods of reaching them. We can never change our message, but we will often have to change our methods. When it comes to working for the lost people around us, we can cling to our traditions only if we're willing to become irrelevant.

Create Substructures of Belonging for Growth

This is vital for closing the back door of the church! New members need to be cared for, and they need to quickly become involved in meaningful ministry. The best way to provide personal care and attention for new members, is to get them into a holistic small group. A mentoring ministry, in which a mature Christian friend is assigned to stay close to the new

¹⁰Ron Gladden, *Plant the Future* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 43.

¹¹Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 50-53.

member, is also a vital substructure.

In addition to being cared for, the church needs to have an efficient process of helping the new believer identify his spiritual gifts, and begin serving God in a ministry. At Saddleback this doesn't happen until class 301, *Discovering My Ministry*. In my opinion, depending on how quickly the new believer works through the classes, this might be leaving things too long. I've found that if a new member doesn't become involved in ministry within the first year, she either drops out of church, or becomes a permanent bench warmer. I resonate with the approach of Erwin McManus who has established a radical minimum standard for every new believer. At Mosaic, McManus has raised the bar of expectations. He says you get what you ask for, and since many churches ask very little of their new members, that is what they get. When someone joins Mosaic, there are four clear expectations: live a holy life, be an active participant in ministry and a small group, return a faithful tithe, and live an evangelistic lifestyle.¹² The new members are expected to invest their passions, their service, their resources, and their relationships for the kingdom. And this begins right away! New members are put to work for God immediately.

As the church grows, we must start new ministries to create more opportunities for people to serve. A church that doesn't do this will find that even when they receive new members, their attendance won't increase. Not only will a larger ministry base give members more options for service, it will also help meet the needs of more people.

¹²Erwin Raphael McManus, *An Unstoppable Force* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001), 216.

Plant Multiple Churches for Growth

If you want to know if a denomination is growing in North America today, you only need to ask one question. “Do they have an aggressive church planting strategy?” If they do, they’re growing. If they don’t they aren’t.¹³ We must make church planting our top priority! Rather than praying for God to bless what we’re doing, we need to pray, “God, help us to do what you are blessing!” God is blessing church planting.

Evaluate for Growth

Healthy churches grow. We therefore need to regularly evaluate the health of our church. Where are we doing well? Where do we need to improve? What do we need to do to get healthier? The problem is that often our own subjective evaluations aren’t accurate. Hence the need for an objective evaluation instrument. Natural Church Development is an excellent tool to use for this purpose. It evaluates church health in the following eight areas: leadership, lay ministry, spirituality, organizational structures, worship services, small groups, evangelism, and relationships. Once a church has identified which areas it needs to improve in, other resources can be obtained to help bring growth and health in those areas. The Natural Church Development strategy is simple but effective. A full 85% of the churches that have conducted one or more follow-up evaluations have experienced an increase in attendance. Clearly, a regular evaluation process helps churches grow.

¹³Gladden, *Plant the Future*, 40.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF RELEVANT CHURCH GROWTH THEORY

In establishing the goal to plant seven new churches in Winnipeg by the end of 2011, I realize that there will be some who would question both the appropriateness of setting quantitative goals, and the practice of targeting specific populations for church planting. I will now briefly discuss the theory behind both of these issues.

Goal Setting

In the church growth literature, there is some controversy over the issue of setting quantitative goals. Some authorities indicate that it isn't profitable, and can even be counterproductive to set quantitative growth goals. For example, Christian Schwarz advocates setting qualitative goals for church health, rather than quantitative goals (such as baptismal goals) over which we have no direct control. The research that Schwarz has conducted indicates that only 31% of rapidly growing churches have publicly announced a goal for the number of members they would like to have by a certain date. In other words, he argues that setting time-bound membership goals isn't necessary for growth. He says, "Goals can only motivate people when they touch on areas which they can personally influence."¹⁴

¹⁴Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996), 44.

