

# The New Connection: Creating Networks of Spontaneously Multiplying Churches

## A Proposal for Free Methodists

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present George Patterson's article on The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches based on his experience in Honduras, and to apply it so Free Methodists can reach the goal of having 1% of the U.S. population attending the worship service of some Free Methodist church within 20-25 years, or doubling every 3-5 years. This will create new connections with over three million people, and between 20,000-30,000 new Free Methodist churches, and 1000-2000 new conferences. This goal is a way for Free Methodists to become a noticeable and vital part of each community in the U.S. With less than 1% of each community, Free Methodist churches are "off the radar" in most communities, have little influence, and are not positioned to reach the millions of unsaved. Imagine just New York City with over 8 million people and 80,000 Free Methodists attending 500-800 churches within 25-50 new conferences? This compares with a single New York conference now with just 5086 weekly attenders in 49 churches.

But the United States now has 300 million people, most of whom do not have a saving relationship with Christ. Since 1860 when the denomination was founded in Pekin NY, weekly worship attendance at Free Methodist churches in the U.S. has grown to just 101,141 people. So in 146 years, Free Methodists have only reached 1/30<sup>th</sup> of 1% of the population. And with the U.S. population growing about 0.92% per year and Free Methodist attendance growing about 1.68%, it will take 446 years before even 1% of the U.S. population is attending some Free Methodist church. Table 1 uses Yearbook data to summarize the number of conferences and churches, worship attendance, membership and ministers, and converts. Over 9 years the number of conferences declined by 3, societies by 120, and total churches by 35. A fourth Bishop added in 1999 did not reverse the 9-year trends. The Change row shows the total change over 9 years, while the % Year row shows the average compound annual change.

**Table 1**

US Year Ending	# US Conf	Total Churches	Societies	Fellowships	Church Plants	Worship Attendance	Adult Members	Ministers	Total Converts	Youth Converts	Adult Converts
2005	29	<b>994</b>	806	32	156	<b>101,141</b>	<b>65,907</b>	1,958	<b>11,790</b>	4,829	6,961
2004	29	<b>1,008</b>	820	37	151	<b>100,593</b>	<b>65,272</b>	1,913	<b>11,786</b>	4,746	7,040
2003	29	<b>1,008</b>	880	26	102	<b>96,340</b>	<b>63,538</b>	1,888	<b>10,945</b>	4,135	6,810
2002	28	<b>999</b>	852	44	103	<b>95,511</b>	<b>62,742</b>	1,874	<b>10,266</b>	4,677	5,589
2001	28	<b>978</b>	869	43	66	<b>94,053</b>	<b>61,202</b>	1,883	<b>10,830</b>	4,699	6,131
2000	28	<b>971</b>	884	41	46	<b>91,376</b>	<b>60,382</b>	1,871	<b>10,000</b>	4,161	5,839
1999	28	<b>971</b>	884	41	46	<b>90,303</b>	<b>60,499</b>	1,869	<b>10,461</b>	4,416	6,045
1998	29	<b>990</b>	902	41	47	<b>90,020</b>	<b>60,278</b>	1,898	<b>10,125</b>	4,123	6,002
1997	30	<b>1,010</b>	921	42	47	<b>89,744</b>	<b>60,273</b>	1,918	<b>11,259</b>	4,609	6,650
1996	32	<b>1,029</b>	926	51	52	<b>87,100</b>	<b>59,343</b>	1,889	<b>9,779</b>	4,139	5,640
Change	<b>-3</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-120</b>	<b>-19</b>	104	<b>14,041</b>	<b>6,564</b>	69	<b>2,011</b>	690	1,321
%Year	<b>-1.1%</b>	<b>-0.38</b>	<b>-1.53</b>	<b>-5.05</b>	12.98	<b>1.68</b>	<b>1.17</b>	0.40	<b>2.10</b>	1.73	2.37

Over 348 churches have closed, merged out of existence, become inactive, or withdrew during this decade of turmoil, with 199 churches existing in 1996 and 149 failed church plants or restarts. It was

the immense sadness from seeing this list I compiled that motivated me to complete this paper. Even with 154 of the 348 churches having just “zeros” for statistics, I saw proof that at least 3191 members, 5755 attenders, and 1010 converts were affected by these closures and are probably no longer Free Methodist.

Now with new initiatives such as One More Soul, are recent trends better or worse than the 9-year average? Table 2 shows the percentage growth or decline from each previous year. 2005 had worse results in every category than the 9-year trend shown above on the % Year row. So even with new efforts, the objective measurements of kingdom work indicate a need for dramatic improvement over past results just to keep the decline from accelerating.

**Table 2**

US Year Ending	% Total Churches	% Worship Attendance	% Adult Members	% Total Converts
2005	-1.39%	0.54%	0.97%	0.03%
2004	0.00%	4.41%	2.73%	7.68%
2003	0.90%	0.87%	1.27%	6.61%
2002	2.15%	1.55%	2.52%	-5.21%
2001	0.72%	2.93%	1.36%	8.30%
2000	0.00%	1.19%	-0.19%	-4.41%
1999	-1.92%	0.31%	0.37%	3.32%
1998	-1.98%	0.31%	0.01%	-10.07%
1997	-1.85%	3.04%	1.57%	15.13%
AVE % / MEDIAN %	-0.37% / 0.00%	1.68% / 1.37%	1.18% / 1.31%	2.38% / 4.97%

But isn't there growth in some individual conferences, under the leadership of the Bishops? Table 3 ranks conferences and their leaders from 1996-2005 according to the percent change in the number of churches, adult members, worship attenders, and converts where 1=Top. By sorting on the sum of the 4 ranks for each conference, we produce the Overall Rank in the far right column.

**Table 3**

Conferences: % Change in 9 Years. Grouping reflects mergers & multiplication	Supt.	Bishop	Churches	Churches Rank	Adult Members	Rank Members	Worship Attendance	Attendance Rank	Converts	Converts Rank	Sum of Ranking	Overall Rank
OHIO	YOUNG	SNYDER, JAMES	7.9%	7	31.6%	6	44.6%	5	98.2%	4	22	1
SIERRA PACIFIC	BUSH	MANNIOA, HASKINS	34.8%	2	9.8%	14	35.6%	7	219.0%	1	24	2
NEW YORK	GREGORY, HASKINS, HARVEY	SNYDER	-3.9%	14	99.8%	1	76.0%	2	64.2%	9	26	3
MID AMERICA	BERTHOLF, GREGORY, JOHNSON	BATES, KROBER, KENDALL	26.3%	4	14.3%	12	54.7%	4	84.1%	6	26	4
NEW ENGLAND	SHARPE	SNYDER	36.4%	1	37.6%	5	39.5%	6	22.4%	15	27	5
TEXAS	MOTE, SEGURA	MANNIOA, HASKINS	5.0%	11	17.0%	10	67.6%	3	89.2%	5	29	6
SUSQUEHANNA	HASKINS, L.THOMAS, PIERCE	SNYDER	-29.6%	27	69.9%	2	120.4%	1	106.6%	3	33	7

Conferences: % Change in 9 Years. Grouping reflects mergers & multiplication	Supt.	Bishop	Churches	Rank Churches	Adult Members	Rank Members	Worship Attendance	Rank Attendance	Converts	Rank Converts	Sum of Ranking	Overall Rank
SOUTH ATLANTIC	STRYKER, BEDFORD, SNYDER, RILEY	SNYDER	29.4%	3	25.2%	8	15.0%	13	29.0%	14	38	8
SOUTHERN MICHIGAN	CRYDERMAN, RAMUNDO	BATES, JAMES	5.6%	10	20.9%	9	25.0%	9	30.5%	13	41	9
NEW SOUTH & ALABAMA- GEORGIA	NEELEY, BEDFORD, NEELEY, RILEY	SNYDER	5.7%	9	47.4%	3	25.8%	8	-23.4%	22	42	10
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA	MANNOIA, FITCH	MANNOIA, HASKINS	7.0%	8	43.1%	4	22.6%	12	-13.9%	21	45	11
EAST MICHIGAN	SIPES, SHINABARGER	BATES, KROBER, KENDALL	1.7%	13	1.0%	16	23.3%	10	33.5%	12	51	12
COLUMBIA RIVER	R.BATES, M.THOMAS, COLE, BAILEY, BURNS	MANNOIA, HASKINS	10.5%	6	25.8%	7	7.4%	18	-12.2%	20	51	13
MARYLAND VIRGINIA	ROGERS, HASKINS, HARVEY	SNYDER	11.8%	5	-3.4%	20	-3.1%	22	69.8%	8	55	14
PACIFIC NORTHWEST	JAMES, WHITEHEAD	MANNOIA, HASKINS	-8.0%	18	14.9%	11	13.8%	15	14.1%	16	60	15
GENESEE	GRIMM, L.THOMAS, PIERCE	SNYDER	-7.7%	17	12.9%	13	11.4%	16	5.0%	18	64	16
ROCKY MOUNTAIN	MAURER, JEFFREY	MANNOIA, HASKINS	-25.0%	26	-32.6%	26	22.9%	11	176.1%	2	65	17
NORTH MICHIGAN	EVOY, TINSLEY, WHITE	BATES, KENDALL	-5.0%	16	0.5%	17	-3.1%	21	35.0%	11	65	18
NORTH CENTRAL, HEARTLAND, MIN-I-KOTA	LEITZKE, HARRELL, HENRY, GROVER	BATES, KROBER, KENDALL	-9.6%	20	-4.4%	22	9.0%	17	77.6%	7	66	19
GREAT PLAINS	GRIFFITH, KENDALL, MAYSE	BATES, KROBER, KENDALL	-20.6%	23	-3.1%	19	5.0%	19	61.5%	10	71	20
GATEWAY	RUPERT, WINSLOW, KROBER, DELEMARTER	BATES, KROBER, KENDALL	-17.9%	22	-3.0%	18	14.3%	14	-1.4%	19	73	21
PACIFIC COAST JAPANESE	HONDA, HINO	MANNOIA, HASKINS	-4.3%	15	4.6%	15	0.4%	20	-27.4%	23	73	22
WABASH & WEST VIRGINIA	COLGAN, STERNEMAN, MARTIN	BATES-W, SNYDER- WV, JAMES	2.6%	12	-7.2%	23	-11.2%	25	-40.1%	26	86	23
PITTSBURGH	TINSLEY, KELLEY	SNYDER, JAMES	-8.7%	19	-4.0%	21	-6.3%	23	-34.9%	25	88	24
ARIZONA & AMERICAN INDIAN	ABLARD, CHEESEMAN, MCLAUGHLIN	MANNOIA, HASKINS	-46.4%	28	-36.8%	28	-6.6%	24	5.8%	17	97	25
KEYSTONE	L.THOMAS, PIERCE	SNYDER	-23.7%	25	-9.6%	24	-11.7%	26	-29.9%	24	99	26
OREGON	KELLER, SLOAN	MANNOIA, HASKINS	-17.1%	21	-28.0%	25	-15.6%	27	-44.1%	28	101	27

