

## INTRODUCTION

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*Alan McMahan, General Editor*

My journey into the field of missions studies began in my teenage years and steadily built in intensity through my college and seminary preparation. But it was not until I had accumulated a few years of ministry experience and sat under the teaching of Dr. George Hunter that my understanding for how to lead the church to reach unchurched people took a giant leap forward. The research into how lost people come to Christ and are added to the church, led me on a pathway of discovery that served to sharpen my sense of call and set my life direction.

With that in mind, our opening article for this issue is one written by George Hunter who has been a leading thinker in this field for at least 40 years. Reflecting on how church growth research has drawn from the study of scripture, history, and field research of growing churches, George provides helpful suggestions for conducting interviews with practitioners to add to our understanding for why churches grow.

As church growth research progressed, it produced insights that ran contrary to prevailing assumptions about effective evangelism strategies. Gary Comer's article challenges popular ideas about evangelism and calls for new research into this important topic. Your reflections on and responses to his article are welcomed and may be published in our next issue.

The next article by Gary McIntosh is the sixth installment of his work on the life and ministry of Donald McGavran, the founder of the church growth movement. This article focuses on McGavran's transition from the Institute

of Church Growth, which he founded in Eugene, Oregon, to the opening of a new school of missiology at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena and the hiring of Alan Tippett as the second full-time faculty member. This school was the foundation from which McGavran launched a movement that would shift the orientation of missions preparation for the next 50 years.

The next two articles discuss innovative approaches for evangelism and church planting that are applicable in North America but especially in international contexts where a more direct approach is impossible. Jay Moon shares his research on entrepreneurial church planting strategies in the marketplace and provides four examples of the types of church planters who are best equipped for this task. In the next article, Lewis Edwards and Ken Nehrbass discuss opportunities for missions that come from teaching in foreign, secular universities, an often overlooked but highly strategic point of influence for missionaries, church planters, and evangelists.

In the beginning of the church growth movement, much of our understanding of how people came to Christ and how churches could grow was informed by research from foreign missions contexts. This orientation was helpful to bring balance and perspective to the movement because missionaries were more sensitive to issues rising from the context compared to many North American practitioners. The two prior articles, just mentioned, continue to widen our perspective on how unchurched people can be engaged and brought to faith. In a similar way, the next article submitted by Cameron Armstrong is based on qualitative analysis of conversion stories of Romanian Orthodox-background believers with the goal of helping to inform the church in terms of how to reach these Orthodox people. Cameron identifies themes emerging from their stories and offers an “evangelism rubric” to help churches improve their evangelistic effectiveness.

The last article in this issue focuses on how pastors of large churches can lead their congregations through changing organizational dynamics as they continue to grow through various stages. Some of these dynamics are more typical of large churches and Stephen Grusendorf offers insights to help the lead pastors navigate the pitfalls and opportunities of growth as they seek to serve the receptive people in their community.

Also in this issue are four book reviews of some key publications that should be of interest to well-informed practitioners and researchers. Thanks goes to Mike Morris, our book review editor and the team of reviewers with whom he has worked. Aaron Perry, Garrett Eaglin, April Berg, and John Thompson, we thank you for your hard work and insightful comments as you have guided us through the summary and assessment of these published works.

Appreciation goes to Parnell Lovelace, Gary McIntosh, and Len Bartlott who with Mike Morris makes up our team of content editors. Thanks also goes to Laura McIntosh, our Technical Editor, Joy Bergk, our Publications

Manager, and Lee Wilhite, Biola's Vice President for Marketing and Communications for making this publication possible.

It is our hope that the research, perspectives, and principles that emerge from these articles and book reviews will help inform our efforts to complete the Great Commission.