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2008 State of the Church

Pastor Bryan Clark

Our lives have been radically changed by the power and the love of Jesus and our calling is to love others the way Jesus has loved us. The "State of the Church" is a chance to take just a quick glimpse backwards, but mostly a look forward to what's coming in this year.

When we look back over the last year, the first full year in the new facility and moving ahead with that, we have a lot to be encouraged about. It was a wonderful year financially; it was a very strong year; we've finished the year in the black; we're doing well there. But more than that, it was a year of seeing God touch and change the lives of many, many people.

You'll get a glimpse of that this morning at the end of the service, but you'll also get a powerful glimpse of that tonight. If you've never been to one of our baptism services, I would strongly encourage you to come back tonight at 6:00 in the chapel. Thirty-five people will be telling their stories of what God has done to change their lives. It is one of the most powerful services of the year. I assure you, if you come tonight, you will walk away encouraged and excited.

Our Mission Statement is, "To Glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ." The wording for that comes out of the last couple of verses of Colossians, chapter one, where Paul says,

> **"We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose, also, I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."**
> (NASB, Col. 1:28-29)

It is for this purpose we live. I want to go back to the mission statement and highlight three of the phrases to just understand basically what it's saying. The first one is, "To glorify God." For us, that isn't just religious verbiage in a statement. We take that very seriously. We are seeking to create a culture where this ministry is not about a personality; it's not about one or two people. There are no stars; there are no spotlights; it's about all of us. It's the Body of Christ fulfilling our calling for God's glory. God's glory simply means to enhance or to raise the reputation of God. That's what it's all about.

The second phrase is, "…seeking to present every person." Every person to us means *every person.* We talk about this often. Whether you're talking about people around the world or people in our community, it is seeking to reach every person. And as long as there is still one person who does not know Jesus, we are not satisfied. This phrase, *every person,* is a challenge. One of the disciplines, I try to practice, and would encourage you to do the same, is,--- anytime I'm out in a restaurant, any time I'm out doing one of my hobbies, any time I'm out in my neighborhood--- I'm asking the question, "Are we reaching that person? Are we reaching these people?" And if not, what would be necessary to reach them in a way that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of hope, would intersect their lives in a way that they would consider meaningful, that they might come to know the life changing power of Jesus? In order to do this, we're going to have to continue to plant churches; we're going to have to continue to start new ministries; we're going to have to continue to think outside of the box, driven by this question, "What will be necessary to reach that person?"

And thirdly, the phrase, "…every person complete in Christ". The goal is not to see how many people we can fit through the doors of the church; the goal is that people would become like Jesus! That's a very, all encompassing, complex way to do ministry. But at the end of the day, that is the calling: that people would be built up in their faith, that they would become like Jesus, complete and mature in Christ.

The process is fairly simple. It is visualized by something we refer to as *The Loop* or, *The People Loop.* If you're new in the last couple of months, you may wonder, "*What's all this 'loop' language?*" You get this magazine that's called *The Loop*; you see a video and it's called, *Life in the Loop*, and you're kind of wondering, "*What's up with that*?" Well, basically, it's just the picture of our strategy. We believe every single one of us, as those who have trusted Jesus as Savior, are called to go out into the marketplace, out into our neighborhoods, out into our schools, out into wherever life finds us, in order to reach people with the life changing message of hope.

When we do that, people are brought into the Body of Christ and they're built up in their faith. Once they're built up in their faith, they turn around and they go back out and they reach someone else. If you think about that process, it makes what looks like, a loop. Last year we talked about the strategy of, *Each One Reach One.* If every single one of us that has trusted Christ as Savior, would prayerfully consider God using us to reach one person over the course of a year for Christ, build a relationship, bring that person into The Body, see that person built up in his or her faith, and at the end of that year, that person goes back out, and, *Each One Reach One.* If we all did that, we would reach every single person in our city in just a matter of a few short years.

When we think about this People Loop, at the end of that loop, there is an unleashing of people to go out into the community and to the world. We're going to talk this morning about ways that we believe God is leading us to be unleashed in ways we've never known before. I'm going to invite Jeff to come and he's going to talk about what God is doing through the ministry of Lincoln Berean globally, throughout the world, and then Mark's going to come and talk about where we're heading in the year to come, to unleash the body into our community.

