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# Great Commission Research Journal, Volume 9, Issue 1

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# INTRODUCTION

*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 Bartlotti 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.

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# LEARN WHY SOME CHURCHES ARE GROWING

*George G. Hunter III*

***Abstract***

Donald McGavran's pioneering contribution to understanding the growth of churches and Christian movements drew from field research in growing churches and Christian movements, in addition to scripture and history. While field research included analysis from observation and the church or movement's history and statistics, interview research produced the lion's share of new insights. This article reports some of what has been learned about field interviewing—who to interview, the kinds of questions to plan to ask, the importance of follow up questions, and how to ask questions, manage the interview process, record insights, and reflect on the insights to inform future growth.

Church growth people believe that planning for a church's mission must necessarily be informed by data and by insights we derive from data. Knowing the Bible, church history, and tradition are necessary (but less than fully sufficient) prerequisites for faithful, strategic thinking. Furthermore, your plans are unlikely to be any better than the data on which you based them; as computer people say, "Garbage in, garbage out!"

It is possible, of course, to overstate the revelatory power of data and ways you can use it. I was once reminded of this while flying from Atlanta to London. I asked the fellow sitting next to me what he did for a living; he replied that he was a professor. I asked him where he taught; he taught at the University of California, Santa Cruz. I asked, "What do you teach?" He replied, "I teach politics." I asked, "Do you mean political science?" I will never forget his reply or its intensity: "It is NOT a science!"

The professor explained that his field was "inappropriately named" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—when the influence of science in academic institutions was huge; so, the people who studied political life felt compelled to justify the field by calling it a "science." I then recalled that in that same period, many emerging academic fields—such as most of the behavioral sciences and the social sciences—experienced the same pressure.

Much later, some church growth people felt constrained to claim that church growth was a "discipline" and a "science." It is probably not a discipline but rather a field within the eclectic discipline of "missiology." It is certainly NOT a science, though its people discover insight by reflecting upon data, in addition to traditional, theological reflection.

To be specific, informed mission requires knowledge of what Donald McGavran used to call the available "field data." The reason we need data, McGavran taught, is that the facts are usually obscured by "an informational fog" that rises from such factors as denominational chauvinism, semantic vagueness, and especially rationalization for what the church is already doing. Such fog keeps most church leaders in the dark; they do not really know what is happening, or why, or what could happen.[1]

Therefore, if you want to plant a new church in an under-reached section of your city, you need to gather and study the available demographic data. If you want to turn around a church that once grew but has more recently declined, you need to study the earlier growth period (to discover why they were growing) and the more recent period of decline (to discover why they declined). Again, if your church is called to reach addicts, you need to gather intelligence about the causes and experiences of addiction, and you need to learn from churches already serving that target population. You need data, facts, information, and organized intelligence to plan your church's future; meanwhile, we bathe our research in prayer, knowing that we had better discern God's answers to our prayers when we are informed.

Much of the data that church leaders need to plant churches, plan for growth, or reach a target population already exists, but it does not await us on a silver platter. You must dig for the intelligence you need through practical research, and it usually requires industry and persistence. From the global field research by Donald McGavran and others, the Church Growth movement has already gathered more intelligence than we have ever known before about how the gospel spreads and how the true church grows. In the USA, the forty years of quiet research by Lyle Schaller and others has taught us much more than we knew before about the health, growth, and development of Western congregations. The research that really matters, however, is local. It stands on the shoulders of the body of global and national insight,

[1] See Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed. (Eerdmans, 1990), chapter 5.



 

but local research is needed to help "Old East Side Church" to clarify its mission strategy in its historical, demographic, and cultural context.

In local church growth field research, we do not usually have to begin from scratch. In your area, some churches are already growing, and some churches may already be reaching the target populations that your church is called to reach. The purpose of this chapter is to get local church leaders started in discovering why some churches are growing and reaching target populations and in making sense of the opportunity that God has entrusted to them.

One field research method that we have often featured is historical analysis of growing churches and Christian movements—like J. T. Seamands employed in his study of the Methodist church in India, and McGavran, Alan Tippett, and others employed in many field studies. Another method is observation—something like a cultural anthropologist would do. You carefully observe the growing (or declining) church, record your observations, and later review your data to discern some patterns in all you have observed.

