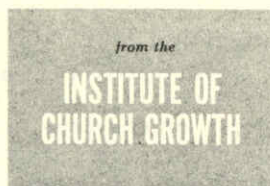


CHURCH GROWTH BULLETIN



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March 1968

Subscription \$1 per year

Volume IV, No. 4

Church Growth in California

Between 1947 and 1967, the denomination known as the American Baptists started about 150 new churches in Southern California, during which time the population of the area grew from six to twelve million. Forecasts indicate that by 1987 the population will increase to about eighteen million.

The Southern Baptists (another denomination) who till about 1937 regarded all California (North and South alike) as American Baptist territory, started then with twelve churches in California. By 1967 they had more than a thousand--most of them in Southern California.

Various figures are given concerning the percentage of the population in Southern California which is church affiliated. Some say twenty, some thirty and some forty. Much depends on how "church affiliation" is defined. It is safe to affirm that half the population over sixteen years of age seldom darkens the door of a church. Thus in 1968 at least six million unchurched people live in this small area--less than 250 miles long and 60 miles wide--who consider themselves in some vague way as Christians and would resent being called pagans, Buddhists, Moslems or Jews. They are winnable; but are not storming the gates to get in. Some denominations in this land have planted very few--if any--new churches. Some have planted half-heartedly. Some, on the contrary, have been good stewards of God's grace.

Against this background must be seen the American Baptist story, immediately following, told by William Powell, Director of the Division of Church Planning and Development, of the Southern California Baptist Convention. It is a story of compassionate concern to lead non-Christians in California to face the reality of their lost condition and accept eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. It is also a story of action to find the lost and bring them into a multitude of new churches.

What this concern and this action mean to Churches and missions in Asia, Africa and Latin America will be set forth in my comment which then follows Mr. Powell's account.

--Donald McGavran

BAPTIST CHURCH MULTIPLICATION IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA by William D. Powell

Some of the new churches American Baptists have planted have made significant contributions to the life of the denomination and the ministry of Christ throughout the world. Others have never grown or realized their potential. Some have failed. Others exist at the level of being too weak to serve and too strong to die.

There is no such phenomenon as "instant church"--new churches are neither incidental or accidental. Careful planning and committed concern are vital.

Timing the beginning of a new church is important. Work can begin before there are enough people to warrant such a ministry or after the pattern of church relationships has been so firmly established that penetration and service are difficult. When a community is developed as much as forty percent, it may be too late to begin church extension.

Sites must be chosen with extreme care. It takes approximately 1,000 family units to adequately support one Protestant church. It is the policy of American Baptists to consider only sites at least one mile from another American Baptist church. Many church planners, government planning commissions and sociologists suggest that a new church should be located in or near the market place.

People problems face the new church. Those who would establish a new church must know the community and the specialized needs of its people. Mobility of population causes constant frustration, but presents the new church with a continuing stimulus for training its leadership.

One of the major concerns of church extension is rapid growth. If growth does not come quickly, the new church does not have an effective program of outreach. Without such a program, the new church will be faced with a rapid turnover in pastoral leadership, a discouraged and spiritually introverted congregation, and a community that either ignores the presence of the church or considers its program inconsequential.

A Prescription for a Successful New Church: Experts agree on what makes a new church grow and on what hinders a new church from growing. The following paragraphs summarize their conclusions.

A Committed Core Group: The first and most basic ingredient for a growing church is a group of concerned Christians who want an American Baptist church in their community badly enough to become personally involved.

Capable Pastoral Leadership: The pastor is key to the church's success. He must have the same basic abilities as those needed by a man serving an established church--and something more.

He must be experienced so as to not become discouraged and must exhibit much patience. He must be willing to risk his prestige by becoming pastor of a tiny church and must all too often make do with a subnormal salary.

Sponsoring Churches with Vision: Established churches with enough vision to sponsor a new church by giving people as well as money are desperately needed. Within the Baptist tradition of autonomy, unless established churches respond to the challenge, the job will not be done. The denomination cannot force

a program. The most vigorous churches have received people from the sponsoring churches. Sometimes the people are only loaned, commissioned by the home church to missionary service in a mission church.

The most helpful financial pattern yet found is for the sponsoring church to buy and pay for the land, turn the deed over to the Convention with no obligation for the mission church to repay as long as it remains an American Baptist church. The building loan and repayment for the initial and subsequent buildings become the responsibility of the new church.

Priority of Denominational Leaders: If new churches are to be properly established and encouraged to grow, denominational leaders must give priority of time, talent and patience to them. They must have vision and communicate this vision to the others who need to be involved. The new church must be administered and nourished until it becomes mature enough to be self-sufficient.

