

NORTH AMERICAN CITY REACHING FORUM

CITY REACHING: ITS NATURE, PROCESS AND COMPONENTS

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Throughout the centuries, the Church has accepted the Great Commission as its Magna Charta for ministry and the clearest description of its mission worldwide. Jesus said clearly that the Church, the continuation of His incarnation, was to make disciples of all the biblical ethne of the world.

After almost two thousand years, we are still trying the infinite patience of God by not yet completing this all-encompassing task. In fact, in major sections of the world, the work of the Great Commission is hardly begun.

As we have come together to address this concern in the North American City Reaching Forum, we cannot be responsible for all that has been left undone in the past nor is it our calling to involve ourselves directly with all the still unreached or undisciplined nations of the world. What we **MUST** do, however, is take full responsibility right now for all the people and peoples within the geographical boundaries of North America and on out into such other cities as the Lord leads. We can no longer work sporadically here and there AT bits and pieces of the Great Commission. It is time, if not past time, to wholly commit ourselves to the charge of **FULFILLING** the Great Commission for our region of calling.

The Great Commission

The difficulty we face, however, is that the Church through the ages has been unable to reach agreement on the precise means and measurements for accomplishing this task. We can—and must—find answers.

With this commitment to our specific area of responsibility in completing the Great Commission, we can look to several biblical passages other than Matthew 28 that have been brought to the forefront in these days that enlightens and encourages us in this supreme mission.

Habakkuk 2:14 (et. al.), for example, declares that the purpose of God's work in the world is "For the earth [to] be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." In some way, then, the fulfillment of the Great Commission requires not only that the glory of God be revealed throughout the world through creation but that His glory become internally acknowledged within the heart of mankind everywhere.

Psalm 22: 27-28 states God's intention that "all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations." We don't know exactly how or when this will happen, but our commission nonetheless is to work as directly as possible towards this eventuality. God continues to do His part; we must do ours.

John records in Revelation 7:9 that "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." Looking backward from eternity future the Apostle bears witness to the result of the work of God on earth. People representing every class, kind and condition of man are gathered around the throne representing every nation, tribe and tongue.

Isaiah 2:2 and 3 says, "In the last days . . . many peoples (nations) will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.'" What is a nation that wants to learn the ways of the Lord in order to walk in them but a NATION—not just an individual—that has become his disciple. And this is to happen in the last days, surely the days we are in. Now is the time for America.

The incredibly great good news is that so many of God's chosen servants—the ones to whom He reveals his secrets (Amos 3:7)—believe that we are living in the time when these passages, and others like them, will be fulfilled and all the nations will come to God in obedience. This is the *chaïros* moment we must seize for embracing all that it means to actually work directly and specifically at completing the Great Commission for North America and beyond.

A second piece of good news is that we don't have to start from scratch in developing the optimum strategy for the discipling of America. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. For city reaching is the contextualization of the principles learned from 140 countries each of whom are committed to the biblical admonition "make disciples of all nations."

The essence of this strategy being implemented in nations throughout the world and the distillation of the passages above is that the most direct way to work at the task of making a disciple of a nation is to see that there is the presence of the incarnated Christ within easy access of every small group of people of every class, kind and condition of man.

This is a very simple statement of the Great Commission. However, it is not simplistic. It represents a very complex set of principles, concepts and activities that we must wrestle with in order to develop the optimum strategy for reaching our cities.

Discipling the city

In the **FIRST PLACE**, we must understand how our sense of calling in NACRF to reaching whole cities for Christ fits in with the task of making **DISCIPLES** of

NATIONS. After all, Los Angeles is not a nation; or, you might say, it is many nations. Of course, neither is the country of the United States a "nation" in the biblical sense.

The reality is that the world is no longer neatly divided into easily identifiable, autonomous people groups or ethne. Still, our task is to make disciples of all the ethne, however much they are dispersed and/or intermingled in our populations. In North America, we know there is a vast representation of people groups permeating society and our cities.