The method we rely upon the most in church growth field research is the interview. An interview can be defined as interactive communication between two parties that involves the asking and answering of questions. From the perspective of the classic

**Source Message Receiver**

model of the communication process, interviewing is a unique genre of communication, in which the receiver initiates and shapes the communication.

Interviewing is the most common form of planned communication. An interview has been initiated every time a nurse asks a patient, "How are you feeling?" or every time a dad asks a son, "Where have you been?" or every time a manager asks a worker, "How is it going?" or every time a waitress asks a customer, "What'll you have?" or every time a prosecuting attorney says to a witness, "Please state your name," or every time a pastor asks a parishioner, "How is your life?"

More specifically, in church growth field research, we interview pastors, core lay leaders, rank and file members, new members, and, especially, new converts to discover how people have been reached. In time, we discover reproducible, or adaptable, strategic principles with which our churches can cooperate.

Interview research is best done in concert with the other methods. For instance, when you observe people emotionally responding to a song, you ask your "informants" why it engaged them so powerfully. Again, when you have done the "graph of growth" in interviews with people who were around at the time, you point to the period when the graph moves from growth to decline and ask, "What was happening in this period that could have caused that?" Of the several methods, however, the interview is usually the most productive. Over the years, I have learned more about how effective evangelism actually takes place from interviewing new converts than from

most of the books (combined) that prescribe how evangelism ought to take place!

As a method for gathering intelligence, the interview method has limitations, as all research methods do. The subjectivity of both the interviewee and the interviewer are the most obvious traps in the interview method. However, you can reduce the effects of each interviewee's subjectivity by asking enough people the same questions. Further, you can reduce the effects of your own subjectivity by trying to disprove your own hypotheses. In comparison to other methods, however, including questionnaires and various statistical approaches, the interview method has strengths and advantages. Decades ago, when I first started doing field research related to evangelism, I was impressed by Pauline Young's case for interviewing's advantages:

> The interview is a highly flexible tool in the hands of skilled interviewers. It allows a more permissive atmosphere than is the case when using other techniques of investigation. Questions not readily grasped by interviewees can be rephrased, or repeated with proper emphasis and explanations when necessary. Also, the interviewer has greater opportunity to appraise the accuracy and validity of replies. Contradictory statements can be followed up and possible reasons for contradiction learned. The interviewer might also be able to differentiate on the spot between fact and fiction supplied by informants, their hearsay and impressions, convictions and opinions. In the presence of competent interviewers, interviewees often feel freer to express their fears, complexes, emotionally laden situations, than when filling out a questionnaire. Only in the study of human beings is it possible for a scientist to talk to his subjects and investigate directly their feelings and thinking processes. The social scientist can secure about the object of his study a degree of intimate and personal knowledge that is denied to the natural scientists. The latter cannot communicate with the subjects despite all the instruments of precision.[2]

Decades later, we are now aware that effective interviewing is a more powerful, catalytic tool than our forbearers knew. As Young's generation stressed, skilled interviewing obviously taps into what people consciously know and can talk about and makes that knowledge available to the researcher. At least as important, skilled interviewing sometimes engages people's tacit knowledge. That term characterized the philosophy of Michael Polanyi, who is famous for his observation, "We can know more than we can tell, and we can tell nothing without relying on our awareness of things we may not be able to tell." That is, experienced people know some things they have never

[2] Pauline V. Young, *Scientific Social Surveys and Research*, 4th ed. (Prentice-Hall, 1966), 222–223.

expressed in words; skilled interviewing brings some of that tacit knowledge to consciousness and helps them express some of that in words for the first time.[3] Their first draft may not be perfect, but follow-up questions and occasional probing can help them clarify and express their contribution. Therefore, interviewing can be epistemic; it can create conscious knowledge—not *ex nihilo*, but from people's background tacit understanding.[4]

## PREPARING FOR CHURCH GROWTH INTERVIEW RESEARCH:

There is no advantage to doing interviews "cold." One should prepare for field research as much as time and available data permit. Through many sources (print and internet), you can familiarize yourself with a community's history, demographics, and distinctive features before visiting it. You will usually find that denominations have published much of the data that you need to acquire and graph. The "General Minutes of the United Methodist Church," for example, has published useful local church and judicatory data annually for decades. Most denominations publish such data, available at judicatory offices. A few do not publish such data, but they have it on file at headquarters.