Adequate Site and Buildings: The new church must be conveniently located. The buildings must be adequate for a total program. Very few churches begin with anything like adequate buildings and most cannot add the needed additional buildings because of the dire lack of finances.

Thought is now being given to establishing assistance groups made up of capable laymen from established churches who would help a new church in time of emergency or special need.

Thought is also being given to developing a group of dedicated and capable retired ministers, missionaries, and lay preachers who could be called to assist needy new churches.

It is imperative that the American Baptist Convention make its people aware of the crying need for new churches.

(Crusader, February, 1968, Southern California Supplement)

COMMENT BY DONALD MC GAVRAN

(1) Deliberate planned church planting must go on in Afericasia as much as in Southern California. The mission or younger Church which carries on good church and mission work trusting that sometime, somehow churches will spontaneously "occur," will, we believe, hear "wicked and slothful servant" from its Lord. Church multiplication is always intentional, never accidental. Note how carefully knowledge of the area and of the principles of church growth which work in California have been woven into the Baptist plan.

(2) This kind of church establishment--where each new congregation builds a church near a market center--is expensive. The only way it can succeed, Powell says elsewhere, is for each American Baptist church in Southern California "to designate one-tenth of all its building funds to help new churches with their building needs." Every congregation engages in mission by providing land and buildings for new, small churches. If this is desirable in wealthy California, how much more necessary is it among poor churches in Timbuktu. Cooperation in multiplying new congregations must be built into the budgets of all churches.

(3) Exclusive reliance on well trained pastors probably hampers the American Baptists in Southern California; but even if it works well there, it is

poison in Afericasia. Most church growth in Afericasia results from the fervent evangelistic activity of Christian peasants, laborers, clerks, teachers, wood cutters, fisherman, and truck drivers. The Holy Spirit in the lives of nameless laymen--'"Men of Cyprus and Cyrene'"--planted churches in Antioch of old. Most great expansions of the Church have come as laymen burst out with the Gospel.

(4) In affluent California, at least for American Baptists, new churches appear to mean ample buildings at once. In Afericasia new churches arise in the form of home Bible study groups, house churches, shack churches, store front churches, courtyard churches and the like. Only when many small worshipping groups (churches!!!) have arisen does it become possible to build permanent, adequate buildings.

While "mission aid" in building churches of note in Afericasia should not be scorned or forbidden, its dangers should be remembered. The young Church must not conclude (a) that Christians have to have adequate buildings in which to worship; and (b) that the only way to get one of these is by a \$10,000 grant from the assisting Eurican mission.

(5) Arnold Boal's Church Growth Doctrine, which appeared in the same issue of the Crusader as Mr. Powell's above article, is reproduced in compact form in the following box. It is as true in Afericasia as in California. Many ripened fields are not being reaped because God's servants are busy waiting tables (ed., med., ag) as sufficient mission, are "not sure they have a message," or are content to be practicing a dialogue or a vague or innocuous Christian presence. Nothing takes the place of the conviction that "man without Christ as accepted Savior" is a "lost man" and that the supreme task of the Church is to deliver "an authoritative message from God of His redeeming and transforming grace."

"Our day is characterized by doubts and uncertainties....Many are not sure they have a message for today....But some of us are sure we have an authoritative message from God--a message of His redeeming and transforming grace, a message that centers in the atoning sacrifice of His Son on a cross at Calvary...Our problem lies in finding ways to get people to listen to the message and accept God's offer. Current self-analysis and psychological explanation have all but removed men's consciousness of the reality of sin. Satan could not have devised a more effective strategy for capturing humanity. God's Word clearly states that man is lost and condemned without Christ as Saviour. If we really believe this, compassionate concern will drive us to find ways to help men face the reality of their condition and accept the promise God makes of forgiveness and eternal life." --Arnold S. Boal, Executive Secretary, Los Angeles Baptist City Mission Society (American Baptist Convention)

(6) Churchmen (missionaries and nationals) in Afericasia, who devote hours to prayer and planning for revival and church multiplication, set forth recipes for church growth different from that given by William Powell. The different social structures, religious climates, and political currents require different amounts of the various ingredients. That recipes are different is of no importance. That Christians, full of compassionate concern for lost men, devise

adequate plans for a vast multiplication of churches of Jesus Christ across every countryside and throughout every city in the world is of tremendous importance.

(7) If readers of Church Growth Bulletin wish to engage their colleagues in a stimulating consideration of church planting, I suggest they send me a dollar and let me send them (anywhere in the world, postage free) by surface mail, ten copies of Basic Policy in Evangelism. Joint consideration of this brief document would help any group of missionaries see the real and critical issues in evangelism in Afericasia today.