

Gospel Outreach Ministry Annual Report Update – 2007

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We will start with a major lesson learned, and move onto more substantive areas of our outreach.

In late 2006, we were asked by a small assembly of people who had been involved in an unfortunate, but necessary congregational separation, if we would consider coming to their meetings and helping them out. These are people with whom we had worshiped with for many years. They were well aware of our desire for outreach, as well as specific doctrinal areas in which we had gained a greater understanding of the scriptures. After prayerful consideration and with some hesitancy (we didn't want to get sidetracked from gospel outreach or involved in more "church problems", nor did we want to impose our doctrinal views on them), we agreed to help out as much as we could and we began to meet with the saints on a fairly regular basis, starting on Sunday mornings and occasionally Sunday evenings. There was much hurt that needed to be healed and we believe that it was a time of healing for all of us. For this, we are very thankful.

We spent the first six months of this year working with these saints and we enjoyed a time of rich fellowship. Nearly every meeting and lesson was geared towards spiritual healing and building up the body of Christ, with special periodic Sunday morning meetings being conducted as outreach efforts. We started out meeting in homes, but by March, we were no longer able to comfortably gather in one home, so we rented out a conference room at the local Marriott in downtown Springfield, Ohio.

However, all uncharted paths are not without their difficulties and obstacles. We share the following, not in a condemning way or to "air dirty laundry", but as there are many people who are also leaving the Institutionalized Church, possibly we can share both our success stories and our occasional set-backs as a learning tool for others in similar circumstances.

Frank Viola, a renowned house church and Christian writer, has well noted from his many years of experience with new house churches that an average life span of six months to two years is typical for a new assembly. Within this six-to-two window, the assembly is at a high risk of dissolving due to an irreconcilable split or an unresolved crisis. Viola observed that if the group manages to hold together through the difficult start-up time period, it will either succeed or it will drift toward a scaled down, "small-is-beautiful" version of the institutional church from which it came away. Having survived the first six month milestone, the latter observation is clearly the path that this new assembly was quickly heading down.

Once we started working with the saints, it soon became clear that not all were viewing the future of this little assembly with the same singleness of heart. Rather than just drift towards becoming a scaled down institutional church, it seemed as though some of the saints actually **desired** to become a scaled down institutional church. In fact, it became clear that some were determined to recreate the same structure and traditional practices of which they had experienced for many years. Shortly after the six month time period, some became closed to anything that they perceived as being different from their own customs, and they perceived any changes as a departure from "truth". In essence, some of these brothers and sisters wanted to pattern themselves after the same religious system in which they had left, a system which by all accounts and measures has consistently failed time and time again. For instance, several of them wanted to locate and purchase a "church building" and get a "full time pastor". Others were not as eager to make these major decisions so soon, and still others were not in support of this approach at all. Other minor issues developed, such as the passing an offering plate or having an offering box set off to the side, the seating arrangements during the service, having an altar at which people could bow down, whether a Christian should pay tithe to the storehouse or give a free-will offering. All of these issues are actually ridiculously insignificant in and of themselves, but they represented a much larger divide in the overall path that was to control and shape the future of the assembly. By summer of this year, it became abundantly clear that all were not of one mind and that we had reached an impasse.

As Frank Viola had accurately described from his years of experience, this situation resulted in an irresolvable crisis and an attempted power play. We offered several times to bow out and continue with our outreach efforts as we had been doing, but the saints asked us to continue to stay and help. The end result was that some of the group decided to leave the assembly in a somewhat amicable fashion and worship with an established congregation that shares the same background and traditional practices of which they have been accustomed. While we still have genuine love for these dear saints, and we pray that they will be blessed in their spiritual endeavors, we recognize that we had honest and sincerely different viewpoints. Our visions for both the present and the future were simply not the same. It is not necessarily that one was right and the other wrong, but they were clearly different.

