

# A Plan for Gospel Advancement through the Multiplication of Grace Community Bible Church

David Sunday

*Presented to the congregation on 1/22/06*

## **Introduction**

1. The Bible gives us a variety of metaphors for pastoral leadership . Tonight I desire to function as God's fellow-worker, seeking to be a wise master builder, by presenting to you a vision and a plan for the direction I believe God wants our church to move in the months and years to come

2. I realize I am speaking tonight to friends who dearly love this congregation. I know you long to see this church advancing the gospel in this region. Some of you have just recently joined our church – perhaps you only plan to be here for a season, or perhaps you are expecting to raise your family and spend the rest of your life here! Some of us have invested many years in this church. Kate and I are beginning our fifteenth year of membership and ministry in GCBC. Whatever our situation, I know all of us would agree that we have received from God's grace far more from this congregation than we have given to this congregation. So our hearts are united in seeking to bring God glory by loving this local church.

3. I also realize that you have entrusted to your pastors and elders a serious responsibility to provide leadership for our congregation. So I am seeking to do that honestly, clearly, and decisively tonight. I am asking for your patient and careful consideration of some matters that I believe are of crucial importance for the future health and vitality of our body.

## **The Context of this Plan**

I want to begin by giving praise to God for some of the ways we see his gracious hand resting on our church. When I talk to the people of our church about their feelings for this church – whether they've been here a long time or a short time – I regularly hear people expressing gratitude to God for some particular evidences of grace in this congregation.

Distinct evidences of grace in our congregation

1. We are a church that is increasingly valuing and living in the good of the functional centrality of the gospel.
2. We are a church that embraces a robust biblical theology.
3. We are a church that values and practices the expositional preaching and teaching of the Bible with it's focus on Jesus Christ.
4. We are a church whose members value and care for one another and whose leaders take seriously their pastoral charge.

5. We are a church that God has raised up to thrust people out into significant ministries of gospel witness world-wide.

I am speaking broadly here. If we were to get more specific, we could list evidences of grace in the lives of individuals and we'd be here all night. But we are a blessed people. God has smiled on us in Christ, in spite of the wrath we deserve! In light of this morning's message, I think we all should give praise to God for these things: "you have done for us all our works" (Isa. 26:12).

Now I want to see these strengths continue, and so do you. But I need to express to you a concern I have. I earnestly believe that all of these things are in jeopardy if we don't add a #6. And that's what this vision and plan is all about tonight.

I would not be leading you well if I did not openly address what I feel to be some of the distinct challenges that face our congregation.

#### Distinct challenges facing our congregation

1. We need to be gripped by a positive, compelling vision for how God wants to use us to advance his gospel here in this region. There is a vision for overseas missions, but our Lord wants all of us to see ourselves as missionaries right where we are. God has a purpose for our church that we need to more fully embrace. We tend to think too much about our individual preferences and ideas and we need to rise up and unify around a collective vision for advancing the gospel. If our goal simply becomes self-preservation, not only will we fail to advance, we will actually lose the things we value. This is #6 – if we don't change in this area, we are going to slowly lose the distinctive strengths we already have.
2. In the absence of a positive, compelling mission, we tend to get comfortable with the way things are. Comfort with the way things are threatens us with complacency. Inertia sets in easily. Our prayer life becomes weak and insipid. Evangelism falls by the wayside. A spirit of complacency leads to discontent, and discontent leads to division. There's nothing wrong with being comfortable and enjoying the church family – but that can be seductive. Tonight I am going to call our church to embrace a higher level of discomfort for the sake of the Great Commission.
3. The geographical spread of our congregation makes it very difficult for us to mobilize the congregation to live out the functional centrality of the gospel in a community. We praise God for everyone who comes here, and we're grateful for those who love this church so much they are willing to drive a long way to get here – but we believe God has a purpose in this.

Now I realize that some would say this is just a reality of life in suburban America and there's really nothing we can do about it. I respectfully disagree. First, it's not practical. People still care about communities and live in communities. It hinders our own ability to establish deepening relationships with one another. And secondly, it does have the effect of diminishing our outreach into communities – evangelism is happening, but it is not being funneled into the life of the local church. I believe that a church's mission becomes more compelling when it is focused in a particular locality.

