

**Speech to the JEMA MLC Meeting, February 22, 2010:
Presenting the Strategy Forum's strategic vision for the evangelization of
Japan.**

SLIDE 1

Times change, don't they?

My trip to Japan last Wednesday reminded me of this. The security checks at the airport were very different from when I first came to Japan in August of 2001. Of course in those days there were security checks. But I will tell you, those were mild compared to what I just went through! Today the world is responding to a wholly new level of international terrorism threat. Twenty years ago none of us imagined that anything like that could happen, but it has. None of us imagined we would be subjected to these elaborate security measures, but we are. Times change – and we have had to do some new things to respond to those changes.

Of course by the time we notice that times have changed, the real change often already happened long in advance. The underlying situation changed years ago, and its only now that the effects are becoming clear to us.

For example, the force of international terrorism existed for many years before the events of 9-11, 2001. But it wasn't until the tragic killing and destruction that happened on that day that the US government, and most of the other governments around the world, really started to pay attention to the terrorism threat.

Times change. And when they do we often have to change.

Well, today is a day for us to consider whether we should change some of the things we are doing.

Every one of us is disappointed with the progress we've made in Japan. We all know that the soil here is hard. We all know that the growth of the church has been slower than we wanted. We all know that we have worked hard and yet are still praying for results.

So why is growth so slow here in Japan?

One possible explanation lies in our actions, the things we are doing or not doing. If we look at the things we are doing, I don't think any of us can point to anything that is bad, anything that is contrary to growth. I am quite certain that everything we are doing is good. But another question is this: are we doing enough of the right things, the things which will really promote growth of the church? If this is where the limitations lie, then an acceleration of growth waits for us to find and adopt some new methods that will overcome the existing barriers.

Today is a day to examine this possibility. Today is a day to dream new dreams and to see new visions. Please be willing to think new thoughts. Please be willing to envision new things we all could be doing together.

Times change. Let's join together and encourage each other to think outside of the box, to consider new possibilities, to imagine new things.

Today's Program

Here is the plan for today's program.

First, I will describe the Strategy that the Strategy Forum has developed. As an introduction to the strategy, I want to briefly tell you about the history of the Strategy Forum and the process we used.

You will see that the strategy statement is at a very high level. It is a statement of vision for several areas of the church. It contains little specific recommendations for

detailed actions. The intent is to provide a strategic direction, and then to ask all of you to think about the details. What are you currently doing that moves the church towards the vision, and what new things might you do that would contribute to even stronger movement?

So, after I describe the strategy, we will break up into working groups, with each group considering one of its dimensions. During the first group session, we would like you to talk about what you are currently doing that does match with the strategy. Then we will hear from two Japanese pastors who will give us their thoughts on how the missions can help the Japanese church pursue growth in a couple of the strategic dimensions.

Then, in the afternoon the working groups will focus on new thoughts. We will ask you to brainstorm about what new things you individually, and all of us together, could be doing to implement the strategy.

Please join me in prayer for the rest of our session.

PRAYER

Most gracious and merciful Father in heaven. Hallowed be your name. We worship you, O God. Because you are not willing that any perish, and because you call us to consider all possible means by which we may save some, please today encourage us to dream new dreams. Please show us new visions of the things we should be doing. Please, dear God, liberate our minds from any shackles imposed by our current strategies, our current ministries, our current thinking. Help us imagine not just the new wine, but the new wineskins we might need to contain it. We love you. We love your church. And we desire that your kingdom come, here on earth, through your mighty church. So, dear God, use us to glorify your name here in Japan. To you and to our Lord Jesus Christ be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Strategy Forum History

First let me give you a brief history of the Strategy Forum. It consists of Martin Crowhurst of WEC, Gary Fujino of the IMB, Wolfgang Langhans of OMF, and myself from Asian Access. Jonathan Kohl is our facilitator.

The Strategy Forum has been investigating how to increase the growth of the church in Japan for the last year and a half. It all started at the 2007 MLC. There I stated my personal interest in working on strategy. These brothers approached me and said they wanted to be involved. It took a year to get some other things out of the way, but finally in June of 2008 we were able to meet for the first time.

