Jeff Reed

Director, BILD-International

Pastor, Ontario Bible Church

Church-Based Leadership Training: A Proposal

The greatest need of the evangelical church world-wide seems to be that of training spiritual leaders. From Burma to Africa, from Rumania to the United States, the Church is suffering from a dearth of qualified, mature spiritual leaders. Seminaries are able to attract and train only a fraction of the leaders needed at present; in some parts of the world they are even restricted in how many they can enroll. Many who do graduate have been found to be greatly wanting of tested character and effective ministry skills. In response to this need in the late 1960's in Guatemala a movement was born - Theological Education by Extension (TEE). "Since many in need of training cannot come to the seminary, let's take the seminary to them" was the founding theory. The concept of TEE exploded with the reverberations being felt around the world. On the surface, this seemed to quench the thirst for trained leaders, yet for some reason, in the last 20 years it has proven to be more of a mirage than a true oasis. There seems to be a growing consensus that something is missing. Some are withdrawing, with a reluctant sigh, to the more traditional mode of theological education - the institutional seminary - where the training is more closely monitored, and is less accessible. Yet this only resurfaces the original problem: there are not enough truly equipped leaders, and the hope for any significant change seems distant. Is that the end? Case closed? Experiment ended?

I recently assisted Ted Ward in a week-long seminar held at the Overseas Ministry Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut on the subject of "Third World Theological Education: Reconciling Conflicting Models" where we discussed this exact issue. From the interaction at this seminar I am more convinced than ever that the original model of TEE needs retooling. I believe the achilles heel of the TEE movement will prove to be that it, like so many other movements before it (including the present day discipleship movement), failed to take seriously the central role of the local church in God's plan for this age. It clung too tightly to the Western institutional model of theological education from which it "extended", and has failed to include the centrality of the local church in leadership training. Without the base of the life blood of a mature local church, and without the mentoring of mature church leaders, those young promising leaders often got the worst of both worlds.

In a diverse, pluralistic society, where does one begin such a difficult task of reconstructing the TEE model, which had so much residual promise? As is often the case with complex problems needing carefully constructed solutions, the starting point is so simple as to be overlooked. In this case, what better place to begin than with an examination of the early churches themselves. They had plenty of leaders. How did they get them? How did this "ideal" situation develop? And how was it built upon? To gain insight into these questions, we must travel back to Antioch to observe how they developed such an abundance of well-trained leaders.

Training in the Early Church

1. Paul and Barnabas taught considerable numbers for an entire year, which means they were well grounded in the Word. They developed in the context of a church which was being established (Acts 11:19-26; 13:1-4).

In 13:1 we see an ideal situation has developed. Antioch possessed a number of mature leaders. From where did they come? Who trained them? To answer this question we must look carefully at the ministry of Barnabas, for it was his wisdom that God used to lay the kind of foundation which produced "a number of prophets and teachers". Barnabas, the son of encouragement, rejoiced with and nurtured these new believers at Antioch, and encouraged them to stay strong in their new found faith. The text says that Barnabas was a good man, that is, he was genuinely concerned for the welfare of these new believers, as well as being competent and spiritually fit himself. His encouragement came from the heart of one who was himself totally and completely devoted to the Lord. This "good man" was more concerned about their welfare than his own recognition. This was confirmed by the fact that when he saw that the ministry needs were bigger than he could handle alone, he went to get Saul, whom he knew was appointed for greatness, and brought him down to assist him in teaching the new church at Antioch. Together "they taught considerable numbers for an entire year" (11:26). This is all the information we have on the establishing of the church at Antioch which produced this abundant crop of leaders.

What can we summarize from this example? Two key observations can be drawn which give insight into the reason for the emergence of an abundance of mature, solid leaders. First, the new converts were initially followed up by good men who were sincere and resolute in heart, competent and able, committed to working as a team, skilled in the Word, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith. Second, the church was then given solid, systematic and thorough teaching for a considerable length of time, in the context of the gathered church, by mature men.

2. When key leaders were sent from the church to further the gospel, they quickly appointed leaders (elders) in every church who were to assume responsibility for the oversight of the new converts (Acts 13:1-14:28).