The things I am presenting to you right now are things the elders have been wrestling with for years. Pastor John Sale was wrestling with these challenges when he was here. As we've worked through these issues, the option of relocation has continually come up. Most recently we have asked you to pray about a possibility of transferring our building for some land in Streamwood owned by Tabernacle Baptist. That door has closed because Tabernacle has decided to hold on to that land for their own congregation.

The Elders are comfortable with the fact that this door has been closed, because our goal has never been merely to purchase better property or build a bigger building. It's always been about a mission. The strategy of relocation has always been driven by a desire to see our church establish a stronger mission, living out the functional centrality of the gospel in a community. But the problem with relocation is that, #1, there is a community right here that needs to be reached with the gospel; #2, wherever we relocate, we still have a congregation that is spread out all over this region and it means we will be meeting even farther from where some of our members live; so relocation alone is probably not the answer.

But we still have a challenge before us. We believe we must face this challenge, and we believe there is a clear and compelling way to do so – a way in which we can advance our church's mission, combat inertia, and harness the geographical spread of our congregation. We can transform our geography into an opportunity for gospel-growth rather than a hindrance.

### **The Essence of this Plan**

I have presented a vision and plan to the elders and it has been met with their unanimous and enthusiastic support. Here's the essence of the vision:

**Grace Community Bible Church will advance the gospel in this region by reaching beyond these four walls into the communities in which we live, starting multiple services in multiple locations, with the goal of eventually multiplying churches.**

I believe that GCBC should ultimately become a family two or three (or more) congregations. I think we all would agree there is an enormous need for more churches with our vision and values in the Chicagoland region.

Is not the fact that people are driving from so far to come to Grace evidence that there is a need for more churches like Grace in this region? We need to recognize that God has entrusted our church with a stewardship. He has given us decades of biblical teaching, gospel preaching and faithful leadership. He has preserved the unity and peace of this church for many decades. We've sent out missionaries all around the globe. Now God wants us to take what he has given us and multiply it throughout this region.

Obviously, this is not going to happen overnight. Nor do we presently have the human or financial resources to immediately plant two or three new congregations. However, we are ready to get started on this in 2006. There is a reasonable, incremental way to see this vision become a reality. It can succeed, and it will result in greater glory to God and greater good for his church. How will we do this?

## **The Execution of this Plan**

1. We are making plans to begin two Sunday morning services in September, only they won't both be at this location. One service will continue to be here as usual, and the other service will take place at our first mission church somewhere in the City of Elgin.
2. Why Elgin? Because we have for years had a number of people coming to GCBC from the City of Elgin – in fact, we have more families coming from the Elgin area than we do from the Roselle area. Additionally, Elgin is a diverse city that is presently on track for a 46.5% growth rate over the next fifteen years. The population of Elgin in 2000 was 94,487 and the projected 2020 population is 138,000.
3. The goal will be for the Elgin congregation eventually to become a self-supporting, growing church, with a particular focus on living out the functional centrality of the gospel in the City of Elgin. But for the first couple of years, or however long it takes, this congregation will be a missional extension of GCBC – we will continue to function as one church in two locations.
4. Very important: the focus will not be on a building or property, but on establishing a biblical church with a thriving gospel witness in the Elgin community.
5. Future possibilities beyond Elgin: As we focus first on Elgin, we recognize that there is another significant segment of our church family that is coming from Downers Grove and Hinsdale. One of our Elders, Mike Laslo, and his wife Debby, have a particular burden to see a church planted in Downers Grove. As we work toward establishing a congregation in Elgin, Mike and Debby intend to scout-out possibilities in Downers Grove and serve as forerunners for a possible future church plant there.

We will continue to have regular opportunities to fellowship and partner in ministry together as a family of churches such as a fellowship meal every five or six weeks.