Jeff Petersen:
Well, it's extra special for me just to be here to worship together with everyone this morning, because on Friday afternoon, I arrived back home from my latest trip to India. And being back here is such a reminder of the special thing that we have here. And being over there is such a reminder of the great needs out there. And that's why I'm so thankful that God has called us as a church to be unleashed, to have a transformational impact in our city, our region, and literally around the world.

While I was in India again, splashed across the front page of the national newspaper were some of the latest statistics on poverty in that country. It was very sobering to read that 456 million people in India are today living in abject poverty. Fully, one third of the poorest of the poor in the world are living in that country, and that number represents 40% of the total population of India. Forty percent of those people are children. It was even more staggering for me to read that 828 million people in India (if you could think of it, that's approximately three times the population of the United States), 828 million people live on less than $2 a day. Imagine every single person in the United States and two other countries of similar size, all living on less than $2 a day. And that 828 million is 75% of India's 1.1 billion people. The physical human needs are staggering!

The spiritual needs are even greater! Approximately one billion people are living right now, at this moment, in India, without the hope of Jesus Christ. And while the church seeks to reach out to those people across that country, they do so in the face of opposition and persecution. Even again, while

we were there in India, major persecution broke out in an area of the country; 50,000 people have just been displaced; 4,000 homes of Christians have just been destroyed. Hundreds of churches and house churches have been burned and 20 Christians have been killed, just in the past two weeks.

And even as we sit here together this morning 13,000 of our brothers and sisters in Christ in India are displaced in relief camps, either because they don't have a home to return to, or they're too afraid to even go and find one. The needs are truly staggering. And that is why I am so thankful that God has called us and given us, together, the opportunity to be involved in having a transformational impact in a place like that. For even in the midst of those conditions, it was such a joy to be spending time with the leaders of our church planting movement, as we continue to seek to develop them, and watch them rise up to take leadership, as indigenous leaders of a movement that has become self-governing, self-reproducing and self-sustaining, as those leaders give leadership to our more than 300 church planters who are serving in 29 districts all across that country.

And what an amazing joy to hear story after story of the lives that are being changed! Literally thousands upon thousands of people have now heard the good news because of what's been happening in our Berean Church planting movement in India. Lives are being transformed all across the country. We are so thankful to God that He has given you and me the privilege of being a part of something like that. And in the days to come, we are going to continue to be involved in India. We're going to continue to reach out to places like that through our existing ministry. Even now, we're exploring future, additional church planting partnerships and opportunities, and we also are looking at some opportunities to be involved in compassionate ministries, that will bring tangible help among the many desperate people in that desperate land.

We're also going to continue to reach out as a church to countries all around the world, as we continue to support and send missionaries out from our midst to places all around the globe. I'm really excited this morning to share with you today that we are opening a brand new country and a new field of impact for the first time as a church. It's a pleasure for me to welcome and to introduce to you this morning our first Berean Church Planting Team that will soon be going to the country of Poland. We've been telling you over the last several months that God has called us to enter into a strategic partnership with Avant Ministries, where we're going to be sending teams of people out from our body to some of the needy nations on earth, to establish church planting movements.

And it is such a joy for us to have these four individuals who are, right now, entering a one year training process here at Lincoln Berean, in cooperation with our Lincoln Berean Christian Leadership College, that they might be prepared and ready, one year from now, to go out to the country of Poland for five years to establish a church plant that will lead to a church planting movement in a needy country. (Applause) Thank you very much. I'm excited to introduce them to you: Clint Kirby is going to be serving as the leader of our team, we thank God for raising up Clint for this opportunity, along with his wife Melissa and Dawn Ebbers and Kimberly Pester. Shelly Adler is also slated to be a part of the team but was not able to be with us here this weekend.

I truly do thank God for these people, and the choice that they're making to respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to go to Poland. Because as we were researching and asking God where He wanted us to send our first Berean Church Planting Team, perhaps you, like me, will be surprised to learn what we found out about Poland. Do you realize that there are four times as many Evangelical believers in the country of Saudi Arabia as there are in Poland? In fact, in the country of Poland today, there are 2500 counties, and 2,219 of those have absolutely no Evangelical Church.