Once the church reached a relatively mature state, marked by the emergence of key leaders, God decided it was time to further his work by pulling two of the leaders out and sending them to work somewhere else. And who did He pull out but Paul and Barnabas, the two main leaders who established the church in the first place. These men, commissioned by the other leaders, were then sent from the church out to a work which the Holy Spirit had for them (which obviously was the work for which Paul had previously been set apart, see Acts 9:15,16). Their strategy was quite simple. First they proclaimed the gospel wherever they could gain a hearing. They then instructed any who believed, encouraging them in their new-found faith. They then quickly organized them into a church (a community not a building) and appointed elders over them, commending the newly established church to their care. After they had completed this strategy in several cities (Acts 14:22,23), they returned to the church at Antioch and reported back to them all that had been accomplished.

Again, a couple of insights appear to be fundamental in insuring that the

churches were supplied with adequate leadership. First, mature, experienced leaders were sent out to evangelize strategic cities and establish new believing communities - local churches. These men were the key leaders in the church. Second, these leaders were commended to their work by the leaders of the church in which they ministered, appointed leaders over the new churches, and returned and reported to their home church what had been accomplished. They were not self-appointed men doing their own thing apart from the local church. These men were tested in ministry and commended by the church with no one doubting their gifts, abilities or experience.

3. *Paul spent extensive time, three years night and day with the Ephesian elders, in order to see that they were established in the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:17-38).*

From this observation, one of the questions which might immediately arise centers around the wisdom of appointing new elders over the new churches so quickly (Acts 14:22,23). It seems necessary to have appointed elders quickly since Paul had to leave after only a short period of time. Yet this does not necessarily indicate that Paul thought training for these new leaders was unimportant. The Ephesian elders are an example. Paul spent an intense period with these elders, "night and day for a period of three years" according to his own words (20:31). He imparted his life, as well as what he calls the "whole purpose of God" (20:27). And then, knowing that he may never see them again, he makes a dramatic and rather formal charge to these men. He says "I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace". Note the use of the word "commend" again. It's the same word used in 14:23. These men were commissioned to their responsibility after they had been involved in extensive training in the "whole counsel of God". They were well taught in the Scriptures, just as were the leaders in the Antioch church. In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul identifies the crucial character qualities and ministry responsibilities of the elders of a local church. In one of the main passages addressing the appointment of elders (Titus 1:5-9), Paul isolates one fundamental responsibility of the elders as being "able to both exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict". Clearly, Paul expected these men to be steeped in the Scriptures and able to handle it well when challenged. An abundance of mature leaders emerged in the early church because Paul spent considerable time teaching and developing them.

Several more insights can be added to the set of observations concerning the propagation of leaders in the early church. First, much time was spent developing the elders who had been appointed to watch over the churches which Paul had founded. And second, they were carefully trained in the whole counsel of God, and commended to that Word as the tool upon which they could rely in order to preserve them from all of their enemies.

4. *Paul selected key men to be part of his leadership team, who would assist him in establishing the churches and furthering the gospel. He trained these men in the context of the ministry, entrusting sound doctrine to them, as well as shaping their life and ministry (Acts 16:1-5).*

Along with the leaders he appointed over the churches, Paul built a team of leaders who would assist him in establishing the young churches he founded. Timothy is probably the best example of one of these men because we have such abundant material on him in the Pastoral Epistles. What did Paul's training of

147

Timothy involve? Our first insights emerge from the record of Paul's selection of Timothy to travel and assist him (Acts 16:1-5). Paul obviously needed help in establishing the new churches in Asia Minor. He was visiting them for the purpose of further establishing them in the faith (Acts 15:36; 16:5) and he needed help in getting the job done. Timothy was "well spoken of by the brethren in Lystra and Iconium" (16:2), making him a perfect candidate to assist and train under him. Paul invited other men to be part of his roving missionary team who assisted him in establishing the churches. Titus, for example, was left behind in Crete on one occasion to "set in order what remains" in strengthening the churches on the island (Titus 1:5). Paul saw himself as training both Timothy and Titus, viewing them as spiritual sons to whom he was passing on the deposit of sound doctrine (2 Tim. 1:13,14) as well as training through his life and example. Paul's view of his role in Timothy's life is seen clearly in his encouragement to Timothy to continue on in what he has learned in 2 Tim. 3:9,10:

> "But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions and sufferings; such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra..."