Conferences: % Change in 9 Years. Grouping reflects mergers & multiplication	Supt.	Bishop	Churches	Churches Rank	Adult Members	Rank Members	Attendance Worship	Attendance Rank	Converts	Converts Rank	Sum of Ranking	Overall Rank
GULF COAST	JOLLY, BEDFORD, BUNN	SNYDER	-23.1%	24	-34.3%	27	-19.1%	28	-42.3%	27	106	28
Average			-2.36%		11.07%		19.92%		34.00%			
Median			-4.13%		7.22%		14.06%		25.67%			

Table 3 shows that on balance, Ohio, Sierra Pacific, and New York conferences were the highest ranked based on increasing churches planted, new members and attenders, and converts. Lowest ranked are Gulf Coast, Oregon, and Keystone. Except for the new Alabama-Georgia conference that is shown with the New South for 9-year comparison purposes, the other conferences grouped together reflect mergers and boundary shifts. Denomination growth at Ohio’s rate would reach 1% of the U.S. in 104 years, but could not sustain with just 2392 churches. No single conference is the complete model for all the rest.

In my list of churches closed, merged, inactive, withdrawn, or just vanished, I’ve counted 108 having 20 attenders or more their final full year, and 23 churches with 50 or more. 27 churches had 10 or more converts their final full year. Why were those not saved? Some churches closed multiple times. Others closed without even being assigned their own ID number. Conferences “recycled” ID numbers from closed churches for new ones even though the church is a new group of people. The 6-digit church ID number which should uniquely identify each church has changed 2 or more times for many churches, because the numbering system erroneously assumes that churches belong permanently to conferences. As churches shifted between conferences, not only would their 3-digit conference prefix change, the new conference would change their 3-digit church ID to be unique within the new conference. Churches were not considered worthy of having their own permanent published ID, apart from the conference, to track their progress over time and avoid “losing” them. An internal unique ID within computer records has not yet replaced the traditional conference-based church ID in the yearbook, and tracking these massive changes was difficult. If a permanent ID wasn’t reused when a church closes, it would forever identify each body of believers who became a church that either continued or ended. Their vital statistics and story would not be lost. Table 4 shows the top and bottom in each single category.

**Table 4**

The Top and Bottom	Churches	Members	Attenders	Converts
Highest 9-Year Growth	36.4%	99.8%	120.4%	219.0%
Highest Annual % Rate	3.5%	8.0%	9.2%	13.8%
Highest Conference & Current Bishop	New England Snyder	New York Snyder	Susquehanna Snyder	Sierra Pacific James
Lowest 9 Year Growth	-46.4%	-36.8%	-19.1%	-44.1%
Lowest Annual % Rate	-4.1%	-3.4%	-1.9%	-4.0%
Lowest Conference & Current Bishop	Arizona Haskins	Arizona Haskins	Gulf Coast Snyder	Oregon Haskins

What is interesting about Table 4 is that two of the conferences which were top in one area, such as New England with churches planted or Susquehanna with Attenders, were so much behind in the other areas so as to not place within the top three conferences overall. Reaching the U.S. requires excellence in all four areas because we cannot just increase attenders without adding churches or new converts, and we must disciple and enfold new people into membership. To succeed, all four metrics must increase.

Table 5 shows the rankings of the current Bishops and their territories from top to bottom:

**Table 5**

Bishop / Region	Sum of Rankings	# Conference Groups	Ave Ranking (4 metrics)	Ave Ranking (1-28 Scale)	Overall Rank
Snyder / Eastern Area	490	9	54.4	13.6	1
Kendall / Heartland Area	352	6	58.7	14.7	2
James / Central Area	237	4	59.3	14.8	3
Haskins / Western Area	545	9	60.6	15.2	4

Table 5 shows that the Western and Central areas have slightly lower growth rates than Eastern and Heartland, even though Sierra Pacific and Ohio ranked within the Top 3 conferences. Because of changes in Bishops assigned to conferences, not all credit or blame should go to the current officeholder.

John Maxwell has said, "People change when they hurt enough that they have to, when they learn enough that they want to, and when they receive enough that they are able to." Change is hard and requires a vision of a better future, and persistent motivation every day.

This 1% goal will reverse the historical lack of growth since 1890 by strengthening the weak spiritual condition that ultimately underlies the statistics. So let's prayerfully consider how we can actually obey Christ's command to make disciples in our country, because only from a deep commitment to obey Christ will we overcome the obstacles that hinder us from reaching the prize.

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## 2. The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches - George Patterson



Since 1965 George Patterson has worked in northern Honduras under the Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society. Patterson has developed a special kind of theological education-by-extension program, "Obedience-Oriented Education," that trains Honduran student-workers in evangelism and church-planting. This program has produced 80 new churches in northern Honduras in the last fifteen years.

Christ commands us: "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields" (John 4:35). A brief glance at the "fields" of over two and a half billion unreached people is awesome. Just the mathematics involved forces us to the conclusion that it is not enough to simply *go* to a mission field or to *send* someone else. It is not even enough to go to a mission field and start a few churches. Obedience to the Great Commission will mean that we either send and train, or go as, the type of missionary that can start churches that will grow and reproduce normally (as churches will) and start daughter churches, and granddaughter churches, and great-granddaughter churches and on and on and on until you have reached enormous population areas. There is no other way that we can obey Christ.

I have been working in Honduras directing a Bible institute which is our tool for church planting. Our field is not highly responsive. Ordinary traditional missionary methods get very little results. Our people are very poor, semi-literate, subsistence-level farmers. Even though most of our churches are small, in small villages, we have developed a strategy to enable the churches to multiply. We start an average of one new church every three or four months. We have been doing this now for over ten years.

Fifteen years ago, we ran a traditional Bible institute which was similar to seminaries and Bible institutes in the United States. It was a residence program where students would come in, live and study, and so forth. We saw very negative results. The students that graduated simply did not go out and start churches, nor could the majority of them pastor churches. The same thing had been happening throughout Latin America. And so we changed to a TEE program, that is, Theological Education by Extension. We took the studies to the people who lived in the villages and in the mountains and in the cities. We went primarily to older family men instead of the single young men who had been coming to our Bible institute. We focused on men with roots in their village, who could begin pastoring with the respect of the people much more easily than a single young fellow could.

I would like to share some biblical extension principles which have given the best results in Honduras for using TEE to plant churches. The specific methods and forms may not be compatible with your field, but these biblical principles, applied with methods that are compatible with the culture, should foster the spontaneous multiplication of churches in any mission field. Remember, God does not bless methods; He blesses obedience. We have simply taken TEE and combined it with a strong discipling program focused on obedience, and, with hard work, churches have resulted. These principles are not only for those of you going to the field. They are just as important to those continuing at home, either in multiplying disciples in your area or in molding your church to train and send missionaries capable of planting self-multiplying churches. There are four basic principles to follow: Look on the Fields, Edify the Body, Aim at Obedience, and Organize for Spontaneous Multiplication.

## **LOOK ON THE FIELDS**

Christ commands a careful scrutiny of the fields (John 4:35). Paul knew his own "sphere" of ministry quite well (II Corinthians 10:12-16). He knew what kind of church he wanted to plant and where he wanted to plant them. He had a clear idea of his own ministry.

### **Define Your Own Area of Responsibility**

Every one of us needs to ask the question: "For whom am I responsible?" Many missionaries never learn to define their responsibility. The geographic and ethnic aspects of their ministry are never clear. Some are opportunists, like gold panners running around mining gold, always looking for a richer vein over the next mountain range. I asked one missionary in Honduras, "What is your area of responsibility?" "Oh," he said, "I am going to win Honduras for Christ." And he is going around "winning Honduras for Christ", but he has never started a church and probably never will. He goes to this city, then that city. He hands out tracts in prisons and army camps. But he has never defined his area of responsibility. You must learn to define your area in precise, concrete terms. My area of responsibility, for example, is "the Spanish speaking people of rural north central Honduras." This includes about 400 villages, and a few towns and cities. Defining your area will take much study and prayer. Use a map. Confer with mission leaders, colleagues and national workers. Investigate several areas to find where the population lies, where other missionaries are not working, and where people are responding to the gospel. Be exact. You cannot make practical plans until you know exactly where you are going to work.