The denominational data may not serve all of a researcher's interests. For instance, they probably report the membership and/or the average worship attendance and/or the funds received for each year, but they may not record the number of small groups or the number of people involved in lay ministries. Nevertheless, you are much better prepared if you gather the data that is available for at least the last ten years. You are even more prepared when you graph the data, which permits you to detect and discuss in interviews the trends that are reflected over time in the year-by-year data.

Wherever possible, it is always useful to schedule interviews ahead of time; it is even more useful if a local leader can invite the people and schedule the interviewees for you. Who, or what types of people, do you want to interview? That depends entirely on who has the data that you want to access—who already knows what you want to know. In the years when I was studying growing churches the most, spending a Friday evening and all day Saturday at each church, I often asked for the following kind of interview schedule:

1. The pastor—90 minutes
2. Group meeting with six to eight leaders—90 minutes
3. Five to eight new members (preferably converts)—45 minutes each

[3] The skilled psychotherapist, of course, can more deeply engage and surface a person's tacit awareness.

[4] This chapter is only an introduction to interviewing perspectives and methods. Many good texts can take the reader much farther than what is written here. The most widely used text (with this writing) is in its eleventh edition. See Charles J. Stewart and William B. Cash, *Interviewing: Principles and Practices*, 11th ed. (McGraw-Hill, 2005).

4. Group meeting with several longtime active members—60 minutes
5. Group meeting with several inactive members or dropouts—60 minutes
6. Church staff—individually twenty minutes each or with a group—60 minutes
7. City manager or city editor (whoever best knows the community)—60 minutes
8. Final group visit with pastor and the six to eight leaders—to check perceptions and to probe deeper where necessary—90 minutes.

Before the interviews begin, you will want to prepare some questions to ask each person or group. My students always ask at this point, "What are some good questions to ask?" I respond by saying, "Well, here is a great question: 'Will you marry me?'" I suggest that it is such a significant question that most of us would not even be here if someone had not asked that question once!

For research purposes, however, the "good question" is the question that elicits the information you want. To identify that kind of question, you first become clear about what hypotheses you want to test and, if valid, can generate relevant insights. You then formulate the questions that can best check the hypotheses and help you learn. If one hypothesis, for instance, is that people become more receptive to Christianity during periods of transition or stress in their lives, then you might ask new converts, "What (if anything) was happening in your life, shortly before or during the time you became a Christian, that made you more receptive to the Christian possibility for your life?" You might use several different questions to test a single hypothesis.

Your list of questions, for each person or group, constitutes your "interview guide." There are especially six points to remember about your interview guide and the overall interview process:

1. Begin each interview with an appropriate greeting. Explain the purpose of the interview and what you will do with the data. (I usually explain that when I report and interpret the data, my sources are confidential.)
2. Plan to ask general questions early, like, "Tell me the story of how you became a Christian in this church." If their answer to that general question also answers a more particular question that you had planned to ask later, it is even more valuable; you know you did not influence their answer.
3. The interview guide is your servant, not your master. Like a game plan for a football game, you do not adhere to it rigidly; you are not required to ask every planned question.
4. Plan to ask some of your questions to multiple persons or groups.
5. Not all interviewees are created equal! Feel free to extend a productive interview; feel free to graciously abbreviate an interview with a "stone."



 

6. Many times, their answer to your planned question will stimulate a question you had not considered; those "follow-up" questions will often turn up more gold than your planned questions! Indeed, an interviewee's answer to a follow-up question may stimulate a new church growth hypothesis.

