
PROPOSED ADOPTION PROTOCOL FOR CHURCHES (IN EUROPE)

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

The following thought-piece was composed in March 1997, as a beginning point for discussion. It was not then, nor is it now, a complete or thorough discussion of all the issues related to adopting churches and pastors into the Foursquare Church. The paper centers on Europe, but most of the ideas discussed can be applied elsewhere in the world; however, the U.S. church is in a unique situation these days as our Foursquare president's credibility and "vision for what a denomination could/should be" will likely draw increasing numbers of pastors and churches toward an affiliation with Foursquare.

"Obviously, those dynamics were not present when I wrote this paper. Much that is said in this paper must be contextualized with our present and future changed reality...I offer it as a departure point for exploration and discussion."

IDENTIFYING PROSPECTIVE LEADERS IN EUROPE

Numerous European Christians are disenfranchised—spiritually unfulfilled by the traditional churches they have either left or never been a part of. These believers have established informal Bible studies or more structured house church groups that are independent of any transnational group. They are not independent in spirit or attitude, just in fact.

Among these disenfranchised believers, there are several leaders who have a deep longing for an alternative to the already established denominational possibilities. These men and women are open to something larger than themselves, although they remain understandably suspicious of *denominational* (especially American) dominations.

Our hope will be to find spiritual leaders/pastors who might easily become "*National Leaders*," who will plant and develop several churches. Such godly men and women do exist in these nations, and we as a movement might just be "*raised for such a time*" to seize an incredible Kingdom moment—

an opportunity to “leverage” what we have to offer local churches—with what they have to offer our larger family. Some of these leaders already have the respect of several different churches. They are already “supervising.” And this will be our goal to find these men and women. The key characteristics of these leaders and their already existing ministries should be:

An apostolic desire to pioneer into new areas and plant new churches;

- A strong desire to pastor and disciple leaders (other pastors); and,
- A *settled maturity* that will allow them to receive input from “outsiders” without intimidation and without losing their national, cultural distinctives.

The key will be to find leaders who are already doing, thinking, and believing in ways with which we, as a denomination, are comfortable. It is a hopeless task to try to change these men or make them “do it” the way we Americans do. The marvelous diversity of our denomination and the many varied approaches used by our national churches throughout the world make this openness to “*their ways*” possible.

We should undertake to identify, cultivate and embrace *as our peers*, men and women who are already the kind of spiritual leaders we would hope to have be Foursquare Leaders. Much like we have done in other countries, our missionary strategy should be to find leaders in the indigenous population, then send them to do the work of the ministry. The only difference is that in Europe we should not emphasize permanent American missionaries; instead, liaisons and friends could come and go, visiting the field as a resource, not staying as a director.

ADOPTING CHURCHES IN EUROPE

“As we think about policies and procedures that will help us expand the worldwide ministry of ICFG in Europe and elsewhere, it is important to remember what we are trying to accomplish, and why.”

Most of our growth as a denomination will come from Foursquare Church Planters who establish reproductive Foursquare Churches. But as has been the case in the U.S., we ought to expect and welcome growth through adoption. The focus of this paper is on how we might make the adoption process more effective for churches in other countries of the world.

Simply put, we want to develop adoptive measures for churches that will greatly reduce the risk of future disappointment—either those churches discovering after the fact that Foursquare is not what they hoped it would be, or us being surprised by attitudes and doctrines that we did not know existed in those churches. Too often in the past, Foursquare has embraced independent churches

into our denominational fold, only to realize some months or years later that we had moved too precipitously. Without any published guidelines for courtship, we have sometimes ended up with partnerships formed in haste, excitement, and misunderstanding.

Sadly, these failed adoptions have turned off many in our denomination to the very valid and redemptive possibilities awaiting us throughout the world. As surely as we adopt new converts into our churches, so surely ought we to embrace new churches into our denomination—after we have assured ourselves that they will fit and have taken them through proper orientation. A careful study of Foursquare’s failed church adoptions worldwide will reveal inadequacies in the process leading up to the point of adoption; not any real argument against welcoming non-Foursquare Churches into our circle of relationship.

As we include an increasingly large number of independent churches in our Districts here in the U.S., we cannot really be against the same form of growth abroad. By no means do we want adoption to replace opening nations and churches with Foursquare Missionaries and Church Planters. On the contrary, we want to accelerate the supernatural birthrate. We want more Foursquare pastors and missionaries going into more parts of the world.