On a more positive note, we continue to meet regularly with the saints and to rent a conference room at the Springfield Marriott on Sundays. Talk about low overhead! You cannot find a better deal than meeting in a Hotel conference room such as this! For a very small weekly cost, we are provided a nice sized air-conditioned room in the summer and a heated room in the winter. We have clean restroom facilities. No grass to mow. No shoveling snow (we pull right up to the outside doors under a covered entranceway. Even the doors open automatically!). No weekly cleaning program. No building repairs and maintenance. We're right in the heart of downtown Springfield. And for being such a small assembly, we sure get a lot of visitors who come to the meetings. In fact, we usually have 2 or 3 times as many people who come on Sunday evenings then we do on Sunday mornings. We are surely a blessed people!

One of the ladies who works at the Marriott is now attending the Sunday night evenings during her lunch break. We have gone to her home for Bible study and we have come to really love this sister. It is apparent that the desire of the saints is also for outreach and the goal is to be an assembly of the New Testament church in every aspect. This is readily apparent by the personal and corporate charitable deeds of the saints throughout the entire community, as well as the way we have structured our budget. We lovingly give to others more than we spend on our own needs, which is in part a fulfillment of the second greatest commandment that Jesus taught us... to love your neighbor as yourself. We have created a website for this assembly and you can get updated information at: www.NewCovenantChurchOfGod.com.

This year, we also discovered that we are small part of a great Revolution! That was news to us!

According to researcher and Christian statistical analyst **George Barna**, North America is in the early stages of what may well become the most significant spiritual reformation of the past hundred years! Whether we realize it or not, we live in the midst of a revolutionary age, and we, the Gospel Outreach Ministry and the new covenant church of God have become a small part of this great revolution. We have all read about past revivals and spiritual awakenings and we wondered if we would ever see that day again and experience anything like we have only read about. We read the history books and we wept, longing for spiritual revival and a fresh outpouring of the Spirit of God upon our land! Now, slowly but surely, it is now beginning to happen. Sadly, many people cannot discern the signs or the times, but we are feeling the tremors of that last and final earthquake!

Unlike previous Great Awakenings, which worked to bring people into organized religion, this new movement involves people coming away from reliance upon the organized church into a deeper connection with and reliance upon God. Already

in our country, millions of Christians have stopped "going to church." Barna expects that in 20 years "only about one-third of the population will rely upon a local congregation as the primary or exclusive means for experiencing and expressing their faith."

How big is this silent Revolution? According to Barna, some 20 million people, dubbed "Revolutionaries", have left the Institutionalized Church in North America and are now living "a first-century lifestyle based on faith, goodness, love, generosity, kindness, and simplicity". These are people who "zealously pursue an intimate relationship with God." and are now experiencing freedom in Christ as never before. For Christians in other countries like China, Russia, Indonesia and Korea, this time of revolution and manner of worship has been commonplace for years, and by necessity. It is in these countries that true revival is already taking place. As we continue to lose our religious freedom in our own country, is it possible that God is preparing us for days ahead?

While not using the same terminology, such as "revolution", "Institutionalized Church", etc..., the early pioneers of the church of God Reformation movement had experienced this same freedom that we and millions of other people are discovering. It is found throughout their hundreds and hundreds of evening light songs, songs that for us now have renewed life and new meaning.

For example, just read the words to some of these songs:

There's a mighty reformation sweeping o'er the land.
God is gathering His people by His mighty hand.
For the cloudy day is ending and the evening sun is bright.
With a shout of joy, we hail the light!

Free from babel in the spirit,
Free to worship God aright.
Glory, glory saints are shouting,
We are saved in evening light!

From Babel confusion most gladly I fled,
And came to the heights of fair Zion instead;
I'm feasting this moment on heavenly bread;
I'll never go back, I'll never go back.
The beast and his image, his mark, and his name,
My love or allegiance no longer can claim,
Though men may exalt them to honor and fame;
I'll never go back again.

Some think I've done wrong,
By leaving the throng,
Who abide in sectarian strife.

But I've only come back,
Where God's people belong.
From Babel, I fled for my life!

Praise the Lord! We rejoice even as we type these very words! In a small way, we are again experiencing what these writers experienced many years ago!