What specific questions might you ask people or groups? My interview guide has often included questions like these:

**Questions for the pastor of a growing church:**

1. How did you get to this church? Tell me the story.
2. What strengths did the church have, and what opportunities did it face when you came?
3. What has happened since you became pastor here?
4. What is the church's main business?
5. What is your philosophy of ministry?
6. What do you do best?
7. (Referring to the graph of growth) What explains the rises, plateaus, and dips in this graph?
8. In the last five years, how many new classes have been started? New groups? New ministries? New outreach ministries? New congregations? What new groups, ministries, etc. are projected for the next five years?
9. What does the congregation do best?
10. Why do you think the church has grown (or plateaued or declined)?
11. How have you planned and organized for growth?
12. Does the church have a strategic, long-range plan in place that the people are conversant with, that is being implemented?
13. Knowing what you know now, what would you do differently if you had it to do all over again?
14. What would have to happen for more pastors to lead growing churches?

**Questions for the leader group:**

1. (Introductory) What do you do for a living? How long have you been a Christian? How long have you been a member here? How long have you been a leader here?
2. What is your church's main business?
3. Describe how your church reaches people. How did your outreach get started? What is the story? What does the church do, specifically, to help reach people?
4. What is your church's image in the community?
5. Why is your church growing? What do you believe are the causes?
6. In what ways does your church respond to and connect with first-time visitors?
7. What does your pastor do best?
8. What does this congregation do best?

9. Does the church have a strategic, long-range plan in place that the people are conversant with, that is being implemented?
10. What kind of people are you reaching? What kind of people do you plan to reach?
11. How do you initiate and assimilate new members?
12. What are your expectations of members, especially new members?
13. (Referring to the graph of growth) What explains the rises, plateaus, and dips in this graph?
14. What are the most meaningful moments, events, and experiences in this church?
15. In the last five years, how many new classes have been started? New groups? New ministries? New outreach ministries? New congregations? What new groups, ministries, etc. are projected for the next five years?
16. What goes on here that gives people an opportunity to talk about what God is doing (or what they want God to do) in their life?
17. As the church's leaders, what are you trying to do that you can only succeed at if God is with you?
18. Do you ever invite people to this church or to faith in Christ? If yes, how do you go about that? If no, what would have to happen here before you would feel free to do that?
19. If you could change one thing in this church, what would it be?

**Questions for new converts and new members:**

1. What do you do for a living?
2. How long have you been a serious Christian? How long have you been a member here?
3. Tell me the story of how you became a Christ follower.
4. Before you were ever interested in becoming a Christian, what was the image of Christianity and the church in your mind and in the minds of your peers? What helped to change that image?
5. What was happening in your life that made you more receptive to Christianity than you might have been before?
6. Why did you first become interested? How was the possibility opened up to you? What got you started?
7. What or who attracted you here for the first time?
8. What brought you back the next time and the next?
9. Describe your first visit to this church, including your feelings. What might have caused those feelings within you?
10. What kinds of needs were you experiencing in your life? What helped meet those needs?
11. Why did you choose this church, rather than some other church?
12. What almost kept you from joining?
13. What keeps you coming and getting involved?



 

14. What happens here that is very important, even significant, for your life?
15. Now that you are a Christian here, what does the church expect of you?
16. Do you ever invite people to this church or to faith in Christ? If yes, how do you go about that? If no, what would have to happen here before you would feel free to do that?
17. How do your non-Christian friends and relatives view Christianity? What could this church do to appeal to them or to communicate with them?

Sometimes you want to reach a distinctive population (such as deaf people, Filipino-American immigrants, or gambling addicts) you do not understand, but some people are "experts." What questions might you ask the experts?

1. What is very important to understand about their history or specific life condition?
2. What appears to be their goals in life? What drives them?
3. What are their distinctive behaviors, habits, and pastimes? What beliefs, attitudes, or values might these reflect?
4. Who, or what types, are their heroes and role models? What does this tell us about them?
5. What are their conscious problems, struggles, and felt needs?
6. What are their strongest driving beliefs and values?
7. What are the themes of their music, movies, legends, and stories?
8. How do they perceive the world? How do they perceive the future?
9. What are their taboos and hang-ups? What turns them off?
10. What is their image of God? Jesus Christ? The church and Christianity?
11. What do they assume is Christianity about? What does Christianity offer? Who do they assume that Christianity is for?
12. What can we learn from those who have become Christians about approaches to effectively reach others like them?