Our conclusion, then, is that city-reaching—making disciples of our cities—is the dynamic equivalent of the Great Commission. When we speak or write of "city reaching," we are including everything Jesus meant when he said ". . . make disciples of all nations."

The application for the discipling of America is that by seeing the presence of the incarnate Christ become a reality in every neighborhood, every nook and cranny of our cities, we will in the process reach out and touch every segment of every ethnic group residing here. When we do this for every city in the country, and every city reaches out to its suburbs and rural environment, we will be doing everything we can to fulfill the command of discipling all nations in our specific context.

City reaching in our context represents the most comprehensive approach possible to ALL that is involved in FULFILLING this command and commission from our Lord.

Defining the city

A SECOND CLARIFICATION we must make concerns what it means to make a disciple of a city, to reach a city for Christ.

This starts with setting the geographical boundaries for each situation. In some cases this will be a whole metroplex consisting of many contiguous cities. In others this will mean dividing a metroplex into logical segments. Sometimes it will be one whole city or grouping of several communities that are not part of a metroplex. This is crucial, as determining the geographic dimensions of the city or community makes measuring the Church's task possible.

Fulfilling the Great Commission above all else requires bringing people to Christ from every strata of life and every cultural and ethnic slice of humanity and gathering them into fellowships with other believers where new converts can be trained and equipped to fully represent Jesus Christ in the world. No city can be made a disciple of our Lord without a hefty bulk of believers being present

City reaching also requires bringing the knowledge of God into the very fabric of the structures of life. God's purposes cannot be fully met by redeeming individuals and people groups while leaving societal structures and systems such as education, the arts, government, social services, and others for Satan to possess and control.

I agree with the words of urbanologist Al Linthicum when he states, "We simply cannot save individuals in the city and expect that the city will get saved. If the church does not deal with the systems and structures of evil in the city, then it will not effectively transform the lives of that city's individuals." It is for this reason that city reaching emphasizes the redemption of society and the transformation of the city as the ultimate goals of the Church's mission in the city.

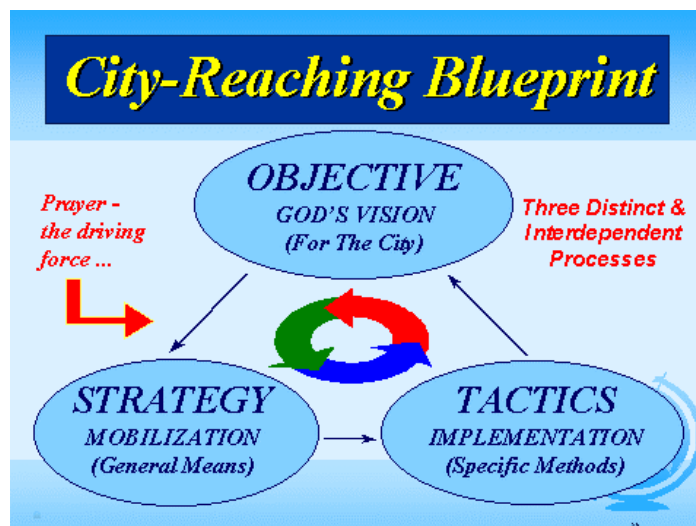
Within the geographic boundaries we set there live people with observable ethnic, social and generational characteristics. The number and kinds of people are not infinite and therefore they also can be identified and measured. The same could be said for the major issues of life that are faced by individuals. The Church can identify, measure and prepare strategies to help people face the most demanding economic, relational and spiritual issues of life. The social systems that have a deep impact upon life are also limited in number and can therefore be measured and changed.

The complexity of the Great Commission can be viewed through these various components and one by one the Church can make significant progress in bringing about the redemption of individuals and peoples and the transformation of city systems and structures. The Great Commission and city reaching, when viewed in this way, can become a more measurable task that can be systematically approached toward the goal of completion.

Tactics and strategy

A THIRD ISSUE to wrestle with is the distinction between tactics and strategy, the primary focus of this paper.

