March 12 Newsletter

Remembering the Forgotten Commandment

Generally speaking, attendance for weekend religious services is declining worldwide. Daniel R. Sanchez, author of Church Planting Movements in North America, reports that 80% of local congregations have reached a plateau or are declining in attendance.1

A June 2005 Natural Church Development (NCD) survey among Seventh-day Adventist congregations reveals that the Church lacks an overall sense of community, "where people can share their feelings and trust each other." A report published in September 2007 reveals that the picture is pretty much the same. The survey also reveals that Adventism’s strength lies in need-oriented evangelism and passionate spirituality. Unfortunately, "there is missing spirituality in small group settings."

Why is this the case? Could it be that the answer lies in remembering a commandment we may have overlooked in our impetus to herald the Second Coming of Jesus? As a response to this great spiritual need, Dr. Don James has devoted his entire life to fostering the development of discipleship groups that focus on building people spiritually, as well as solidifying strong loving relationships with one another. In 1987, while working for the Oregon Conference, he organized his congregation into relational Bible study groups where each one played an important role. The Lord blessed his efforts by doubling the weekly attendance; precious souls surrendered their lives to Christ in baptism. Perhaps the most amazing surprise was a strong retention rate due to the close relationships fostered in these groups.

The concept of relational groups is rooted in the Jethro model of administration as adopted by Moses and Jesus’ mentoring of twelve disciples into successful ministry. The evidence of the effectiveness of these groups is in the lives that have been transformed due to the close knit relationships that have been formed. Moreover, the groups are well structured and suitable for enhancing the mission and vision of traditional congregations. Leadership is built from the ground up rather than appointed by a committee that is not intimately acquainted with the candidate. Leaders are mentored from initial discipleship, through baptism, and targeted training.

In accordance with the biblical model of the priesthood of all believers, these small groups visualize everyone as possessing leadership potential, thus honoring by faith their spiritual gifts. These leaders, in turn, eventually reproduce into more holistic groups and establish a solid platform for growth, spiritually and numerically. Discipleship and evangelism are both supported by the spiritual fabric of loving relationships.

In 1990 Dr. James was invited to join NADEI to train pastors and laity in establishing discipleship groups in their congregations. Since then he has travelled the US and abroad promoting the concept of loving relationships through small groups. In 2002, as a request from seminarians at Andrews University, he founded The Passage, a congregation built on small groups and run by student leadership.

Today The Passage is a movement with a vision to equip disciples for ministry. Seminarians that go through Dr. James' classes leave inspired to mentor new congregations to implement discipleship groups as their strategic mission plan. It is a movement that is well aware of its evangelistic responsibility as well as the new commandment that Jesus entrusted to His disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (Jn. 13:34-35) It is a commandment that calls His disciples to be of one accord while directing their energies to saving precious souls.

Every year The Passage raises funds for a corporate mission project. This is a great opportunity for many to become involved and contribute. This year The Passage goal is to raise a minimum of $1000 to aid a program designed to help end violence against women and girls. Specifically we have chosen the country of Nepal. ADRA reports that about 12,000 Nepali women and children are trafficked every year into sexual exploitation into Indian brothels. The average age of these girls is between 10 and 14. We will be helping women and children by establishing Life Guard Centers at several cross-border transit points. These centers will rescue trafficked females, as well as teach gatekeepers how to detect potentially trafficked women and girls. Rescuing these victims at the point of entry, as opposed to rescuing them from a brothel, increases their chances of reintegration with their families and communities.

1 http://www.nadei.org/article/343/newsletter-signup/newsletter-archive/march-12-newsletter
The Passage leaders know that just as the early church is known for their deeds of love toward their fellow men, their acts of kindness today to alleviate the pain of suffering humanity will be remembered for eternity. Let us not be forgetful of Jesus’ commandment to foster in our congregations a safe haven for loving relationships that lead to genuine trust. Help The Passage surpass their goal.

For more information on how you can establish discipleship small groups in your congregation, visit nadei.org or send your donation for the mission project today. Make your check payable to: NADEI (memo: The Passage).

Victor M. Reyes-Prieto, MDiv student, Andrews University

1. Daniel R. Sanchez, Church Planting Movements in North America (Fort Worth, TX: Church Starting Network, 2007), 18.

Gulf States ChurchWorks

(Editor’s note: On the weekend of February 17-19, 2012, a team from NADEI held a ChurchWorks program in Montgomery, Alabama, with plans for a follow-up Equipping University program. ChurchWorks is an official meeting sponsored by a local conference for pastors and a mission-focused leadership team of 8-12 from each church or district. These teams work together around tables creating a skeleton strategy, and upon returning home, are able to create and share the vision and continue to develop their plan for reaching every person in their territory for God. Below is a letter from the president of the Gulf States Conference explaining what the ChurchWorks program has done for the people in his conference. For more information on ChurchWorks, visit our homepage.)

I want to thank the NADEI Team for coming to Gulf States Conference over the weekend of February 17-19. I believe the ChurchWorks weekend will be one of the major milestones in the history of Gulf States Conference. We have intentionally focused for several years on equipping and empowering our membership to reach the people in their sphere of influence. I see this weekend as the launch of a Conference wide thrust to reach every person in our territory in the next five to ten years.

There were several comments I heard from the pastors and church members that I think underscores the benefit and the importance of this weekend for us. Several local church leaders shared separately that the weekend far exceeded their expectations. They were expecting another “rally” and to go home with another “nice weekend” feeling. Now they are going home with a vision of reaching people with God’s final message. Several mentioned to me they have long known what needed to be done, but did not know how or where to start. ChurchWorks gave them ideas to begin working with. We have churches that have resisted evangelism in all forms, now feeling there is a way to reach the people around them. They are actually getting excited about reaching the people around them.

I believe the majority of our people want to be missionaries for God. ChurchWorks created a climate where all were able to visualize themselves actually accomplishing God’s work, this work we all have long talked about needing to be done.

The Equipping University is necessary to keep this Conference wide momentum moving in the right direction. I am thrilled we have chosen to hold a city wide meeting in Birmingham at the conclusion of the first series of the Equipping University.

I personally believe the ChurchWorks weekend and the follow up with the Equipping University will be the most important event in the history of this Conference.

Melvin Eisele, President, Gulf States Conference

SEEDS Pacific Northwest

NADEI will be holding a SEEDS conference in Seattle, Washington, May 9-12, 2012. David Jamieson, Senior Pastor of the Aldergrove SDA Church in British Columbia and Dan Linrud, Executive Secretary of the Ontario Conference will be among the main speakers.

Topics include small groups, leadership, creating a vision for and overcoming obstacles in church planting, community outreach, holding a successful evangelistic series, and more.

There is no cost to attend, but pre-registration is required. Visit nadei.org for more information.
Ministry Area Profile

Demographics Analysis*

Ministry Area Profile is high-impact, comprehensive demographic analysis of any area of your choice. It is custom made based on ZIP Code(s), Radius or Polygon (multi-sided boundary). The 27-page PDF document is sent electronically and can be distributed or printed as needed.

NADEI Recommends:

Metro areas – a 3 mile radius from the church
Rural areas – your ZIP code or a larger radius (5-10 miles)

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*This demographics analysis is available only for churches within the United States.