In order to reach the country of Poland, every single church planting unit, every group like this that's going there with an intention to plant a church, would have to reach a million people for the country to be reached. Those statistics certainly have been born out in the area that we're targeting in northern Poland, in the tri-cities areas along the Baltic Sea. For there we found an area of nearly one million people, 900,000, and to the best of our ability to discern, there are about 600 to 900 believers total, less than 1.1% of the population. And, we've discovered that in that area there is not a single church that has a strategic plan or even a stated intention of reaching that nearly one million people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Not a single group of people is seeking to do that, until now, until these folks responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit of God to go out, to be unleashed from this place, to go to a place on earth that desperately needs a church planting movement, and to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I'm so thankful to the team and I'm so thankful to all of you, that we are on mission together to help present…"every person complete in Christ*"*. Thanks. (Applause)

Mark Kremer:
It's so exciting to be a part of a church like this and to know that we have the opportunity together to touch the very ends of the earth. When you think about places around the world, where there are so few people who know Christ and so little opportunity for them to even hear the Gospel, I think we have this clear sense that we have to do something about that. But, the question that I want to pose to us is, "How should we all think about our own city, where God has put us?"

One of the things I wrestle with from time to time, when you hear about that is, really there are so many of us here, maybe I should go, maybe more of us should go. I do think God is going to call many more of us to go to other parts of the earth. But God has also called us to reach this city. And when you think about the fact that one out of fifty people in Lincoln and Lancaster County actually attend this church, you have to begin to think about the possibility of every single person in our community having an opportunity to experience the love of God and to come to faith in Christ. That is not just a pipe dream; that is a very real possibility. In fact, it ought to be happening through our lives. God has called every single one of us to be on mission for Him out in the community, where we work, where we live, through our hobbies, through the associations we have. God has called all of us to be on mission. It's not the job of the organized church to draw people here to hear the Gospel but it is our job to equip each one of us to go out and to be on mission, 24/7, in the community, wherever God has planted us.

We want to be a church unleashed. You're going to hear that term again and again in the years to come. Our whole passion is to unleash every one of us to be on mission, to be passionate about what God has called you and me specifically to do. We believe there is a calling on your life that is no different than the calling that is on the lives of these people headed to Poland - that God has a very specific thing that He has called you to do right here in our own community.

Our job as a church is not to just draw you in and have a great, nice holding pen where we can all gather and live in our little nest and be comfortable and cozy and enjoy all the amenities that come with our faith and fellowship and love and more learning, but it's to be a place where we can be challenged and equipped and trained in order to be sent out, in order to be unleashed, to be on mission, where God has called you to be on mission.

And, as Bryan described just a few moments ago, that idea of the *People Loop*, one of the things that we have to do in order to be a church unleashed is actually have a structure that is on that "going out" side that we've not had before. You know, in the traditional church, you would probably hear many times from the platform, "*You know, you really ought to be witnessing; you really should be reaching out in your neighborhood; you really ought to be doing this."* But there

really is no help, no structure, nothing there to help you know how to do that, and to actually be able to go out and find your place to make a difference in the community.

And so, one of the commitments that we've made, is to actually restructure ourselves in such a way that we would assist and help people to be unleashed, out on mission, 24/7, in our community and every facet of it. And that's what we're calling **"*The Church Unleashed*"**. You'll hear about it every month, and from here on out for years to come.

One of the things we've worked on, over these last few years, is to really make sure that we are creating here in our church a place where people could come for healing, a place of grace, where people could come and name their issues and find help. No matter what issue you faced, no matter what challenge you came from, we would have a place where you could come and find healing and hope, where you could be equipped, where you could be fed, where you could grow up in Christ. That has been a major priority for us over the years.

And as we have talked about it in the past, even now, we have asked the question, "So now that God has done that and allowed us to have what we have here, how do we steward that for the greater Kingdom of God?" And we believe that safe place, that wonderful nest, that recovery area that is our church, should now become a launching pad for sending each and every one of us out onto mission into this world, and into this community.

God cares about every Allison (girl in the video) that's in this community, every lonely person, every child, every one of the poor and disadvantaged, every single mom, everyone who today, grieves over the loss of a loved one, but doesn't have any support system around them. Every refugee, every international student, every single person in this community matters to God. And we believe that, rather than us having a grand vision for our community, as leaders, and then saying, "Hey, you ought to come and fulfill our vision," we believe that God wants to put the vision for what He wants to do through *your* life into *your* heart and that we are here to help you fulfill God's calling in your life.