When we first came together, we discovered God had given us a common vision: to identify a strategy for increasing the growth of the church in Japan.

But we faced a serious question: how could such a strategy be implemented? After all, we, the Strategy Forum, can not set strategy for any mission. Each of you is an independent mission with your own strategy. You are the ones who determine what you will do. The Strategy Forum has no authority over those decisions.

However, we thought that we could do this. If we could get some insights that are useful to all of us, and if we could design a strategy that made sense, then simply creating it and publicizing it would benefit all missions, and more broadly the entire church in Japan.

Here are the vision and mission statements we adopted to guide our work in that direction:

SLIDE 2

Vision

“To produce an overall guiding strategy for seeing more rapid church growth across Japan. This strategy is for the missions community and for interested churches across Japan as an aid to their own strategic planning.”

The last words – “as a aid to their own strategic planning” are there to emphasize what I just said. The strategy is offered as support to you. If it makes sense to you, then as you develop your own annual plans, you can regularly take a look at the strategy and decide how you could address part of it with your annual plan.

I want to be clear about our intent with the words “more rapid church growth.” Please understand what we mean by that and what we do not mean. We are not talking about the Donald McGavran school of church growth theory, and we are not talking about ways to grow individual churches into mega-churches. Instead, we are using the term in a very natural sense. Because God wants everyone to come to salvation in Jesus Christ, it is clear that God wants His church to grow. It is in that simple, God-honoring way that we say “church growth.”

Given that vision, this Mission statement identifies the work we wanted to do:
“To offer an assessment of the state of evangelization of Japan, identifying strengths and barriers; to highlight areas for strategic attention, and to present an umbrella strategy for specific actions to see more rapid church growth across the whole of Japan.”

The next step in our thinking process was to be bold and courageous and make a statement of vision for what the church should look like. To guide us, we needed a shared goal for the church so that our final strategy statement would contain elements to promote it.

So here it is.

SLIDE 3

What is the goal for the church in approximately 2030?

Why did we choose the year 2030? To be honest, there is no special meaning to the year. The point is simply that big changes often take a long time to accomplish. Picking a hypothetical time several years in the future helped us keep our focus on big changes.

So here is the vision we hold for the church 20 years down the road:

“The more rapid expansion of God’s Kingdom in Japan for His glory through growing healthy churches full of courageous, spirit-filled Japanese Christians – both professional and lay – who love and work with each other, non-Japanese Christians, other churches and the church globally to make a significant, noticeable impact on the nation through their Christ-like service and bold faith, resulting in transformed lives and communities.”

Before moving ahead with our work, we thought it was important to see if all of you agreed with this goal. So we asked you in one of our surveys. Many of you had some very good comments and suggestions about the statement, but there was virtually 100% agreement with its basic intent.

Well, the formation of our vision and driving objective was the start for everything else we did.

In order to accomplish our objective, we put in place a strenuous process to guide us. As in doing good hermeneutics, using a sound process is important. Using a bad process is almost guaranteed to produce bad results. So we worked very hard to make sure we had a solid process.

Here is the process we adopted.

SLIDE 4

First, we brought in Jonathan Kohl to act as facilitator for us. Jonathan is a committed Christian. He is an MK, and is an Asian Access board member. His secular job is as manager of marketing strategy for Eli Lilly company in Kobe. We prayed that his expertise in developing strategy would help guide us. That prayer was abundantly answered. Thank you Jonathan!

Second, the entire effort was constantly bathed in prayer for wisdom to know what should be done. First Chronicles tells us that the men of Issachar “understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” That God would provide that kind of wisdom was our constant prayer.

The third step was to state our objectives. These are the vision, mission and strategic intent statements I just showed you.

After identifying these objectives, we started a series of research projects to give us insight into the facts. Knowing the facts is clearly part of the wisdom of the men of Issachar.

The first of those research projects was to search God’s word to see what He says about how He intends His church to grow. This was a critical first step in our research, since we must follow God’s plan, even when our own intuition says something else.

After this, we did research to understand the actual state of church growth and the factors contributing to it, to understand what all of you believe are the major barriers to growth, and to understand the current practices of missions which are affecting church growth.