### **Define the Kind of Church You Must Plant**

What kind of churches must you plant so that they will multiply themselves spontaneously throughout your area of responsibility? Describe the church in terms of what it is able to do and what it does do, rather than in terms of structure and organization. Please distinguish very clearly between preaching points and genuine New Testament churches. Now, what is a preaching point? A preaching point is a designated place where a missionary or national worker goes weekly to the people who will gather to listen to him preach. They may sing and play the guitar and pray. Local leadership is neither

trained nor established. Rarely are new converts baptized. The Lord's Supper is seldom served. And often there is little discernable difference between the Christians and non-Christians. Perhaps as many as 90% of church planting missionaries start preaching points with the hope that they will somehow evolve into a church. It does not happen except by the grace of God, if He's merciful. Preaching points tend to perpetuate themselves.

It is imperative to know precisely what you are aiming at so you are not stumbling around with the idea, "I'm gonna go and preach and I hope someone comes." Be careful not to start places where people come to listen to you preach. You really don't need your preaching at all to get a church started. There are many ways of communicating the Gospel besides public preaching from a pulpit.

A church is a congregation of disciples who obey the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are repentant, baptized believers who celebrate the Lord's Supper, love one another, show compassion to their neighbors, pray, give, and evangelize. In Honduras we simply define a church as "a group of believers committed to obey Christ." You will want to use your own biblical definition, but make sure that it is concise and precise, so that you will know exactly what you are aiming for on the field.

### **Define the Shortest Route to Plant a Church**

Let's set the stage: you've got a good education behind you; you are on the field; you know some of the language; you have unpacked your suitcases; you walk out of the door and find five million people at your doorstep. What are you going to do? What is the shortest possible route to plant a church that will spark a spontaneous movement to Christ? The steps will vary in every situation. Avoid sidetracking in unnecessary intermediate stages in the evolution of a church. Sometimes some cultural factor absolutely demands an indirect route. Keep the steps short and simple. If you add unnecessary steps, you will fall into the error of starting unnecessary institutions like radio stations, schools, or working through medical teams and other indirect means. And when they do start what they think is a church, it is not a church at all. It is a preaching point again, dominated by the missionary; not a real church, growing and reproducing spontaneously as a living Body. If there is a need for auxiliary institutions, you can help the national church raise them up later.

In Honduras we multiply churches most rapidly following these five steps:

1. Witness first to male heads of households: go with them to win their friends and relatives. Have no public services until the local men are trained to lead them.
2. Baptize all repentant believers without delay.
3. Organize a provisional board of elders, right away (Acts 14:23). Explain that they must win their own people and learn to pastor them themselves. Authorize them to serve the Lord's Supper and to lead their flock in doing the other things Christ commanded. They do not "preach" yet.
4. Enroll these elders in extension training classes. Meet with them every two or three weeks, or as often as possible until they are mobilized.
5. Provide a checklist of the congregation activities ordered by Christ and His apostles for His churches. Use this list as a guide to teach and mobilize one of the elders who teaches and mobilizes the rest.

### **Define Your Ministry**

What are you doing? My own ministry is: "to help the Honduran churches train their own workers." I can say it in one sentence. Yours will probably be a bit different. You may work for a time before you discover what you can do. Be flexible. You may be on the field a year or two before you can pin it down, but keep working at it until you can pin it down. Be concise. If you cannot be brief and precise, you have probably taken on too much. Trim your task down to where you can't help but do a good job; then let God open doors to wider fields.

Of course, consider what gifts the Holy Spirit has given you; but remember that we are to seek gifts,

not to call attention to ourselves, but only to minister in love to one another in the most practical, edifying way. Make sure your ministry gives first priority to the greatest command: to love (John 17:26).

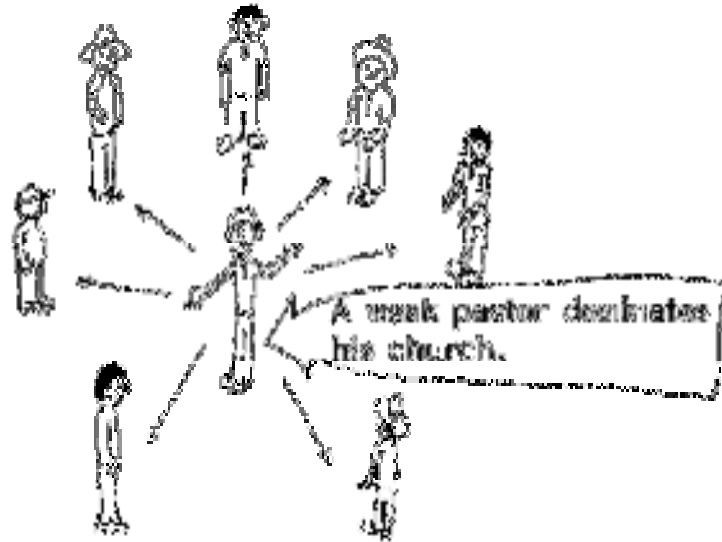
### **EDIFY THE BODY**

The second principle is to build up the church as a living body. Paul teaches us in Ephesians 4:11-12 that whatever pastors and teachers and missionaries do, they are to train the members of the church for the edifying of the body of Christ.

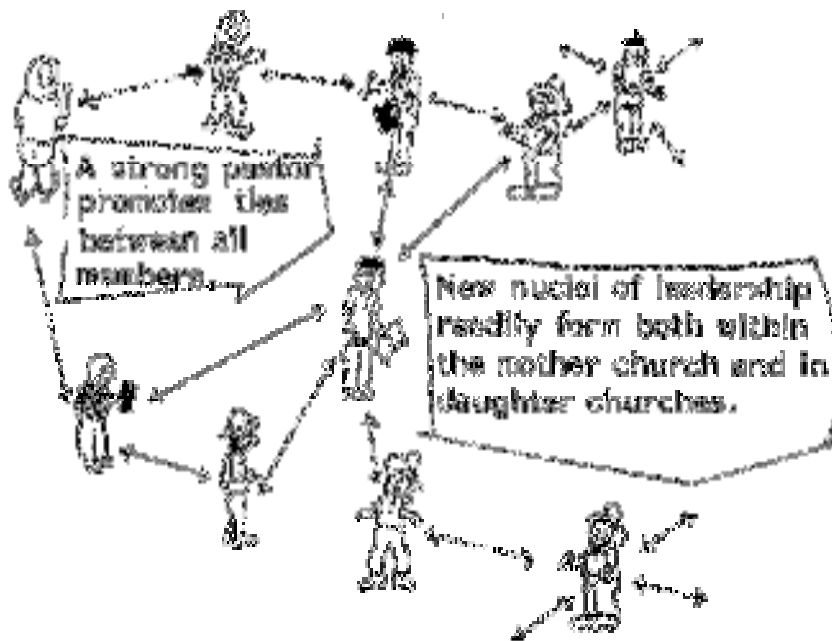
#### **Build Loving and Serving Relationships Among Church Members**

What kind of church organization provides the minimum guidance and coordination necessary to enable the members of an infant congregation to minister in love to one another and to the lost? The key to building edifying relationships among the church members is the pastor. Keep in mind the Biblical model for church leadership (Titus 1:5; Eph. 4:11-16, II Tim. 2:2; Acts 20:17-38). A weak pastor dominates his congregation. A strong pastor promotes ties between all members.

**A PASSIVE, PASTOR-CENTERED CHURCH:**



**INTERACTION IN A DYNAMIC CHURCH:**



Teach your converts from the beginning to edify one another in love. Building a network of strong relationships provides for the large number of ministries required in the local church in order for it to grow and reproduce daughter churches.

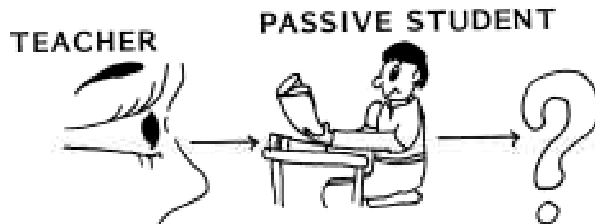
**Build a Teaching/Reteaching Relationship With Lay Church Leaders**

How can you lead them into those personal, loving relationships through which they can readily serve, teach and counsel one another? Paul left Timothy behind to work with the elders in several newly planted churches. He charged him: "The things you have heard from me...these entrust to faithful men

who will be able to teach others also." (II Timothy 2:2). Develop a loving confidential relationship between teacher and student, a "Paul-Timothy" relationship. This is the "master-apprentice" teaching relationship. Teach the way Christ did. Teach the way the Apostles did. Train your men on the job.

