

Paul's Missionary Band as Metaphor

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Postmodern Advances At New Hope

PART FIVE OF A SIX PART SERIES

In this last section I will highlight the most helpful applications of Paul's missionary band in our multicultural postmodern context. Special attention will be given to the particular advances at New Hope Christian Fellowship and related lessons from history.

Multiplication occurs rapidly ... one team responsible for a mission becomes four ... ministry and discipleship multiply simultaneously.

Our primary texts are Exodus 18 and II Timothy 2:2. The number 10 is a regulatory and optimum sized number for groups. New Hope uses the formula $1 + 4 \times 2 = 10$ to identify one facilitator (team leader), four persons who bring complementary gifts, and any available spouses, to form discipleship teams with a maximum of ten persons. The facilitator's primary role is to disciple each member as the team accomplishes its mission. They multiply teams by finding faithful men and women who will find faithful men and women, etc.

New Hope's mission is divided into four functional parts. Four persons who serve on Pastor Wayne Cordeiro's leadership team are responsible for multiplying discipleship teams. Each member of every team begins by training a shadow to take their place so that they will be available to move to another team. Teams are then reproduced within each of the four pages. Multiplication occurs rapidly and one team, responsible for a particular mission, soon becomes four teams. Ministry and discipleship are multiplying simultaneously. Alignment of teams within the overall mission is automatic and continuous.

All ministry is done by teams with a clear goal and mission. If an individual gets an idea that fits the overall mission, New Hope does not launch the ministry until a balanced and qualified team is properly prepared.

All teams are sodalities (specialized teams) with minor modality responsibilities. Since every team has a singular mission that is definable and measurable, each team can pursue that mission with a minimum of encumbrances or distractions. The central task of any team, however, does not override the importance of valuing and caring for each team member.

All members of teams are missionaries and emerging leaders. Evangelism occurs on virtually every team. Many of the service teams invite pre-Christians they meet along the way to join their team and to help them serve in various capacities. The attraction of the team's contagious, transforming and authentic faith serves as a powerful witness that proves to be highly fruitful.

The greatest congregational value is to be part of a team that is sent out to form a new congregation. No one is forced to be involved in a church plant, but everyone is encouraged.

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The entire congregation is a missionary organism (sodality vs. modality focus) rather than maintenance-minded institution. The focus of each ministry is sodalic in nature. The overall sense is more like a missionary movement than a large local church. New Hope' s sodality mindset has permeated and transformed a modality organization into an indigenous movement among a variety of postmodern peoples.

Spiritual renewal and organizational replenishment is ongoing. Members grow as they go. Approximately 20% of the focus of all care groups for new Christians is devoted to team-like activities. Each group determines among themselves how they can focus strategically on others. Service as a Christian core value is built into the discipleship DNA almost at inception.

Accountability and placement are strengthened and simplified. Only on an exceptional basis can a person be on more than two teams. Most of New Hope' s leaders are being disciplined on one team and at the same discipling others on their own team.

Individuals move with ease from being disciplined in a team-like care group, to joining a real team as a leader in training.

Territorialism and hierarchical thinking are irrelevant. Because of the rapid movement of individuals and the constant multiplication of teams, individuals do not develop cherished positions, or set up their own turf to defend.

The greatest congregational value is to be apart of a team that is sent out to form a new congregation. No one is forced to be involved in a church plant, but everyone is encouraged. When a leader senses that their time has come to begin a new work, their divine call is vigorously celebrated.

Contributing to this continuous exodus of teams is the belief that one' s gifts can best be maximized by experience on a variety teams. Individuals move with ease from being disciplined in a team-like care group, to joining a real team as a leader in training. They are taught immediately to train another person to take their place. As soon as this first step is completed they are free to make a lateral shift according to their interests and burdens. In most churches such rapid movement by an individual among several teams would result in chaos, and be interpreted as a lack of faithfulness or commitment. At New Hope, lateral shifts are encouraged as a spiritual way of discerning one' s gifts and gaining the necessary experience on several teams to become an eventual team leader.

Small groups are feeders to teams, rather than self-contained units that reproduce other small groups. Specialty teams are able to reproduce more quickly than conventional cell groups because there are fewer skills to learn. Cell groups are more like a modality, since they function as a house church, or a complete reproducing entity. In contrast, specialty teams have some secondary modal responsibilities, but they focus approximately 80% of their energy on a single mission.

A few additional guidelines will be helpful to maximize Paul' s missionary band approach, as it relates to our multicultural postmodern reality.

1. Realize that the transition usually takes two to three years for the average established congregation. There is a normal sequence of understanding, embracing, adopting and implementing any radical ideas. However, change should be encouraged throughout an organization, wherever there is receptivity. The shift to teams should permeate an organization at any and all levels gradually, rather than proceed systematically from the

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top down or, from the bottom up. Sometimes several pockets in the middle or at one side are the best place to begin.

2. Be sure to make the focus on reaching receptive groups of barbarians rather than on individual nominal Christians. One of the best ways to reach indigenous groups is to emphasize hospitality as a critical frontline gift, and as an essential skill for all Christians to acquire. Wayne Cordeiro places a major emphasis on food, fun and relationship building activities at virtually every church gathering. In a nutshell, New Hope is not a program, but a heart to heart ministry, where one heart touches other hearts constantly through service and sensitivity. This relational reproduction of teams can be described as adopting more of the outgoing, hospitable style of St. Patrick than the cerebral style of St. Augustine.
3. Adopting the Pauline approach enables congregations to shift from complexity to simplicity. Any one who attempts to track the flow of people at New Hope, or to sketch an organization chart, will likely be disappointed. Individual leaders flow from one team to another through an almost invisible, yet spiritually discerned signal, by those who are relationally in tune with large numbers of leaders.
4. The criteria of selection of leaders is also reduced to a short, easily discernible list of three: Ability to facilitate teams, loyalty/comfort with team leader; some expertise in the area ministry. In contrast, most congregations in America, still require a long list of leadership competencies, and assume that the most talented or experienced player will be the best team leader.
5. Perhaps best and most radical of all is the distillation of a single primary measurement of leadership effectiveness. In future 21st century team based ministries I believe the most important question to ask at the end of each year of ministry, is how many discipleship teams have you reproduced in your ministry this past twelve months?

Conclusion

Current postmodern writers often describe the frustrations and the difficulties in entering the world of the postmoderns and engaging them with the gospel. Wayne Cordeiro has put Paul's missionary band into action in 21st century Hawaii. New Hope has creatively contextualized McGavran's people movement principles in a postmodern expression of tribal Celtic Christianity. Advances by the teams at New Hope provide the biblical means to accelerate effective ministry among the emerging postmodern tribes in North America.

The great commission has not changed. The gospel has not changed. According to McGavran, God's unswerving purpose from the creation of the world has been for the salvation of persons of every race, tribe, language and clan. Congregations should continue to press forward, making sure that every tribe within their reach has within it a witnessing band of vigorous Christians.

Here is an appropriate core ecclesiology. Missionary bands (sodalities) can once again become the heart of a reproducing ministry. The two indispensable parts of a Christian church are fellowship and witness. Reproducing discipleship teams is a better and a biblical way to fellowship and witness, to grow as we go, to become a force, rather than a farce.

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