The fifth step was to evaluate all the information and identify missing elements. The question is this:

Given God's plan for growth and given what is currently happening, what is missing? What elements necessary for growth are either missing or under-represented in our current practices?

Identification of these elements then leads up to step 6 – creating the strategy recommendation. Formulating the recommendation at this point is easy – it is simply to take action to respond to these missing or under-represented elements.

Step 7 is today. Today is the beginning of encouraging us all to engage in and respond to the strategy.

When I show you the strategy in a moment, you will see that it is stated as a vision for change in several areas. It is a recommendation that we all work together to help the church in Japan grow in these key areas. The strategy statement contains few specific action suggestions. We believe that identifying specific actions and programs can only come from all of us working together to find things we can do to promote these visions. That is why we think of today as a joint brainstorming session to begin envisioning how we jointly could move forward in these key areas.

Steps 8 and 9 are things that should happen in the future. If we all agree that the strategy recommendation is useful, then we should periodically report on how our efforts are proceeding. And finally, based on progress that is being made, strategic investigation and redefinition should be an ongoing process. This will help us all keep our attention on what is most important.

SLIDE 5

Here is a list of the research projects we did. We emailed you a pdf document containing the full report for all of these, in case you want to dig into the details. It is also posted on the Strategy Forum page on the JEMA web site. A few of the more significant results are in your handout packet. Today we don't have time to discuss

these in detail, but when I show you the strategy I will comment on the most significant results which support the conclusions.

These 7 research projects cover four areas.

First is understanding God's intended process for church growth. I mentioned this a moment ago.

Second, analyzing statistics on the current state of church growth.

Third, identifying current barriers to growth and current strengths of the church. This was done through two surveys of the mission leaders and an interview with Kamei-sensei, the leader of Natural Church Development-Japan. So far NCD has worked with over 130 churches, so Kamei-sensei's experience is broad and his insights into strengths and barriers is important.

Finally, another survey of JEMA missions to find out what activities we missions are currently engaging in. This is Roman numeral VII.

Now I want to show you the main conclusions that came out of the research. These are foundational for the strategy.

SLIDE 6

In these slides the Roman numerals in parentheses refer to the research projects. Here, for example, the Roman numeral I in the title refers to research project 1, where you will find full documentation of the project.

The first project was to read through the New Testament looking specifically to see what God says about church growth. We looked for answers to three questions:

1. What does God say the growth should look like?
2. What processes does He use to produce the growth?

3. What role has He mandated for us human beings to carry out?

We did this research so that later we could compare what is actually happening to what God says should happen.

Here are the key conclusions that came from that investigation. Most of these are obvious. But in a couple these points we found a biblical emphasis that is different from what many of us practice.

Evangelism, that is, proclamation about Christ, is central. Romans 10:14 is very clear – no one can believe in Christ if they haven't heard about Him, and no one can hear unless someone tells them. People cannot believe if they don't hear.

What God actually says about the role of prayer in church growth is very interesting and changed my thinking. I suspect that most of us often say things like, "Let's pray that so-and-so will come to Christ" or "Let's pray for the salvation of the Japanese people." However, we found no specific command to pray for the salvation of others, and there is no specific example of such a prayer in the New Testament.

Regarding prayer for reaching the lost, we found only two specific things said. First is Jesus' command to pray that God will send workers into the field. Second is Paul's request that the Ephesians pray that he would proclaim the gospel boldly and clearly. This, together with Romans 10:14, clearly underlines the role that God has assigned to proclamation to growth of His church. Workers must go out, and they must speak of Christ. Only then will growth occur. So if there is little growth, one place to look for an explanation is in the amount of proclamation that is being done.

Numbers 3, 4 and 5 really require no comment, as I think we all know very well the role of love, church planting and the Holy Spirit in growing the church.

Number 6 requires comment because this is something we often forget. Ephesians 4:11-12 identifies roles that God has assigned to people in the church. This passage says: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,” and then there is a purpose statement: “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” This passage is a strong reminder that God’s intended process is different than the one we often fall into.

I believe that we missionaries and church pastors often think we are the ones who are supposed to grow the church. But God says it is the lay people who are to do that. Our job, according to God, is to train the lay people so they can do that building.