In reaching a distinctive population, you do not usually have to begin from scratch! Some churches have already discovered, for example, underreached blind people or single mothers, and some of those churches are already serving them effectively. From an onsite visit in which you interview the leaders, you can stand on their shoulders in developing an outreach ministry.

1. What is the ministry or program that you use to reach these people?
2. Tell us the story of how this ministry got started.
3. Describe, systematically, how you got it started.
4. What keeps it going? When it is most effective? What makes it effective?
5. What kinds of human resources are necessary for this ministry's effectiveness?

6. What kind of financial resources are necessary for this ministry's effectiveness?
7. Please tell us the stories of persons who have been significantly helped by this ministry.
8. What churches did you learn from when you began this ministry? What similar ministries do you network with now?
9. What sources (like experts, articles, or books) have been most useful in understanding this population and being in ministry with them?
10. Knowing what you know now, what would you do differently if you were starting the ministry today?

Most churches, in most cultures, reach and involve more women than men. A three to two ratio is typical, and we sometimes find two females for every male in attendance. However, we reach some males, and church growth people would suggest that our occasional male converts could show us how to reach others, IF we asked them!

1. How long have you been a Christian? Tell me the story.
2. Before you got involved, what was your image of Christianity and the church?
3. What was happening in your life that made you more receptive to Christianity than you might have been before?
4. Who, or what, got you involved?
5. What kinds of needs were you experiencing in your life? What helped meet those needs?
6. What almost kept you from joining?
7. How is your life different now?
8. What happens here that is very important, even significant, for your life?
9. Do you ever invite people to this church or to faith in Christ? If yes, how do you go about that? If no, what would have to happen here before you would feel free to do that?
10. What would this church have to do to reach a lot more men?

We have not, of course, exhausted the range of people who could be usefully interviewed, nor the questions one could plan to ask. These sets of questions for interviewees should, however, be sufficiently illustrative. Good interviewers, with a few models and some experience, become very competent in identifying points in church growth literature to check out, in clarifying their own hypotheses, and in generating their own questions.

Two other questions should doubtless be asked of all interviewees. 1) Often, interviewees will come to the interview with something in mind they already know they want to contribute, and until they do, they may not really hear your questions. It is useful to ask early, "What did you come here thinking you might want to share with me?" 2) The interview will often stimulate insight in the interviewee's internal conversation that no question from you has particularly invited. While some interviewees will be confident



 

enough to intrude unsolicited information, most will not. The interviewer should undoubtedly close almost every interview by asking, "What other question should I have asked you? What else would you like to tell me?"

Incidentally, as you have thanked the interviewee for his contribution, and you are both standing up to end the conversation, he may "by the way" verbalize his most important contribution. Do not neglect the material that "slips out" at the last minute!

## ESSENTIAL PERSPECTIVES FOR EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING

Interviews consist of both verbal and nonverbal interactions. The words within a language system are the currency of verbal communication; they are the culturally-agreed-upon symbols that we use for people, animals, things, ideas, beliefs, feelings, and so on. A word is usually an arbitrary symbol chosen by a culture for the symbol's "referent." The symbol's meaning is within the people, not within the symbol, per se. So, in American English, we agree upon the genus of critters we refer to with the symbol "dog." However, most of the earth's other languages refer to the same group of critters with different symbols. Even within a language community, individuals may attach contrasting meanings from their experience; so "dog" may mean Corgi to one person, while another person thinks of a Dalmatian. From our life experiences or socialization, many words have emotional connotations for us; one person may respond to "dog" with affection, another with amusement, and another with fear.

Distinct cultures sharing more or less the same language may have different referents for the same symbol. For instance, "football" does not refer to the same sport in England as it does in the USA. Furthermore, distinct cultures, or even subcultures, that share more or less the same language may have different symbols for the same referent. My "automobile" burns "gasoline" as I drive it down a "highway," and it has a "windshield," a "hood," and a "trunk." My British friend burns "petrol" as he drives his "motorcar"—with a "windscreen," a "bonnet," and a "boot"—on a British "motorway!" All of this means that the interviewer must NOT assume that, by any key word, the conversation's two parties mean the same thing. The semantically aware interviewer will often ask the person to define what he means or to say it in other words. This is especially necessary when the person's first response to a question is expressed in Christian jargon—for which some Christians may have no referent at all!

