

erful conviction of God in our hearts—by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God. Let us issue a call for repentance to pastors, seminarians, and laity—a call which challenges them to fasting and prayer, evaluation, confession of sin, repentance, and renewal. In this atmosphere we will be able to recognize those who have been truly called as evangelists, to lead the way in taking the gospel to the remainder of the world. The purpose of our training, praying, and calling is that we might be involved in sending.

The Challenge of Sending

Those duly sent by a local church have been sent by the Holy Spirit himself (Acts 13:3–4), such is the primacy of the local church in world evangelization.

Barnabas and Paul preached the gospel and planted churches until their work was completed. Upon returning they gave a full report to the sending church (14:26–28). Our missionaries today should do the same.

The whole church today faces the challenge of sacrificial sending. It is much easier to sing, “We will give, we will pray, we will witness every day,” than it is to actually accomplish these tasks. This is why we need to re-emphasize the power of the Word of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, and the power of evangelizing. World evangelization calls for sacrificial giving, sacrificial praying, and sacrificial witnessing. May each and every local church rise to the occasion, based on the authority of God’s Word, and fulfill the responsibility to pray for, to send, and to support laborers in the worldwide harvest field.

Let us pray and set goals under the direction of the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. And let us expect the Lord to do more than we could ask or imagine! May God be glorified in the church, in each local church, and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations.

THE PRIMACY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH II

The Importance of the Local Church to World Evangelization

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I represent thousands of pastors from small local churches scattered in different parts of the world. I used to think small local churches were insignificant because large churches have all the attention and we were seldom noticed. But this is not true today. Large and small local churches are equally significant and important to world evangelization. As a matter of fact, it is the *key* to world evangelization.

According to David B. Barrett, the total world population in 1989 is 5,200,782,100. By the year 2000, the total will be 6,259,642,000. Today the total number of Christians is only 1,721,655,700. And the total number of practicing Christians is even lower at 1,193,073,400. It has been claimed that 2.5 billion souls have never heard the gospel of salvation. Who will reach them for Christ?

People are important to God. He is a people-seeking God. The Bible says God is “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God loves people.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:16–17).

This is the gospel of the kingdom: In Christ alone, there is hope and salvation. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The entire world must hear the Good News of God. The gospel of the kingdom is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). But,

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Romans 10:14).

God is calling the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world—proclaiming Christ faithfully until he comes.

The church is the key to world evangelization. The church is a gathered and scattered community of God’s people throughout the world in different situations and

contexts. The church is a called-out people placed in the world and being sent into the world to evangelize and do good to all people. The apostle Peter said,

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

The church has been chosen to demonstrate and declare the Good News of salvation to the whole world. It is God's will that the entire world be evangelized before he comes.

God will not do it alone. He can, but decided not to. He chose a human instrument to do his will in his own way. God chose Israel to be his instrument. To bless them, to be blessings to the nations, and to be his servants and light to all the world, but they failed. Christ came through the faithful remnant and said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Christ, the Good Shepherd, died for church growth and world evangelization. He commissioned and commanded his church to do the same. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). God will not do it alone. He has chosen and is calling his church, the local churches gathered and scattered around the world, to carry on his work of proclaiming him until he comes.

God has given the local church all the resources to do the needed task entrusted to her:

1. *We have the Word of God* in our hands. Says the Lausanne Covenant:

We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written Word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We also affirm the power of God's Word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women. For God's revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God.

2. *We have God himself* in the person and power of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the Son. The Holy Spirit is to enable and empower his people to do the work that Christ began. As Christ said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). The Holy Spirit came to teach, guide, and empower the church. World evangelization will become a reality only when the Holy Spirit renews and revives the local churches in truth, wisdom, faith, holiness, love, and power.

3. *We have other members* of the body of Christ. We may vary greatly, but we are all part of one body. Local churches have a variety of settings and approaches to world evangelization. As the apostle Paul said, "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:16). In all our doings, we should make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in peace to accomplish together our evangelistic and cultural mandate.

4. *We have spiritual gifts* to prepare and equip God's people to do the ministry. Spiritual gifts are a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to each member of the body of Christ, according to God's grace, for use within the context of the body. The body is an organism with Jesus Christ as the head and each one of us are members functioning with one or more gifts. It is our responsibility as pastors and Christian leaders of local churches to assist our members to discover, develop, and use their spiritual gift(s) respectively. If our spiritual gifts are being discovered, developed, and used, we will know our "spiritual job description." Our attitudes will be changed, the body of Christ will grow and multiply, the world will be evangelized, and God will be glorified.

God has given us all the resources we need in our local churches to be active participants in world evangelization. The church has never stopped growing since the Day of Pentecost. The church is God's instrument, chosen to demonstrate and declare to the whole world Jesus Christ, the Savior and Lord. God will hold us responsible and accountable to him.

The urgency of the task is before us. God has not changed his plan. The local church plays an important role in world evangelization. But the problem is the church is not growing fast enough. Total commitment, unity, and sacrifice to world evangelization is greatly needed.