In any enterprise there are three fundamental components that must be appropriately integrated in order to succeed. The overall objective must be clear and compelling. A strategy expressing the general approach to accomplishing the objective must be established. The necessary and specific tactical action steps must be carefully determined. The more thoughtful the planning and careful the execution of each step is, the more we will insure a greater measure of success.



An example of these three components from every day life might be something as simple as getting to work on time. The objective is to arrive at the office at 8:00 a.m. The strategy involves waking up, personal preparation and arriving at the office. Each of these general phases of preparation could be divided into many tactics. These are action steps such as setting the alarm, having a cup of coffee, plugging in the electric razor and so on. Each of these tactics contribute to the overall strategy to reach the objective of arriving at the office safely and on time.

What is approached in an elemental and intuitive manner in this simple example must be approached more intentionally as the complexity of the task increases.

The overall objective of city reaching is the fulfillment of the very complex task of the Great Commission, of making a disciple of the city, of absolutely saturating the city with the dynamic presence of Christ.

The strategy to accomplish this objective includes mobilizing the Church, provides a clear assessment of the Church's unfinished task and identifies immediate and measurable goals that will lead the Church most directly toward accomplishing its mission in the city.

The tactics or action steps of city reaching flow naturally out of this strategy. They will be innumerable but they should each be chosen and developed from the perspective of how they contribute to the overall strategy and ultimate objective.

To further clarify the fundamental and highly significant difference between these terms, let us look at the arena of warfare from which they come. The objective, of course, is to win the war.

Strategy, we are told by Daniel Webster, is the art of the general. It has to do with the development of the overall plan or scheme by which the war can be won. Tactics, on the other hand, have more to do with the effective movement of men and equipment on the battlefield to accomplish limited objectives of battle.

Strategy is planning and preparation oriented while tactics are action and methodological in nature. Strategy prepares for battle while tactics are employed in battle. The former must be comprehensive and focused upon the long-term objectives while the latter must be focused upon the immediate and short term objectives of the coming engagement. Strategy takes into account the comprehensive whole while tactics design the individual parts.

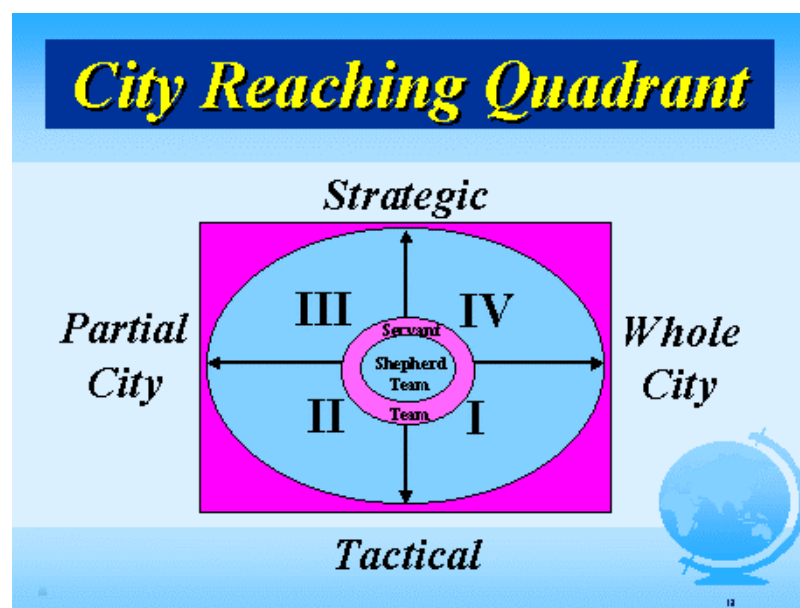
Any soldiers knows that the two are not antithetical, but complimentary. The goal is not to do one or the other, but to properly integrate the two in order to maximize the potential for success. Strategy births tactics while tactics complete strategy. Strategy without tactics would be akin to a car without gas. Tactics without strategy is likened to a ship without a rudder. Both are needed, but in proper relationship to one another. Tactics flow from strategy, but scattered tactics do not embody a strategy.

Of course it is true that there are many strategies being employed within our cities. A ministry might have the objective of reaching the homeless, for example, and might have a good plan or strategy for reaching this objective.