And finally, we noted that Jesus often speaks of growth of the church in agricultural terms. This implies that God’s expected pattern of growth is organic, or what a mathematician would call “exponential growth.”

It is important to have these directions from God clearly in mind so that we can identify how well the church is doing in the areas that God has assigned to us. Remembering to focus on the basics is always important.

Research Conclusions

Now I want to show you briefly the conclusions about the state of the church in Japan that all the other research led to.

SLIDE 7

Here’s what we learned about the size and growth of the church.

First, as we all know, the church is small. According to the CIS data, the number of Christians is about one-half of one percent of the population.

We also learned that the growth rate is very, very low. It is about 0.61% per year. To understand how low that is, consider this. If this growth rate continues into the future, after another 100 years the number of Christians will be at only 0.8% of the population, still less than 1%. And it will take 400 years of growth at this rate to reach 5% of the population.

Even more disturbing than the slow growth is the fact that the growth pattern is not biblical. It is not the organic, exponential pattern that Jesus speaks of. As a result, the growth rate is actually declining over time.

SLIDE 8

This graph will help us understand what I am saying about growth patterns. The vertical dimension measures numbers of Christians, and the horizontal axis shows years. Each line in the graph shows a different kind of growth pattern.

The red line shows the shape of biblical, exponential growth. Each year it grows by the same percent growth, resulting in a curve that is more than linear. It is bowl-shaped, and becomes steeper and steeper each year [hand motion].

The purple line in the center is linear growth. It increases by the same number each year. Because the amount of increase is the same each year, the growth rate actually decreases from one year to the next. This is not biblical growth.

The brown line is a growth pattern that is very much not biblical. It isn't even linear. It is growing, but each year the absolute number of increase is less than the previous year. It has the shape of an upside-down bowl [hand motion]. The annual growth rate in this pattern is decreasing faster than that of the linear growth line.

Unfortunately this last pattern is the pattern of growth in Japan.

To recap, the conclusions about church growth are:

The church is small. Its growth rate is low. And most significantly, the growth pattern is not biblical, and thus the annual growth rate is actually declining from year to year.

Now, I want to give you a summary of the barriers to growth and of the strengths of the church the research pointed to. These conclusions come from the surveys of the mission leaders, from the interview with NCD-Japan, and from our own experiences. As we look at these, please compare them to the conclusions about God's intended process for growth of the church in Slide 6.

SLIDE 9

First, there is little evangelism being done in general, and more importantly, there is little personal evangelism being done by lay people.

Another barrier is that fact that in the majority of churches there is the pastor-centered, hierarchical leadership style, rather than one which trains and empowers the lay people to build up the church.

Another serious barrier is the fact that in many churches there is little vision for growth of the church and impact on society.

Coupled with little lay evangelism and the pastor-centered leadership style is the fact that lay involvement in ministry is low.

Further, for most churches there is little engagement with the society around them. There is a lot more detail in the research document that you can read. But these six points summarize the major barriers to growth that we all see.

SLIDE 10

These two important strengths of the existing church stood out.

First, the Japanese Christians are full of Holy-Spirit driven love for one-another. The kind of love that Jesus commands is certainly being lived out in the Japanese congregations.

Second, many pastors and lay people are dedicated to the church and give lots of time to service.

These, then, were the conclusions about the state of the church growth in Japan, about the barriers to growth, and about the strengths of the existing church. I imagine that these conclusions are no surprise to any of you, since these are regular topics of conversation amongst us.

With these barriers and strengths identified, the Strategy Forum's next step was to identify strategy to do something about the barriers. We settled on eight streams of strategy.

As I told you earlier, we stated these as visions for what the church should look like in the year 2030. Our joint task today, as we move into our discussion sessions, will be to suggest some more concrete things we could be doing together to help the church develop in each of these areas.

Slide 11

Here are the eight streams of strategy. Take a quick look at this slide either up here on the screen or in your handout. I am going to talk about each of these streams in detail, but it may help you to glance at the full set. You will quickly see that the emphasis of the overall strategy is to promote renewal of the church, so that the existing church can become God's harvest force. Each of the streams contributes to creating that renewal.

