

# THE NEW MATH

## Church Multiplication

In *Disciples Are Made, Not Born*, Walter Henrichsen describes a display at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. This display features a checkerboard with one grain of wheat on the first square, two on the second, four on the third, then 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, and so on. Somewhere down the board, there was so much wheat that it was spilling over into neighboring squares so the display ended there. Above the demonstration was a question: At this rate of doubling each square, how much grain would you have on the checkerboard by the time you reached the 64th square? To find the answer to this riddle, you punched a button on the console in front of you, and the answer flashed on a screen above the board: Enough to cover the entire subcontinent of India, 50 feet deep!

Henrichsen concludes: “The reason that the church of Jesus Christ finds it so hard to stay on top of the Great Commission is that the population of the world is multiplying while the church is merely adding. Addition can never keep pace with multiplication” (*Disciples Are Made, Not Born*, p. 142).

I remember attending the Urbana Missions Conference in 1987, and the big news then was that the world population was about to pass the five billion mark. Today we have passed six billion and are on our way to seven billion. The world is multiplying rapidly. The Western church, however, has only been adding (at best) and in

many places is subtracting and losing ground. Things must change.

Spontaneous expansion of the kingdom of God will start small and seemingly insignificant. Multiplication always starts small. All of us began life as a zygote. A single cell becomes two and then four, and eventually becomes a full grown adult. Multiplication may seem slow at first, but it soon exceeds addition, and in time the difference is incomparable!

Roland Allen describes a spontaneous church multiplication movement in the following ways:

“By spontaneous expansion I mean something which we cannot control. And if we cannot control it, we ought to rejoice that we cannot control it. For if we cannot control it, it is because it is too great, not because it is too small for us. The great things of God are beyond our control. Therein lies a vast hope. Spontaneous expansion could fill the continents with the knowledge of Christ: our control cannot reach as far as that. We constantly bewail our limitations: open doors unentered; doors closed to us as foreign missionaries; fields white to the harvest, which we cannot reap. Spontaneous expansion could enter open doors, force closed ones, and reap those white fields. Our control cannot: it can only appeal pitifully for more men to maintain control” (The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church, p. 13).

## Multigenerational Churches

When we started Awakening Chapels our desire was a movement that was out of control. We had a lot to learn to see this happen, but we had even more to unlearn. Many of the things that seemed right actually were barriers to spontaneous multiplication. With each generation of churches we seemed to learn more. The first church we started was a committed team of twelve Christians, and we met in my home. From that we sent a smaller team to start a second church. That second church brought about the people who started a third church. This next church started with all newly transformed disciples meeting in one of their homes. The third church has since daughtered about 16 or more churches. This church is still fully alive and full of transformed lives. It is not uncommon for me to find out about new churches after they have started.

One young man came from Indiana for a summer to work with us. He then went back to school in the Midwest, and we didn't hear much from him for a time. Then he came back again to a Greenhouse training event in Las Vegas and caught the bug again. Soon he had a new Awakening Chapel meeting in a small town in Indiana. This church was small and made up of students and former students as well as some people that met at a local coffee house. Soon people graduated and moved to different parts of the country, and we are now hearing of churches starting in some of those places.

One evening at church, Milton (who paints houses for a living) asked me about the church we had on Gaviota Street in Long Beach. Gaviota is only a few blocks from where I lived at the time. I

told him that we don't have any churches on Caviota. He smiled and said, "Yes you do." He told me that he had been painting a house, and one day noticed cars arriving at the house across the street. People pulled out guitars, bongos, and Bibles and went into the house. He went over to introduce himself, and mention that he had a church meeting in his home as well. When they saw him they recognized him, and said that they were also a part of our network of churches. A church had started only a few blocks from my home, and I didn't even know about it! When I heard this story I felt like we had finally reached a goal of spontaneous reproduction. We were beginning to see things out of control. We still have much to learn, but God seems to be showing us the way to release spontaneous multiplication.

A couple of us from this third Awakening Chapel started a new church in an apartment complex in the barrio of East Los Angeles. One Saturday, we went to the apartments to have a barbeque and baptize new believers. When we arrived I was surprised to see one of our other church planters there. He was also surprised to see me. It happened to be that he lived on that same block and led a church, which he had already started there, in Spanish. Now there are two churches on that block, one in Spanish and one in English. Could it be that we are now bumping into each other?

In the beginning of Acts, Luke is very careful to list precise numbers of disciples. As the book (and the movement) expands, he gets less and less specific and starts using more general language. Observe how he describes this expansion as he develops the story further: Acts 6:7 "And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number

of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”

Acts 8:4 “Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.”

Acts 12:24 “But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.”

Acts 13:49 “And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region [Pisidian Antioch].”

Acts 19:20 “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing [in Asia Minor].”

When a spontaneous multiplication movement starts to gain momentum, it becomes impossible to keep count. It is out of control. Recently, I was asked what I wanted to see happen when I die. Without hesitation my reply came back, “I want to see more churches started the year after I die than all the years I was alive.” This will only be possible if we are multiplying. We must not be content with anything less.

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