In Honduras I have only three students, whom I teach one at a time. They "re-teach" the same things in several churches, to men who "re-teach" in other churches. We have over one hundred active student-workers. Whenever we start a new church, a provisional board of elders is organized right away. As soon as possible, the outside worker enrolls the natural leader (most respected and loved by the people), as his own Timothy and student worker. This man teaches the rest of the provisional elders in the new church. Do not worry about "Leadership Training" as such. Simply organize those human relationships in such a way that many can teach or serve one another and daughter churches are born. Such a project will automatically call forth its leaders. But if you reverse the process, manufacturing the "leaders" first, in hope they will accomplish the project afterwards—you will end up getting things done only by spending enormous sums of money. Trust God's Spirit to raise up and motivate His leaders!

The outside worker (missionary or national) does not decide who these new leaders will be; let the church observe and acknowledge those who best conform to the biblical idea for elders (I Timothy 3:1-7). Beware of traditional education objectives which focus on educating a *man*. Biblical education objectives seek to edify the *church*. The traditional teacher sees only his student.



He is satisfied if the student answers correctly and preaches good sermons. He neither sees nor cares what his student does in the church with what he learns. The obedient teacher sees beyond his student, observing his ministry in the church. The teacher responds to the needs of the church through the reports of the student worker, and teaches exactly what the people of the church need.



### **Build Inter-Church Relationships**

To establish daughter churches we must build loving, edifying relationships between the mother and daughter churches. We must aim at mutual edification within the Body of Christ on the inter-church level. There are several biblical examples of good inter-church relationships: Acts 11:19-26; 11:29-30; 14:26-27; and 15:1-2, 28-31. There are many ways to give and receive between churches. We do it several ways in Honduras. The simplest way is for an extension worker from the mother church to hold extension classes in the daughter churches every two weeks.

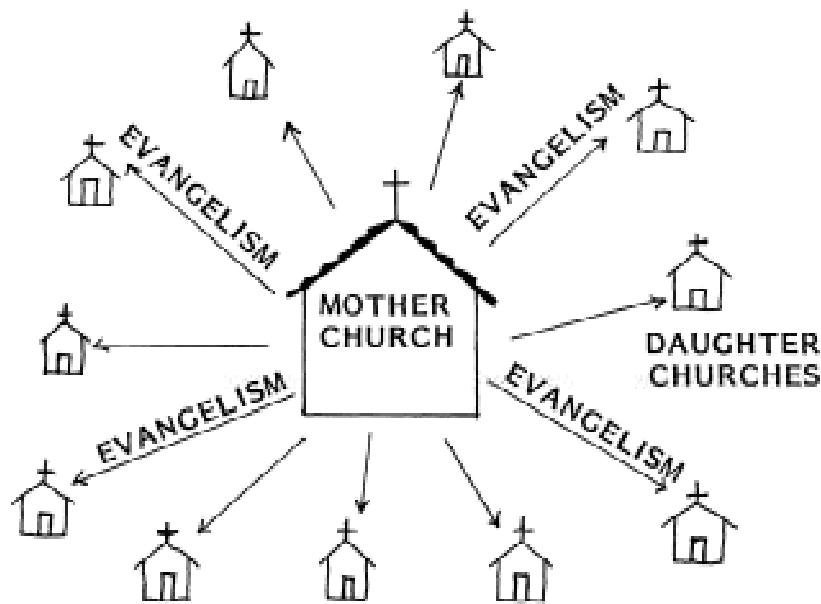


Another way, in case there is no one who can travel freely, is to get the main worker from the daughter church to go every two weeks or so to the mother church.



Of course, these two ways can be combined, especially if churches are a great distance apart (we have several cases of a two days' walk separating churches). One month someone goes from the mother church; the next month someone goes from the daughter church.

These kinds of inter-church relationships are essential to the spontaneous multiplication of churches. You will find that these mother-daughter relationships can rapidly multiply in a spontaneous way. In fact the inter-church relationships are the best way to reach a large field. Beware of the bad strategy of the mother church sending workers to several daughter churches.

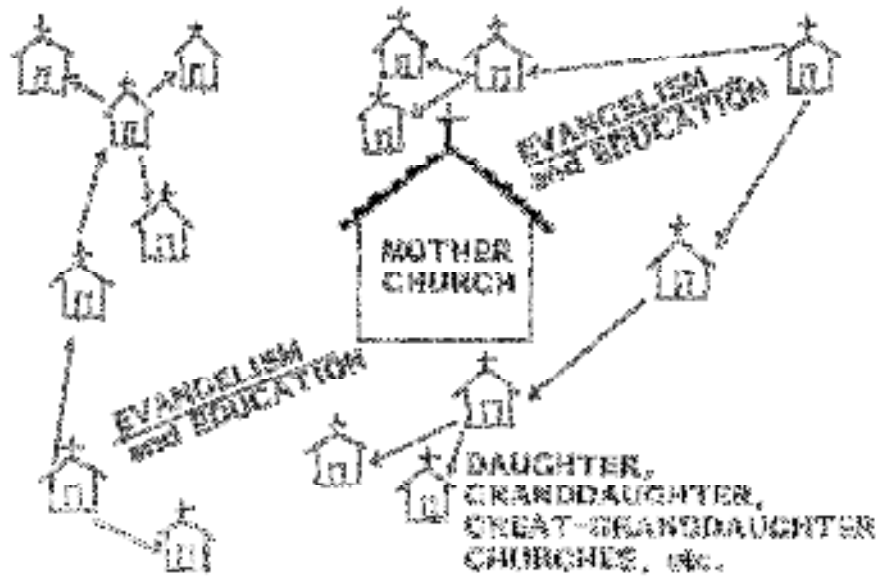


You will wear the workers out and discourage the mother church. It won't work. God's strategy enables a mother church to raise up one or two daughter churches, and then make sure these daughter

churches repeat the same steps. This will reach grand-daughter churches and so on. This does work.

The links in this chain of churches are maintained by volunteer extension teachers from the mother church. We must activate these ties between churches. Help men to know, love, and train each other.

Edify the Body of Christ. Let the natural, chosen leaders train the elders. Let mother churches train daughter churches. Allow strong leadership to develop. Don't commit the missionary's greatest sin—controlling the national churches. Keep out of the way. Let them work and grow. That's when you see the "spontaneous" dynamic. By "spontaneous" we mean that the impulse comes from the Body itself, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The controlling impulse does not come from the missionary. You can share your vision and start the ball rolling, and then you've got to step back and let the Holy Spirit work.



One of the several extension chains we have in Honduras has reproduced over five generations and twenty churches.



**AIM AT OBEDIENCE**

Jesus sent the Apostles to make disciples who would obey all that He commanded (Matthew 28:20). Many missionaries simply preach for "decisions" instead of aiming at making obedient disciples.

### **Define Evangelism Objectives in Terms of Obedience**

In the American decision-oriented culture, decisions for Christ often lead to conversion. But many people of other cultures are not conscious of making a decision while being born again. Repentance is something far deeper than a decision. Decisions are made every day, but you only repent once and for all. It is a permanent change wrought by God. We're born all over again.

In Honduras we find that when we baptize repentant believers immediately, without giving them long doctrinal courses first, we can follow up the great majority and we teach them obedience from the very beginning. They are saved to obey the Lord Jesus Christ in love, and we don't put a large emphasis on doctrine. The doctrine comes! They will learn all their life. This is the error of the American missionary. He manufactures Christians through an intellectual process. He just blindly assumes that if they learn the right doctrine, and believe correctly, and have the right interpretation of Scripture, that this is the way that we make them into Christians. NO! That's not the way that we make disciples. It has little to do with the brain, but it has much to do with the heart and the soul. Make obedient disciples. Then you will see churches multiply. If you just get intellectual decisions, they may believe right, they may know all the dispensations and the covenants, and they may know this and that, but what do you have? Are they multiplying churches? Are they fulfilling the Great Commission of Christ? Are they actually doing what Christ ordered?

What are the specific things that Jesus Christ told us to do? In Honduras we ask each new church to memorize the following list of Christ's main commands:

1. REPENT AND BELIEVE: Mark 1:15
2. BE BAPTIZED: Acts 2:38
3. LOVE: John 13:34
4. CELEBRATE THE LORD'S SUPPER: Luke 22:17-20
5. PRAY: John 16:24
6. GIVE: Matthew 6:19-21
7. WITNESS: Matthew 28:18-20

Teach each new believer from the very beginning to obey all these commands. Don't wait for anything. The first few weeks and months of one's spiritual life are the most impressionable; they will greatly determine his future Christian character.

In Honduras we start each new church right away celebrating the Lord's Supper. Most of them serve it every week, by choice. Don't put off training the new elders to serve the Lord's Supper; don't wait to start obeying Christ!

### **Define Theological Education Objectives in Terms of Obedience**

How can you best help your student to train his congregation to *do* those things which Christ orders them to do?

Our Lord's Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 requires this orientation. *Education* and *evangelism* married to each other in one extension ministry become an effective church planting tool: combined, one reinforces the other. To teach *biblically*, our primary educational objective must not be to "educate" a student but to edify his church. All basic educational objectives and field plans must be based on the commands of Christ.

Memorize the "commands" of the Lord Jesus Christ for His churches. They are the ABC's of church planting. Only Christ has the authority to ordain what His churches must do.

*We must learn to discern three levels of authority:*

1. His Commands—which carry all the authority of heaven (Matthew 28:18-20): repent and believe,

baptize, love, Lord's Supper, give, pray, and evangelize.