It's kind of backwards from the traditional church. We believe God's going to speak to you, that God wants to direct you, that God wants to call you, that God wants to empower you and give you a passion for something in this community, where you can make a difference. We are here to support you in every possible way and we're committed to doing that in the years to come. In order to do that, we have formed what we call a *Church Unleashed Directional Team*. And in that team there are eight different sub-teams, or component teams, to help you accomplish the mission that God has given you. Five of those sub-teams on our *Church Unleashed Team* relate to particular needs or opportunities out in our community.

One of those we call the *Compassion Team,* and the Compassion Team is really looking at those who are poor and disadvantaged in our community and what are the needs, what are the opportunities to reach them, and touch their lives with the Gospel of Christ. One of the teams is our *Cross Cultural Team.* As I just mentioned, there are thousands of refugees that come into our city. Five thousand Iraqis, many Sudanese, many other different ethnic groups, internationals, are here in our own community. This team is identifying the needs so that they can let us know what those needs and opportunities are, so that God can direct those who are to work in that area.

Another part of the team is the *Children, Youth and Families Team.* Every child matters; every young person matters; every family matters; single moms matter. All of the kinds of issues and needs of the families, children and youth in our community, this team is working to identify, to let us know ways that we can plug into what's happening in our community.

We also have two other needs teams which are *Community Improvement,* just looking for opportunities to make a difference in our community and I'll mention one of those in just a minute. We're going to have an opportunity to come together to make a statement to our community and to serve our community. We have another team we're calling *Justice and Public Policy.* One thing that I just was not aware of, is how many people, battered women, abused children, do not have any access to the help that they need. They have no one who advocates for them, no one who stands up and defends them as the widows and orphans and fatherless in our own community, and that just should not be! So we have a group that's looking at the opportunities and needs in that particular area.

We have three other teams that are connected to the *Church Unleashed Team* that are really equipping or mobilization teams. And that is, they're helping all of us be on mission with our friends and neighbors. Actually, all of our Season of Life Pastors and our Life Groups are really going with that, *Each One Reach One,* and make it a priority to help equip all of us to have the tools that we need to reach out to our friends and family, those who are close to us, and to really be praying about and thinking about who that person is that God wants us to be ministering to. We need to constantly be praying about those things, and talking about how that's going, and working together within our small groups and other places, so that we're on mission with our friends and neighbors.

Another huge area where we spend a huge amount of our time is our work. A year from now we're going to launch a brand new WorkLife Ministry that's going to give all kinds of tools to help you in the workplace where you are, whether that's part time, or a leader, or as a stay-at-home mom, or whatever it is that your work is. How can we help you be on mission for Christ in your work? That's a huge area of opportunity for us to think about and dream about together and The WorkLife Team is going to help, be here as a resource to you in that area.

And then, finally, there's a good number of us that are in "*HalfTime*". We've been in the marketplace for 20-30 years and now we're thinking, "*What's the rest of my life going to be about?"* And so we have a team of folks that just focus on how to help people in mid-life think about living the rest of their life on mission, taking all that they've learned in the first half to make a greater Kingdom impact in the second half.

Now, there are so many opportunities that are out there, that we don't want to overwhelm people with that. Each of these teams really has a very simple mission. One is to inform us of needs and opportunities, i.e. what is happening in our city, who is in our city, how we can be used in our community in each of those areas, and then, to help create pathways for people to get plugged in. We are not going to create new ministries as a church to all of those particular things. We are going to try to connect people into existing ministries, just help people launch out. Some of you will do things that are not connected to any particular organization. Others of you will plug into something that's already happening, where God's already working.

But our job, really, is to create pathways and to help launch people out on mission. And that's what each of these teams will be doing in those particular areas, provide ongoing encouragement, support, and cheering along the way, while we're out on mission, because it's not easy always to be loving people and be on mission to do what God's called you to do. We think we ought to cheer

you, rather than you cheering us. As leaders of the church, we're here to cheer you on in what God's called you to do, and we want to do that well.

And then, we want to tell stories of what God's doing, just to continue to inspire us to really accomplish what God wants to accomplish. One of the things that we want to do is to really start this entire *Church Unleashed* process by entering into a project together, where we can all get our feet in the water together. You should have gotten a little flyer like this in your *Life in the Loop* this morning. And this is really an amazing and, I think, a fantastic project that eight evangelical churches in our community are going to tackle together, here in just about a month from now.

