The Telegraph Office

Dear Brothers,
Judging by the number of telephones listed in our Community Directory, we as a nation probably spend at least $100,000 on telephone expense every year, possibly even twice that amount. In addition to the financial burden, telephones also incessantly interrupt our lives, our conversations, and our sleep. As we try to call our brothers in other households or communities, we're met with a busy signal more often than not. Worst of all, the sheep who try to call us must be very persistent to get through.
On top of all this, communicating by telephone often puts us in the position of giving or receiving a quick answer that may well be premature. Our fast-paced communication often suffers from a lack of thoughtful consideration, prayer, and counsel. We would do well to slow down.
But writing letters and sending them through the postal system is often too slow to serve the pressing communication needs of our growing nation. During the past two years we have begun using electronic mail (e-mail) in a limited way, especially for apostolic communications. This way of communicating combines the benefit of written communication with the speed of the telephone, but it also has many potential hazards. The Internet, which carries the e-mail, has a tremendous lure toward distraction and defilement, and we want to keep our use of it to a minimum (1 Cor 7:31), and that only by very responsible brothers or sisters who are covered to access it for a specific purpose. We do not want it to be that everyone has his or her own computer and e-mail account in order to be able to communicate effectively.
There was a time when people who needed to communicate urgent messages over long distances would go to the telegraph office, write out their message, and hand it to a clerk who would send it by Morse Code to its intended destination. Then when the reply arrived, the clerk would write out the message (translating it from Morse Code) and deliver it to its intended recipient, or hold it until the person came to check for a reply. The speed of communication that this system provided was considered amazing in its day, compared to the time it took to send a letter and receive a written response via the postal system. Of course, telephones didn't exist and probably few people even imagined having such a device in their very own home. But life went on, and there were no telephone bills.
We would like to implement a "telegraph office" system of our own using e-mail in place of telegraph wire. By practicing a little self-control it seems possible for us to virtually eliminate our long-distance telephone bills — and still benefit from rapid communication. As we establish "telegraph offices" in every clan and tribe, it will be possible to communicate quickly with our brothers everywhere on the earth without picking up a telephone.

This is how it will work: Every clan will have one computer and telephone line dedicated to communications, and one e-mail account with unlimited access privileges. Such an e-mail account typically costs at most $20 per month and is accessible via a local telephone call. When you need to communicate with someone in another clan or tribe, you give your message to the "telegraph operator" to send, and he or she lets you know when the reply has arrived. You could have your answer in a matter of minutes, depending on the accessibility of the person you're communicating with and how long it takes him to consider what you are saying and compose his reply.

Communicating in this way would help us to consider more carefully what we say and how we respond, taking time to pray and seek counsel locally, rather than just making a quick and costly phone call. We do not always need the immediacy of a telephone call, and often it causes more damage than genuine help. We can learn to be patient and wait on our Father. And as a bonus, the sheep will be able to call us without the obstacle of an almost continuous busy signal.

Obviously there are some communications that may still need to be done by telephone, such as contacting people or businesses outside our communities. But even some of these may be accessible via e-mail. In the past we have discouraged using e-mail to communicate with people outside our communities, but the main reason for this has been to avoid placing a burden on the few apostolic workers with e-mail accounts, not wanting to

distract them from the works that were prepared for them to do. But surely there are people among us with the diligence and discretion to serve the Body as telegraph operators, so that sending and receiving messages is one of the works prepared for them to do. This doesn't mean that all they would do all day long is stare at a computer screen. A telegraph operator might also be a receptionist for a cottage industry, or perhaps even do hand work as part of cottage industry, or any number of very useful tasks that can be easily interrupted without causing harm or loss.

But what about very sensitive, confidential messages? For these we can use encryption, which is a technique for encoding a message so that only the intended recipient can read it after giving his password. We already have very good and easy-to-use software for this purpose, and it is actually free. Someone who needs to send a confidential message would type it himself at the computer and simply press a button to encrypt it for its intended recipient. When an encrypted message arrived, the telegraph operator would contact whomever the message was addressed to and he would come and enter his password to read the message and perhaps print it out to take with him.

Messages sent via the telegraph office will not necessarily need to be typed. We will provide notepads on which anyone can write his message, and if it fits on a single page, it will be a simple matter to scan it and send it in handwritten form. This will be warmer and more personal, and also easily allows the communication of little drawings, either for information or decoration.

It may sometimes be inconvenient or difficult to walk several blocks or more to where the telegraph office is set up in order to send a message. In this case, several options are possible:

> a. Write your message and have someone else take it to the telegraph office;
> b. Call the telegraph operator and dictate the message;
> c. Fax the message to the local telegraph office.

This third option will be very effective in many communities. Fax machines are becoming cheaper and cheaper as the world goes toward e-mail and computerized faxing. Any of our houses or offices could have a fax machine in place of a normal telephone. When someone wants to send a message to a person at another clan, he or she can write it on the notepad next to the fax machine, then fax it to the telegraph office (a local phone call within his own clan), and the telegraph operator then forwards it via e-mail (also a local phone call) to the telegraph office of the other clan. The reply could be faxed directly back to the household fax machine if it is convenient. In this way a woman cooking in the kitchen, covering several children, could send a request for a recipe to her friend at another community, and receive a printed answer back without necessarily having to leave the kitchen. Of course, it might be nice for her to take a little walk to the telegraph office instead sometimes, but the point is that we want to make the system very convenient and efficient. Otherwise it will not be used and we will still have our telephone bills, interruptions, busy signals, etc.

Ultimately, the usability of the system will depend on its being established in every clan and on the telegraph operators being devoted to the work with great diligence. It will be a great responsibility to be a telegraph operator, requiring much faithfulness and discretion. But it will also be a great service to the Body of Messiah. To establish a telegraph office, a community will need a computer equipped with a scanner, a printer, and a modem, which together should cost about $1000 in America. The software we are planning to use is a combination of what normally comes pre-installed on new computers (Windows 95 or 98), plus additional software that is totally free (Pegasus Mail). Most communities already have a computer that is capable of supporting a telegraph office, but unless the computer can be somewhat devoted to this purpose, there may be conflicting demands on the computer that will slow down or jeopardize communications. A dedicated telephone line is also a necessity. There should normally not be a physical telephone attached to this line, as it will be solely used by the computer.

The telegraph office should be set up in a secure office, such as that of a cottage industry, and it should be clearly understood in the entire community that only the trained telegraph operators would handle the equipment. There should be in all of us a clean fear of the entire realm of computers, and access to the Internet

in particular. Hopefully the orderly implementation of the telegraph office network will give us the benefits of communicating via the Internet without opening the door to its defilement.

I am hoping that we can implement telegraph offices on a trial basis in Coxsackie, Oak Hill, and Palenville immediately, and from our experience here, develop a printed manual and organize a seminar to train telegraph operators for the other clans and way-out houses of Yehudah. Hopefully the other tribes can also benefit from our experiment and, with the help of the manual, extend the telegraph office network to all of the tribes and clans of Israel.

Please feel free to communicate with me about any questions, concerns, or ideas you may have concerning this proposal.

Shalom,
David Zerubbabel