2. Apostolic Practices (not commanded)—which carry only the authority of their example: holding possessions in common, laying hands on new believers, serving the Lord's Supper frequently in homes, baptizing immediately, speaking in foreign tongues as a sign to unbelievers, etc.
3. Human Customs—whose authority is derived from a given congregation's united agreement on the matter, which is recognized in heaven as binding on that specific congregation (Matthew 18:18-20). For this cause we should not judge another congregation by the customs of our own.

Nearly all church divisions and quarrels come from someone requiring apostolic practices or human customs (second or third level above) as though they were divine commands (first level above).

In Honduras we have been using a "Congregational Progress Chart" which lists activities ordered by Christ and his Apostles for His churches. Under each activity are listed suggested studies for the corresponding theory, as well as questions which verify the necessary practical work. For the new church leader, this functionally ordered curriculum, oriented strictly toward obedience to Christ and his commands, combines the two ministries of church edification and theological education in one pastoral program. As the student works through the list of activities (the sequence is determined by his needs) he also works through all the essential elements of a traditional pastoral training curriculum.

We refer to the progress chart every two weeks or so when we meet with the student or less experienced pastor. We base all assignments on *obedience to Christ*, not to the teacher. First, we let the student explain the needs and his church's progress to the teacher; we note this on the chart. This should reveal the next logical step in obedience to Christ; we ask him what his plan is, and write it down with a carbon copy, to verify his work at the next extension session; we make suggestions if needed but write them down as a formal assignment only if the student agrees. When assigning specific practical field work, deal with *one man at a time*. This establishes responsibility.

## ORGANIZE FOR SPONTANEOUS MULTIPLICATION

### Build an Extension Chain

Each church should send one or two extension workers, as did Antioch (Acts 13:1-3), to raise up daughter churches. The sooner the better. It is much harder to mobilize an older church for multiplication. Any mother church can start one or more daughter churches which can in turn start more churches. This is the process we call an "extension chain." The links are not individuals but congregations.

Any chain of Spiritual reproduction (in which one reaches and trains another, who does the same for another, and so on) eventually fizzles out unless it is continually re-energized by a *Body* of believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The reproducing unit in the chain of spiritual reproduction is not the individual witness, but his church. Plan your extension chains with this in mind. Each church should be a link in the chain; each witness for Christ, an arm of his church.

### Take New Believers to Relatives and Friends to Witness

Develop a plan to *show* each new convert how to witness to his family and friends. The Holy Spirit flows most readily through these bonds which already exist between people. If you do not use these ties between people as bridges for the Gospel, those very bonds will soon become barriers.

In Honduras we furnish simple studies for each new convert to teach to his kin and close friends. Some older Christian goes with him the first few times to show him how. We prepare the materials both for literates and illiterates (pictures only). They teach of Christ, repentance, faith and forgiveness, leading to baptism.

### **Plan Field Objectives With National Leaders**

Use a map of your area of responsibility, of where your national colleagues will work to plan *evangelism* (church planting) and *education* (pastoral training) objectives together. Let the nationals take the lead in this; you simply help them to know what kind of objectives will get the job done which Christ has ordered. If you leave out the national leaders in these field plans, they will cooperate only *passively* later on.

Ask each man to sign his name on the map by the communities for which he accepts responsibility on behalf of his church. To get a group to agree on concrete plans, proceed one step at a time, praying about each decision. Keep reorienting the group to the basic demand of Christ's Great Commission; train disciples to obey His commandments.

Write out a brief outline of the field objectives agreed upon. What are the new communities you hope to reach, where are the strategic centers for extension of the work, and who are the men who accept the responsibility?

In Honduras we began our extension program working with one mother church (Olanchito). We met and divided our area of responsibility (the Aguan Valley) into nine regional areas. Our first objective was to start a daughter church in each of the nine areas, with a view toward each church reaching all the villages in its area, through extension classes. The workers signed their names to the areas of a large map, where each would work. The second objective was to mobilize each daughter church to do the very same thing for her own, smaller area of responsibility. This has resulted, in 11 years, in 80 congregations, over half of which are now self-supporting, self-governing, and self-reproducing *churches*.

Be sure to plan for specific results. How many daughter churches this year? How many new converts and pastors-in-training?

The students of Honduras Extension Bible Institute plant an average of seven new churches a year, which have an average of 15 baptized adult believers after a year's time. Each congregation has from one to three pastors-in-training. We anticipate the same progress in the future in our original area of responsibility; also we are opening up entirely new areas where we will repeat the whole program. We set yearly goals in keeping with Christ's evangelistic orders, our field objectives and *our faith*.

### **Note Impediments to a Church's Normal Growth and Development**

Christ's "church growth" parables (Matthew 13; Mark 4:26-29; John 15:1-6) show us that churches, obediently shepherded, will grow normally quite like plants. Like all other living things which God has created, they will reproduce after their own kind, bear good fruit, yield an abundant harvest, and grow on their own (one worker plants, another waters, but God gives the growth). It is the inherent nature of the church to grow. If it doesn't, it is like corn which stops growing when only a few inches high; something has to be wrong. An obedient church in normal conditions *has* to grow: it's her very nature. If not, it was planted in the wrong field, or it needs water, weeding, pest control or more light. When a church doesn't grow among a fairly responsive people, something is quenching the power of the Holy Spirit in the Body.

There are several pitfalls to avoid:

#### 1. Avoid Decision Rites

Do not try to confirm men's salvation with American decision-making rites (hand raising, card signing, going forward, etc.). None of them sufficiently emphasizes the need of repentance. Such decision rites are a novelty in church history. They replace baptism as God's ordained rite for confirming a new convert's faith and repentance. Baptism is changed into a graduation ceremony following a discipling course and time of probation.

Do not expect men from non-democratic societies to "decide" for Christ as individuals. Normally, a sincere decision requires much discussion (often arguing) with his closest friends and relatives. The Bible does not speak of "decisions" for Christ nor "accepting" Him; it requires life-transforming faith and repentance from sins.

## 2. Avoid Delaying Baptism

We dare not disobey Christ's command by refusing baptism to a sincerely repentant sinner for any reason (Acts 10:47-48). Serve him the Lord's Supper as soon as he is baptized. Teach him to do everything Christ commanded, especially to love, as our Lord and His Apostles taught as most important (Acts 2:41-42; John 13:34-35).

The first few weeks of a convert's new life in Christ are most important for molding his future Christian character. An older believer can hardly be mobilized to work for Christ, once he has passed his spiritual adolescence simply listening passively to sermons.

Some evangelicals require the new believer to sanctify himself outside the church before he can be baptized and become a member. The Apostles baptized new repentant believers immediately, with no exceptions. Their indoctrination and perfection continued within the church under pastoral care. Do not delay obedience to Christ's commands once a man confesses his repentance and faith.

## 3. Avoid Missionary Subsidies

Many missionaries hesitate to teach stewardship. They corrupt their churches by giving them "easy money," discouraging the believers from giving. Supporting God's work is a privilege; a believer, rightly taught, enjoys it. Don't rob poor believers of this blessing. God multiplies their bit by His own celestial mathematics and their church will prosper spiritually (Luke 21:1-4).

Few missions normally pay national pastors. It tends to corrupt both pastor and church, especially in poor communities. If a congregation is too poor to pay its ministers, let them serve voluntarily. Train several men to work together. Never create a church dependent on foreign aid. It creates resentment, weak churches and missionary control.

## 4. Avoid Delays

Do not accept the argument, "We can't start a daughter church yet; our church is too weak; we must wait until we have a strong home base first."

No church is too young to obey Christ. As soon as a worker is available, send him. New churches raise up daughter churches more readily than old ones. If you wait for your church to get strong, it will also get hard; it is often impossible to mobilize an old church to start daughter churches.

## 5. Avoid Communication Breakdown

One church often starts another, which starts another, and another, to several generations. The flow of extension studies may follow the same chain. One teaches another who teaches another. The best church growth seems to occur one or two links removed from the foreign missionary; there is less dependence on his help and more reliance on the Holy Spirit. But beyond three or four links of teacher-student relationships, communication may break down and reorganization of the chain is necessary.

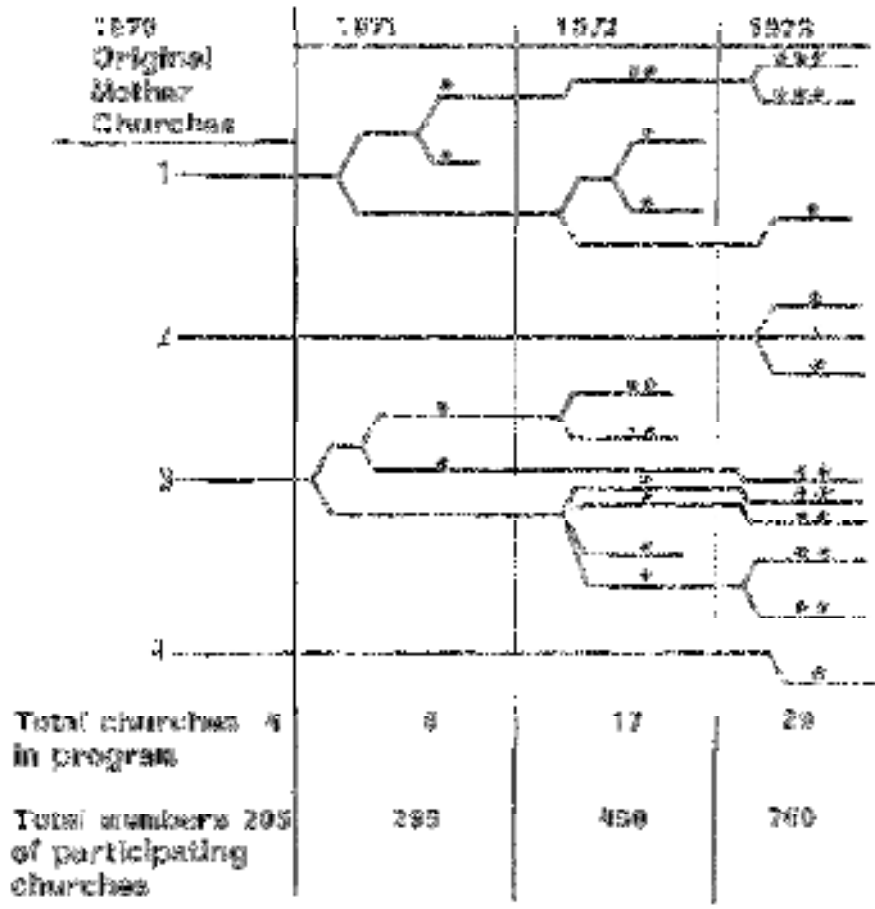
The teacher must have continuous, accurate reports from each church down the line. If he is not getting this "feedback," he cannot teach well; the chain will break. He must detect and strengthen weak links.

