

*FIFTEEN NEW  
PARADIGMS  
(NO. 10-12)*

ARNO & MARIANNE CLAASSEN

*A FRESH NEW CONCEPT ABOUT  
CONGREGATION! (PART 5)*

© KOPIEREG 2010

**ARNO & MARIANNE CLAASSEN  
LIFEWISE CONSULTANTS**

UITGEGEE DEUR:

**LIFEWISE UITGEWERS**

ABSA, Takkode – 334 645  
Rekening nommer: 9211 621 868

POSBUS 31288  
WONDERBOOMPOORT, 0033

(012) 335 7571  
Arno Claassen- 082 460 3024  
Marianne Claassen - 082 412 7000

**arno@lifewise.co.za**

**www.lifewise.co.za**

DIE REGTE VAN DIE GESKRIF SOOS HY IS, IS IN DIE  
HANDE VAN DIE SKRYWER. ENIGE LESER WORD  
AANGEMOEDIG OM DIT VIR SOVEEL MENSE AS  
MOONTLIK AAN TE STUUR SONDER OM DIE INHOUD  
DAARVAN TE VERANDER. DIE INHOUD KAN VRYLIK  
VERWERK WORD IN JOU EIE WOORDE EN WEER  
GEBRUIK WORD ONDER JOU EIE NAAM!

## *PROLOGUE*

Cell church brought me much hope and vision to live and reproduce the heart of the gospel so much better. I will always be grateful to the Lord for that. However, the biggest enemy you will ever encounter in congregation life is numbers and growth! The cell church has the inherent capacity of becoming more of a burden the bigger it grows, and ultimately it cannot meet the goal of discipling 'the nations'! Most cell churches consist of 80-150 people, then 400-600, then 2000, then 6000, then 30 000 and then the congregation of Paul Yonggi Cho has 900 000 members. There are interesting reasons why congregations come in these particular sizes, which is a subject on its own. The largest cell churches is also primarily in the East and more specifically in Korea. The largest Methodist, Presbyterian, as well as Charismatic congregation in die world, are all in Sheol in Korea. Research shows that any growth above 150 members is primarily caused by two factors, namely a dynamic, evangelical leader, and especially a very strong organizational management and administrative system.

Unfortunately, most leaders are not five-fold evangelists and do not have the ability to organize or manage. Leaders are normally spiritually passionate people and their weakest gift is usually organizing. They have no desire or ability to create huge systems. You can present them with 100 good courses about it, all to no avail. History over the last 300 years has proven that. Nevertheless, we were commanded to disciple ALL the nations and not only 150 people. Our command is to disciple all the nations of South Africa. How are we going to organize them? There must be an answer.

## *THE FIFTEEN PARADIGMS*

All fifteen paradigms are descriptions of radical differences in functioning between the average congregation in the West and what David Watson did in India. Please remember that the descriptions of the paradigms are still no solution. It is only the analyzing of the problem. We are working towards a place where we will create being practical congregation from all the different things we are talking about. For now we are still trying to discern the heart and outline of the new dynamic of congregation capable of discipling the nations. After the fifteen paradigms, we will build positively towards a dynamic solution.

### **10) OFFICE OF THE BELIEVER!**

The heart of congregation is to disciple unbelievers and to mobilize them immediately with the task of gathering the harvest. The task is not to evangelize the unbelievers, then bring them to church, then disciple them and then send them out again. That particular process has proved itself a failure for the last few hundred years. Although congregation is mainly about disciples, the voice of the fulltime team is so overwhelming that not much are heard of the believers. Throughout history we have made use of every conceivable method and object available to gather the harvest, anything from buildings, organization, books, radio, television, motors, airplanes, preaching, courses and a myriad other things. Everything made a particular contribution somewhere, but with all that, it does not appear as if we have made a significant difference in numbers to claim that we will soon finish the task! I believe in all these things, but not one of them has made a dramatic difference.

Only one factor remains that can help us. Every existing believer must be mobilized in a team to gather the harvest. Did Jesus not identify the problem for us when He said "Pray the Father of the harvest that He will send labourers into the harvest!" The harvest is already ripe and the workers are too few. The only solution to reach the world is that the Word and the Holy Spirit work through every believer on earth. The congregation is the bride of Jesus Christ and the largest slumbering, untapped factor on earth! She has all the authority and power of the bridegroom! Unfortunately, she does not believe in herself and has become passive because of ministry, preaching and entertainment. Her leaders do not believe that she is the solution, otherwise they would have made room for her to fulfill her calling.

What David Watson did, was simply to restore the office of the believer! The ordinary believer is the most important person in the congregation. Leaders simply exist to facilitate them and not to take over their work. The remaining work on earth must be completed by the ordinary believers and not the fulltime team! The office of the believer is the key to the Father's work on earth. The Word and the Holy Spirit need the believers to manifest the Father on earth. It is impossible for any existing fulltime team to accomplish the work. The more the fulltime leaders work, the less the believers work! Leadership should abandon the stage and give the body the opportunity to take in her place. Do we truly believe the body is more capable of accomplishing the work than us leaders? Perhaps it is true that they are not quite as competent as we are, but exponentially they can do far more.

