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The State of the Church

A Decade on Purpose

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The purpose statement for Lincoln Berean Church is: “To glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ.” Ultimately the goal is to glorify God—to enhance His reputation—but to do that we have to take big steps of faith, seeking *to present every person complete in Christ*. As we talk more about the vision in a little bit, it will be evident that we take that statement ...every *person...very seriously*.

We have a very simple strategy: We refer to it as the People Loop. Basically we think of it like this: People come to faith in Jesus; they come into the life of the church to be strengthened and built up in order that they might go out and talk to people they work with, in your school, in your neighborhood, in order to introduce them to Jesus. Those people come back into the life of the church and that process looks like a loop—which we refer to as the People Loop. So if you’re new with us, you may have wondered, “Why is the front of that magazine called *The Loop* and why, after every video, does it say “Life in the Loop”? “You know, what makes these people so loopy?” (Laughter) The answer is, “Well that’s just simply our strategy.” It’s simple but it’s biblical that, “*We come in* to be strengthened in order to *go out*.” Two weeks ago we showed a video with Curt and Claudine Lehman, the founding couple of this church, and one of the things they said is that the people of this church have always been characterized by big vision and then the faith to carry it out, the willingness to sacrifice, to trust God to carry out the vision. And I do think that is true and I think that is true right up to the present. I think that’s part of the DNA of our church. It’s part of what God has blessed over the years and we’re excited this morning to continue to take big steps of faith in that direction.

So when we think about all that, “What are we actually doing?” Go all the way back to when they built the chapel—the C-Wing—which today is called The Chapel and, at that time, was the auditorium. The slogan they used for that campaign was: “To strengthen the base in order to lengthen the outreach.” In other words, the whole point of growing the home base was to lengthen what we could do beyond our own building and our own campus.

We kind of took the same type of slogan when we built the D-Wing and then we carried it over to this wing to enlarge the loop, which is basically what we do here—in order to expand the vision of what God might call us to do. It’s really important to understand it that way. It’s not *either/or*. When we moved into this facility one of the criticisms leveled toward us was, “Why are we out here spending all this money on a building?” What they were implying was that all the resources go to a building and we are just kind of a selfish bunch of people. But those statements are always made in ignorance, because that’s never been the case. It’s always been a case of *both/and*. As we continue to enlarge what we do here, it allows us to be able to do more out there. So two weeks ago we even talked about—while we were building this facility—all the things we were involved in, in north Lincoln, in India, things beyond our campus. We pour hundreds of thousands of dollars back into our own community every year in a variety of ways. And just in the last eight days we were able to send over \$35,000 to Haiti for relief. So it’s never been a case where we want to consume all our resources on ourselves and it never will be the case.

What's exciting this morning is the fact that this campaign does not include any buildings! If you remember, when we did the Purpose Campaign to build this, we actually said it would be great to have a campaign that didn't include buildings. We feel like what we did is, we took a significant step to strengthen the base and now we are at a point where we can really lengthen the outreach—just as has always been the vision—and that is what we're going to talk about this morning.

So with all of that in mind, we call this *A Decade on Purpose*. Why a decade? Well there are a couple of reasons for that.

One is that Lincoln Berean Church, like many churches across the United States, is led by a significant number of Baby Boomers. I'm fifty-one years old; I'm towards the end of the Baby Boomers. There are a few more years behind us but many, many, many of the leaders at Lincoln Berean are Baby Boomers. So we're at this point where we are kind of in our last big decade push, where we are going to have the resources and the energy to really give it our best shot. So part of the appeal would be to all of us that are Baby Boomers, that are at a place where we are becoming "Empty Nesters". We have some spendable income; we are in a unique place in our lives to give this our absolute best shot to make a difference. I would say that, at the end of these ten years, we are really going to give the reigns over to the next generation. So this is our decade—so that is a part of it.