## 6. Avoid Pressuring for Growth

We cannot *make* the church grow; we only *let* it grow. Do not push your student to convert men by human devices. Let his church grow spontaneously. A normal, obedient church simply grows as we

obey our Lord. Jesus' church growth parables show this growth to be similar to that of plants and animals. All created living beings (the Church included) grow and reproduce. The Church is alive. She is Christ's Body. We must *expect* her to grow. If we try to control this growth, we kill it. It is spiritual. All we do is obey God's commands. We plant, water, weed, shoo birds and God gives the harvest.

Here's how the program produced twenty-five new churches in Honduras between 1970 and 1973:



+ Daughter Churches  
 + Granddaughter Churches  
 + Great-Granddaughter Churches

By the end of 1976, the program had produced:

Great-great-granddaughter churches	8
Great-great-granddaughter churches	8
Total churches in program	52
Total baptized members (approx.)	2029

**Study Questions**

1. Traditional educational objectives focus on educating a man while biblical education objectives seek to edify the church. Explain the difference between these two objectives. How would these two objectives each affect a strategy for training church leadership?
2. Describe how you would start and develop an extension chain from yourself to a great-

granddaughter church if you were to enter a new field. Label the individuals involved (i.e., trainer, trainee, congregation, elders, new believers, relatives, friends, etc.), their basic responsibilities, and major pitfalls to avoid in order to promote growth in the chain.

3. What is a "preaching point" and how can you avoid starting one?

### 3. Obstacles to Overcome for Free Methodists

1 Corinthians 9:24-27: Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Bishop Snyder said in the Bishop's 2001 State of the Work report "The Free Methodist Church in North America planted 944 new churches in its first forty years (1860-1900). We averaged less than two per year over the next eighty years (1900-1980). Can we regain the passion and sacrifice of our homesteading pioneers?" He also said at a One More Soul conference that 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of Free Methodist churches are stagnant or declining. The Bishop's report of 2005 says: "There is need for every church to understand that making disciples of Jesus Christ is our mission and to make this the central focus of our training and action. We praise God for those churches that are equipping leaders to guide small groups of people into the character and ministry of the Lord. We will not be satisfied until every Free Methodist Church is focused on making disciples of Jesus Christ."

The watershed moment starting the slowing trend was the General Conference of 1890 that regulated and drove out the Pentecostal Bands. David McKenna describes this in his book "A Future With A History: The Wesleyan Witness of the Free Methodist Church". At the General Conference of 1890, the delegates voted to regulate, thwart, and stop Pentecostal Bands that were evangelizing and rapidly multiplying Free Methodist churches. The delegates and leaders wanted control rather than obedience to Christ. McKenna says that "the fires of aggressive evangelism that characterized Free Methodism during the first 30 years of its history were banked, if not snuffed out." People within the Pentecostal Bands left the denomination and in the General Conference of 1894 a report said "there are too many preachers who, instead of devoting themselves to earnest, faithful pastoral work, and to feeding the flock of God, want to be running hither and thither as evangelists." But by the General Conference of 1898 the same committee said "We are compelled to admit that our work does not grow internally as fast as we desire. ... We often enter new fields to the loss of old ones; thus we expand rather than grow."

George Patterson's model for planting churches calls us back to form new church-planting groups within churches, and to change structures within the denomination that currently limit local church effectiveness. The basic model he describes in the 1950's and 1960's was also used by Ed Sywulka among the Maam People in Guatemala (1930-1990), Jack Hook in Irian Jaya (1980's to present), Paul in Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossai, and Corinth (50-80 A.D.) to reach well beyond those beach-head cities, and early Methodists in the U.S. It succeeded in all these places despite obstacles we don't have in the U.S., including language, illiteracy, the need to translate the entire Bible, and people living far from paved roads.

In order to obey Christ's command to make disciples and multiply churches, we must understand Jesus' teaching on Corban found in Mark 7:5-13 where the Pharisees asked Jesus why the disciples weren't keeping their traditions. Jesus responds to them starting in verse 9:

And he said to them “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban [that is a gift devoted to God], then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

The Pharisees were *not at all* ashamed of this rule that allowed a person to declare all his property dedicated to God, and thus unavailable to support his parents even though he would keep it for his own use. They thought this was *honoring* God by dedicating their possessions to Him. But Jesus rebuked them for using this rule to disobey God by substituting a man-made tradition.

In the same way for Free Methodists, any tradition or church structure which we proudly follow instead of obeying Christ’s command to make disciples is “Corban.” Jesus would tell us that by these ineffective traditions we have nullified the word of God and are living in disobedience. The Yearbook statistics clearly show our failures to plant churches and make disciples. We can only reach the 1% goal by letting go of these obstacles to obedience, and we must choose to obey Christ by nullifying the “Corban” we find, or we continue in willfull disobedience. Reaching the goal requires decisions and actions by local churches, conference and denominational leaders, and finally actions by the General Conference. As you read these action steps, ask yourself four questions:

1. Will this change help reach the 1% goal by multiplying disciples, churches, and conferences?
2. Is there any other way to reach the goal? If not, “no change” is choosing disobedience.
3. Are these proposed changes sufficient, or must there also be other changes not included here?
4. How can we get started right away to obey Christ and reach the prize in 20-25 years?

### **3.1 Replace traditional church planting efforts with the Patterson Model**

Instead of church planters trying to start one church that they pastor, they should instead start 5-10 Bible studies in a city or region that become house churches led by the churches themselves. 149 traditional church plants failed between 1996-2005, and were very expensive. Patterson’s model, whether done by churches or conferences, offers the only way to plant 20,000-30,000 churches in 20-25 years.

### **3.2 Local churches should make disciplemakers who reproduce themselves each year**

It is from this group of reproducing disciplemakers that church planters and other small group leaders will come from. Learning to share the gospel of Christ and lead people into salvation is an essential part of any disciplmaking process. The Navigators, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, and Youth for Christ, are three organizations that have disciplined very well and provide models and materials. Many future disciplmakers have personal or spiritual issues to be resolved before they can effectively disciple others. It is the building up of the leadership already within church plants that provides the greatest gain, since sending in just a pastor from the outside (like the Appointment System typically does) merely creates yet another weak “preaching point.”

Stagnant or declining churches (about 2/3rds of total) should be brought into the discipleship program of a stronger church so that they are not left behind. 199 closed churches in 9 years has been a tragedy.

### **3.3 Local churches should each define their ministry area**

The 1% goal requires Free Methodist churches every 15-30 minutes drive apart across the country, with

more in dense metropolitan areas. A conference's geographical area is just the combined ministry areas of each local church, and right now conferences have large gaps between church ministry areas that need to be claimed by new churches. Drawing artificial conference boundaries and Bishop regions (like the Yearbook does) ignores the massive ministry "holes" across the U.S.

### **3.4 Local churches should plant other churches to reach their ministry areas**

We cannot reach 1% of the U.S. or even 1% of our own cities with just the 994 churches from 2005. While some churches will plant a church each year, others will plant every 2, 3, or 4 years with the combined effort resulting in a doubling of churches about every 3-5 years even if some church plants fail. Most new churches will be started as a combination of evangelism efforts and Bible studies that teach new believers in small groups or house churches. Church planters who succeed will mostly plant the gospel in many places at once and let God bring the increase in the places He will instead of just going to a single community and living there 5-10 years to plant one church. Between teaching and evangelism visits every 2-4 weeks, the new believers at each place will practice their faith by meeting regularly together and holding each other accountable as a church. Many of these churches will become fully led by the elders taught and disciplined by the church planter, recognized as leaders by the local church, and finally admitted into conference.

As church plants themselves plant churches, a network forming a New Connection is made. As these networks enlarge, new annual conferences are formed that release newer churches to form their own ministry networks and networks of conferences that are tied together not just by positional roles or legal power, but by demonstrated spiritual leadership working in mentoring relationships to disciple and plant churches.

