

*FIFTEEN NEW
PARADIGMS
(NO. 13-15)*

ARNO & MARIANNE CLAASSEN

A FRESH NEW CONCEPT ABOUT
CONGREGATION! (PART 6)

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**ARNO & MARIANNE CLAASSEN
LIFEWISE CONSULTANTS**

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PO BOX 31288TH
WONDERBOOM, 0033

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

arno@lifewise.co.za

www.lifewise.co.za

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PROLOGUE

Although there is no cell church in the world which has more than a million people, there are several house church movements with more than one million, three million, and even six million people. It is interesting that almost all of these are in the East. The Oriental people, in their thinking, are less structured than the West and they find no need to package and control everything as we do. There is definitely something in the Oriental home church movement that works, which apparently is hidden to us or maybe it is too simple. The facts that also play a definite role are that the Christian faith is illegal and actively persecuted. Personally, I have not much contact with the Oriental house church movement.

There are a few reasons, in my opinion, why the Western house church movement is not acceptable. To a large extent it is just a Sunday church at home. Everything is the same as it was, except that it is small and it happens in houses. The intentions are good, but the product is not much different. Unfortunately in the West many people got hurt by authoritarian leadership and they are now hiding in house churches. You cannot run a congregation amidst hurt, rejection, reactions, shame, and an individualistic spirit! The Western house church is angry with leaders, Sunday services, and buildings, and this as such is the playground for dismay. None of the three things mentioned here is good, bad or sinful, but perhaps not always managed correctly. Our congregational problem is not primarily an external problem; it is an inner problem of the heart which manifests in a wrong lifestyle! If we create external structures in the hope that it will bring forth life, we will be disappointed. Everything starts with the heart and the command to disciple. So, what is discipleship?

THE FIFTEEN PARADIGMS

We have reached the last part about the paradigms. This is an introduction which basically leads to the analysis of the matter. After these chapters, we will actively search for a solution to establish a workable congregation model by summarizing all the new things found. Remember that the solution of the problem is not in the analysis of the matter; it is by pro-actively building from the Person of Jesus Christ as the solution to everything in life. These last three paradigms do not seem so odd on the face of it, but they are more far reaching than it seems.

13) MAN OF PEACE!

The thought of the man of peace comes from Luk.10:5-7. *“And into whatever house you may enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest on it; but if not so, it shall return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking the things shared by them; for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Do not move from house to house.”* This principle has more impact than we generally understand. One of the major reasons for the many conversions and the rapid spreading of the gospel in India is exactly the principle of the man of peace.

David Watson has not focused on individual or mass evangelism, but on the man of peace. Again, there is a place for individual and mass evangelism, but the principle of the man of peace brings much more efficiency and speed. I do not think we really have an idea of how much confusion we cause in the Asian countries by individual and mass evangelism. In that part of the world one person simply does not make decisions and then moves in any

direction on his own, and the mass does not decide without prior consultation with each other either! If you do not honor their family infrastructure, you have big problems. The gospel is a covenant and family issue. We overstate the fact that every person has to decide on his own whether he would accept the Lord. Why can everyone not decide on their own – TOGETHER! If this is not the way it happens there, individuals are thrown out of their families because they are regarded as individualists who choose to go their own way.

There are several benefits to the principle of the man of peace.

- The man of peace is a pre-motivated person who is already looking for answers and is willing to accept help. He already has a spiritual hunger and is looking for answers in life. God is already at work in every community. We should just go and move in where He works and that is where there is a man of peace.
- The man of peace is an influential person who already has a group of people around him as in a business or an extended family. If this person comes to salvation, he will automatically bring the others in. This is a person with many contacts.
- If you work in another country or culture it is very difficult to preach the gospel to the people within the context of their culture. If you have found a man of peace, he will do it for you.
- The man of peace is therefore a key person to the community who leads the community in making decisions. He is the person who will bring you into the community and introduce you.

The approach to the man of peace is not to lead him to the Lord so that he can lead the others to the Lord. No, he is just the key to the others. He is also not the person who takes you to the community for you to do the work. The man of peace is the person who gets people together to find answers together in a discipleship process where you, preferably, are not present! The man of peace gathers everyone around the Word so they can together find the solution while the Father works through the Word and the Holy Spirit! This I call a dynamic concept of planting a congregation! This man of peace shall gather his people and together they shall search for the answers in the Word as total unbelievers, with no believer present to preach or to provide answers, and after about six months there is a congregation! This is how the Father can plant congregations without always having a believer to teach or explain.