The other would be for everybody to think in terms of a decade. The last campaign was three years and it was about building this building as well as India and the other things that we did. But three years is kind of a blip on a time line; three years is a sprint. So when I say three years and you think about your own children: Okay, an eight year old will be eleven years old; that's not really kind of eye opening. But a decade is different than that. A decade isn't a sprint. A decade is a distance race. What we're talking about now is a way of life. What we're talking about now is really changing the way we live our lives and cultivating a life style that is about living for the things that matter—and that's more the idea of a decade. So for example, if you're a parent, every single one of your children that are eight years of age and up are going to be out of your home in ten years! And it helps you realize, "Man, I've got to get at this; this is going really fast and I don't have a single year to waste." So if you're ten years old, you think ten to twenty; if you're sixty years old, you think sixty to seventy. Everybody can frame your own decade. But in terms of your decade, what really is going to matter? What do you really want to make sure that you pour your life into? When you look back, knowing there are no do-overs, what do you really want to make sure that you live for, over the next ten years? That's the idea of a decade and calling everyone to live *A Decade on Purpose*.

As far as the decade vision—in addition to all of the things we do and will continue to do as a church—we think it's important to call ourselves to something bigger than ourselves, something that collectively we are doing to take big steps of faith that could not possibly happen unless God shows up and accomplishes it. So it's a way to enlarge our vision, to increase our faith and to really trust God to use us to do something special—something bigger than ourselves. So with all of that in mind, we want to introduce you this morning to six new initiatives that we are calling *A Decade on Purpose*.

The first one is the one that you are already somewhat familiar with and that is **Global Church Planting**. You've been introduced to the concept of short-cycle missions, which is a five year church planting commitment somewhere in the world that's less than two percent Christian. The ten year vision would be that we would plant ten church planting movements somewhere in the world that are less than two percent Christian. Five of those will be through the short-cycle teams

that will come from Lincoln Berean; five of those will be through indigenous leaders, partnering with other organizations such as we've done with India. The short-cycle teams are teams that are made up of people from Lincoln Berean. It's a five year commitment to go somewhere in the world and not just plant a church, but to start a church planting *movement* where those churches will plant more churches and those churches will plant more churches and so it's beginning a movement in those places. As we speak there's currently our first team in Poland—six individuals that are starting a church planting movement in Poland—and that's the first church short-cycle team. The second will go in October to Madrid, Spain, in order to start a movement there. Ten people and one of those ten happens to be my daughter. Now the only reason I tell you that is I want you to know this isn't something we are asking everybody else to do. This is something we genuinely believe in and we, as a family, have a very vested interest in this because we understand the cost from the standpoint of our own personal family. So it's just good to know that we, as leaders, believe in this and we're calling our own family members, as well as our church family, to this vision. So we want to plant five of those short-cycle teams in order to start five movements in five different places in the world.

The second five are indigenous leaders, such as we've done in India. We'll partner with other organizations to raise up people within their own ethnic group to start and plant churches. Now this is what we did in India. We partnered with India Campus Crusade and with Avant Ministries in order to do this ministry—and that's what's so powerful! As a matter of fact, it's been so powerful that many other organizations around the world are looking at this as a model—because of the potential. So we're going to partner with other organizations and in five different places in the world, we want to basically do the same thing that we did in India, to again get a movement going of church planting. So ten different places in the world—ten different movements! So you think about what happened in India and we went through those statistics two weeks ago. Multiply that by ten and the impact of that is staggering.

The second initiative also has to do with **church planting**, but **domestically**, here at home. One of the trends in the church across the country in the last ten years has been church planting. It's become much more of a focal point and many churches are planting other churches—and we think that's a good thing. It is a very biblical thing; it's a great trend. There are many very good, very healthy churches in Lincoln that really have that vision and they are planting other churches—even within our city—and we applaud that and we celebrate that. But because of that, we really were praying about: “Then, God, what are you calling us to do? Is there something maybe unique or some sort of a niche that you have called us to?” And we have concluded that what God is calling us to is a very strategic niche across our state. We believe that God is calling us to plant fifty ethnic churches across the state of Nebraska in the next ten years. One of the things that's true of Lincoln—and is true of the state of Nebraska—is that it has dramatically changed over the last twenty-five years in terms of its ethnic diversity. I'm a native Lincoln person. I grew up down by Lincoln High, went to Prescott Elementary, went to Irving, went to Lincoln High. There was really no diversity at Prescott, very little at Irving and most of it was in Lincoln High, but even that was slight compared to Lincoln today.