On the other hand, Peter Wagner has found that making a “faith projection” can be very helpful in motivating numerical growth. In 1972 he launched a project in Venezuela in which 52 churches participated. He conducted church growth workshops for the pastors once each year for three years. At the first workshop Wagner challenged each of the pastors to make a “faith projection” for quantitative growth. At the third workshop (in 1974) Wagner compared the growth rates of the churches before and after the first workshop. The combined growth rate of all 52 churches for the previous decade was 6% per year. The combined growth rate for the two years following the first workshop was 25% per year! Wagner believes that setting a faith goal makes a difference.¹⁵

In 1973, the Illinois Baptist State Association set a goal to plant 100 new churches in a span of 3 years, 1974-1976. (At the time there were just over 1,000 churches in the association.) With a lot of prayer and work, God’s blessing resulted in the successful planting of 100 churches. Charles Chaney says, “It was accomplished through broad involvement of local churches, an extensive use of volunteers, the efforts of a few catalytic missionaries, the ministries of many bivocational preachers, the allocation of limited support funds, and the efforts of a very small number of fully salaried church planters.... We were unashamed of small churches and unafraid of failure.”¹⁶ Of the 100 starts, 21 of the new churches failed. Their net increase was 79 new churches! If the association had not set this goal, would they have planted anywhere near that many churches? You be the judge. There will be thousands more in heaven because of the God-

¹⁵C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1989), 146.

¹⁶Charles Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1982), 47.

inspired vision to set that goal!

Jesus Himself set goals. When certain Pharisees tried to frighten Him out of Perea by saying that Herod wanted to kill Him, Jesus replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’” (Luke 13:32, NIV) If Jesus set goals, then it must be appropriate. I rest my case.

Targeting Specific Populations

Jesus said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” (Matt 15:24) Paul proclaimed, “I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews.” (Gal 2:7) Targeting populations is biblical. The fact is, no single church can possibly reach everyone. Rick Warren declares, “For your church to be most effective in evangelism, you must decide on a target.”¹⁷ What types of people live in the area of your church? Which of these groups is your church best equipped to reach? Knowing who you’re trying to reach makes evangelism a whole lot easier! Consider this illustration. Imagine a commercial radio station that tried to appeal to everyone’s taste in music. It would play a little classical, a little heavy metal, some country, a bit of rap, and to balance things out, a few gospel songs. Who would listen to that station? No one! All successful radio stations select a target audience.

Yet, when it comes to church planting, some church members still have a hard time accepting the idea that we need to select a target audience. What they need to understand is the purpose for targeting. We target to be effective, not to be exclusive. We need to define our target geographically, demographically, culturally, and spiritually in order to learn as much as we

¹⁷Warren, 157.

can about him. Where does he live? How old is he? What kind of job does he have? How well educated is he? What kind of music does he like? What kind of clothes does he wear? What are his needs? His values? His fears? His pet peeves? What does he think about religion? All this information helps tailor evangelistic strategy for greater effectiveness.

Adventist author Bruce Norman, in developing a strategy to reach today's young adults, argues for what he calls "generational evangelism." The idea is that groups should focus on winning those who are from their same generation. He writes, "Because of the complexity of and tensions between the various world views in our society, it would appear most efficient to allow each generation to target and work for its own members.... Modern thinkers would reach out to fellow modern thinkers, and postmodern thinkers also would work to evangelize their postmodern peers."¹⁸ The bottom line is this: the people you will be most effective at winning, are the people who are most like you. This is the concept at the heart of Donald McGavran's homogenous unit principle.

¹⁸Bruce Norman, *Bridging the Gap: An Evangelistic Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2003), 118.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

There are four key categories of church growth literature relevant to my challenge of leading the Henderson Highway Church to plant seven new churches by the end of 2011. What follows is a sampling of my research in each of these categories: church health, leadership, reaching the postmodern generation, and church planting.

Church Health

Natural Church Development, by Christian Schwarz, is a helpful resource. Schwarz has conducted extensive research in order to identify the eight essential qualities of healthy churches. “There has never been such an extensive, statistically valid, world-wide church growth research project ever conducted.”¹⁹ The eight universal characteristics are as follows: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. Schwarz has demonstrated that churches attaining a quality index of 65 or above in all eight areas are always experiencing quantitative growth. Over 22,000 churches around the world have now conducted an NCD evaluation, and not one exception to this rule has ever been found.