14) CONGREGATION LEADERS ARE NORMAL PEOPLE!

One thing remains without a doubt. Believers should be part of a congregation and congregations need leaders. This has always been the Father's will and plan on earth. However, we often think from out of division that there are too many congregations in our towns and in the country. Congregations should be easy to start everywhere and easy to manage and reproduce. A congregation as we know it is difficult to start and even harder to build or reproduce. The problem we have is probably that our concept of congregation is wrong. In the world's opinion congregations must be large and public with many buildings and leaders. Actually, congregations should be smaller, less public, more personal, and more easily reproducible!

I myself have been busy planting churches in towns for many years and I observed an interesting phenomenon as the years elapsed. To plant a basic renewal congregation today with all its infrastructure has become harder than in the past. There is a resistance and people in towns do not believe that things will turn out right, even if they have a new leader, a new vision, and a new strategy. To find an efficient leader to do the job is even harder than to try and convince people “to come.” The only leaders who accomplish something are those with an evangelistic gift. People become easily bored with 90 percent of the leaders in the field, because they are not supposed to listen to one person’s sermon and remain excited for the rest of their lives. Whatever you as leader use to attract people, you must keep on doing it or else “the service is not good enough.”

The whole world economy operates on a *consumer mentality*, and that is how people ‘come to church.’ We will attend the service to see what is presented on Sundays. If you listen to the congregations’ ads on the radio, it is just about how good the next speaker is, the quality of the music team, the children’s ministry, and the courses! Basically there is nothing wrong with any of it, that is true, except it is not what a congregation is about, and it is not the command of Jesus. We do all the beautiful and good things but not God’s thing. I have never heard an ad where people are incited to join so they can be sent out. New members ask you frankly: “What do you offer us?” This cycle in church life is sick and must be broken before believers will ever consider going out again!

In church life we are busy building monopolies, as in the business world. One person controls everything and everyone else is working for the same company. Just one generation ago 80 percent of people had their own

businesses, but today more than 80 percent work for other people. This necessitates greater control, and personal initiative is getting less. In the vernacular, they say there is no place for the little guys! Our intention with church has always been to build a few large congregations instead of building thousands of small ones. Building a large congregation is more difficult, with many more problems, and there is only room for one leader. All the others are called leaders as well but basically they work for the one senior leader.

It is much better and easier to build with small congregations because there is a lot more *ownership* in the process. There is also the possibility, and it is expected, that every believer will build a congregation. You do not have to wait until one day to be trained and ready, because the best time for a congregation to be started is the day after your conversion! There is nothing acting quite as energetic in church planting as leaders working with a *first love*. If you fail to do this, your first love will not pass into adulthood, but it will pass into passivity and disappointment. New believers have an intense desire to do something dynamic and unique for their Father. Allow them to start a congregation! The solution to our congregational problem lies in the people sitting in chairs. They are described as common believers or even as lay people! Every believer is a dwelling of the God of the universe through which the fullness of God the Father can manifest! There is no reason why all of them cannot have a congregation of their own, even if they work full time. Indeed, it is better if they have a full-time job. Perhaps we should take a fresh look at our definition of congregation in the following chapters.

15) LEADERS FACILITATE THE PRESENCE OF GOD!

Unfortunately this is also a difficult point for congregational leaders. We are so full of zeal and enthusiasm for the Lord, and we are so eager to do something for Him that we really take over everything and in the end we leave nothing to the Father! In the process of congregation everything begins and ends with leadership and that has never been wrong. The only question is how we exercise our leadership. One should understand that the head of a business must be very strict, even rigid, because it deals with turnover, production, profits and employment, and that comes with a reward. In most cases the head is also the owner of the business and he himself paid for everything there is. In a congregation Jesus is the head and not man, because no one has ever paid any price for the salvation of other people! We do pay a price so that they can hear the gospel and to experience their freedom in Christ, but we have no ownership of anything in the congregation.