## **What will this mean for the Pastors and Ministry Staff?**

1. We are going to make maximum use of the staff God has given us.
  - a. We are going to need to hire additional personnel, but we believe this can be done without needing to hire an additional full-time pastor for the first couple of years.
  - b. As churches grow and multiply, additional full-time pastors will be needed.
  - c. Here's what the staffing will look like for the first two years:
    - i. Pastor Jeff and his family will move to Elgin and establish themselves as a gospel witness in that community.

ii. Pastor Jeff's responsibilities will focus on establishing ministry structures, administration of the Elgin plant, equipping and training the saints in Elgin to do the work of ministry. Pastor Jeff, Jen and their girls will continue to have fellowship and involvement with the church here, but their focus for at least two years will be on developing the mission church in Elgin.

iii. I will continue to be the senior pastor for one church in two locations. For the first two years I will be preaching in two different locations most Sunday mornings. At the same time, I will be focusing much more intentionally on developing pastoral and elder leadership for what I believe will be a slow but growing movement of church multiplication. My theme verse for these next two years (and beyond) will need to be 2 Tim. 2:1, "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

iv. Reba Gordon will serve Jeff and me as our Administrative Assistant, providing invaluable help to us personally in managing the operational tasks involved with advancing the gospel here and in Elgin. As the need develops for a church office in Elgin, we may need to hire additional secretarial help, but Reba will directly support us as our Administrative Assistant.

2. I am asking you to approve in the 2006 budget \$15,000 to be used for a pastoral apprenticeship program. I want to immediately hire a pastoral assistant whom I will be training and developing for gospel ministry. I think God has gifted this congregation with an ability to encourage and develop future pastors and leaders. We must do this, especially if Jeff is going to take on different responsibilities in Elgin. This is our training component and it will become a launching pad for future pastoral leaders who will serve a multiplying family of churches. In 2007, I anticipate raising the amount for pastoral apprenticeship so that we can continue to train and develop more men for gospel ministry.

### **What will this mean for the Elders?**

1. We will need more Elders – thus the need for leadership training. Tonight we are presenting Nathan Martin to you as a nominee for the office of Elder. After having a couple of months to get to know Nathan, we will be asking the congregation to affirm him at the next membership meeting.
2. The Elders will divide oversight geographically. They will continue to focus on the spiritual oversight of the congregation, providing leadership over such things as the prayer, teaching, discipleship, diaconal, and missions ministries of the church.

### **What will this mean for the Congregation?**

1. We are asking all the members of our congregation to view themselves as missionaries of the gospel in the community in which they've been placed.

2. We are asking every member of our congregation to join a Care Group and to adjust to a new evangelistic dimension to the Care Group ministries – we will be expecting every Care Group to focus more on the local area and to incorporate more opportunities for evangelism into their group.

3. For those who feel called by God to stay involved in the Roselle congregation, we need to see a revitalized witness for the gospel in the areas immediately surrounding our church. If you live far away but feel compelled by the mission of this church, is it possible that you could move closer? And if that is not possible, is there anything you might do right now to reach out to your community, possibly even paving the way for a future church plant there?

4. Obviously, we cannot plant a church alone! The Elders do believe that this is what God wants us to do, but we need to see a number of you rise up with a passion to join us on a mission. We are looking for a Core Group who is ready to consider becoming a part of a church plant in Elgin. You don't necessarily have to live in Elgin right now to be a part of this, and just because you happen to live in Elgin does not necessarily mean that you should become a part of this. But what we are looking for is a group of ten families or individuals who will be ready to invest themselves in seeing a gospel-centered church develop in the City of Elgin – so much so that you would be willing to consider eventually relocating your residence to the Elgin area. So we're not simply talking about starting two services, and you pick which one is most convenient for you. We are talking about establishing a full-orbed local church in the Elgin community.

If you are interested in considering this possibility, we invite you to the Sundays' home for an **informational meeting on Friday, Feb. 17**. Please let Jeff or me know if you plan to attend.

5. We are asking you to give sacrificially. In anticipation of the costs involved in this, we have included \$26,000 in this year's budget. That's modest and do-able, but it involves a step of faith. We foresee future increases in coming years.

6. We are asking this congregation to embrace some discomfort for the sake of the gospel and in obedience to the Great Commission.

