



## **“Flying the Friendly Skies” - Part 1**

As I ready myself for my first flying experience since my wife’s diagnosis with cancer almost a year ago, I was humored by some of the normal preparations in order to “fly the friendly skies”. There are certain things you must do as you walk aboard that aircraft and commit yourself to the flight. Like air travel, living life with other churches in the region is all about making adjustments. It is much like dealing with mechanical delays, missed connections, lost luggage, annoying seat partners, inconveniences, storms, unexpected turbulence, unanticipated surprises, and having to make the best of it so you truly enjoy the journey. Just as we don’t try to jump off an airplane when there is a problem, we should remain committed to staying on board when it comes to this God-ordained union between the region and churches. Please join me in this journey as I reflect upon six things I have learned in my exciting flight these past seven years. I will share two this month and then the other four in September. “Ladies and gentlemen, please fasten your seatbelts!”

### ***1. Know Your Flight Destination***

It would be absurd to show up to the airport and just jump on a Delta airplane traveling to any destination. Though that sounds exciting, it’s not good planning. Our CB North Central mission statement is “to nurture and connect churches who desire to make disciples of Jesus Christ.” That is my flight destination and it has not changed in seven years of flying with the region. In understanding our regional identity, it is our true desire to serve local churches by encouraging their pastors and leaders. We want to energize them with a Great Commandment passion to love God and His people. Every time I fly, at some point one of the pilots gets on the public-address system and reassures the travelers of its mission. As you fly with us, we want biblically healthy churches that have God’s heart to see people come to new life and maturity in Christ. Every pastor is called to a leadership position and it is our desire to assist them to be that kind of leader that will bring about effective change. We are working to assist churches in developing Christ-centered servant leaders. This is where good church health and growth begins. The old adage is true, “Healthy churches give birth to more healthy churches.” Through my own church plant experience in Wanamingo, Minnesota, I have seen churches succeed in the birthing process of reproducing themselves in the heart of their community. Of course, planting churches is vital and important. Can I be bold? Without a heart-desire to see the lost get saved in your community, you can forget about planting a church. At CB North Central, we desire to see many come to Christ from your communities. Finally, on this flight destination, who is going to care for the pastor? Over the years, I have seen the strength of covenant relationships through the

networking of regional Cluster Groups. This is the place that pastors can learn, grow, share, and be encouraged to stay the course of “making disciples”. As we have stayed focused on this CBNC flight destination, we are seeing that churches are growing and making a difference.

But wait! How are we going to do this? This is scary stuff, right? Sometimes when you step into an airplane, you don’t know if this 175,000 pounds of metal is going to bring you home safely. Yes, there are fatalities when planes crash and people are injured in flight all the time, but it is still worth the risk. I see casualties almost every week from churches who do not take the risk of accomplishing mission. Just after Jesus gave the terrifying assignment to reach a lost world with the gospel in Matthew 28, He said to these men in an almost forgotten verse (20), *“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* Where are you flying right now as a church? Is your destination clear? Without the purpose of mission for which our Savior died. . . WE HAVE NOTHING and we fly aimlessly.

## *2. Realize You Don’t Know It All*

I have learned more on this flight experience. To travel in this position as Regional Director, thinking I know all there is to know about church health and growth, is like getting on board the aircraft and tuning out the flight attendant who is going over life-saving information. We all do it! God continues to humble and remind me that He is in charge of His church. I just hung up the phone from one of those challenging and problematic churches. The Lord convicted me as I hung up when He said, “Don’t even think about trying to fix this church. You don’t know the whole problem and you sure don’t know the entire solution.” He reminded me of John 15: 5 when He said, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* We are only measly instruments to help bring about important change. I am learning during this flight to pay close attention to Him and others who are far more experienced in flying than I am. Are there other people traveling with you that can assist in your mission at church? Use them. It is better that you reach out for help, than do nothing and crash.

I simply love how the Lord encouraged Paul when he was being made fun of, ridiculed and rejected as he shared the gospel with the sinners of Corinth. Paul just obeyed the call for the mission to make disciples in a city that was without God. Jesus said in a vision, *“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”* So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.” (Acts 18:9-11)

Wow! Are you catching the power in these words from our Lord? Don’t be afraid to get on the plane. Set your flight destination on Me and the mission that I died for. And when you get bold to share the gospel in obedience, I will be with you always. Don’t forget that I (God) have many others in your life that have already traveled this journey. When we understand this, we stay the course and keep flying.

See you next month for part 2 of “Flying the Friendly Skies”.

*Pat Phinney*

*Regional Director, CB North Central*