We're calling it *Project Serve* and the churches that Bryan has been in connection with the senior pastors over these last years, are all coming together on a single weekend to tackle projects that our city has identified as needs within the community. We're going to ask thousands of people from our church, and all of these churches, to come together on a Saturday morning or a Sunday afternoon, your choice, and, on that weekend, go out into our community in designated projects and let the people of Lincoln know we love our city; we care about its people; we're here for the long term, and this city matters to us, because it matters to God. And this will be an opportunity for all of us to get our feet wet together in what it means to live "unleashed".

I believe that through that process, God will begin to open our eyes to see opportunities and needs in the community, and you may find that place of calling through this particular project. And at the end of that weekend, we're all going to come back, all eight churches, and have a combined celebration service that we're going to host right here in our auditorium on October 12th. You'll hear a lot more about that in the next four weeks and how to sign up. There's a website that'll be up later this week and you can actually see the projects and sign up for them, so we're very excited about that, as we're getting our toes in the water together. www.lincolnprojectserve.com

And then each month we'll focus on a different area of opportunity and need. As we go through the years to come, we're just going to continue to put those things before you and let God speak to you. But the vision and the passion to reach our community, really, we believe is going to come from you, as you listen to the Spirit of God.

We've talked in the past that the Christian life is not a cruise on a luxury liner; it's like life on a battleship. We actually want to tweak that just a little bit, because we think a more accurate picture of what the church really is, is an aircraft carrier. It's a place where people are launched out onto mission and then brought back with the people that they've rescued, to refuel, refresh, be re-fired up again, and be ready to launch out on mission again. Take a look and just see if you don't think this image of an aircraft carrier is exactly what God has called us to be, as a church.

(Video)

Pastor Donn Stoner:
When I was in the Navy and I was aboard the carrier USS Ranger in San Diego, my role was to work in the Air Traffic Control Center. But, I've thought back many times on how it relates to the church. On a carrier, of course, there are 90 some aircraft, and the mission is to be ready at all times to launch those aircraft. Part of the process is launching and recovering aircraft. And so, on a given day, when they would go out on mission, you'd probably launch about 30 airplanes. Those airplanes would fly on an hour and a half mission and then come back and recover. And when that happened, everybody's role was important. Some people's roles were very visible; some people's were not visible much at all. But everyone mattered!

I think of the parallel with the church, how we have different divisions of ministry, different responsibilities; some are more visible than others and some are less visible. But, each is important to accomplishing the mission. On board the carrier there were 5500 people and the amazing thing is that they could come together from all different backgrounds and influences, to be centered on mission and to seize opportunities. As a church, we are from all different backgrounds and influences and, as we come together as the body, we have a mission that God has called us to and we all need to be centered on that mission.

And so we come back together on a weekend and we worship corporately, as we recover, and then we leave here and we launch out again on mission. We can't afford to not be in the highest state of readiness in order to accomplish the mission of the church.

Bryan Clark:
Instead of thinking, *"I need, I need; somebody needs to do all this for me,"* maybe we need to rethink that and say, "God, I need to know what You've called me to. I need to know how You want me to serve You, how You want me to be a part of changing the world, building for Your Kingdom. God, I want to step out by faith and I want to depend on You."
(End of video)

Bryan:
We are very excited about what lies ahead in the years to come. But, make no mistake, there's not a one of us as leaders that is excited about strategies and programs and methods and buildings and charts. We're excited about the potential of people's lives being changed, by the hope and the power of Jesus. Many, many, many of you here the morning, over the last year, have invested a significant amount of your time, your money, your energy and your talents into building for God's Kingdom. And this morning, we want to give you just a glimpse of the return on your investment. We often say every person has a story. The following people are going to share their own personal stories, but they'll do it without saying a word! (Parade of people carrying placards of how God has changed their lives)

Mike Stelzer, following the music accompanying the people, "Can we just give God some praise for what He's done in these people's lives"? (Applause)

Thank you Jesus; we praise You; we know we're nothing without God! And we lift You high in this place; we thank You for transforming our lives and making us like You. Thank you, God; thank you, God. Praise Your name, Jesus; Praise Your name, Jesus.

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