If we believe an ordinary, working believer can manage a cell group, he can also manage a congregation if it is built on relationship and not organization. It has been proven

countless times across the world, but we still refuse to believe it. It cost 4 dollars on average to start a congregation in India. Perhaps that is too confrontational for us as fulltime leaders. We have many references of ordinary believers that started and manage 1-15 congregations (or cell groups in cell church terminology)! Perhaps we should simply give them the opportunity, place the vision and authority in their hands, and set them free. In the West, we plant congregations with fivefold ministry leaders with at least 10-20 years of experience, and then we still struggle. In India congregations are planted with newly converted believers, for their first love enables them to do things for the Lord that is extremely risky. A new convert's first love is the most powerful passion you can find with which to plant congregations. The only difference is that it must be kept simple!

If there is one principle that excites me beyond words, it is this one of believers that rise up and do the work of the ministry. The next significant movement in the body will not be any leadership movement, but ordinary believers that rise up to spread the fullness of God through His Word and Holy Spirit! As I move around in congregations, I hear the outcry and sigh of the believers to do something dynamic and effective for the Father. Until now we merely accommodated believers in departments to fulfill certain functions for the leaders, but they want to be trusted to lead the congregation on their own! David Watson managed, with the revelation of the Holy Spirit, to employ every believer and to give them the most responsible job in the kingdom, namely congregation leadership. It was an incredible risk, but it resulted in the fastest planting of congregations in recent years! I believe we should seriously reconsider and reevaluate these things with the Father. The solution to all our congregation problems is in our congregations - the believers in the chairs!

## **11) ATMOSPHERE VERSUS FEEDING!**

In the existence of a living organism, two important factors determine the health and future of the organism. These two factors are atmosphere and feeding. The atmosphere of the goldfish is the water and his feeding is the food thrown into the water. We should never put these two factors in opposition, for we need both, although one is more important than the other. A goldfish can survive for weeks without food, but will die within 15 minutes if taken out of the water. You could therefore survive longer without feeding than without atmosphere! Atmosphere thus determines more than feeding!

In our congregations, we have turned this around. We feed and feed and over feed every single believer until they are very fat, but we do not give much attention to their atmosphere! We know the food is the Word. Much preached Word is given, but firsthand Word directly from the Father is rare. The atmosphere of the fish is the water and the atmosphere of the bird is the air, but the atmosphere of man is relationship. We are the product of relationship, is born from relationship, must be raised in relationship and can only grow in relationship. The atmosphere of man is not offices or lecture halls! The heart of man can only grow in relationship with other hearts. Man is a flock being and always dependant on others in some way or another. Not one of us was created to live for ourselves or on our own. If you no longer have friends with whom you can reveal your heart and with whom you can live, you will become unhealthy in yourself and pine away spiritually.

It is therefore of utmost importance for every person to have a group of people in his life with whom he can lay down his life and from whom he can receive support, encouragement and input. It is also of utmost importance that he should be transparent in the group concerning his life by declaring his responsibilities and be accountable to the same people! Few believers are voluntarily accountable to other believers or open up their lives for input. I do not think we have any idea of the huge gap this creates in our congregation life. The English idiom goes: "If you do not inspect the fruit; do not expect that there will be any fruit!" If people are not being held responsible for certain fruit in their lives, and no accountability is expected of them concerning the absence thereof, I do not know if they will see the necessity of bearing fruit at all. In my opinion, this is one of the most important missing factors in discipling men. Men are inclined to be private, individualistic, closed and resist revealing their heart. Man's ego has no natural tendency towards openness and transparency. Men are competitive and do not want to discuss their problems with others!

## **12) FAMILY INFRASTRUCTURE!**

With the next paradigm we now get to how we package all the people that have come to the Father. It is logical that people be housed in some kind of infrastructure that will eventually be called congregation. At the moment, believers come to the congregation and then we accommodate them within the existing congregational structures that more or less consist of a building, a database, a previously planned program and a certain relationship infrastructure such as cell groups, departments and various ministries. I strongly support that we should respect and honour our leaders and even the previous

forms of congregation for its contribution to our lives. What we have and even had previously, is not so much wrong as completely inadequate of fulfilling the command to disciple the nations!

For years I have been a leader of a typical renewal congregation and thoroughly enjoyed it, except that its ineffectiveness of mobilizing people frustrated me endlessly. We cannot build anything better if we are not thankful for the beautiful things the previous form of congregation life did have. Solutions are not built in reaction of previous things, but on an intense appreciation of the beautiful things it did have. What we had was not purposely wrong, for people and leaders had no other revelation concerning anything better. When you have a revelation of something better, you should walk in wisdom and not in pride. I come from a Reformed background, various ministries, mission organizations, charismatic- and renewal congregations and all of them have done me a world of good, although one often outgrows certain things. If not for the foundation laid by the Reformed world with its Sunday school and confirmation class in my life, I do not know where I would have been today. I enjoyed it thoroughly, and although many may call it an old system, it connected me to the Word. This ministry system may no longer be so readily acceptable to the youth of today, but few congregations have put down anything better on ground level! Be careful of being critical about things that no longer work perfectly in our electronic era, if you have nothing better to show. Let us be very grateful to the Father for every ministry infrastructure our predecessors put down, for it was their heart that it should serve us.