Paul was concerned with far more than just passing on information. He wanted to train leaders, men of God who could build Christ's Church. A careful examination of the Pastoral Epistles will demonstrate that the training involved at least three fundamental areas of development: sound doctrine, ministry skills, and character formation. These areas will be developed more fully in the second article in this series.

From Paul's training of his ministry team we can see two additional insights that were key to the early churches having an adequate supply of leaders to handle their rapid expansion. First, Paul looked ahead to the next generation of leaders who would be needed to take his place, and carefully apprenticed them as he carried on his ministry, entrusting to them ever increasing amounts of ministry responsibility. Second, this apprenticeship involved a type of training that built leaders who were mature in character, skillful in ministry and sound in doctrine, and who would be able to be fully entrusted with the building of Christ's churches.

5. *At the appropriate time Paul passed the baton of full responsibility of the churches to those he had trained and appointed as leaders, encouraging them to engage in the same training process he had used with them (Acts 20:17-38; 2 Timothy 4:5-8).*

148

We have seen that Paul spent a lot of his time carefully preparing leaders to shepherd and guard the churches he established. He turned over an increasing amount of responsibility to these leaders as they matured. The time eventually came when he, being at the twilight of his own ministry, needed to turn over full leadership responsibility to the men he had trained that they might carry on the work into the next generation. We have two scenes, both of them full of emotion and tenderness as well as sobriety and drama. The first scene is with the Ephesian elders in a farewell meeting at Miletus (Acts 20:17-38). Here Paul tells the elders, who he had trained intensely for over three years, that he would not see their face again. In almost a ceremonial fashion he commends them "to God and the Word of His grace" and they fall on his neck and weep as he prays with them one last time. The second farewell takes place by letter, a letter to his very special son in the Lord, Timothy. Although this is not the last time Paul

expects to see Timothy, his second letter to Timothy is written as sort of a final letter near the end of Paul's ministry. He begins the letter by addressing Timothy as his dear son who he longs to see as he recalls Timothy's tears at their last parting (2 Tim. 1:1-4). Near the end of the letter he charges Timothy to fulfill his ministry, modeling his life after Paul who describes himself as having fought the good fight, having finished the course, having kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:5-8). In both situations it seems that the men being addressed, though previously recognized or commissioned in some way to formal leadership (the men at Miletus were already elders and the elders had laid hands on Timothy at an earlier stage in his ministry), were being given some form of final commending into their ministry responsibilities by Paul. Paul wanted to be sure that they were cognizant of their very important and solemn responsibility. And he encouraged them to find other faithful men and entrust sound doctrine to them, shaping their life and ministry as he had done to them, thus raising up generation after generation of sound, godly leaders (2 Tim. 2:2).

In these final scenes at the end of Paul's ministry we collect two further insights into the process of supplying the first century church with the leaders it needed, as well as insuring a crop for the next generation. First, Paul built within the leaders he trained a sense of their vital and solemn responsibilities, encouraging them to be faithful, commending them to God and His Word. And finally, Paul encouraged the leaders he trained to continue the process he had modeled for them. They were to select faithful men whom they could apprentice as well, thus providing a steady supply of solid, experienced leaders from generation to generation.

The leaders for the first century churches were the progeny of key leaders, such as Paul, who gathered around them young, faithful men and trained them in the context of church ministry. If each local church today would seriously consider this model and take up the challenge of training its young leaders, our leadership shortage world-wide would evaporate. A serious response by local churches to quality church-based training has the potential to make the rapid spread of TEE in the late 1960's look like a mere brush fire in comparison to the infernos it will ignite. The church, however, must make a committed move in order for such an effect to be realized. The following is a set of propositions intended to guide discussion on making just such a commitment.

A Proposal

1. *Churches must commit themselves to assuming responsibility for the training of the promising leaders under their care.*

Churches have almost universally abdicated their central role in training leaders, both for ministry in their own generation as well as the generation to come. Just as parents give up their vital role for the spiritual training of their children to the church Sunday School, so the churches give up their role in training leaders to institutions such as seminaries and Bible colleges. Yet all along, the heart of the leadership training mandate beats in the churches and in the mature, experienced and sound leaders of those churches (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul commanded the leaders involved in establishing the churches to find faithful men and train them. Until leadership training becomes a vital ministry of those leading in our churches, and by implication a ministry of the whole church, we will continue to experience a severe leadership shortage in churches around the world, both in this generation and in generations to come.