¹⁹Robert Logan, in the preface to Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996).

Schwarz also explains how a church can go about the task of improving its health by addressing the “minimum factor,” the lowest scoring quality characteristic. By applying one or more of the six biotic principles, church health will improve, and attendance will increase accordingly. The six biotic principles are all about allowing the “growth automatisms” to work in the church. These six principles are the methods that release the “biotic potential” of the church. The church will experience organic growth all by itself when we apply the following six biotic principles: interdependence (connecting with each other), multiplication (reproducing through cell division), energy transformation (harnessing and redirecting energy to advance God’s kingdom), multi-usage (self-sustaining; eg. on the job training), symbiosis (cooperating; win-win relationships), and functionality (evaluating for usefulness & fruit-bearing).

Schwarz makes it clear that only God can make a church grow. We can apply biblical principles that lead to church health. But it is always God who gives the increase.

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Ineffective Churches*, Ron Gladden identifies seven factors that limit church growth: a pastor who doesn’t function biblically, an inadequate or poorly-maintained facility, unhealthy relationships, ineffective evangelism, an uninspiring worship experience, a poor organizational structure, and the lack of a shared vision. In his book Gladden also highlights the need for small groups, earnest prayer, and the importance of members engaging in ministry in accordance with their spiritual gifts. He therefore covers all the same bases that Schwarz does.

The Purpose Driven Church, by Rick Warren is landmark work, and should be required reading for every pastor. He indicates that to be effective, every church must answer four questions: “Why does the church exist? What are we to *be* as a church? What are we to *do* as a

church? And, how are we to do it?”²⁰ The answers to these questions are derived from the great commission (Matthew 28), and the great commandment (Matthew 22). Warren states that the purposes of the church are five: evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry.²¹ He claims that intentionally building a church around these five purposes ensures balance, and creates a healthy congregation. However, the purposes need to be communicated over and over and over again. The vision needs to be constantly recast. Rick has built Saddleback Church on a “life development process” which helps people personalize the five purposes. Consecutive commitments are made to membership, maturity, ministry, and mission. Rick Warren has certainly figured out how to do church. And he has proven that the purpose-driven model works.

Leadership

In *An Unstoppable Force*, Erwin McManus relates his experience as lead pastor of Mosaic in Los Angeles. He came into an existing church (The Church on Brady) and made sweeping changes in order to better reach the unchurched. McManus is at the vanguard of a movement that is dedicated to reaching the postmodern generation. He is accomplishing his goal of shaping a biblical church that effectively reaches the postmodern context. He sees himself as a cultural architect, and a spiritual environmentalist. He says that the work of re-forming a congregation, and leading it from institution to movement, is very dangerous. He’s got the scars to prove it. But for the sake of the lost, we must be willing to change. The church must regain an apostolic ethos. Mosaic’s mission is, “To live by faith, to be known by love, and to be a voice of hope.”

²⁰Warren, 98.

²¹Warren, 103.

Leading Beyond the Walls, by Adam Hamilton. Lyle Schaller says, “Adam Hamilton has written the best book I have ever read on how to be an effective parish pastor.”²² Hamilton has demonstrated that even a mainline church can experience dramatic growth. He planted the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in a suburb of Kansas City in 1990. By the year 2000, there were 6,000 people attending each weekend! He submits that starting a new church is often easier than transitioning an old one. But he believes the same principles, concepts and strategies can be used in a pre-existing church.

Hamilton says every pastor must answer three questions: Why do people need Christ? Why do people need the church? And, Why do they need *this particular* church? “Without deep conviction about the responses to these questions, a pastor will never lead a congregation to change the world.”²³ The Church of the Resurrection has been built on vision casting, dynamic preaching, and systematic follow-up of guests.

How to Change Your Church Without Killing It, by Alan Nelson and Gene Appel, is a practical book, intended to be used by local church improvement teams. The authors lived this book before they sat down to write it. In 15 years, Gene Appel led Central Christian Church (in suburban Las Vegas) from an attendance of 450 to over 5,000. It was the change process described in the book that led to this significant growth. In order to effectively reach the unchurched, churches must change. And if our mandate is to reach the lost, then we must make

²²Lyle E. Schaller, in the preface to Adam Hamilton, *Leading Beyond the Walls* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002).