THE MEANING OF FOURSQUARE

But that brings up a cogent point: what distinguishes a Foursquare pastor from all other kinds of pastors? What exactly makes a church a Foursquare Church? If we argue that Foursquare is an issue of birth and natural ancestry (like being Jewish), then many of us who have come into Foursquare from the outside are disqualified. If being Foursquare is a matter of time and history with the Movement, it is like saying you cannot be Foursquare without already having been Foursquare. Our emotional, relational, intuitive definitions of Foursquare can unintentionally cut others off from joining us.

With such a variety of ministry styles, emphases, and interests even within the U.S. Foursquare Church, we cannot realistically think of Foursquare as being defined by specific distinctiveness of ministry. We are a variety: a people who have chosen association with one another; who have adopted a basic polity; who have expressed charity and granted liberty to one another’s doctrinal and stylistic peripherals; and, who have banded together to exalt Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Who and what we are as individual Foursquare Ministers makes us what we are as a collective denominational expression. Foursquare is the sum of its parts; it is not a set of pre-determined, exacting specifications used to assess the suitability of someone’s ministry. Foursquare is like a mosaic: made up of many colored and differently shaped pieces of tile. It is not a paint chip sample held up to walls to see if they are the *right* color. Of course, in doctrinal essentials and matters of church governance, we do have minimal standards: a piece of *cardboard* cannot fit appropriately into a mosaic composed of *tiles*.

“There are intangible elements to Foursquare that some have referred to as the spirit of our movement. I prefer the term culture—an organizational personality that gets shaped through the years, and that changes through the years as well.”

Culture in a denomination is much like culture in a nation. It is an invisible pattern of unspoken assumptions and mentalities that have shaped the way a group of people deals with the issues of life. It becomes the *correct* way to think and behave, not because it has any inherent righteousness to it, but simply because it is the way of the group. Culture develops through a common history—both long-term and recent. It adopts a folklore and customs: language, dress, stories, rites of passage, etc. Culture is also a product of relationships. This can be why it can be difficult for “old-timers” to welcome “newcomers,” and why those “newcomers” have difficulty becoming acculturated into the old network of relationships.

But back to our purpose in this paper; can we implement steps and safeguards that will enable us to separate churches whose adoption into Foursquare will mutually benefit them and Foursquare *from* those churches who will turn out not to be a good fit with Foursquare? I think we can. Let’s start our discussion with an attempt to clarify what we can about items that we consider non-negotiable for Foursquare Churches throughout the world:

DOCTRINE—The simplicity and clarity of our doctrinal statement, and the enumerated points of *This We Believe*, present churches who may be interested in joining Foursquare with their first, and most significant reference point in the process of becoming joined to our fellowship of churches worldwide. Unless a church wholeheartedly subscribes to what we believe, it makes no sense for that church to try to formally link with Foursquare. We do not wish to dilute our doctrinal distinctives just for the sake of enlisting churches into our family.

We would much rather agree to disagree and leave off any need to join together under the name Foursquare. We are committed to interdenominational ministry—not letting the particulars of our biblical understanding get in the way of cooperative ministry with other Christian groups. But that is not the same as having no particulars. Having fellowship with churches is one thing; calling them Foursquare is another.

POLITY—We have a modified Episcopal form of church government. We do not claim that it is the best or the only way for the leadership and succession affairs of a church to be handled, but it is our way. Though great latitude is incorporated into our practices, there can be no mistaking the fact that Foursquare pastors are *appointed* (never against their will) to churches by a denominational official; they are *not elected* or otherwise called by the churches themselves.

CHURCH COUNCILS—The elected officers of the church are given an informal opportunity to advise against the appointment of a pastor, but that is a rare occurrence, and not one strictly allowed for in our bylaws. Church Councils have powers limited to the business and administration of a church;

the pastors of Foursquare Churches are the spiritual leaders, and are not subject to the Council, except in finances.

NATIONAL LEADER—Though, the first National Leader in a country is appointed by the ICFG Board in Los Angeles, succeeding National Leaders are elected by voting delegates at the Foursquare Convention in that country. The term of office for the National Leader may be fixed at 4, 5 or 6 years, and the number of successive terms allowed can also be fixed by the National Church in its bylaws.

COMMON PROPERTY—Whenever possible within the laws of the land and the national culture, National Foursquare Churches are encouraged to adopt the pattern of the U.S. Foursquare Church in holding title to all local church property in the name of the National Church. This practice greatly enhances the ability of each local church to obtain loans to purchase property, and it greatly diminishes the likelihood of church splits and off base pastors “taking churches with them.” This distinctive of Foursquare policy: better enables the National Church to guard its assets for ensuing generations. However, in some countries such a common property would be either unwise or impossible.