2. *Churches must make a serious commitment to leadership, which includes re-writing the job descriptions of pastors and other leaders, to allow significant time in their schedules for "passing on the deposit" to these men.*

As I share the insights of this article with pastors throughout the United States as well as Third World and Eastern European countries, they are almost universally affirmed by them, denominational and non-denominational alike. Responses range from "I've always thought in the back of my mind I ought to be involved in training leaders," to sheer ecstasy at the thought that eventually, "We can even assist churches around the world in developing in-depth church-based training for leaders." But concerns surface quickly in the discussion when consideration is given to what it would take for a church to get serious about this vital ministry. It is usually expressed by some form of the exclamation, "But you don't know what my job description looks like!". Why aren't more pastors and churches doing what they know they ought to be doing? Because the pastor's job descriptions are such a distortion of the New Testament guide that a major upheaval must take place for key leaders to get time in their schedules to train other leaders. Today our leaders and pastors are expected to do the work of the ministry rather than equip the church to do the work of the ministry. How did we get to this place? Training promising leaders, training faithful men, has been treated as an option when it should be obeyed as a mandate (2 Tim. 2:2). It ought to be a vital part of every pastoral job description! Yet we all share the responsibility of this distortion of the pastoral role. The pastors and leaders are to blame for abdicating their role. The people of the churches are to blame because they demand to be "ministered to" by the pastors. And the theological institutions are to blame because they've assumed almost total responsibility for the task of training leaders - a role which should only be supplementary. We, as pastors, churches, and theological institutions, must educate ourselves biblically on these issues if any major significant change is going to take place. And I believe it must start with pastors - bold, mature pastors - who will take the risk this mandate requires. They must educate the church on the biblical pastoral ministry, and make a serious commitment to train the faithful, promising leaders under their care, regardless of the cost!

3. *Churches must design a system for tapping into the wealth of resources available to insure the best possible training, while still assuming responsibility for their own men.*

This is not as easy as it first sounds, and at first may not appear as very important. The task of guarding the truth in this day and age is getting more and more difficult as the world quickly moves toward a "global village". Any philosophy, cult, and doctrine possible is available in every media form imaginable to whomever desires to listen. Almost all serious study of theology, ethics and apologetics, each crucial in establishing churches in this age, has been done in our formal theological institutions. Many groups who feel the need for the church to reclaim its central role in training leaders overreact against the formal institutions and, in turn, assume that disciplines such as theology, ethics and apologetics are unnecessary. "Just give me the Bible" they cry. As a result, they pull away, often in pride, from the rest of Christ's church, and from the very important "wealth of resource" resident in the formal theological institutions.

This can result in misplaced zeal as well as a propensity for imbalance and error. Churches who desire to reclaim their central role in training leaders and building a quality church-based leadership training program would be well-advised to design some way to tap this resource. In our own church-based training at Ontario (a township, not a Canadian denomination) Bible Church in Ames, Iowa, we have made it a practice for the past 15 years to visit a couple of seminaries once or twice a year, collecting resources, getting advice from key professors and testing our ideas and theological conclusions in dialogue. This has been of immense value, and actually has become the foundation to what now has become a fully developed curriculum increasingly made available to churches through BILD International. Many professors and other especially gifted church leaders have graciously agreed to keep us updated on new journal articles and newly published books in their area of expertise. This is the kind of "spirit of unity" we must possess if we are going to build the best possible church-based leadership programs. It is also crucial that part of the church budget is directed toward building a library/resource center for such training.

4. Theological institutions must become resource centers for these church-based leadership training programs and accept a new role of in-service development, restoring the primary training responsibility to the church.