²³Hamilton, 21.

whatever changes are needed in order to accomplish that mandate.

The authors invite us to honestly assess how effectively our churches are reaching the lost. Our contemporary culture, they say, is a culture that is foreign to the gospel. And in order for us to effectively communicate the gospel in our changing Western culture, we must begin to think of our churches as strategic missions in foreign territories. We must learn the language and customs of a vastly different culture. We must adjust to the postmodern community, because we cannot expect them to adjust to us. Our message must stay the same, while our methods must change.

The way to make effective, long-term change is to first visualize what you want to accomplish, and then inhabit the vision until it comes true. For any new idea to become adopted, it must first be accepted by a critical mass of the opinion leaders in the church. People will do what they perceive is in their best interest to do. We need to ask ourselves four questions: Where are we now? Where do we want to be? What needs to happen to get us to the goal? Who, when, where, and how is this going to happen?

Reaching The Postmodern Generation

In *Bridging the Gap*, Bruce Norman describes “the internet generation” and recommends a strategy for churches who desire to become relevant to those born between 1968 and 1988. Norman describes this generation as the generation of the unwanted. Latch key kids, they’ve grown up without much attention from their parents, many of whom are divorced. This helps explain why many young adults today experience feelings of loneliness and abandonment. Friends become vitally important. Friends become family. This generation longs for a sense of belonging. The music of the internet generation often glorifies drugs, sex and suicide. Often relationships

forged in cyberspace become more meaningful than the relationships with their own parents.

Truth is not perceived as being absolute. It is not perceived as being valid for all people at all times and in all places. What is true is what works in real life. “Postmodern thinking subtly, yet directly, challenges the very basic assumptions on which the Adventist church bases its existence and evangelistic mission.”²⁴ We have been almost completely ineffective at reaching postmodern thinkers! And we’re in danger of becoming extinct in one generation if we insist on hiding our heads in the sand on these issues.

There are seven essential characteristics that the church needs to exhibit if it wishes to make an impact on the internet generation: it must be authentic, function as a community, be spiritual, be practical, reflect an inclusive diversity, lack judgmental attitudes, and speak through the arts. Postmodern worshippers are looking for a worship experience that is unique, non-traditional, flexible, interactive, featuring testimonies and inductive preaching. They want energy, passion, informality, casual dress, creativity, practicality, challenges, acceptance, warmth, God-focused worship, contemporary music, visual images, and variety.

The postmodern worldview is very relational. Perhaps the greatest single thing we can do to help them come to faith in Jesus is provide small fellowship groups where they can experience genuine Christian community. “These small groups are places where perceived needs can be addressed, where sharing and support is provided,... where members share personal experiences, pray for each other, and have social contact with each other outside of regularly scheduled meeting times.... If she is to meet the needs of the postmodern thinker, the church must return to

²⁴Norman, 27.

the small group format of the early centuries of Christianity (see, for example, Acts 2:42-47).²⁵

Postmodern Pilgrims, by Leonard Sweet, is a thought provoking work. Sweet strives to help his readers understand, but not embrace, postmodernity. He then presents a model for doing church in a way that is at the same time both biblically absolute and culturally relevant. The acronym is EPIC: experiential, participatory, image-driven, and connected. Sweet suggests that the internet has changed society in much the same way that the invention of the printing press did in its day. He claims that postmodern people are finding a sense of community in cyberspace.

Jimmy Long, is a regional director for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. In his book, *Generating Hope*, he relates what he has learned from working with Gen Xers on university campuses. Long states that the Enlightenment brought about the neglect of certain biblical foundations. He says we can become more relevant to Generation X by regaining these lost biblical values. An emphasis on community, adoption into God's family, and a renewed emphasis on the eschatological dimension of hope, will minister hope to Gen Xers in the midst of their pain and despair.