Now, more than ever, we understand the vital difference between **being the church** and simply "**going to church**".

So, we're part of a Revolution. What else?

Let us share with you what God is doing on the more practical side of this ministry.

This past year, we made significant progress in rediscovering the manner in which the New Testament church operated, including the manner in which she conducted assembly meetings. Coming from a background that was not as structured as mainstream Protestantism, yet very programmed, we have advanced to an environment of openness in our meetings. We are striving to allow the Spirit of God to move freely in our midst and to allow the ministering gifts to be in full operation. The days of spectator church meetings are long past for us. Rather than just one person doing all the speaking while the others sit back and watch, we are now in an environment where each member of the body adds to the discussion as he/she is lead of the Spirit. We have found the level of body edification has greatly increased as a result. 1 Corinthians 14:30-31 *If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.* This has now become the standard practice among us, and not the rare exception.

We have also gained great strides in implementing the New Testament eldership governing model into our assembly. This past year, biblical lessons were brought by various individuals. Only on a few rare occasions did the same person lead in both the morning and evening service, and those occasions were part of a series. Otherwise, we have a different person who leads the discussion, including the sisters among us. The unwritten prohibition that was previously placed on the sisters has been completely lifted (including a proper interpretation of the two misinterpreted scriptures) and we have greatly benefited from their unique insight.

Even our seating arrangement has changed. While meeting in homes, we discovered the great advantage of looking at each other's face, rather than the back of each others heads! Now, in our general assemblies, we prefer to sit in a circle or semi-circle, rather than in rows. It is amazing how even this small detail can change the atmosphere of a meeting from one of formality to informality. Of course, we have no reserved or elevated seats for the "ministry" among us,

because we are all ministers. We have fully adapted the biblical teaching of the royal priesthood and kingship of **all** believers.

But our meetings are certainly NOT the focus of our ministry!

Jesus said in Matthew 25:35-36, 40, *“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me... Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”*

Our general assembly meetings are primarily focused on body edification, but our real mission lies outside of the four walls. This is where real ministry takes place.

We are thankful that conducting outreach and personal evangelism has become “second nature” for us. We are always looking for and finding ways to conduct outreach ministry, both in our personal lives and corporately as well.

This year, we assisted the saints in ministering at the Forest Glen Health Campus. Biweekly services are held there and we have developed a good relationship with several of the workers and residents there. The Coons family have also continued with their 3rd year of nursing home ministry at Oakwood Village.

Bro David and Sis Becky invited us to participate in their weekly Monday night outreach meetings in Snyder Park in Springfield, Ohio. These meetings are part of their outreach burden and we were thankful to help them out.

We were able to conduct a series of outreach meetings in April and October of this year, one in South Charleston, Ohio and the other here in Springfield, Ohio.

We also continued to work with other congregations in the area, specifically the Buxton Ave Church of God and the saints in Washington Court House, Ohio. We have developed bonded relationships with these dear saints and they hold a special place in our hearts. We look forward to many years of sweet fellowship.

We recently got involved in supporting our local jail and juvenile systems by supporting a ministry that provides assistance and literature to the inmates and their families. We hope to get more involved in this ministry.

Our Gospel Outreach Ministry website ministry has really taken off this past year. Recently, we surpassed 100,000 hits on our www.JesusSavesFromSin.com website! We have had visitors not only from most States in the USA, but from every continent of the planet and we have established contacts from many of these visits. This website has brought us into contact and fellowship with many

other Christians who have also left the Institutionalized church and are striving to be a local representative of the New Testament church.

Our New Testament Church Government website, www.BiblicalElders.com, has received over 12,000 hits from many places in the world. We get more Internet traffic from foreign countries on this website. The concept of shared leadership is a foreign concept to many people in the United States, but apparently not to others in foreign countries! However, as time goes by, more and more people are beginning to embrace the New Testament teaching of Biblical Eldership and are forsaking the hierarchal governing models that were introduced in the 1st century apostasy of the early church and was handed down to us from Catholicism and Protestantism.

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