Nevertheless, it remains true that the nations cannot be accommodated in our existing infrastructures. Fortunately for our infrastructures, our congregations grow very slowly

and we have enough time to make structural changes. Should every congregation double in numbers today, it would be a huge shock on the infrastructure, although it would still not be significant progress in reaching the nations! Not only are our structures incapable of handling it, but we will definitely not have enough leaders to handle the multiplication. What did the congregation in Acts do when first 3 000 and then 5 000 believers were added? How did simple people like the disciples handle the situation? There has to be an answer. Our problem in our present setup is that we want to house people in *outward structures* with a *hierarchical leadership model*. A structure built like this is not necessarily wrong, but cannot do justice to the being of the body and also severely inhibits the growth of the body.

The only infrastructure at present that can physically accommodate everyone on earth is the family-infrastructure. The congregation ought to function in the same way and should not be run like a business! The body of the Lord is in essence a bride and cannot be run like a business. It may have certain advantages such as security, but it will neutralize her being so that the nations are not reached effectively. Congregation life concerns *people* who have given their *hearts* to the Father and have bound themselves as a bride to a bridegroom. This type of relationship cannot be run like a business, but only as a family! I have never seen believers treat their marriages according to business structures, but we drive from our homes to a place where we 'run' the bride of Jesus Christ in a business form! How do we justify that? This is what the world has taught us and not the Word!

Read I Thess.2:7-12 and consider all the family terminology Paul uses throughout. He calls himself a nursing mother who cherishes her children. He says that he longs

affectionately for them and how pleasant it was to share the gospel and his own life with them, because they have become dear to him. He himself worked so as not to burden any of them, so that he could exhort, comfort and charge every one of them as a father does his own children! The God of the Word is a Father with children. We are not an institute, organization or business. Even if we *make use of these elements*, we may not package the bride in them! She was made for a home with loving relationships and many children!

Our existing structures are not “evil”, merely the wrong structures and ineffective for the purpose of discipling the nations. It is extremely important to realize that any organism or movement should have some form of infrastructure. God is a God of order and infrastructure is vital for keeping anything together. We should simply create the right infrastructure. I do not think the existing structures in congregations keep people captive. They are free to leave whenever they please. It is the way in which leaders use the structures that has a hold on people. Leaders create the structures. If you wish to change the structures, you have to change leadership. The structure is merely a tool used to validate the leader or the body! It is the leader’s decision whether he wants to relate with the people via an organizational infrastructure or purely from his heart. The existence of a structure is not the problem, but much rather the way in which leaders relate to the people!

How do you keep 6,5 million people together without each of them going their own way? No organizational structure could accomplish that. Only relationship between one heart and another is capable of that! The entire movement in India is kept together simply with relationships from the heart. In the West we inhibit the initiative and freedom of

people with leadership structures, with the result that they constantly want to break free. In India, people have complete freedom to do what is in their hearts, and therefore they want to stay together to help each other! Give people their freedom and they will give you their lives! Our leadership styles in the West divide people because the focus is on the leader and not on the work of the kingdom. True unity is not a certain amount of people gathered around a leader, but where people can all gather around the headship of Jesus Christ. That is easily spoken, but must be facilitated in a certain way.

In congregation life, we thus need a strong inner skeleton such as that of man. Most congregations have a strong outer skeleton like that of the crab, which is not pretty and inhibits growth! Once more, let us not overreact about infrastructure, but create the right infrastructure with relationship. With the infrastructure of fatherhood and sonship an unlimited amount of people can be managed, for everyone knows their place and where they fit in. God's solutions are much simpler than we think.

## *SUMMARY*

- 1) The biggest enemy you will ever encounter in congregation life is numbers and increase!
- 2) We will never be able to disciple or accommodate the nations in our existing congregation systems!
- 3) Congregation leaders is and has always in general been poor organizers, although passionate shepherds!
- 4) Only one factor in congregation life has never been utilized fully, and that is the office of the believer!
- 5) It has never been the task of the fulltime team to do all the work and bring in the harvest on their own!
- 6) The ordinary believers will never rise up to do the work as long as the professional, fulltime team does it.
- 7) The solution to all our congregation problems is in our congregations, namely the believers in the chairs!
- 8) People can survive much longer without feeding than without atmosphere!
- 9) The atmosphere of man is relationship with other people!
- 10) We should show honour and respect to leaders who built infrastructures in sincerity of heart because they truly believed it would help us grow!
- 11) The outward church structure with hierarchical leadership is incapable of gathering or accommodating the full harvest.

12) The only infrastructure capable at present of accommodating all people physically on earth is the family infrastructure. The congregation should function in the same way and not be run like a business!

13) When Paul addressed a congregation, it was always from relationship and in family terminology.

14) We need only “father and son” relationships to manage an unlimited amount of people. Everyone fits easily within the family infrastructure.