To reach this generation, Long says we must establish small groups as a community where people can experience nurture, worship, prayer and outreach. He says the role of authentic community in promoting spiritual growth cannot be overemphasized. Long suggests that Gen Xer groups need to stay together longer than Boomer groups. He also notes that Xers like to participate, but are low on commitment. So the commitment level needs to be played down at the beginning. As loyalty to the group grows, so will the commitment level.

²⁵Norman, 40.

Church Planting

Charles L. Chaney, in *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century*, roots his argument for aggressive church planting in the fact that America is one huge mission field. Only 20% of Americans regularly attend church. He says, “Church planting is preeminently an apostolic task, and is central to the mission of the church.”²⁶

Chaney suggests that there are two major problems that hinder the work of church planting in North America. First, the various denominational bodies often lack a national or regional strategy for church planting. Secondly, local churches lack a climate for them to become actively involved in church planting. Chaney provides suggestions for both regional and local church planting strategies. He is convinced that church planting is primarily the task of the local church. Not only is this scriptural, it is also “a more practical, efficient, and effective way than any other system.”²⁷ Foundational to successful church planting at the local level is a dynamic, creative leader who thinks big, and who has genuine compassion for the unchurched. Chaney says that such pastors must take time to create a climate for church planting in the local church. They must train their laity in the principles of church planting. And they must also stay long enough to see the strategy through.

Plant the Future, by Ron Gladden, answers the question, “Why do we need to plant more churches?” Gladden argues that traditional churches are not reaching the 200 million unchurched

²⁶Chaney, 39.

²⁷Jack Redford, *Planting New Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 22.

people of North America. We need to raise up new culturally relevant churches that are committed to communicating the gospel in ways that secular people can understand. We need to change our methods, not our message. We've been doing church for ourselves, not the lost. We're stuck in the past, communicating in ways that are confusing to secular people.

Like people, churches do most of their growing in their youth. When they get mature, they stop growing and plateau. Research at Andrews University indicates that "New Adventist churches grow at ten times the rate of established churches."²⁸ Once a church becomes mature, its role is no longer to get bigger itself, but to give birth to the next generation. Gladden compares the cities of Anchorage, Alaska, and Eugene, Oregon. In 1980 there was only one Adventist church in Anchorage. It had a membership of 352. That church, however, caught the vision for church planting, and by 1999 there were seven Adventist churches in the city. Their combined membership had grown to 1,100. Church planting resulted in significant growth. In Eugene, however, the story is different. In 1980 there were 9 Adventist churches with a combined membership of 2,000. In 1999, there were still nine churches. And guess what! The combined membership was still 2,000! No church planting, no growth.

The bottom line is this: "It's easier to have babies than to raise the dead! The single most effective evangelistic method under heaven is planting new churches."²⁹ As a rule of thumb, one year after planting a new church, the combined attendance of the two churches is 20% higher. Five years later, attendance is up 50%. And after a decade, Sabbath attendance has doubled. Often it happens even more quickly.

²⁸Roger Dudley, quoted in Gladden, *Plant the Future*, 35.

²⁹Peter Wagner, quoted in Gladden, *Plant the Future*, 40.

Gladden appeals for us to get back to our denominational roots as a church planting movement. In the early 1900s, Ellen White wrote, “Decided efforts should be made to open new fields in the north, the south, the east, and the west.”³⁰ “Place after place is to be visited; church after church is to be raised up.”³¹ In response to this appeal, pastors travelled from community to community planting new churches. A pastor would raise up a church, train the lay people to work for God, and then move on to raise up another church in a different community. Soon Adventists were envied as the fastest growing denomination in America! We need to remember that every Adventist church in existence today is a church that was planted at some point in time. The only way you get a new church is by planting one!

Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century, by Aubrey Malphurs is a comprehensive church planting guide. Malphurs has put it all together in one book. It is essentially a “how to” guide for church planters. It is quite detailed. If it were the only book I had on church planting, it would be more than adequate to guide me through the process. A must read for church planters in the 21st century!

Malphurs first points out why we need new churches planted. The church in America is dying. 80-85% of churches are either plateaued or declining. Each year 3,500 to 4,000 churches are closing their doors for the last time. The percentage of unchurched Americans continues to increase. Traditional church methodologies are no longer relevant to Baby Boomers and

³⁰Ellen White, Manuscript 11, 1908, published in *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), 19, 20.