Let's now look at the streams one-by-one.

SLIDE 12

The first stream is Church Multiplication, and the vision for the year 2030 is written at the top of the slide: The church in Japan is growing in a Biblical pattern (that is,

exponential growth) in terms of the number of new believers and newly started congregations.

I just showed you the statistics on the current growth rate and pattern, so I won't repeat that. Just a reminder, the Roman numerals in parentheses refer to the research projects.

The section entitled "Current Missions' Efforts" on each slide includes any information we have on what we missions are doing about this stream today. Let me explain what this means. In research project number 7, question number 8, we asked missions what percent of personnel time was spent on various activities. That is what we are showing here. This is not the percent of missions, but instead the percent of actual effort. For example, even if a missions has church planting as its main focus, less than 100% of personnel time goes into church planting activities. This is because there are many other necessary support things that must be done – for example administrative office work.

On church multiplication, the survey showed that only 30% of the current missions' effort is devoted to working in church-planting partnerships with Japanese churches and pastors. Of course there is more church-planting activity than this going on. Another 20% of missions' efforts is in church planting but not in a partnership mode.

So one question for us is this: if we want to encourage the church to become a multiplying one, should more of mission church-planting be done in conscious partnership with the Japanese churches? In order to model church growth and in order to challenge them to bolder steps?

Each one of these slides has "Some possible action projects" listed. These are not intended to be strong recommendations from the Strategy Forum. Instead, we have listed them simply as suggestions to stimulate your thinking. We have been praying

that God will direct your thinking in our working sessions today, and that you will come up with some more relevant concrete proposals.

With respect to promoting church multiplication, these possibilities occurred to us.

As I just hinted, there could be more collaboration with Japanese churches in church planting projects. Some examples. For missions who are already doing this, putting more your personnel on this task. Together with this, shifting the nature of your involvement in order to strengthen the encouragement you give to your partners. For a mission that is doing church-planting on its own today, finding a way to work with and encourage one or more Japanese churches.

Another possible action: create programs to encourage stronger growth vision among the leaders of the Japanese churches.

SLIDE 13

The second stream is for the church to be missional in their worldview and practice, having God's heart for the lost, and focused on going out and penetrating existing non-Christian groups in more communities across Japan.

This missional attitude, rooted in an understanding that God Himself is missional, is the fundamental motivation for church planting and church growth.

The need for a stronger missional worldview in the church was one of the major barriers you mentioned in the opinion surveys.

Even though this is a serious barrier to growth, only 13% of the current missions' effort is being devoted to leadership training and/or discipleship, which are the activities where you would expect to see this worldview taught and modeled. The question is, is there more we could do to promote this outlook among our Japanese brothers and sisters?

Here are a few thoughts, just to start your thinking.

We missionaries could conduct seminars for church leaders and for lay people to teach and encourage adoption of this outlook.

We could create and conduct theological teaching on God's missional purpose.

We could witness regularly and urgently about God's desire for the salvation of all people. For example, what if we created a group of articulate speakers from several of our missions who travel around Japan like a crusade. But rather than trying to evangelize the Japanese population at large, they target the Japanese church with this urgent message.

Those are just a few possible ideas.

SLIDE 14

This next point is very key – Individuals evangelizing.

The strategic vision is that the church reach a state where “all believers are so in love with God that they are personally engaged in evangelism with the goal of leading others to Christ, in the context of their relationships.”

This stream must be taken very seriously. In the opinion surveys, 43% of you, almost one-half of you, pointed to lack of evangelism by the lay Christians and pastors as the number one barrier to church growth. And NCD-Japan also identified this as one of the two top needs in the church.

In addition to these opinions, there are two strong practical reasons that this stream is key.

SLIDE 15.1

We are to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest field. Who are the workers in Japan, and how many are there? Let's try to get a feel for this with this picture.

The areas of the circles are proportional to the number of people in each group. The tiny circle at the bottom left represents the missionaries. In round numbers, there are about 2,000 evangelical missionaries in Japan. The next circle above represents the Japanese pastors. There are approximately 8,000 of them, so this circle has an area 4 times that of the missionary circle. Above that is a circle for the number of Japanese Christians. According to the CIS data, the number is about 560,000. This is 280 times the number of missionaries. So this circle has an area 280 times that of the missionaries circle.

