

# **A CASE STUDY IN COOPERATIVE EVANGELISM THE DAWN MODEL**

***FOR THE BILLY GRAHAM CENTER EVANGELISM ROUNDTABLE  
“TOWARD COLLABORATIVE EVANGELIZATION”***

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## **“COLLABORATION IN THE DAWN STRATEGY”**

As CEO representing Dawn Ministries today, I must say how pleased we are to see this topic of Collaborative Evangelism being explored and how privileged we are to be one of the presenters. Truly, collaborative evangelism has been the hallmark of the DAWN strategy from the beginning.

With up to hundreds of denominations and other ministries participating in each of the 150 or so national DAWN projects scattered around the world, the number of collaborating agencies reaches into the thousands. As denominations, para-church groups, foreign mission agencies, local churches and virtually every believer focuses on the multiplication of churches, a synergy takes place that is significantly more powerful than if we each worked individually.

Just one good example of dynamic cooperation is evident in this meeting where the DAWN vision and the Jesus Film Project joined hands in India. During one recent eight-month period in one region, more than 600,000 Jesus Film audio and video tapes were distributed by church-planting teams. As Jesus Film leaders readily suggest, as a stand alone evangelism tool it is sometimes very difficult to quantify to actual number of disciples made and the long-term impact of such a distribution.

In this case, however, it was determined that more than 8,000 churches were formed out of this partnership of a very effective evangelism tool and a church-planting strategy. A year later it

will be possible to tell how many disciples have been made, how many baptisms took place, how the new churches are growing and multiplying and so on. In addition to extending the Kingdom itself, there is an accountability structure to show how resources have been invested that were entrusted to them by the Lord.

### **Early Development of the DAWN strategy**

From the inception of DAWN—Discipling A Whole Nation—the premise has been that it was going to take the whole body of Christ functioning as a body to complete the magnificent task of the Great Commission.

Jim Montgomery, who introduced the DAWN strategy and founded Dawn Ministries, credits two men for giving him the foundational principles on which the strategy is built. The first was Dick Hillis of OC International with whom Jim worked for 27 years. Hillis commissioned his missionaries to work with the whole Body of Christ in whole nations in ministries of cooperative evangelism, national pastors conferences and a host of other cooperative efforts.

Then Jim's long association with Donald McGavran immersed him in the principles of Church Growth with its particular emphasis on the multiplication of churches as the most direct way to make disciples of peoples and nations. While neither of these pioneer missionary thinkers developed an actual strategy for the discipling of all nations, they did give Jim the vision of the task, the scope of the task, the tools for the task and—in line with our Roundtable here—the needed insights and skills for bringing together all segments of the Body of Christ to cooperate in the effort of completing the Great Commission in our time.

By 1975 when Jim left the Philippines where he had served as Field Director and developed the DAWN strategy, the Church there had been provided the framework and cohesiveness for what would become DAWN Philippines 2000. This initial effort successfully completed the goal of increasing the total number of all evangelical churches in the country from around 5,000 in

1975 to 50,000 by the end of 2000. In 1984 the Lord led Jim to launch Dawn Ministries, a mission entity with the sole focus of encouraging the development of national DAWN strategies the world over. Since then, the DAWN vision and strategy has been embraced by the Church in over 150 nations.

### **The DAWN Model**

As with most truly profound concepts, the DAWN strategy for completing the Great Commission in our time is simplicity itself. In summary, it is to mobilize the whole Body of Christ in whole nations and all nations to work most directly at completing the Great Commission by providing the incarnate presence of Christ in the form of local gatherings of believers within easy access of every person of every class, kind and condition. This is sometimes referred to as Saturation Church Planting (SCP), but it is much more than the mere multiplication of buildings and meeting places. It is the intent to see the life of Christ lived out in all its purity, power, truth and outreach in the midst of every neighborhood, village, tribal group or other identifiable entity in every nation and people group in the world.

The process of carrying out a DAWN project is likewise the essence of simplicity, but requiring hard work, commitment and dedication by leaders at every level. We look to the Lord to lead us to a leader or leaders in a nation or people group who seem to embody the cry of John Know to “Give me my country or I die.” When such leaders have caught and committed themselves to the DAWN vision, we share with them the elements of the DAWN process and provide whatever training they feel they need to carry out the whole DAWN strategy.

The three most basic elements in a DAWN strategy are 1) the strategy of saturation church planting itself, 2) research which provides basic information of the size and growth of the Church, various societal conditions that relate to responsiveness and the scope of the task that remains and 3) national movements of prayer to undergird the project.

The process includes the initial sharing of the vision, gathering of pertinent data, forming a national collaborate committee to carry out the project, gathering the leaders of all evangelical structures for a national DAWN congress and setting a national goal for the number of churches to be established in a five- or ten-year period. Each denomination and para-church ministry then sets its own goals and infrastructure to accomplish. The national committee follows the Congress with continuing research and reporting on what is happening and then prepares for the next Congress where progress is evaluated and new goals set.

When these elements are integrated into a system, the Discipling A Whole Nation strategy is ready to take off.