Radical statements such as these often create consternation rather than vision. Granted, some form of higher education will be necessary if the church is going to act responsibly in this age. But a case can be made for significant reform of our present systems. Edward Farley, in his book *Theologia: The Unity and Fragmentation of Theological Education*, calls for major reform in theological education which involves far more than re-designing curriculum. He makes a strong case for the fact that theological education of pastors today has shifted from the kind of training in the previous centuries, which built habits of the soul for the purpose of acquiring wisdom, to the training today which pre-pares men and women for professional ministerial duties or for teaching in theological institutions. Farley's book has spawned a major ongoing discussion in *Theological Education*, the prominent journal published by the Association of Theological Schools. Other prominent leaders, such as Jonathan Chao, Harvey Conn, Ted Ward and Max Stackhouse, argue from their own arena for signifi-cant theological education reform. The core of the debate centers around the issue of whether or not the seminaries are adequately training the pastors that the churches so desperately need. One solution to the problem is to allow the church to train pastors and leaders in the context of the local church, utilizing quality leadership training programs performed in the tradition and flexibility of the early church. Then, after several years of experience, make a more advanced training available to those who excel in the ministry, yet in a form flexible enough to allow them to remain in their ministries. Perhaps some of the more innovative D.Min. programs offered by seminaries are a prototype of what I am proposing, where they allow pastors to study under the tutorship of a number of professors and require only short-term on-site training. The present seminary models need to be adjusted so that they become resource hubs, "think tanks" if you will, serving the churches in their task of training leaders. Writing guilds, seminars, debates, consultations and independent study are just a few of the possibilities for such resource hubs. Training and use of such "resource hubs" must be flexible enough to accommodate the manifold training needs and educa-tional backgrounds (formal, non-formal, or informal) of pastors and church

leaders. Seminaries in the USA *have* made significant changes in the last decade. With the development of internships with churches, innovative D.Min. programs for pastors, extension centers in different cities, and lay training for the surrounding communities, it is clear that the winds of change are in the air. To my knowledge, however, there has yet to be a seminary which has even seriously broached the subject of breaking out of the western schooling model and turning back to the training traditions of the early church. Oh that God would give us such a bold academic dean and seminary adminstration!

5. *The evangelical church of Jesus Christ must come up with better ways of recognizing well-trained spiritual leaders than the grossly inadequate degree/accrediting system. Forms of proper recognition need to be established which recognize quality training, regardless of formality or context.*

We must abandon the myth that those with degrees from the formal Western schooling model are automatically better trained, and thus better prepared for ministry, than those trained in non-formal (well organized but non-traditional) programs or those trained informally (whether they be in a one-on-one apprenticeship or self-taught). (I know of one prominent seminary where over 80% of all the incoming students tested were dominant in the passive-aggressive personality type. This fact says a great deal about how these "leaders" will perceive the education process and what kind of leaders they will ultimately be.) We must build a more biblical and educationally sound method for recognizing those prepared for ministry. The Western educational schooling model as we know it today in the USA is under serious critique as well, evidenced by recent books by prominent educators such as *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, by Allan Bloom; *Cultural Literacy*, by E.D. Hirsch; and *The Paidea Proposal*, by Mortimer Adler. Each critique makes a strong case for the fact that we are not turning out well-educated, mature, thinking, creative adults, concluding that the schooling model needs some significant re-tooling. The degree, by itself, is not a dependable measurement of preparedness for life work, whatever the sphere. (This has long been recognized by the professional world, evidenced by many professional bodies requiring several years of internship before being given a license to practice on their own.) Most will agree that a Bible college or seminary degree does not tell us much about the giftedness and spiritual maturity of the graduate. Yet the degree from a formal institution has become the dominant criteria for assessing preparedness for ministry, to such an extent that those who have been trained non-formally or informally are generally understood as being untrained or assumed to possess inferior training, being encouraged to "get the degree" somehow. Since the degree has become more and more the dominant criteria to measure preparedness for ministry, the role of the local church in the assessment and ordination of leaders (another area of discussion, but for another time) has receded to the background, in many cases taking on the status of a ritual or liturgical formality. This shift has contributed to the broadening gap between the clergy and laity, a gap I might add, which is hard to find in Scripture. And it has encouraged the 3rd world churches, where the Western model clashes with culture and fails to produce the needed leaders, to set up "accredited education" which is "as good" as ours. It is difficult to teach them to follow a more biblical model when we place so much emphasis on the formal degree.

Where, then, is the local church who recognizes its qualified leaders through laying on of hands with prayer and fasting? Where is the local church which takes seriously its role in the recognition of preparedness for ministry? Where is the local church which commends only experienced, well-tested, gifted leaders into the ministry? Where are the churches who would value this recognition as carrying more weight than the degree behind the name?

The church of Jesus Christ around the world is desperately short of spiritual leaders. Is our failure to see the centrality of the local church in leadership training at the root of this shortage? I believe it is!

154