- Sharing your pastors and allowing us to invest ourselves more fully in the development of leaders
- Embracing new men who will be growing as pastors and teachers
- Being flexible about changing ministry structures
- Joining a Care Group
- Establishing evangelistic Bible studies and outreaches into the community
- Being equipped to serve and use your gifts to build up the Body
- Thinking in terms of "How can I help GCBC accomplish what God is calling us to be and to do?"

7. I would very much appreciate a personal response to me. Of course, feel free to speak with any of the Elders about this. But please talk to me about this too. This represents a significant turning-point in my ministry among you as your pastor, and it is important to me that we communicate openly and lovingly with one another about these things. I want to know what you're thinking. Maybe you're thinking, "This is great!" I'd appreciate hearing that ☺. Maybe you're thinking, "This stinks – but it's the right thing." I'd love to talk with you and hopefully help it smell better for you. And maybe you're thinking, "I have some ideas that could improve this

plan.” Anything you can contribute to make it better, please do! And maybe you’re thinking, “How in the world will this work?” My answer to that is that every movement of gospel expansion involves a step of faith.

### **Will this work?**

I cannot tell you exactly how this is going to look five or ten years from now. What I can tell you is that I believe it’s going to be better than it is right now!

This is what I envision for GCBC in five or ten years if we embrace this vision:

- A vibrant congregation with a revitalized gospel witness here on Gary Avenue
- A growing gospel-centered church in Elgin, planted by this congregation
- Probably another congregation getting started somewhere else (Downers Grove???)
- New men trained and equipped for gospel leadership
- Older leaders growing in wisdom and encouragement by seeing their gifts put to use in the establishment of healthy churches
- The Kingdom of Christ advancing in the communities in which we live
- Our neighbors, family members, and people we don’t even know becoming followers of Jesus
- Our commitment to world mission being strengthened as our joy and confidence in the power of the gospel is deepened right here

I believe this can succeed because God is ready to do exceedingly abundantly more than we could ask or imagine. He is going to allow us to make a difference that is disproportionate to who we are. It is obedient to the Great Commission, it is motivated by a passion for God’s glory, and it is fueled by the invincible power of the gospel.

Jesus is with us. And we also benefit from a deep and growing partnership with other churches in this region. Particularly meaningful are our relationships with CrossWay Community Church in Kenosha and Wellspring Chapel, another FIRE congregation in DeKalb. I can envision a whole family of likeminded churches from Chicago to Rockford to Milwaukee working together in gospel partnership.

### **Anticipating Questions**

Is this simply a back-door attempt to move our church to Elgin?

No. This is an honest plan to multiply our church by planting a church in Elgin (and then in other locations). We would love to see a family of churches who share the same vision and values multiplying throughout this region.

Why don’t we just hire another pastor to plant a church in Elgin?

Because we are committed to planting a church that shares the same vision and values as this church and shares a deep unity and fellowship with GCBC. We envision future leadership for these churches developing right out of this church. We also believe this is the best stewardship of the pastoral and financial resources that God has given us right now.

Won't this be too much work for our pastors?

Not if every member of the church rises up and puts their gifts to work! There is a long history of pastors branching out beyond their present congregations to aid in the establishment of new churches. In times of great need and gospel expansion, churches need to look beyond themselves and reproduce themselves in other churches.

What will happen to our missions program?

It will be strengthened, not weakened, as we get serious about advancing Christ's mission right here. In truth, apart from some real changes in our church's mission, we are inevitably going to see a weakening of our missions commitment overseas.

Do we still have plans to relocate?

Yes and no. Yes, we will be relocating to Elgin by becoming one church in two locations. But no, we do not have any immediate plans to sell this building. We want to invest ourselves in a revitalized gospel witness in this community just as we seek to advance the gospel into new communities in which our members live. Should the revitalization of the church in this location cause such growth as would make a new building necessary, then we would certainly consider moving away from this building. But for now, we are going to seek a revitalization of gospel witness in this community.

Can we afford this?

Yes, as God provides. But we must all joyfully respond to the grace God has shown us by giving sacrificially and obediently to the work of this church. This is going to involve a step of faith and we will need to trust God for an enlargement of our financial resources.