A lot of what happens is, these ethnic groups come into town. They tend to isolate in neighborhoods. The first generation doesn't speak English; they kind of keep to themselves; they have maybe their stores and their markets. The kids go to school; the kids learn English; the kids assimilate but those first generations of parents really don't. Few of them will learn English; few of them will assimilate. It would be great to be more ethnically diverse here at Lincoln Berean, but to think that those first generation ethnic groups are going to come to Lincoln Berean at 70th and Highway 2, when they don't even speak English, is completely unrealistic. But *...every person*

complete in Christ...means every person. So we need to start to think about what do we need to do to reach these people and to introduce them to the hope of the gospel? So what we'd like to do is move into these neighborhoods and plant very small—kind of house/neighborhood—churches that would be in their own language. It would be in their own ethnic celebration; it would be in a way in which they would understand it—and primarily to reach that first generation. These may be kind of seasonal churches in that they may not endure for fifty years. It may be a time when they reach that generation that's here and then we will see where we go from here. They won't be typical western churches. They aren't going to be dominated around building and campuses. It's going to be a very unique way of planting churches. These also aren't going to be Berean churches. We're not trying to kind of build Lincoln Berean's kingdom around the state. We're willing to partner with any other organization or churches that want to work with us on this. We've already determined we want to partner with our friends at Mission Nebraska. They're going to be a great help with this. But other churches in other parts of the state that want to come with us. All we are saying is that God has given us a heart for this and we want a seat at the table and we want to bring our resources to bear on this. And we want to be a part of a bigger vision that—over the next ten years—we would like to see fifty church-planting churches across the state.

Now when I talk about church-planting churches, think of it this way: we are already connected with Solomon and the Sudanese church here in town. So imagine if Solomon was able to raise up a young Timothy that God had called to be a pastor and so we would help train and resource that young Timothy and send him somewhere else in the state where there is a pocket of Sudanese people that need a church. And so they are reproducing themselves across the state in order to reach their brothers and sisters that are coming here from all different places—so fifty ethnic churches across the state of Nebraska in the next 10 years!

The third initiative has to do with what's referred to as the **Next Generation of Leaders**. *Next* is kind of a label that has been put on primarily the "twenty-something's" among us. I don't know how much reading you've done or how aware you are, but there is a lot of information out about this *twenty-something generation*. As a matter of fact a lot of people are really down on them. They are really discouraged with them; they are ready to toss them aside. But frankly, when I look at them, they look a lot like our generation in the 70's. A lot of the characteristics are very similar. They are frustrated with a lot of things; they are ready to kind of abandon the traditional church—go out and do their own thing—and there's a lot that is going through them that looks a lot like us. Think of those who grew up in the 70's. Everybody was frustrated with us and they were ready to throw us away. But the fact of the matter is God has used us in a significant way and we weren't a *throw-away generation* and neither is this generation. For all this stuff that's out there that is ready to abandon this generation, we are on the other end of the scale. What we see is potential; what we see excites us. What we see is a tremendous movement of God and we think this generation is going to be used by God to do something really significant. So we're going to pour a tremendous amount of resources into identifying and engaging and empowering this generation. We're asking them not to abandon the church. We're asking them not to start their own thing. We're asking them to plug in and be part of leading us and guiding us and transitioning into the next generation of leadership.

When we say *Next Generation*, part of the concern for that is it seems to imply if they stick around for ten years, then maybe they will get their chance. So we have *Next Generation* and, in parentheses (*This*) *Generation*, because that's not what we mean. We are only taking a label that's been put on them, but in our thinking we're talking about *This Generation*. We're ready tomorrow to say, "You know you have a seat at the table. We want to talk to you. We want to hear your frustrations; we want to hear your visions and dreams; we want to know what you are excited about. We want to know what God is leading you to. We want to partner with you; we want you to help

steer the direction of Lincoln Berean Church and we want to begin to move toward a very intentional transition. I would say, at the end of this decade vision, we would expect to transition that generation into significant roles of leadership across the church—to be very intentional about that—so that we would partner with them so that the church might be in a place of strength to move on for the next generation. So that vision has tremendous potential.