The big circle off to the right represents the number of non-Christian population in Japan. This number is about 126,500,000 people. A proportionate circle is so large that it cannot be shown on this page, so I have shown only a small portion of it. But I think you can imagine how big it is from this small part.

Now imagine each of the circles to the left as a harvest force going into the harvest field on the right. Which one has the most power? How much more power than the others?

Most of us are not really good at judging areas of circles in relation to other circles, so it may be hard to get a feel for the relative sizes from these, so let me add to the diagram.

SLIDE 15.2

Here are some arrows from the missionary circle and from the pastors circle towards the population. Think of these as evangelistic force from each group. The height of each of these arrows is proportional to the size of the group. The

missionary arrow is 2 units in height, and the pastors arrow is 8 units in height, 4 times that of the missionary arrow.

What does the arrow for the Japanese Christians look like? Remember, they are 280 times the number of missionaries.

SLIDE 15.3

Here is their force arrow! Look at the size of this compared to the missionary arrow. Compared to the pastors arrow. Is it any wonder that there is so little growth in Japan when God's true harvest force is not engaged? When most of the evangelism is done only by pastors and missionaries?

Earlier I reminded us that true Biblical growth is agricultural-like growth and has an exponential growth pattern. As I pointed out, this is not the pattern of growth in Japan. Let me show you one more research result that points to the essential nature of lay evangelism to growth. To get more insight into the power of individuals evangelizing, we tested the impact of three different evangelism strategies on church growth. This was done in research project 3, using numerical growth simulation.

SLIDE 16.1

I will show you the results using this graph. The vertical axis is the percent of Japan population Christian. The scale goes all the way to 100% at the top. All of the growth simulations start at the current percentage, which is $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1% of the population.

The horizontal scale is years from today, and it extends out 100 years into the future.

The first strategy we tested was business-as-usual, that is a continuation of the current practice of professional evangelism. Under this strategy, evangelism is primarily done by the pastors and missionaries. Today there are about 2,000

missionaries and about 8,000 Japanese pastors, or a total of about 10,000 professionals. This strategy is called “Prof-Current” on the chart.

SLIDE 16.2

If the witnessing force remains at this level, and if the response to evangelism remains at about the current rate, this blue line shows the result. After 100 years of growth, the church will have grown to a little more than 2% of the population. Not a good outcome.

The next line can represent three different strategies. It can represent an increase in the number of professionals, or an increase in productivity of the professionals, or an increase in the response rate to evangelism.

First, all of us have said that Japan needs more missionaries. To test an extreme possibility we assumed a ten times increase in the professionals. That is, to 100,000 professionals instead of the current number of 10,000.

Second, if all we professionals became 10 times as productive, it would have the same effect as a 10 times increase in our numbers. Imagine for a moment what this might look like. We would preach to crowds that are 10 times those we address today. We would have 10 times as many one-on-one evangelism sessions with Japanese individuals. Ten times as many of everything related to evangelism.

Third, if God increased the response rate to evangelism to ten times what it is today it would have the same effect. Today, we might need to evangelize 25 people before one responds. If God increased the response rate by ten-fold, then we would speak to only 2 and ½ people on the average before one would respond. Wouldn't that be marvelous!

So this next line represents a ten times change of something in the professional evangelism strategy. Ten times the number of professionals. Or a ten-fold increase in productivity. Or a ten-fold increase in the responsiveness.

SLIDE 16.3

The impact of any one of these on growth is the same, and is shown by this green line. It is called "Prof-10X."

It is definitely an improvement over the business-as-usual strategy. At the end of 100 years the number of Christians will be at about 20% of the population, compared to about 2-1/2% from business-as-usual.

There remain three problems with this scenario. First, even though it is better, it is not good enough. Still millions of people are dying without knowing Christ. Second, you can see that the growth pattern is still linear and not the Biblical growth pattern. Third, to imagine that we could have a ten-fold increase in any of these areas is highly unlikely. If a change does occur in any of them, it is more likely to be only a small improvement, more on the order of 10% or 20% at the most. Small changes like that will leave the growth very close to Prof-Current.