ATTITUDE—Though there are unfortunate exceptions, for the most part Foursquare is characterized by an attitude of servanthood, mutual accountability and love. This means that we are constrained by our inner affections for one another more so than by some legal or structural requirements. The technical autonomy with which each National Church functions (not being legally tied to the U.S. Church) makes it all the more critical that adoptive churches display an attitude of submission before and after they are adopted. A missionary who births churches in a country will most likely foster such respect and regard among the National Leaders. Churches that hope to be adopted will probably need extensive relationship with Foursquare Mentors who serve them before those churches are ready to become *relationally* accountable to ICFG.

MISSION—While we celebrate the multiple ministries of the body of Christ, being involved in different sorts of activities, Foursquare focuses almost entirely on the planting and the nurturing of local churches throughout the world.

OTHER FOURSQUARE DISTINCTIVES—Listed below are several specific points of linkage and responsibility that should be clearly understood and agreed to during the adoption process.

IN COUNTRIES WITHOUT AN ESTABLISHED AND RECOGNIZED NATIONAL FOURSQUARE CHURCH:

1. The U.S. Church, or its appointed representatives, shall have the initial right to approve and certify individual churches within a country as being Foursquare.

2. The U.S. Church, or its representatives, shall have the right to set minimal levels at which individual Foursquare Churches in a country can consider becoming a unified National Church. Though guidelines are flexible and can be waived by the U.S. Church, churches in a nation ought to have at least a minimal level of viability—much like an individual church is encouraged to meet certain requirements before it becomes a Charter Church.
3. The U.S. church, or its representatives, shall have the right to grant association with the International Foursquare Movement, including the use of the name Foursquare. If it is deemed that the National Church in question is not functioning in the best interests of ICFG, this right may be revoked at any time (subject to review by a committee of three National Church leaders from countries other than the U.S., and two ICFG Board members).
4. The U.S. church or its representatives, shall reserve the right to have a voice in the electoral process of selecting a National Leader. This right is to protect the integrity of the process, and to ensure that it will provide a truly qualified candidate.
5. It is also expected that the National Church will cooperate with regional and International Foursquare strategies for evangelism, church planting and leadership training. The advantages of having an international denomination can too easily be nullified if each nation acts independently from others. U.S. appointed Area Missionaries and Regional Coordinators, as well as the Regional Councils provide the forum for such cooperation.

IN COUNTRIES WITH AN ESTABLISHED NATIONAL FOURSQUARE CHURCH:

1. The U.S. church receives no tithes and expects no offerings from the National Church. However, each local Foursquare Church is expected to tithe to the National Church on all income except for missions and building projects, retreats, special events, etc. Money given by the local church to support missionaries is not considered part of the tithe. The tithe is one-tenth of the general income of the church. While a church can usually be granted a period of time to begin tithing, it cannot be a Foursquare Church unless it practices this principle. Tithes from churches, support the office and work of the National Church, especially church planting.
2. Neither the U.S. Church, nor its representatives are directly involved in the process of National Churches adopting Local Churches of the nation. However, there will undoubtedly be some informal advice coming from the U.S. church.

3. As mentioned above, the National Church will probably base their decision on the same criteria as the U.S. church; namely, doctrinal affinity, church polity, established relationship, attitude, and culture.

BENEFITS OF BECOMING A FOURSQUARE CHURCH

In Foursquare, it is always the wrong question to ask, “*What do I benefit?*” The right question is, “*How will others benefit from what I receive?*” The primary benefit to a local church of becoming Foursquare is that the church can now offer long-term, safe relationship to other Independent Churches. By enlarging the circle of Foursquare Churches in a nation, those churches have a larger pool from which to plant new churches and into which to invite still other churches:

BEYOND THAT, THERE ARE FIVE *BASIC* BENEFITS FROM JOINING A CHURCH TO FOURSQUARE:

LIMITED, OCCASIONAL FINANCIAL HELP—Foursquare is not a wealthy denomination, and this has disappointed some churches that joined Foursquare in the hope of receiving American money. What money we are able to direct to other nations is usually focused on assisting church planting or on helping with building projects for National Church headquarters or for rapidly growing congregations.

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS—Ministry partnerships are facilitated all over the world as Foursquare Churches in one nation make contact with Foursquare Churches in other nations. The business community of the world is eager to develop the kind of international network that we have enjoyed for decades. As the world scene—political, economic, and social—grows increasingly complex, the spread of the Gospel into some countries and regions will depend on our ability to utilize multi-national strategies and resources.