³¹Ellen White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 7:20.

Generation X. It is the new paradigm churches, such as Willow Creek and Saddleback, that are effectively reaching the lost. We need many more such churches! They are characterized by: a great commission vision, strong servant-leadership, a well-mobilized lay army, a culturally relevant ministry, holistic worship, culturally relevant evangelism, and a robust network of small groups.

The process of church planting involves six stages, which are analogous to the human birth process: conception, development, birth, growth, maturity, and reproduction. In the conception stage, church planters must discover the church's core values, develop a mission statement, conduct an environmental scan, develop a vision, develop a strategy, and plan for ministry contingencies. In the development stage, planters prepare for the first public service. This usually takes 3-12 months. The core group must be gathered, cultivated and grown. A core group of at least 50 people is recommended. The birth stage is when the church "goes public." In preparing for the first public meeting the church planting team must decide when to start, choose a name, locate a place to meet, publicize the meeting, and plan the meeting. In the growth stage, the leader must cast the vision for growth, staff for growth, mobilize the lay people for growth, assimilate new members for growth, and organize the church structure for growth. In maturity, the church must focus on reproduction. Like the church at Antioch, she must give birth to daughter churches. The mother church should provide money, a core group, accountability, encouragement, prayer, credibility, counsel, talent, personnel, and shared events.

CHAPTER 5

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Leading Change

As I've begun to address the challenge of leading the Henderson Highway Church to plant a significant number of new churches in Winnipeg, I've found that it isn't easy to lead change. Someone once said that the only person who wants a change is a baby with a wet diaper! However, the bible is all about change. Changed lives. Changed families. Changed communities. Changed history! Jesus Christ is the greatest change agent the world has ever known! And still today, Jesus provides the power to change. So I'm optimistic that with the blessing of God, and the application of sound change principles, the Henderson Highway Church will catch the vision for church planting, and many people will be saved for eternity, to the glory of God.

A Lesson Learned

To date, there hasn't exactly been a ground-swell of support for church planting here in Winnipeg. The dozen or so church members who were involved in the aborted planting attempt two years ago, are somewhat discouraged. And because that attempt never got off the ground, others in the congregation have become skeptical about our ability to plant churches. However, I've learned something important from that failure. I've learned that it is vital to know what you want the new church to look like *before* you start gathering the core group! The people who

chose to be in that group were all very dedicated Christian people. However, the group was far too diverse. And everybody had their own idea of what the church plant should look like. The resulting lack of unity was one of the primary reasons why that planting attempt was not successful. If I had read Malphurs' book on church planting before I initiated that attempt, I would have known better. Now I do. I won't make that mistake again!

Responding to Resistance

I've discovered that there are several reasons why many of my church members are passively resistant to becoming a church that plants other churches. One reason is that our members like being together at Henderson, and they don't want to see any of their brothers and sisters leave to start a new church. This view, though understandable, is selfish and short sighted. Are we to do church for ourselves, or for the lost? What is our purpose? What is our mission?

Secondly, some of my church members are not behind the concept of church planting because they feel it will set us back. After all, they reason, if we give away members, leaders, and financial resources, what will happen to us? However, Jesus said, "Give and it will be given to you." (Luke 6:38) Experience has revealed that when the mother church is healthy, God replaces all that was given away, often within one year! It is an act of faith to give away resources in order to birth the next generation of churches. And we must be willing to do so, at the risk of death itself. Salmon die spawning the next generation. It's called the life cycle. Jesus said that unless a seed dies, it cannot produce life (John 12:24). Ultimately we survive only through the next generation.

Thirdly, some members feel that we should just get bigger ourselves, rather than plant new

churches. The problem with this argument is that we will not grow substantially larger as long as we stay in our current facility. For years we Seventh-day Adventists have been trying to fill up half-empty churches. And our track record is not very good. No, trying to get bigger ourselves is not a viable option to church planting.