But having a strategy for a limited objective within the city, which many have, should not be confused with having an overall strategy for the whole city. It must be made clear that a strategy for one task within the city becomes a tactic when viewed as part of the larger task of reaching the city.

Taking time to clarify these terms is crucial when we apply them to city reaching. For the reality is, despite many great and wonderful ministries and strategies for limited objectives, virtually no city in North America is currently implementing a comprehensive strategy for making a disciple of their city. Until and unless we in NACRF come to terms with that reality, we will become just another voice clamoring for the attention of an already overloaded and overburdened Church.

Viewing city reaching through the quadrant below has helped many better understand the difference between tactics and strategy and, furthermore, how to move from tactics to strategy in city reaching.



In every city there is a lot of effective ministry occurring, but not all activity is of the same kind. These quadrants help us see clearly what kind and how much activity is occurring and what more and what kind of activity is still needed to work most directly at our objective of reaching the city.

The vertical axis represents the continuum between strategy and tactics; between preparing for and actively doing ministry. The horizontal axis represents the scope or focus of our efforts, partial or whole. The overlay of the two axis produces four quadrants representing the nature of our approach and the scope of our effort.

Quadrant I represents ministry that is TACTICAL in its approach and WHOLE city in its scope. This is best illustrated by what many refer to as "citywide initiatives" such as

the Jesus Video Project, evangelistic crusades, certain prayer mobilization efforts and more. These are tactical (activity, event, or methodology oriented) endeavors whose goal it is to minister to either the whole Church (i.e., prayer mobilization) or to the whole city (i.e., evangelistic crusade).

Quadrant II represents an approach that is TACTICAL and PARTIAL in its scope. Midnight basketball, homes for single mothers, neighborhood vacation Bible schools, rescue missions and many more are each examples of tactical efforts designed to engage a sub-group of people or need in the city.

Quadrant III represents a STRATEGIC/PARTIAL city course of action. A local church, for example, could develop a full-orbed strategy for the discipling of its neighborhood. A denomination might focus a strategy on reaching the inner city. In this case it is "partial" in that it engages only one segment of the Church, that is, one denomination. Examples of ministry in this quadrant are few and far between.

Quadrant IV represents a STRATEGIC/WHOLE city approach and provides the framework and process for a full city-reaching project. None of the ministries of Quadrants I – III are intended nor designed to be city-reaching efforts. Either their approach or scope limits their activity to something smaller than the whole of the city or the entirety of its needs. There are now several cities in the U.S. that are in the process of developing strategies in this category.

The nature of activity in this quadrant is to bring the whole body of Christ together, identify and release a team of shepherd leaders who will serve the whole Church, assess the unfinished task of the Church's mission within the city, begin to develop a strategic plan to guide the Church in its city reaching efforts and empower tactical ministries to meet the many and specific needs within the city. The maxim of those involved in this quadrant of ministry is, "the whole Church taking the whole Gospel to the whole city."

Quadrant IV, I hasten to state, is not city-reaching in itself, for city-reaching requires the combined efforts of all four quadrants. Rather, QIV activity is that which catalyzes, directs, and synergyzes the activity of the other three. It emphasizes preparation for city reaching by providing leadership at the city level, determining highest priority goals and developing overall strategy. As a result, it prepares the way for more effective implementation of tactics and activity in categories I through III.

There are many examples of Quadrant I and II activity in our cities. However, in most cities there is very little coordination or communication between these varied efforts. Graphically represented, these two quadrants of activity might look like a box of toothpicks dropped at random on a table top. There is no focal point to which they are directed, no overall strategy to which they contribute. The result is competition, duplication, and lost effectiveness.

Quadrant III activity, though present in most cities, remains isolated within small segments of the Church and therefore has little overall impact.

Quadrant IV is the missing element and the key to unleashing the city reaching process.