But we are also not satisfied with just doing that at Lincoln Berean. We see this as a trend across the United States. Many, many churches are dominated by Boomers and there needs to be a very intentional transition. We also see that there needs to be a movement that celebrates this generation instead of criticizing them. So we are committed to trying to get a movement going, to be a catalyst and to partner with any other church or organization around the country that wants to view this generation the same way and together to start a counter movement that says we love this generation. We're excited about them and we want to identify them, to engage them, to empower them, and to get the movement going in the right direction and invite them back to the church and set the church up across the country for a very intentional transition in the next ten years. So we really want this movement to be far beyond our own campus here.

The fourth initiative is very simple: to **Eliminate the debt**. Currently we carry debt from the C Wing, from the D Wing and from this project. Now we're down to \$7.2 million—which for many of us seems like an awful lot of money. But that's less than half of what we owed. We've paid down over half of the debt, so we're very excited about that. We've done really well. But we would like to get rid of this thing in order to really free up resources and to go after this ten-year vision. We just need to get rid of the debt and then be done with debt once and for all. We don't plan to go back into debt, so we should be able to do this in the next three years. In trying to think through, "How do we communicate this?" we decided to pick a number that everybody could identify with. When I think about \$7.2 million, that doesn't really seem to reflect my own personal finances. And so those terms get so big it's like, "I can't identify with that." But you break it down: If there were 3000 people who, over the next three years, were willing to give \$3000, the debt would be gone. That's less than \$3.00 a day—\$2.70 a day. That goes back to that video that was such a blessing to us all. (Laughter)

The fact of the matter is, we throw \$3.00 at about everything on any given day and we don't even think about it: a gourmet cup of coffee, a gallon of gas, a box of popcorn. All we're asking is, "Would you be willing to think about it now and be a little bit more intentional?" And, for the price of \$3 a day, over the next three years, all the debt could be gone. There were a lot of people who were sure we were going to go bankrupt when we built this. If, in the next three years all the debt was gone, that would be a remarkable testimony to our community. Some of you can do more than that. It's the equivalent of 3000 people. So if you do \$9000, that's the equivalent of three people. And some will do less—and that's fine—but we would like to ask you to prayerfully consider what God would have you do and if we would all come together, we can eliminate the debt and we can move forward.

We are not asking you to give what you don't have. I understand the economy is real unpredictable right now. But are you willing to trust God by faith that, if God provides, then you are willing to give? It's easy to say, "We just don't have that in our budget," but let's think of it this way: Let's imagine that this morning there was a \$40,000 SUV on the stage and I told you that SUV is yours. It's only going to cost you \$100 a month for the next 3 years—\$3000 and it's yours! Almost everybody in the room would figure out some way in your budget to make room for that. The fact of the matter is we do have that in our budgets. It's just a matter of what our priorities are and what

matters to us. So I am just asking you to back up and reconsider \$3.00 a day in order to help change the world.

The fifth initiative is what we are calling a **Personal Mission Plan**. We decided to have two of these six be used to kind of jumpstart the decade. One is to eliminate the debt; the other is this **Personal Mission Plan**. Our goal is to have 3000 people fill out a personal mission plan for the decade. It's one thing to talk about *a decade on Purpose*; it's another thing to live that way. Nobody wastes a decade. They waste a day and then it becomes a week and then it becomes a month and then it becomes a year and, before you know it, where did that decade go? So we need to be very intentional about thinking through what is this decade for me? What are my priorities? What do I really need to focus on? What am I excited about? What am I passionate about? So whether you are ten years old or eighty years old, this is available for somebody of any age to sit down and we will help you with the process of thinking through your work life, of thinking through your home life, of thinking through what God has called you to, of thinking through all that and say, "Okay, for the next ten years I really think this is what God has called me to and this is what I am excited about—and to work through a personal mission plan. If we get 3000 people living that way, there will be a dramatic movement at Lincoln Berean Church.