Finally, some members feel that we should sell all four existing Winnipeg church properties and build one large church. From a business perspective, one member told me, bigger is more efficient. And while I must agree there are certain advantages that come with size, amalgamation is not the solution to our church growth problem. Even if we could persuade all our churches to form one large church, we would not see dramatic growth, unless everyone in the new church was willing to organize along the lines of a contemporary, seeker-sensitive, purpose-driven church. Unless the amalgamated church would seek to be culturally relevant to the postmodern generation, the future would not be anything to write home about.

Small Groups

I have found it difficult to establish a healthy, multiplying network of small groups here at Henderson Highway. I will continue to cast the vision. I will persevere on this front. I'm absolutely convicted that our churches will not experience growth without holistic small groups. I found it extremely significant that Schwarz's research has revealed this to be the single most important characteristic of healthy churches. He says that of all the eight quality characteristics, "If we were to identify any *one* principle as the 'most important'... without a doubt it would be the multiplication of small groups."³² I need to help my members understand why this is true.

³²Schwarz, 33.

They need to get to the place where they own the value of living in healthy, biblically-functioning community. This must be a vital part of our strategy to keep the mother church healthy, so that she can give birth to numerous children. Small groups must also be imprinted on the DNA of all the daughter churches. I recall how difficult it was to try and persuade the core group of the aborted church plant that they really did need to meet each week to study together, share with each other, encourage one another and pray together. Most of them didn't feel it was really all that important. So they didn't do it. Just one more reason why that church planting attempt went nowhere.

Recently we have assigned one of our most capable leaders the responsibility of heading up small group ministry here at Henderson Highway. I'm optimistic that we will become a church of small groups. It may take a few years, but with God's help we'll do it!

CHAPTER 6

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The five purposes of the church are evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. It is imperative that we understand the theological basis for each purpose.

Evangelism

God's mission is to be the mission of the church. The Father is the One who loves the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). And yes, without Christ, mankind is lost. God's purpose is to restore man eternally to a right relationship with Himself. To accomplish this, Jesus commissioned His followers to go and make disciples (Matt 28:19, 20; John 20:21). The power of the Holy Spirit is available to make effective the witness of Christ's followers in all the world (Acts 1:8). As we keep a Christ-centred focus in our mission, Jesus will draw people to Himself (John 12:32).

Worship

"Love the Lord with all your heart." This is the greatest commandment in the bible (Matt 22:37, 38). The church exists to worship God. Whenever we express our love to God, we're worshipping. The psalmist invites us to join him in magnifying the Lord, and exalting His name (Ps 34:3). God longs for His people to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). He

established the Sabbath as day for worship. And fundamental to God's end time message is an appeal to worship Him as the Creator of all (Rev 14:6, 7).

Fellowship

Jesus established His church as a place to belong. It is the family of God (Eph 2:19). It is to be a healthy community (Acts 2:42-47). We must therefore keep meeting together (Heb 10:25). The purpose of being in relationship with our fellow believers is that we might care for each other (1 Cor 12:25), bear each other's burdens (Gal 6:2), encourage each other (1 Thess 5:11), teach and admonish each other (Col 3:16), confess our faults to one another (James 5:16), pray for one another (James 5:16), and love one another (John 13:34, 35).

Discipleship

Paul reminds us that as a community, we are to help our members grow to maturity in Christ (Col 1:28). God has provided apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers in order to bring the church to maturity (Eph 4:11-13). Jesus' desire is for every believer to grow in spiritual maturity, become fully devoted to Him, and live in obedience to all that He has commanded (Matt 28:20).

Service

In Luke 4:16-21, Jesus indicated that His ministry had six dimensions: economic, social, political, physical, psychological, and spiritual. This serves to remind us that we need to be holistic in our approach. Ministries of compassion play a key role in demonstrating the love of God to lost people. When we are authentically following in the footsteps of Jesus, we will feed

the hungry, take in the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit those who are sick or in prison (Matt 25:34-36). We are to love our neighbour (Matt 22:39); our neighbour being anyone in need (Luke 10:25-37). The Holy Spirit gifts every believer with special abilities, so that we can engage in ministry to others and build up the church (Eph 4; Rom 12; 1 Cor 12).

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