As a young pastor in 1968, I looked after a small congregation—the Tanauan Bible Church. It was located in the municipality of Tanauan, in the province of Batangas, Philippines—about thirty-five to forty miles south of Manila. For seven to ten years, I had struggled and was ready to quit the ministry because I could not see growth in the church. But God reminded me of his Word saying, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." *I will build my church*. . . . As I pondered those words, the Lord brought me to my knees in prayer—searching, fasting, and waiting upon him for guidance and clear direction.

The field director of the mission working with us came to visit. He asked, "What can we do as a mission to help the Tanauan Bible Church grow, mature, and reach out for others?"

In humility and honesty, I responded, "You can help the church grow, mature, and reach out to others by leaving us alone and by you moving to the next city to begin a new work."

They did. What was the result? Growth!

In our case as a congregation, this was a real challenge. God gave us courage to welcome the difficulty as a challenge to prove the sufficiency of God's grace. I began sharing my burden and vision to the people through prayer, training, modeling, teaching, and preaching the Word of God by the help of the Holy Spirit. My goal was clear: To see Tanauan Bible Church mature in spiritual qualities, leadership ability, financial stability, and in effective ministry—that is, an extension, expansion, and cross-cultural ministry. The people began to see and understand the scope of God's redemption and the seriousness of their role, as the people of God. I often told them:

We are not here for ourselves only, but we are here for God and for others. God has given us all the resources we need to bear witness. We have the Word of God in our hands. We have the Holy Spirit in our hearts to dwell in and empower us. The Holy Spirit has given us a variety of spiritual gifts for the building up of the body and to do the work of

Christ in today's world. We are to discover, develop, and use those gifts in serving God, because God will hold us responsible and accountable to him.

The congregation was moved mightily by the Holy Spirit. Their lives were renewed and revitalized. Faith and vision were enlarged. Burden for lost souls was evident. Consequently, they renewed their commitment to God in Christ. They renewed their commitment to the local congregation and to loving and serving one another. The community was amazed by the lifestyle God's people displayed; they gained much respect and credibility. And they renewed their commitment to the work of Christ in the world.

We are all ministers of God—servants to serve, not to be served. We are to give our lives for the salvation of many and for world evangelization. We are to act local, but our thinking and vision are global.

We need unity and cooperation in local churches, missions, and para-church organizations. But we already have unity in Christ. Our responsibility is to keep, preserve, and work within that unity to be more effective witnesses in our community, in our country, and in the world.

I took the initiative to call and invite all the local pastors and Christian leaders to have a fellowship and sharing time as appointed leaders in our municipality. Our main purpose was for fellowship, to know each other better, and to give the ministry focus and direction. We have also elicited respect and cooperation from each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord, both co-laborers of God in his vineyard. Consequently, we have resolved to keep and preserve our unity in Christ. Our responsibility is to manifest and demonstrate that spirit of unity and mutual understanding in the ministry locally. This spirit prevailed, and we want this to be evident in our district and in the entire nation. As a nation, we are committed to plant fifty thousand local churches by the year 2000. On a global scale, as in the case of Lausanne, we want to evangelize the world by the year 2000. We need to work together in unity and mutual cooperation to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

The Tanauan Bible Church, which struggled with non-growth for at least a decade, found its way through the Word and Holy Spirit. The church is now experiencing tremendous growth and maturity, and has an effective ministry planting daughter churches in satellite towns and has active participation in cross-cultural ministry. The Tanauan Bible Church became a model to others in our district, regional, and national organization. It has been noticed by the nation and by the world. There is no doubt in my mind that the local church is central to world evangelization.

Because the local church is important to world evangelization, there is need for simple planning for future growth and multiplication of responsible and reproducing local churches.

As a local church, we need to set goals for future growth and multiplication. We are convinced that goal setting is biblical, natural, and practical. We have adopted a twofold evangelistic goal: to make responsible and reproducing disciples; and to plant responsible and reproducing local churches. These goals should be relevant, measurable, significant, manageable, and personal.

We need to formulate a simple strategy to guide us. We can start by finding contacts from relatives, friends, interested people, and people groups. Then, we can conduct an evangelistic Bible study for those interested. Through the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the faithfulness of God's people to share the gospel, the Holy Spirit converts people to Christ. New converts need to grow and have fellowship, so we form a congregation or

join an existing congregation, as the case may be. A church is then established and organized to have regular worship, instruction of the Word, fellowship, and expression of the members' faith.

Consequently, a new church is born. As this church grows and matures, they will communicate the gospel to others—to the community they are in and to other communities. Then, the cycle repeats: contacts, conduct, converts, congregation, church, and communication.

Our approach needs to be flexible. Sensitivity to the real context is important. In much of the Philippines, we cannot preach the gospel outside the context of poverty. We must be sensitive to the real needs of the people. For the Tanauan Bible Church, we use a holistic ministry approach. It is an integration of the two mandates—evangelistic and cultural: fulfilling the Great Commission and fulfilling the Great Commandment.

No matter how small your local church, God can make it grow and multiply. It can make an impact on your community, district, region, country, to the nations, and to the entire world. The local church is central to world evangelization. World evangelization will be fulfilled if we work together locally *and* globally in unity and sacrifice.

Together let us aspire to be great for God, as Christ was. He came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as ransom for evangelization. May we, the church—the local churches of the Servant, do the same. May we serve as faithful servants and willingly give our lives to world evangelization.