I trust that breaking down ministry into these four quadrants makes it clear that only the Church as a whole can do city reaching. It is not the domain of any particular para-church or denominational group. There is no one event or activity that in itself can see the discipling of a city. Each and every segment of the body contributes to the overall objective of reaching the city but only the Church and its leadership can integrate the many pieces into an effective framework and process for accomplishing the full objective of the Church. City reaching enables the Church to move from scattered tactics to an overall comprehensive strategy for reaching the city.

Leadership structures

A FOURTH MAJOR CONCERN is to determine what leadership structures best serve the overall city-reaching process.

Two permanent leadership structures have consistently emerged in U.S. cities. One could be described as a leadership core and the other a servant core. The former have emerged as spiritual shepherds who lead the emerging strategic process. The latter team of servants provide the tactical support to the vision and process of the leaders.

The primary role for the shepherd leaders is to cast vision, identify additional leaders, call the pastoral community to prayer and unity, initiate the research process, identify groups for whom reconciliation is needed, establish relationship with city leaders (government, education, law enforcement, etc.) and begin to develop a strategic plan to guide the Church's efforts to reach the city.

The role of the servant team is to provide the infrastructure and process to enable the shepherd leaders to accomplish the goals and responsibilities listed above.

In the strategy phase (c.f. City Reaching Blueprint), which represents the emergence of the city reaching process, the shepherd leaders are focused essentially on Quadrant IV activity and the servant team contributes tactical support to Quadrant IV.

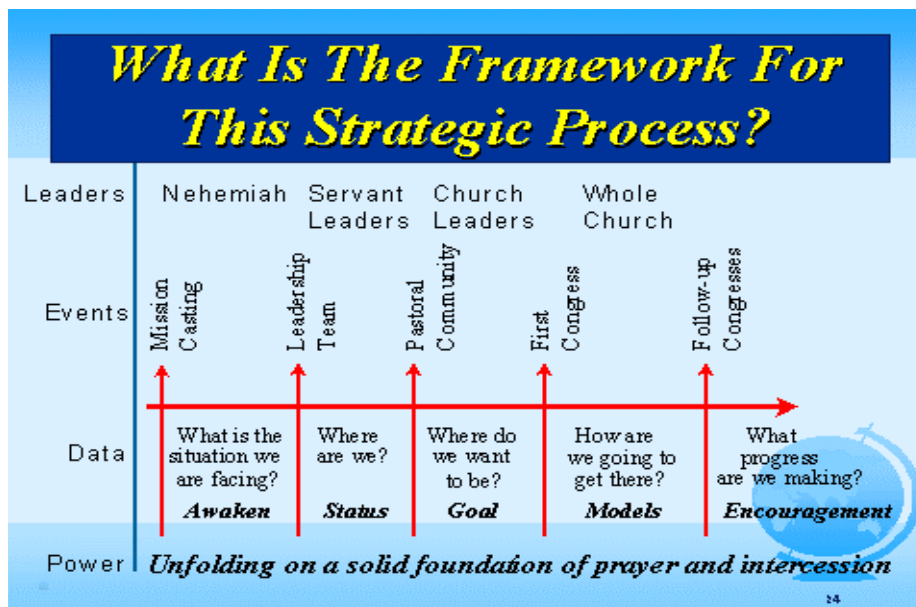
As the Church moves beyond the strategy phase into tactical implementation, both the shepherd leaders and servant teams will expand the scope of their service to engage all four Quadrants of activity. The shepherd leaders will emerge as both spiritual leaders and "strategy coordinators," helping the many tactical ministries more clearly and effectively focus their resources on the highest impacting actions that will produce the most enduring results.

The servant team will likely emerge as "tactical coordinators." Examples of these can be seen in such existing city efforts as Mission Portland, Mission Cleveland, and "The Net: Churches Serving Together" of Colorado Springs. These city missions serve as "partnership forums" where people doing like-kindred ministry in the city establish formal and informal partnerships. These facilitate communication, planning and cooperation. Mission Portland, for example, currently serves to coordinate and support

the activity of thirty-eight distinct ministry networks and partnerships at work in the metroplex.