Now let's look at the third strategy. This strategy is to promote personal evangelism by all believers. To motivate and encourage and train all Christians to share the good news of Jesus Christ with their families, friends and neighbors.

Let's suppose we did this. Let's suppose that each Japanese Christian, on the average, shared Christ with only three people each year. Let's suppose that only one in twenty-five people who hear about Christ respond.

This is a very reasonable scenario, one that is very possible for people to do. Sharing with only three people each year is a light burden. I've talked with many Japanese lay people who have said to me, "Only three? I could do that!"

Remember, this is simply three people shared with, not three conversions. The conversion occurs when only one in 25 respond. Imagine what this looks like in practice. You share with 3 this year, with 3 the next year, 3 the year after that, and so forth. After 8 years you will have shared with 24 people. If one of those responds you have the approximate one in 25 response rate. Eight years of witnessing and one response. Sounds dismal doesn't it? Sounds like a failure doesn't it?

But the agricultural-like growth that God has created is truly miraculous. It takes slow and disappointing results at the individual level and transforms them into amazing kingdom impacts.

If every Christian were doing this on the average, and if every new Christian were quickly trained and encouraged to join in this witness, agricultural-like growth would begin.

SLIDE 16.5

And the result is this red line. Just look at the incredible impact! Within 25 years the growth would become greater than even a 10 fold increase in our current professional evangelism force. And the best news of all – within 100 years virtually 100% of the population would become Christian.

Can there be any doubt that God's plan for church growth is for His lay people, that is every Christian, to become the harvest force?

SLIDE 16.6

Nothing short of that will bring Biblical growth. Lay evangelism is essential for Biblical growth! If lay evangelism does not happen, the church will continue in retarded growth.

SLIDE 17

Coming back to our main slide on this stream, look at our current efforts to affect lay evangelism. Only a tiny portion, 0.2% of the work missions are currently doing is directed at helping lay evangelism to happen. Since it is so important, shouldn't we be doing more?

The possible action projects we've listed are all focused on developing and delivering encouragement and training for lay evangelism. We are anxious to see what you can add to this list as we get into our working sessions.

SLIDE 18

Stream number 4 is impact of the church on society. The vision is that all believers and congregations are engaged in society, bringing about redemptive transformation within people, institutions or Japan as a whole.

In "Current missions' efforts" there is a question mark since we don't really know what all our missions are doing today to overcome this barrier. Our survey did not specifically ask about this. We are looking forward to hearing today what some of you are doing.

Possible action projects include those we've listed here. One novel thought is the last one – getting more material written or translated into Japanese that would help the lay person to live a life for Christ. For example, in the United States, Christian book stores are full of helpful books on how to live as a Christian with impact in secular society. Having more resources like this available in Japan would be a tremendous help for the average Christian.

SLIDE 19

The fifth strategy stream is a vision for relevant churches. The vision is that churches are attractive and relevant to their communities because they are connected to their local sub-culture, while not giving up their solid Biblical foundation.

We all know that the impact of the church in Japan is often marginal because the church is not seen as relevant, and in many cases is simply seen as unattractive. In our surveys, you told us that “the church is inward-focused,” “there is a lack of understanding its surrounding culture,” “the church is out of touch with society,” etc.

Here are some action things we could be doing to help encourage more relevancy. The purpose of all of these thoughts is to keep the need for relevancy and for engagement in front of the Japanese church. To constantly encourage them to find ways to engage and become relevant.

SLIDE 20

In the surveys, and in the experience of Natural Church Development, this theme stood out strongly. The hierarchical, pastor-centered leadership style which is prominent in many churches is a serious barrier to growth.

So the strategic vision is for there to be “generations of” – by that we mean a continuously developing stream of – generations of joyful, capable, servant pastors and church leaders who are equipping, empowering and releasing their congregations to grow in Christ and use their gifts.

Even though this is a significant barrier, only 8% of our current effort is going into leadership training. Should be doing more to target this critical aspect of leadership?