### **The world-wide scope of DAWN**

Now let me give you some examples of DAWN around the world. These do not tell what our tiny little organization has accomplished, but to the glory of God what can be done when the Church of a nation begins to function as the Body of Christ and commits itself to the discipling of its nation.

Ngwiza Mnkandla of Zimbabwe, for instance, is an example of a top national Church leader catching the vision and carrying out the DAWN process over a period of more than 15 years so far. The idea was first introduced in 1985. After a group of leaders caught the vision with Ngwiza, extensive research was carried out and the First national DAWN Congress held in 1987. Church and ministry leaders that attended that congress set a national goal of double their number of congregations from about 10,000 to 20,000 in a ten-year period. The goal was not only achieved, but an incredible 20% of the population of the country turned to the Lord in that period and became active members of local congregations. Now they are in an evaluation process to determine when the next Congress should be held and the next national goal set.

India provides another striking example of the dynamic of the DAWN vision that was first embraced 17 years ago. The state of Uttar Pradesh, for one example of many that could be selected, has long been considered the graveyard of missions. Missionaries have spent entire lifetimes without a single convert. Overall, the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a maximum of 1,500 total churches and optimistically speaking perhaps 250,000 total believers. And yet as the DAWN vision has taken hold, from the end of the year 2000 to today, we've seen more than 10,000 new churches started or six times the growth in an 18 month period than took place in over 100 years.

And so it goes around the world. The individual DAWN projects in nations all over Latin America have been so successful that leaders of these nations meeting in 1999 set a combined goal to double the number of church from 500,000 to one million in the whole continent in the 10 years to follow. From the Zimbabwe model, SCP projects are now spreading to a score of nations in Africa. From a test model in one small province in China where the number of congregations increased from three to 1,250 in just seven years has come a vision and a proven strategy for one million total in all of the nation. In the Muslim world where church planting was not even mentioned a few years ago, there are now projects in 20 of the 22 Arab nations and a vision of one million converts in the next 10 years.

Again I emphasize to the glory of God that the Church in 155 nations in one phase or another of the DAWN process in the decade of the 90s started a bit more than 1,050,000 new churches. Furthermore, these national Churches now have developed a whole new ethos of church multiplication so that their combined vision is for just over ten million more congregations in the next ten years. This is what can happen as the Church moves "Toward Collaborative Evangelism" and church planting.

## **The motivation for collaborating in DAWN**

All evangelicals, of course, believe in the unity of the Body of Christ and the need for functioning as a body. But all of us are sadly aware of the difficulty of getting unity in just one congregation for a one-year evangelistic thrust, let alone mobilizing the Body of Christ for a whole city or whole nation for a major, multi-year project.

How is it then, that a great portion of the Body of Christ in the Philippines, for example, was able to work together for *25 years* in an effort to plant 45,000 churches, and when they reached that goal set another ten-year target to plant another 50,000? Obviously, there had to be very high motivational factors to keep a project going year after year and with a constant turnover of leadership.

We believe there are at least five factors in a DAWN project.

1. Among other things, with the increasing responsiveness to the Gospel in most of the two-thirds world, there is a growing zeal in many evangelical structures to see the Completion of the Great Commission in our time. Furthermore, when the DAWN vision of working at this magnificent task is presented to top evangelical leaders in a nation, there follows an almost universal aHA response. Time and time again, such leaders say this vision of filling a nation with congregations is the very idea God has already put on their hearts, but that they did not know how to proceed with it.

2. A corollary to this is that leaders instinctively see the DAWN vision as having deep theological roots. The oft repeated prophecy in the Old Testament that “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord” (Joel 2:14 et al), for example, easily translates into a fellowship of believers—in whom the glory of the Lord resides (John 17:22)—filling a nation and filling the earth. Paul’s example of multiplying churches everywhere in his zeal to evangelize the earth quickly comes to mind.

3. We have found that accurate data about the size and growth of the church in a nation provides another motivational factor. When leaders have their pre-conceived ideas proven false, when they see how much smaller or larger the Church actually is, when they see how much slower or faster the Church is growing and/or when they see the massive remaining need, they typically respond with a heightened zeal to get on with the job.

4. A fourth aspect of DAWN greatly appreciated especially among top national Church leaders is that the project is not dictated or controlled by outside forces. Leaders are presented with a vision, a process and as much training as they desire, but from there the project belongs to them. They will carry it out in their own way with their own personnel and financial resources, or they will not do it at all.

5. A fifth motivating factor is that unity in a DAWN project is focused on a common goal rather than on a co-mingling of resources. Everything done to plant churches by a denomination or para-church ministry adds to their ministry rather than to a nebulous common good. No one compromises denominational distinctives or worship styles, no church or ministry drops its own program for a unified project, no resources are expended for the benefit of a cooperative effort which by experience they know will bring little results to their ministry.

And yet there is the exuberant joy of knowing they are truly working in unity and functioning as the Body of Christ in an optimum effort to obey the Lord in making a disciple of their nation by focusing on a common, overall goal.

With the massive cracks we are now seeing in the walls of Islam, Hinduism, the Buddhist world and the troubled conditions all over the world resulting in greater and greater responsiveness to the Gospel, it surely is time for the Body of Christ to function as a body in the discipling of nations and completing the magnificent task of the Great Commission in our time.