The congregation is the bride of Jesus Christ on earth and leaders are part of the bride, but definitely not the head. It is a fact that leadership is essential, but no leader is the head of the body. Leaders should not take the place of the bridegroom; their task is to facilitate the bride back to the bridegroom. Leaders should not take over anything; they just have to facilitate the bridegroom's presence. Leaders are like a butler in a house. They carry the authority of the bridegroom, they carry out his decisions, serve in the house because of Him, but they never take the place of the bridegroom. The butler serves the house and sets the whole atmosphere in the house, but he has no authority over the bride. The bride belongs exclusively to the bridegroom! When leaders function correctly, they will

always be the determining factor, but simultaneously stay in the background. If leadership facilitates the presence of the bridegroom through the power of the Holy Spirit, they will be less needed in the foreground. There will be no need anymore for the “matchmaker” to be present when the bride and the bridegroom find each other.

In present-day church the leaders are so essential that if they are not present, nothing happens. Actually, the larger the congregation, the more dependent people are on the leaders and without the leaders, everything collapses. We say we do not build on the leaders, but if the leader is not present the bride does not know how to spend time with the bridegroom! David Watson has left the scene 10 years ago and the movement reached greater heights in his absence than in his presence! The things that I write here are radical and very confrontational, but the time has come to be honest about the realities in church.

The principle is clearly reflected in the ministry of Jesus. Numerous times He said that He only speaks what the Father speaks and only does what the Father does! He did not come to do His own thing; He came to facilitate the plan of the Father on earth. How many times did He say that if you have seen Him, you have seen the Father. The first task in His coming to earth was to show His Father’s image to the people so that they could know their origin! Jesus did not come to do His own thing and to build His own ministry on earth. How much more should we stop building our own ministries and recruiting people to execute it! His whole life and motivation was only to represent the Father as faithfully as possible so that people might come to know the Father.

Leadership does not reside in certain people only and above all, not only in certain personality types. Leadership

resides in God first, and every person in the congregation has leadership in which God is present. Every believer should learn to exercise his spiritual leadership and to become efficient in it. We have a very specialized concept of leadership in the congregation today. Present-day congregational leadership is mainly based on the Five-fold ministry gifts that have to do the work instead of mobilizing the body as an instrument through which the Father can work! Five-fold leadership should not be constantly at the front because it results in an unhealthy dependency. Five-fold leadership opens up new fields and equips people to stand up and take total responsibility for the work so that the leader can move to the next field or unreached area.

Finally, it is important to realize that leadership is actually a political-, business-, and sport term. People are leaders in the natural world, but in the spiritual world we are actually fathers. All believers have a calling to take up the roll of a father in other people's lives. Fatherhood in a house is much different than leadership in the natural world. Fatherhood develops and sets free, while leaders take over and control.

This brings us to the end of our paradigms. Actually, this was the easy part! It is easy to get to the problem and to analyze it. The next challenge now is to build on the solution and find a new strategy. The last major challenge is to implement everything and put it into practice. I do not think that I have all the answers to the questions and challenges. This is not the motion of a single leader but of the body of believers. I know that what I am writing here as a leader in the body will open the doors for ordinary believers and they will do dynamic things for the Father which I could never have contemplated. In one year's time I will look up to them for guidance!

SUMMARY

- 1) Our church problem is not primarily an external problem, but a problem of the inner heart which manifests in the wrong lifestyles!
- 2) The analysis of the problem is not solving the problem!
- 3) Individual evangelism and mass evangelism both have a place, but it is not necessarily the most effective in discipleship. Jesus commanded us to look for the man of peace in the community.
- 4) The Lord wants to do the work through the man of peace, and He needs our groundwork in the process.
- 5) Smaller congregations are more personal, mobile, efficient, and reproducible!
- 6) You build a congregation *with* leadership, not *on* leadership. Leadership is rightly positioned if the congregation can reproduce without it.
- 7) Believers must be cleansed from the consumer mentality of the world! Congregation is a place where you are called for service, not for entertainment!
- 8) If you want to go big, you need to become smaller! We build mega big by building thousands of mega small congregations!
- 9) Congregations should be built through the first love of the newly saved!

10) Congregations should be structured so simple that any believer can do it!

11) No man has ever paid any price for the salvation of others and may not take control over them!

12) Leaders' task is not to replace the bridegroom, but to facilitate the bride back to the bridegroom. Leaders do not take over anything but just facilitate the bridegroom's presence.

13) If leadership facilitates the bridegroom's presence through the Holy Spirit, leadership will be less needed in the foreground.

14) The bigger the congregation becomes, the less necessary is the initial leader's presence!

15) Leadership in the first place resides in God, and in the congregation every person has leadership in which God is present. Every believer should just learn to exercise their spiritual leadership and to become efficient in it.

16) In the natural world people are leaders, but in the spiritual world we are actually fathers.