

VISION AMERICA

An Opportunity to Step Forward

W.W. McEad

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A man took his friend for a ride one day way out in the country. They drove off the main road and drove through groves of trees to a large uninhabited expanse of land. A few horses were grazing, and a couple of old shacks remained. The man, Walter, stopped the car, got out, and started to describe with great vividness the wonderful things he was going to build. He wanted his friend Arthur to buy some of the land surrounding his project to get in on the ground floor.

But Arthur thought to himself, *"Who in the world is going to drive twenty-five miles for this crazy project? The logistics of the venture are staggering."*

And so Walter explained to his friend Arthur, *"I can handle the main project myself. But it will take all my money. But the land bordering it, where we're standing now, will in just a couple of years be jammed with hotels and restaurants and convention halls to accommodate the people who will come to spend their entire vacation here." He continued, "I want you to have the first chance at this surrounding acreage, because in the next five years it will increase in value several hundred times."*

"What could I say? I knew he was wrong," Arthur said years later. *"I knew that he had let this dream get the best of his common sense, so I mumbled something about a tight-money situation and promised that I would look into the whole thing a little later on."*

"Later on will be too late," Walter cautioned Arthur as they walked back to the car. *"You'd better move on it right now."*

And so Art Linkletter turned down the opportunity to buy up all the land that surrounded what was to become Disneyland. His friend Walt Disney tried to talk him into it. But Art thought he was crazy.¹

As IFCA International was preparing to leave the 20th Century behind, a significant document was published in which was set forth a list of recommendations and goals designed to serve as guideposts to the Fellowship in the pursuit of its vision for the future. Some of the items listed under Church Extension appeared as follows:

We are committed to aggressive involvement in planting, establishing, and nurturing biblical, local churches in the United States of America. In order to accomplish this task we make the following recommendations:

¹[1] James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 389.

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- *Surveying areas of the next state, county, city or town for the purpose of assessing the need for establishment of sound, biblically fundamental, reproductive churches*
- *Emphasizing evangelism of the lost, not taking away members from existing Bible-believing churches*
- *Reaching out to people in their own language and culture*
- *Using a variety of methods in church planting*
- *Including a sponsoring church or churches whenever possible*
- *Providing a vehicle whereby churches planted and served may be brought into a member church relationship with IFCA International*

Shortly thereafter, as we were poised at the threshold of the 21st Century, one of IFCA's church extension leaders wrote: "... *IFCA International fellowship is approaching some pivotal times ... we have before us an opportunity to advance our fellowship forward into the 21st Century with a renewed spiritual commitment to being the most effective and powerful witness God can create us to be. If we choose to dismiss these opportunities, we choose instead to enter a decline. Rather than needing to be rescued as a fellowship at some point in the future, should we not choose to powerfully assume a place of leadership as effective witnesses in our land and our world?*" The writer then went on to say that part of that place of leadership "... *will be the advancement of churches in to areas not yet reached by IFCA International.*"

I think it is likely that, on a Fellowship-wide level, those seemingly lofty goals and recommendations did not penetrate very deeply into the consciousness of more than a small fraction of our brethren who "are" IFCA International. Many of us were like Arthur; we looked at the landscape and just could not see what the visionaries among us seemed to see, and if we could see anything at all it seemed out of reach.

Something significant happened, however, in 2005 when the Louisville Launch was proposed at the Convention in Baltimore MD. Suddenly, people began catching the vision of just how powerful the direct and cooperative involvement of a network of churches and individuals can be in the successful planting of one church. Scores of churches and individuals came together in forming a network capable of offering assistance in significant ways to achieve the goal of establishing Jeffersontown Bible Church in conjunction with the 2006 Convention in Louisville KY. Remarkably, apart from the prayer involvement of untold hundreds, perhaps even thousands, the establishment of J-town Bible Church was accomplished with the direct and cooperative involvement of a relatively small number of participants. The fact is that the potential exists, within our Fellowship, for several such efforts to be carried out, in different regions of the country, all at the same time ... all of the time. Instead of one such cooperative effort added to the churches that would already have been planted in the normal course of the ministry of the Church Extension Agencies, it is possible to add several, perhaps even a dozen or more!

Now, in 2007, God has brought about the circumstances that have given birth to [VISION AMERICA](#). He has again "taken us out into the field of America" and is saying to us

again, wherever “our field” is, *“Look around you. I’m building my Church in this field. I want you to buy up the opportunity around you so that you can have a part in the blessing that is going to come as I build My Church.”*

By encouraging the direct and cooperative involvement of local churches in the ministry of taking the Gospel to the next community through the ministry of church planting, VISION AMERICA will broaden the base underlying IFCA Church Extension. Historically it has been the Church Extension Agencies of IFCA International that have served, primarily, as the “engine” which powered the ministry of church planting. While some of those agencies have done a remarkable job on the one hand, others have been hindered in the work by lack of resources, personnel and in some cases even a leader to guide the agency. Indeed, there are some areas of the country where there is no church extension agency at all. By creating a climate in which local churches are encouraged toward church planting and by equipping them with the resources for networking with other churches, the church extension agency, or even for doing it on their own when they are able, VISION AMERICA has the potential of multiplying the number of “engines” which drive the ministry of IFCA church planting.

We have a saying in church planting circles. We say, “Living things reproduce. Dead things do not reproduce ... only living things do. And so it is true as well of the local church.” It is the nature of a healthy church not only to grow, but to reproduce itself. The Body of Christ is genetically designed with the capability of reproduction. Missions and outreach are not optional activities for the local church. More pointedly, a church which is not focused on reproducing itself so as to reach the unreached in the next community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a contradiction. VISION AMERICA is about helping churches to be involved in doing that great work in the field right around your local church.