

## INTRODUCTION

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*Alan McMahan, General Editor*

The purpose of the Great Commission Research Journal has always been to communicate recent thinking and research related to effective church growth and evangelism. Since its original founding, the purpose and role of this journal has not wavered. It has continued on, serving in this manner, even as other voices have gone silent or been broadened beyond their founding purpose. In the last several years, this journal has been unique in the industry.

Going back to its historical roots provides some perspective. In 1984, a meeting was called to discuss the formation of an academic society focused on the research on effective evangelism, mission, and church growth. It was hoped that this academic society would provide a place where scholars, academicians, writers, and practitioners could come together and share their research findings on the effective means for engaging the harvest to yield maximum benefit to the work of completing the Great Commission. This society came to be called the American Society for Church Growth, and the first meeting was announced for the fall of 1985. John Vaughan founded the journal for this society, publishing it under the name *Church Growth Journal*, with the first issue released in 1990. Four issues followed, one per year in 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1993. No issue was printed in 1994, as leadership was passed to Dr. Gary McIntosh, but he soon resumed publication in 1995 and 1996 under the new name *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* in order to give more visibility to the society with which it was con-

nected. From 1997 through 2008, as many as three issues a year were produced under Dr. McIntosh's leadership, and respect for the journal grew.

In 2009, the American Society for Church Growth was rebranded as the Great Commission Research Network, and to maintain connection, the journal became the *Great Commission Research Journal* (GCRJ). Biola University picked up the sponsorship of the GCRJ, and I assumed the role as General Editor.

It is with a grateful heart now that I write this, the introduction to the 18th issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* under my leadership and the last to be published by Biola University. In next few months, we will seek to transition the journal over to a new sponsor and perhaps in a new format as we seek to continue the work that has been entrusted to us over the past 27 years of faithful publishing.

Much appreciation goes to the staff of Biola University who has generously supported the efforts of the GCRJ over the years. They have provided enormous logistical support in the design, publication, distribution, and promotion of the journal.

A special and heartfelt thanks goes to our Publication Manager, Joy Bergk. Joy has patiently waited for the completion of all our articles to be submitted issue after issue. Her positive, buoyant spirit has been a constant blessing. Her professional, yet kind, demeanor has been evident in each publication cycle. Thank you, Joy, for your tireless work and your keen eye for detail.

Thanks also goes to Lee Wilhite, Biola's Vice President for Marketing and Communications, who has provided leadership support in all of the university's publications. He has made the publication of this journal possible by assigning capable staff to the task.

Laura McIntosh, our Technical Editor, is located off site from the university, but she has played a pivotal role in the success of each issue. Laura has done the very important and very tedious work of making each issue comply with good form and proper standards. Thank you, Laura, for making us all look good!

Gary McIntosh has worked alongside me as Assistant Editor. His insight and advice is invaluable, not just as an editor, but also as a mentor and friend. I have learned much from this able guide who has always been in the business of multiplying leaders who will lead in the multiplication of churches and disciples. The impact Gary has had on the kingdom is incalculable. Everywhere I have gone, I have found people who have been encouraged through Gary's books to believe that God is going to build his church and that the new believers who come into relationship with the Savior are worth the effort we all give to see this happen.

Mike Morris, one of our esteemed colleagues from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, is also our Book Review Editor. Mike is nothing short of amazing. I think he lives near his computer, because any request is met with lightning speed. Mike has natural instincts

to assess the value of an article or contribution and to suggest improvements for it. Thank you, Mike, for all of your hard work and faithful service.

Len Bartlotti, a crazy Italian who has been a great friend of mine throughout the years, rounds out our current team of editors. As our International Editor, Len has a profound grasp of what God is doing around the world, and no one emits more passion for the lost than he does. Each one of these people is greatly appreciated for their insights and contributions.

In this issue, we have a host of quality articles and book reviews. Bob Whitesel explains how different generations approach change, while Samuel Lee shares insights on entrepreneurial church planting. Russell Bryan unpacks moving forward in the Church Growth Movement. George Hunter shares his insights on the emotional relevance in outreach ministry, and Mike Norton discusses caring for Muslim ministry workers. The next chapter of Gary McIntosh's biography of Donald McGavern is included in this issue. Finally, Tom Steffen concludes with an article on how the grand narrative of Scripture works against fragmentation to reveal the beauty and power of God to the hearer.

Dustin Slaton, Kenneth Nehrbass, Joey Chen, Benjamin D. Espinoza, and Mike Morris submit book reviews for new important publications. We appreciate your valuable insights and critical reviews to these new publications. Thank you all for helping us to capture the importance of these works through your interaction with them.

In closing, let me say that I have deeply appreciated the opportunity to put this journal together over the last few years. It is an honor to work with others who strive to get the gospel of Jesus Christ into each corner of the world.

In the weeks to come, we will soon reveal the next steps for this journal and invite your ongoing support.