Now one of the ways to think about it is like this: All my adult life I heard this concept of *a list of priorities* and I always understood the concept. And I could always make my list, but it never worked. Everybody knows what is on the list. It's supposed to be God and family and work and church and we kind of go through the list. It's easy to make the list but, when you try to live that way, it gets very complicated because life isn't linear like that. It just doesn't work. Besides, think about this: How do you separate God from church? How are those two different things? And aren't you *The Church*, so how do you separate church from your family? And aren't you the church when you go to work? So how do you separate church from work? You just can't separate out life that way; it doesn't work. So I would suggest to you this morning the whole concept is bogus. And I would suggest that you abandon it. What I replaced it with is what I call *a circle of priorities* and basically what I mean by that is, I prayerfully think through what are the things I want to give my life to? Those will tend to change over the years because our seasons of life change. But think about your decade. What are the things over the next ten years that you want to make sure you give your life to? And they go in your circle. You don't really try to separate them out; you kind of put them in there and put them in the blender—it's all mixed together. You just want to know at the end of ten years, this is what I lived for; everything else is secondary. And that works for me and that's really what we're talking about. We're talking about a **Personal Mission Plan**. I want to make sure I live for these things; everything else is going to have to come in second to these. So that's the fifth one.

The sixth one is what we're calling a **Multiplied Vision**. Think about everything we've talked about this morning from church planting globally, church planting locally with these ethnic groups to the next generational leaders. Think about all this stuff and think about the potential of that, but then think about what would happen if we could multiply all of that several times over. So we started to think about what if we entered into a mentoring relationship with six other like-minded churches—let's say churches of about a 1000 people? So they are large churches but they are smaller than us. And we could enter into a mentoring relationship and we could say to them, "Okay, this is how we moved from a 1000 people to where we are today. These are the mistakes we made; these are the things we learned. This is what has worked; this is what hasn't worked. These are the things that God seems to be blessing" and we could just enter into this together. We would have loved to have somebody help us on this journey and so in a mentoring relationship it's always a win-win deal. They would teach us stuff and help us become better—mentoring is always a win-

win deal. So in the process of that, we would come together. So think about anything you really appreciate about Lincoln Berean, anything you think is really effective, anything that you say is one of the things that I think really makes this church special. Then imagine trying to help reproduce that in six other churches, in order that they might continue to be effective. So, at the end of the day, you would have the vision that we have talked about—and multiply that by six.

In order to accomplish these initiatives you might ask me the question, “How are we going to do that?” And my answer to you this morning would be, “I have no idea—I have no idea.” But that’s actually our philosophy; we think the vision comes first. So we intentionally don’t talk about the “*how*” until we really conclude this is what we think God is calling us to. Now eventually we’re going to have to get to the *how*, but obviously without God stepping in, there’s no way this is going to happen.

As I have tried to think about 2020 and what the celebration would look like, to me it looks like this: Three weeks ago we went back and reviewed the Purpose Campaign and then we reviewed what God has done. So now fast forward it to 2020; we are going to do the same thing. We’re going to come back and capture what we were asking God to do and we are going to celebrate what God has done over this decade. So imagine that we are meeting in the Devaney Center and we’ve got the thing packed from top to bottom—every seat filled. It’s filled with people whose lives have been touched and changed through the power of Jesus. It’s filled with people of every tribe and tongue and nation across the state as these ethnic churches come in, to join us for the celebration. It fills the Devaney Center. But it doesn’t end there. We’re connected, via technology, to ten different places in the world, with all the believers that have been reached there in ten different church planting movements. And they gather somewhere in the world in order—via technology—to join us for this celebration, thousands and thousands of people around the world. But it doesn’t end there. Because of technology we go to six other places in the country that are in their own Devaney Center, that are connected to their own ten movements across the world, that are reaching their own people across their state and they pack into their Devaney Center and, with technology, we are all connected in that place together to celebrate what God has done. Wouldn’t you agree with me—at that moment you would know you had been part of something special? And would it be exaggerating to say at that moment you would know we had been part of changing the world? The question I would raise is, “Why not?” and, “Why not us?” Isn’t our God big enough to help us, to empower us, to allow us to be a part of changing the world? My challenge to you this morning, and I would give you this with every ounce of persuasion I have, to, by faith, join us on what’s going to be a remarkable journey of faith, a remarkable *Decade on Purpose*.

Our Father, we ask this morning that You would give us the courage to trust You, to trust You and take big steps of faith for Your glory, to trust You to change this world. Lord, we’re thankful for the opportunity we have just to be part of what You’re doing and, Lord, we’re excited about what You will do in the decade to come. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

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