### **3.5 New Yearbook statistics are needed to track our progress toward the goal**

Patterson recognizes that good information is needed to promote spontaneously multiplying churches, and to teach what is needed most to those at each stage. Using a permanent church ID separate from conferences, the Yearbook should record:

- A. The numbers of disciplemakers (people actively making disciples, including the pastor) and church planters (people actively planting churches) for each church.
- B. The total churches planted by each church, and the current size of their ministry network.
- C. A ranking of each church across the entire country with the sum the 4 metrics.
- D. The church's target population size, and percent now attending a Free Methodist church.
- E. Using a permanent ID for people, show each Church Planter, Pastor, Superintendent, and Bishop's number of disciplemakers, church planters, churches created by their ministry, and rank when compared with others.
- F. Tables 1 through 5 shown in Section 1, updated each year.
- G. An Income & Expense comparison statement with the current and prior year including everything required by the denomination. This would show income and expense for Pensions, Headquarters salaries & expenses, Bishops salaries & expenses, Superintendents salaries & expenses, Home Missions. Money from "Fairshare" payments should be shown along with how that money is spent. Currently there is just a balance sheet of denomination funds, but not money flows. This report should include Superintendent's expenses as they are required within the Discipline, but need not include items decided solely by conferences and churches.
- H. Change the practice of listing a church "Under the Superintendent" or "Under the District Leader" when it doesn't have an appointed pastor. Because a church without a pastor survives when its leaders want it to, a lay leader or delegate should be named as the contact with their address and phone number to help others connect with and help them.

- I. Correct each conference's number of churches closed, discontinued, merged, or withdrawn. As I compiled such a list, it became obvious that the number "closed" was often incorrect from count of churches vanished or marked closed.
- J. A master cumulative list of all churches closed, merged, inactive, or withdrawn since 1996 detailing In Memoriam:
- Year closed, merged out of existence, became inactive, or withdrew
  - Church ID and name
  - County of the U.S. and conference
  - Last Pastor or lay person responsible. Back up 2-3 years if needed to have an actual name instead of "Under the Superintendent"
  - Notes as to reasons why and what happened to the pastor, such as Merged with (church ID), pastor transferred to (conference and church names), church withdrawn from conference, pastor expelled from denomination, pastor relocated against their will, or church split. These details provide insight so others don't repeat the same pattern.
  - The final year information is available. Closing churches sometimes have 2-3 years of no stats (listed as zeros) before being listed as closed, and this should be the last year of "real" information.
  - Final full year's adult members
  - Final full year's average attenders
  - Final full year's converts
  - Final full year's income
  - Church's Net Worth including church+parsonage+other asset-property debt-other debt
- This information honors those who sacrificed for a church that closed, shows the size of the ministry before it closed, and gives clues why such as unresolved disputes within conferences.
- K. A master list of all churches created since 1995 using similar information to the closed churches. If they close, show the date closed to cross reference with the closed table.
- L. A master list of all pastors who leave the denomination and the reasons why.
- M. A master list of all new pastors and the year they started, cross-referenced with the "left" list.
- N. Develop Internet-based online data entry from all local churches so that weekly statistics can be entered weekly or monthly. This data should be accessible by conferences, other local churches, and denomination leaders and church planters to identify problems within a few weeks. If a church closes, this provides partial-year statistics instead of recording all zeros or being dropped entirely from the conference's list of churches. A church which fails to enter data for a month or two can have phone calls or other investigations to see what the issues are, and resolve them while the church can still be saved. Internet-based data entry would connect local churches directly with Headquarters, and would help eliminate cases where a church simply vanished in the Yearbook. A new church would register the church name, church planter and parent church, and contact information, and receive a permanent unique church ID online. When a church switched conference affiliations or became part of a new conference, it would record the change online along with creating the conference record if needed. This online Yearbook with pictures and resumes may eventually supplant the printed Yearbook with 20,000-30,000 churches.

Many churches now do not have even the pastor discipling a future disciplemaker, and would record zeros for disciplemakers, church planters, churches planted, and size of ministry network. A goal should be at least 30-50% of members actively making disciplemakers each year, and a permanent team of church planting disciplemakers represented on the local church board. Most Free Methodist churches would now be called "preaching points" by George Patterson since they are weak, pastor-centered groups that have not been taught how to be effective disciples of Christ. Well-discipled people who in

turn disciple others is a prerequisite for spontaneously multiplying churches. Small groups that are strategically placed can form the nucleus of new church plants, especially when some people are driving great distances to attend the parent church.

Disciplemaking and church planting statistics tied to individual people is also a great help when selecting denominational leaders. We should keep the statistics to elect the right people, and then use the statistics to mentor or replace pastors who will not make disciples.

### **3.6 Update the Discipline to prioritize local churches**

Patterson calls us to “edify the body”, but the structure and content of the Discipline frequently devalues the local church, and disrespects the Christians who comprise it. To reach 1% of the U.S. in 20-25 years, local churches must be prioritized and unshackled from rules that keep them ineffective in multiplying disciples and churches. This goal is simply too great to win the race without removing current hindrances.

#### **A. Place the local church immediately following the Doctrine in the Discipline**

Currently the Discipline order gives the local church lowest priority with emphasis placed instead on the denominational superstructure. This is followed by The Christian Journey that describes an individual’s experience mostly apart from a local church. Instead, the order should be: Doctrine (most of Constitution #1), The Local Church, The Disciplemaker, Annual Conferences, General Conferences, Church Order, Ritual, with the World Conference (Constitution #2) placed in an appendix. A section in the constitution should say that the local church is the highest priority of all, and that the other structures exist only to serve local churches. While local churches can survive without the other structures (such as in persecution), those other structures are pointless if they don’t help local churches obey Christ’s command to make disciples. Any impediment to increasing the numbers of growing local churches filled with trained disciples who are obedient to Christ must be viewed as Corban, or a structure that causes disobedience to Christ. Once some organizational rule or structure is shown to be Corban, local churches should be exempted from any such rule or structure as they are now exempted from any denominational rule that violates state laws.

#### **B. Remove the requirement for ordination or licensing before being allowed to serve communion and baptize.**

Nowhere in the New Testament are disciples prevented from performing these rituals. Ananias baptized Paul. Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. This rule will hinder church planters from local church teams as they train disciplemakers in new churches who themselves will need to baptize and serve communion.

At Skyline Wesleyan Church under John Maxwell in San Diego, all small group leaders were called Lay Pastors and were trained to offer biblical communion. This training was useful not only for small groups, but also for lay pastors holding nursing home services who could serve communion to those who rarely came to church. Some churches have small group leaders baptize those coming to Christ through their group. Free Methodists should do the same so all members can be fully empowered disciples of Christ.

The “license” model is one possibility, but is far weaker than the “permission” model in the New Testament where local churches were authorized to train and recognize those trained to preach, serve communion, and to baptize without constantly having to seek new conference licenses for more people trained. In the New Testament, those who were discipled were themselves authorized to

preach, serve communion and to baptize. Jesus' disciples all baptized, as did Paul and his team. A conference "license" model becomes a hindrance because it really seeks to deny permission to most people by offering up a license as a special privilege instead of a right to all Christians who have been discipled. Rapid multiplication of churches and disciples requires that the "permission" model replace the "license" model whenever possible. A rule at conference can authorize local church boards to grant this permission as they recognize people are discipled and trained. This single rule would release tens of thousands of disciplemakers and church planters, and avoiding wasting the time of conference boards in granting routine licenses.

**C. Grant church planters from local church teams votes in annual conferences as pastors.**

Church planters from local churches are pastoring and shepherding new churches into existence much like pastoral staff. If they are allowed to vote at conference like pastors, their church plants will be represented at conferences and more likely to become full societies voting at conference. The influence of church planters on conferences by giving them a voice and a vote can positively motivate others to plant more churches.

**D. Change the rule requiring a 2/3rds majority to remove a Superintendent to a simple majority.**

It is simply impractical for a superintendent to continue holding office when a majority thinks he should be replaced. Even a destructive Superintendent can often find 1/3 of the people refusing to vote them out, so the rule allows a single leader with his minority of supporters to weaken the ministries of many churches in the conference for several years before another vote for a new term of office. A Superintendent should serve only with the continuing support of the majority within the conference.

**E. Adopt a quicker process for Discipline updates.**

Every delegate, pastor, and church board member should read the Discipline at least once a year and note the parts they feel should be changed. Representatives from each conference would receive these email notes to compile a master list of proposals annually for all the churches. Those changes supported by a majority of churches voting for non-doctrinal sections, or 2/3 majority for doctrine, would be published as part of that year's update. The Discipline should be a living document that grants churches and conferences the continuing freedom to minister effectively. The 2/3 majority now required for non-Doctrinal "constitutional" changes should be changed to a majority of churches.

**F. Recognize new church plants as full societies as soon as they are self supporting, self governing, and self-propagating by parenting a church plant or house church.**

As Patterson shows, these are now real churches in the New Testament model and Free Methodists should recognize and accept them into the conference structure by granting delegate and pastoral votes. Until these new churches become part of conferences, we are promoting a conference model dominated by the 2/3rds of churches that are stagnant or declining, yet full voting members able to shift conference priorities away from discipleship and church planting. There is also the danger they will fall away like the Pentecostal Bands, and that would weaken both the new churches and the conferences. A consequence of this change is that Fellowships category may disappear, with a church plant transitioning directly to a full society that votes at annual conference.

**G. Modify the Appointment System to permit the self-pastored churches Patterson describes.**

If the Appointment System were effective, 2/3rds of Free Methodist churches would not be stagnant or declining since all have appointed pastors sent in from outside the local church by the MAC.