Describing the process

A FIFTH ISSUE to be addressed is the process by which the Church of the city is mobilized to implement the overall strategy. This could be illustrated in the following graph:



This graph represents a principle-driven process that starts at the beginning and points toward the eventual implementation of city reaching. It depicts a linear view of the relationship between the three pathways of city reaching which includes leadership development, information gathering, and prayer and intercession. Though all the principles are operative at every level of the process, each is given focused priority for attention in sequential order.

This process begins with mission casting and at the other end is continued indefinitely with follow-up congresses. In the middle, the process is punctuated by three formal events; the calling out and establishment of a team of shepherd leaders, formal commitment to reaching the city by a portion of the pastoral community, and the final commitment and goal setting event (Church Congress) that engages the Church at the denominational, associational, regional and local church levels.

Though leadership, information and prayer remain focused priorities throughout the process, each is emphasized at certain points along the pathway.

Sequentially, the process emerges in the following manner:

1. Mission casting – Church leaders must be awakened to God’s love for the city, the Church’s biblical mission in the city, and the current situation the Church is facing.

2. The pastoral community calls out and commissions the shepherd leaders for the Church.
3. The shepherd leaders commission the research process in an effort to thoroughly and accurately describe a baseline picture of the current status of the condition of the city and Church.
4. With the results of the initial research in hand, the shepherds convene the pastoral community to consider God's vision for the city and the current reality describing the city.
5. The shepherd leaders and the pastoral community continuously seek God for a clear understanding of His goals for the city and Church.
6. The whole Church is convened in a final effort to discern God's vision and purposes for the city and to commit to certain highly focused and top priority efforts to bring about increased conversion of society and transformation of the city.
7. Priority shifts from preparing for city reaching to doing city reaching. Though implementation is now the focus the Church continues to identify and empower leadership and regularly expands its awareness of current reality through information gathering.

Foundational to every effort and all activities is prayer and intercession. Prayer is intricately linked to and envelopes every stage and level of the city reaching process.

In summary

Though the primary focus of this paper is on the issue of tactics and strategy, I have tried to place these within the overall framework of city reaching. City reaching is the operational framework for not simply working AT the Great Commission but working to FULFILL it. City reaching is the reaffirmation of biblical ecclesiology regarding the unity of the Church, the comprehensiveness and complexity of the Great Commission and the role of the Church as God's redeeming agent in the world.

An operational definition for city reaching that emerges from the above discussion is: "the ongoing process of mobilizing the whole body of Christ in a geographically identified area to strategically focus all of its resources on reaching the whole city with the whole Gospel."

Each element of this proposed definition deserves further amplification. For just a summary statement for the purpose of this paper permit the following statement to suffice:

Ongoing process – one that is sustainable until the Lord returns

Mobilizing – bringing the body of Christ into alignment so that it can function as one unit

Whole body of Christ – every person within whom Christ dwells

Geographically identified – the optimum geographical unit determined by degree of unity and current momentum of the Church for a city-reaching process

Strategically focused– empowering the highest number of ministries to create the greatest impact and produce the most enduring results

Reaching – seeing that the incarnate presence of Christ is within easy access both physically and culturally of every person in the city

Whole city – all of the biblical ethn representing individuals from every class, kind and condition of mankind, and each city system and structure

Whole gospel – both the cultural and evangelistic implications of the Gospel

City reaching represents the most comprehensive effort of the Church to fulfill all that is implied by the Great Commission. This effort will enable a fragmented and disunified Church regain its functional unity and its strategic focus. City reaching redirects the Church's focus and collective ministries from an isolated and inwardly focused approach to an outwardly and collaborative approach aimed at redeeming society and transforming the city. City reaching requires the reintegration of the cultural and evangelistic mandates of the Gospel balancing the words and works of the Church.

City reaching involves all that the Church does to address the complex mix of issues required to fulfill the Great Commission in the city.

As if the command of the Lord in His Great Commission were not enough, the events and revelations in our society in recent months cry out that the time is upon us when either the Church will be revived and strategically set to work or total disintegration of our society will take place. To a considerable degree, it is within our hands to determine which will happen.

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