Take a look at these suggested projects. We are sort of stuck using a lame term, “leadership training,” but the intent is obviously to make sure that this crucial issue gets addressed. Training needs to work on overcoming the natural cultural reinforcement of the hierarchical leadership style. Leaders need to follow Jesus’ example for the way He led and prepared His followers for service.

A couple of novel thoughts for action are listed here.

In addition to conducting our own training programs, might it be possible to develop curriculum that would help existing seminary professors teach such liberating leadership?

Another thought – some impact could be had by individual missionaries making friends with Japanese pastors and helping them, through modeling and friendly encouragement, to grow in leadership. For example, even if your mission is not planting churches in partnership with Japanese, what if you deliberately made friends with three or four local Japanese pastors in your area, grew close to them, and helped them see different ways of leading and empowering people?

SLIDE 21

Now here is a big title! Collaborative Interdependency!

The words are intimidating, but the thought is simple. We all know that there is relatively little cooperation among some churches, especially across denominational lines. The vision is that pastors and churches would regularly partner with other Christians who are not in their denomination for ministry and to demonstrate unity in the body of Christ.

Some possible projects are listed. Modeling cooperation in one way or another seems to be key. One way this could be done is for each of us to deliberately plan

ways to cooperate with other churches, denominations and missions, and then to invite our Japanese friends to join in that cooperation.

SLIDE 22

Numerical church growth is important since God is not willing that any be lost. But of course, He also desires each Christian to grow spiritually.

Stream 8 is the vision that all believers, both lay and clergy, are growing continually in their faith by being involved in their church and experiencing an ongoing, transformational relationship with Christ.

Even though most of us recognize this as key, and even though many of you said there is a lack of good discipleship training programs and materials now, only 4.8% of our current missions effort is devoted to discipleship training.

Some obvious possible projects are to develop discipleship materials and use them to conduct discipleship training. Even more powerful is to find ways to encourage Japanese leaders to create new materials and approaches that are more culturally relevant. Another interesting thought is to figure out how to measure the degree of discipleship and then use that to diagnose and guide efforts. This would help us all make discipleship a much more deliberate process.

SLIDE 23

That finishes our presentation of the 8 streams of strategy. But here are some principles for action which cut across all of the streams. I pray that these may be useful and help you come up with some more new ideas.

Basically, these eight streams all target creating a renewal within the Japanese church. And it seems to us wholly appropriate for JEMA missions to consider taking on such an objective. For God makes it clear in Ephesians 4:11-12 that the job of us

professional church workers is to prepare the people for works of service so that they can build up the church.

Another thought: we could organize JEMA committees, maybe one for each of the streams, to continue developing specific projects we could carry out together.

Third, encouraging renewal is probably best carried out through a new level of cooperation among us. Ray Leaf often said to us that he felt one of the major impacts of JEMA was in modeling cooperation to the Japanese church. Undertaking this strategy may require an even greater level of deliberate joint work in order to become that force for renewal.

Fourth, I hope is clear from what we said before. Establishing the desired growth and the Biblical pattern of growth absolutely requires that lay evangelism be done. There is no other way to have the growth God wants. Much more effort needs to go into making this happen.

SLIDE 24

Fifth, for us to do anything in any of these areas requires that we exercise excellent, sensitive, loving, God-anointed servant leadership. It must come about not from arrogance, as though we know the answers, but from love and from working together with our Japanese brothers and sisters to jointly discover how we can promote the growth God desires in Japan.

Sixth, here is a practical point about how to be intentional in working with Japanese leaders. Based on the numbers I have used in this presentation, there are roughly four Japanese pastors for every missionary. Four to one. For me, as a lone individual, to think about impacting the entire Japanese church is an overwhelming thought. But to think about each of us working with 4 pastors is much less daunting. For those of us who already have relationships with some pastors, we would simply need to start working a new agenda of influence in those relationships. For

missionaries who don't currently have those relationships, maybe the rest of us can give them help to meet pastors and build the relationships. And all of us may need help, training and encouragement in influencing them for changes in these 8 streams.

Finally, number 7: This may require a shift or reprioritization in some of our work. Rather than continuing what we are doing today, what if we shifted some of our priorities to become more of an exhorter, encourager and modeler to the Japanese churches around us?