Many stagnant or declining churches have had a series of appointed pastors, all of whom failed to make disciplemakers. Patterson calls these churches “preaching points,” and the Appointment System creates those far better than it creates spontaneously multiplying churches.

Some healthy churches have even had their pastor replaced by the MAC against the will of the church or pastor. One such case involved a pastor who planted both the Gananda and Palmyra Free Methodist churches within the Susquehanna conference, and was planning to plant a church in Penfield, NY when he was reassigned to another conference to a church that ultimately closed. The parent church was left weaker from this move. While he is now planting another church in Pennsylvania several years later, Penfield still has no Free Methodist church because of that MAC decision supported by conference leaders of the time.

So long as the MAC makes appointments from outside the local church, the members of the MAC should take personal responsibility to fix problems created from their appointments by, at the request of the local church, moving from their current church to pastor where there was a problem. With 2/3rds of churches stagnant or declining and MAC members moving every 2-3 years to fix problems, few pastors would want to serve – so why not rename the MAC the Ministerial Personnel Service (MPS) to recognize their new voluntary service to local churches and pastors in filling pastoral openings? MPS members could also train local church boards like Patterson suggests.

**H. Permit a church to replace a pastor that is not supported by a majority of members.**

Such pastors weaken churches by causing members to leave or be unproductive for the kingdom. Too many churches have declined or closed when pastors were not replaced fast enough by conference leaders who ignored the problems.

**I. Permit churches to switch conferences or form new ones by majority vote of the society.**

Since many new conferences are needed to reach the 1% of the U.S. goal, groups of local churches should be allowed to form low-cost conferences without a paid superintendent or expensive administrative costs. While there would usually be 6 or more churches in a conference, some parts of the country have so few churches that as few as 2 churches should be allowed to form full conferences. General Conference delegates could come from conferences with 6 or more churches, or groups of 2-3 smaller conferences sending a delegate.

**J. Eliminate church subsidies that corrupt both giver and receiver, and modify the Trust Deed Clause so that it only can dispose of property abandoned by local churches.**

The greatest source of money granted to local churches is from the sale of properties seized using the Trust Deed Clause. But it has created hostile, unloving, relationships between leaders of conferences and their local churches, and reduced rather than increased the numbers of churches. Churches threatened with closure shift to “survival mode” and are not as effective in making disciples and planting churches. Recipient churches that could bless others instead become dependent on these funds. One reason Susquehanna has the highest rate of new attenders is because funds were given to churches growing attenders far faster than disciples. 30% of its churches closed in 9 years. The Trust Deed system also creates irresolvable conflicts of interest in that future recipients of money from closed churches are involved in church-closing decisions.

If a church wishes to survive but its conference leaders wish to close it, the people in that church should be free to leave for another conference with their property. Why is it more spiritual to seize their property and drive fellow Christians out of the denomination, destroying the fruit of their hard

work and giving? Some of those people have invested many years and tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars in that ministry, and the conference should not take it away. Further, we cannot persuade millions of people to join a denomination that practices church property seizures, because all their hard work could be wasted. If new members heard the stories of churches closed, and the ugly disputes involved, they would not join. The Trust Deed Clause, enforced with malice, will keep us from reaching the 1% goal.

**K. Limit conference sizes to 2 hours drive between the farthest two churches.**

These changes promote regular meetings where pastors and lay people can connect for training and to discuss vision and ministries without traveling more than one hour each way. Note that this is opposite the current trend in conference consolidation that is forming mega-regional conferences where pastors and churches are so far apart they cannot really connect regularly.

With 20,000 evenly spaced churches the average spacing is about 15-20 minutes apart. Many existing churches would form new conferences with a few closer churches if given permission. Most conferences boundaries should also not cross state boundaries so that leaders only have to consider one state's laws.

**L. Restructure to lower the “Fairshare” or “Apportionment” or church tax.**

This mandatory payment takes around 13.5% (Susquehanna Conference) of local church income to pay pensions (about 7%), Superintendent and Bishop's salaries (about 1.8%), other denominational executives (about 0.4%), conference expenses (about 1%), Home Missions (about 3%), and other WAVE administration taking the rest. This 13.5% for many churches is higher than nearly all other expenses apart from pastor's compensation, and facilities. The Pension plan must be reformed and made optional for local churches to negotiate with pastors as part of the compensation package. In many cases, a portable pension such as 401-K or IRA would suit pastors better since they may not even vest in the current plan. This kind of system is what most Americans now have at work. A church planting system relying on unpaid local lay leaders described here will create many churches with a pastor who either has their own retirement plan, or will be best served from a more flexible system. The other expenses should be reduced by the national BOA so “Fairshare” is less than 5%.

**M. Permit challenges to Free Methodist “Corban” by any pastor, delegate, or member of a local church when a conference or denominational rule or tradition directly inhibits Christ's command to make disciples.**

These challenges should be handled publicly like Paul's challenge to Peter in Galatians 2:11-14 when Peter reverted to eating only with the Jews, because church policy issues are involved. These are not private offenses to be handled with Matthew 18. In two other cases, the New Testament models how to handle public issues publicly: Peter's preaching to Gentiles in Cornelius' household (Acts 10-11), and whether Gentiles were obligated to follow Judaic law (Acts 15). In both cases public discussion resulted in unity and glory to God. Because conference boards and leaders are the enforcers of Corban with meetings held privately, there needs to be scheduled public times where delegates and church boards can hear the challenge, and delegates given the chance to nullify traditions determined to hinder discipling and church planting. We have lost many people God sent to the denomination to be agents of change because the keepers of Corban drove those people away to preserve ineffective traditions.

John Mark Richardson, pastor of what was the Hawthorne Light & Life Community in California, withdrew from the conference and denomination with his church after starting a network of 17-18

African American churches and leading many men to pursue the ministry of pastoring churches. The 2003 yearbook shows his church with 415 adult members, 156 adult and 54 youth converts, worship attendance averaging 350, and church income of \$199,073. His network has now grown to 20-25 churches apart from the Free Methodist structure. He felt that reaching the inner city and raising up men ordained to ministry was too hard as a Free Methodist. Since many candidates had no college education, it would take seven years or more to be ordained – too many “hoops” to jump through. The people who brought him into the denomination had themselves also been forced into new jobs, and he no longer felt connected with people sharing his ministry vision. For Free Methodists to obey Christ, the structures (or Corban) compelling pastors like John Mark Richardson to leave must themselves be nullified.

- N. **Permit conferences to innovate in structure and function differently from the others.** The Discipline should clearly state that conferences are allowed to innovate, and the Yearbook statistics would show their successes for others to adopt, and failures to avoid repeating.

### **3.7 Select leaders experienced in planting churches and discipling disciplinators**

As John Maxwell has said, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” Selecting leaders on conference boards, the national BOA, Superintendents, and Bishops without this experience will result in “Corban” being reinforced instead of recognized and eliminated. Decisions to expel or relocate effective pastors, close churches, require burdensome rules and high “Fairshare” payments on the churches will continue to be the norm. One example is several years ago when the national BOA raised the “Fairshare” yet another ½ of 1% to support larger pensions, those making this decision probably had not planted churches, personally made disciplinators that year, or been in local churches doing this. They probably didn’t realize how the hundreds of dollars extra from 1000 churches would affect local ministries. Their priority was not local ministries, because if it was those leaders might have considered instead a full pension system reform with a flexible system of 401-K, IRA, and matching contributions of churches with those of pastors. But instead the national BOA chose to increase required payments.

### **3.8 Keep leaders within their effective ministry networks**

Once we restructure so Bishops and Superintendents are selected by their church planting and disciplinators experience, why would we “promote” them away from their ministry networks? They should continue pastoring the churches that head these networks even after being given new responsibilities. This will avoid placing positional leaders over churches and leaders who have not been part of their spiritual formation. By recognizing pastors and church planters with a network of 6 or more churches as a Superintendent, or Bishop with 24 or more, we give titles to those people who are the spiritual leaders of networks of churches already. This solves many practical problems:

- Ministry networks aren’t disrupted by taking effective leaders away to positional roles.
- We don’t have superintendents and Bishops without the experience to lead this new work
- Superintendents and Bishops will lead by example rather than just by word.
- By remaining salaried pastors, we save the 1.8% (2003 Yearbook) of total church income paid them in salaries from the “Fairshare” requirement. Local churches can minister more.
- This reproducible model is needed to get to 1000-2000 conferences with 20,000-30,000 churches, requiring perhaps 1000-2000 Superintendents and 200-300 Bishops.
- This model permits reversing conference consolidations because paying Superintendents is too expensive for conferences with less than 20-30 churches. Now conferences can be formed from as few as two churches, and more typically five or more.

### **3.9 Enlist able-bodied retired ministers and missionaries as disciplemakers and church planters**

In 2005 we had 1,958 ministers but just 994 churches. Even with some multiple-pastor churches, there are still hundreds of retirees that could help make disciplemakers in stagnant or declining churches, plant churches or lead planting teams using the Patterson model, or disciple new Christians in churches.

## **4. Conclusion**

Now that you have read this, will you respond to obey Christ's command to make disciples, plant churches, and remove the Corban that thwarts our efforts? If we obey Christ, we *can* have over 3 million Free Methodists in 20,000-30,000 churches and 1000-2000 conferences in 20-25 years. Jesus Christ sacrificed it all for our salvation and His Church. Let's do this for Jesus!