

HIGHLIGHTING OUR HEROES



KEN STEWART

FLORIDA

Church planting is absolutely necessary if we are going to keep up with the population trend that is currently happening in North America. It takes new churches to reach new generations and new groups of people. I heard someone explain it like this: "It's far easier to have babies than to raise the dead!" I want to share with you the miraculous story of Ken Stewart, NAM director in Florida. I hope you will be inspired to be the next one to plant the next church. God bless!

Jimmy Toney
Director of North American
Missions/UPCI

FLORIDA'S PENTECOST: FIFTY NEW CHURCHES IN ONE YEAR

In November 2014, during our annual Florida North American Missions planning, I desired to open with a challenge to my team. Florida had historically planted three to four new works a year; however, with Florida now becoming the third most populous state (population twenty million), I was burdened to do more. In my notes I planned to challenge my team to start fifteen new churches in a year, but decided that number was too ambitious. Instead, I opened by challenging them to lead the way by starting twelve new churches in 2015.

I asked our district superintendent, C. P. Williams, to close our meeting, and

had not discussed with him my earlier challenge to the team. Superintendent Williams opened his remarks with a challenge for us to lead Florida in having one-third of our churches start a new daughter work or church plant in the next year. This translated to fifty new churches in a year, which was over three times the amount I had envisioned. To be quite frank, I was at first stunned with the enormity of his request, but the Spirit of God began to confirm the Word as we received it. I immediately challenged the nine pastors in the room to make a commitment to start a new work. Three pastors responded. This ratio exactly lined up with our superintendent's challenge for one-third of our churches to start new works.

Two months later I traveled with C. P. Williams to all eight of our sectional conferences and issued this same challenge to our pastors. By the end of our weeklong tour to challenge all of our pastors to start new works, we had received exactly fifty commitments for new works to be started!

We have stayed in touch with those pastors, and since that time we have had thirty-one new works started to reach unchurched areas. Fourteen of those new works are daughter works of established mother churches, and nine are preaching points of established churches. Perhaps the most amazing thing is that we have seen nine new autonomous church plants come into existence, which by itself is more than twice our normal average of new works started in a year. We fully expect the other nineteen works to launch this year, which will fulfill the initial goal of fifty new works. Additionally, more pastors are now committing to starting new works. We feel when this is completed the actual total will be over seventy-five new works started as a result of this initiative.

I want to thank C. P. Williams for his vision and for being sensitive to the mind of God. Also, without our Florida NAM secretary, Troy Shurte, and our promotions director, Daniel Dagan, who laid out the plan for us, and the entire Florida NAM team, none of this would have been possible.

This just goes to show that when we have a common vision and set a clear goal, old barriers and boundaries are removed and God's vision and kingdom

can be established. We estimate that these thirty-one new works have resulted in 690 new members, 148 baptized in Jesus' name, and 131 filled with the Holy Ghost! Florida is truly experiencing Pentecost, and we have learned that if we are willing to make the commitment and step out on faith, God will meet us with revival!

Below are a few comments from our pastors who have caught this vision:

C. P. Williams (Florida District superintendent, one new church plant started) "Living in the third most populous state with an annual growth rate that is almost double the rest of the country, we knew something had to be done to start more churches."

Daniel Dagan (NAM promotion director, one church plant, one daughter work started, and two more daughter works committed) "When I saw the ratios of population to UPC churches and the number of counties without a church, I was compelled to act NOW! We must see it through."

Jody Wells (Titusville, Florida, three new preaching points committed) "The Lord impressed me to train and equip preachers and leaders for a regional church vision back in 2008. Two prophetic words from visiting ministers that year confirmed that burden. Once the health of the mother church was assured and the preparation of our preachers was in full swing, the Florida District leadership cast a vision to plant fifty churches. The timing was uncanny! Not only did it further affirm our local vision, but it added an opportunity to profess that vision openly and increased our accountability. I'm excited to see our organization mobilizing this apostolic model for Kingdom expansion! 🙌"

KEN STEWART

Director, North American
Missions, Florida District/UPCI