Interview conversation also takes place nonverbally, as people communicate meaning through facial expressions, vocal inflections, speaking rate and volume, and through their eyes, posture, gestures, and other body language expressions. Interviewers need to be aware of the nonverbal cues that the interviewee may, more or less, unconsciously emit. All competent communicators look for consistency between the interviewee's verbal and nonverbal messages. If we perceive inconsistency, we take the nonverbal messages very seriously, and we know to probe for more access to the person's meanings.

Listening to the interviewee is an essential part of the process. The most competent interviewers spend over 80 percent of the conversation time listening. Unbelievably, we are only learning when we are not talking! Effective interviewers listen at two levels. 1) They listen for comprehension—to make sure they understand what their conversation partner means. Therefore, typically, they listen for main ideas. They often work to restate what the person has said to their partner's satisfaction. They may ask for examples, or they may probe for the same ideas through different questions. 2) They also listen with empathy for the person's situation, experience, or feelings. Good interviewers will often express in words how they sense that their interviewees feel—which helps them identify more closely with each other.

## THE INDISPENSABLE SKILL: ASKING QUESTIONS

Effective interview processes have a typical structure. In the *opening*, one is welcoming the other person into the project, setting the tone, establishing rapport, and sharing the project's purpose and the way the data will be used. The interviewer will often state the interviewee's status in a way that indicates why his help is needed, for instance, "I really need to understand the experience of the church's newest Christians, like you." In the *body*, one follows the planned questions in the interview guide, plus the follow-up questions that his initial answers prompt. The *closing* is usually quite brief, but important—lest one lose the rapport that has been built, and lest one miss his last "by the way" comment. A "clearing house question" often facilitates the closing, such as, "Can you think of anything I may have missed, or a question I should have asked you?" Often the interviewer simply declares that their time is up, or their task is complete, and expresses appreciation for their contribution. I sometimes ask for a telephone number at which I could call them one time, should follow-up questions occur to me later.

When it comes to types of questions, there is a range of tools in the researcher's toolkit. We have already distinguished between the planned questions for each person or group in the interview guide and the follow-up questions that will occur to us as we listen. There are also closed questions, which can almost be answered with a yes, a no, or a single sentence, and open questions, which encourage a considered answer. Within a few minutes into the interview, closed questions are seldom productive—except for clarification. The more productive open questions often begin with "who," "what," "where," "when," or "how." A question somewhere between the closed and open genres can be productive, such as, "Why did you choose this church, rather than some other?" Skilled interviewers avoid leading questions, such as, "How do you feel about the boring, old-fashioned music in this church?"

Two techniques are especially useful in helping the interviewee to respond and to keep talking. One is the judicious use of silence. When an interviewee pauses in the answer, too many interviewers impulsively break



 

the silence by talking. It is usually far better to wait for the interviewee to finish his internal conversation and then to break the silence and continue talking. Even if he has completed his answer, he will often respond to some silence by expanding upon his answer. The other technique is acceptance cues, which can be defined as "affirming sub-vocalizations." When we nod indicating that we understand, or quietly interject an "uh huh," or "I see," or "Well said," people keep contributing.

George Truell, a teacher for the American Management Association, used to reflect that skilled interviewers are something like major league baseball pitchers. As an effective pitcher does not keep throwing the same pitch, but mixes the fast ball, curve, slider, and change up, so the effective interviewer mixes the questions—planned, follow-up, open, closed, and so on. There is one difference. The pitcher mixes pitches to increase the possibility that the batter will miss; the interviewer mixes the questions to increase the possibility that the respondent will hit! Somehow, not knowing the form that the next question will take energizes the interviewee, and better information emerges.

## RECORDING INTERVIEW DATA AND ORGANIZING INTELLIGENCE

No interviewer, after two days of interviews, has total, or even sufficient, recall of what anyone said. Therefore, recording the data we need to retain becomes essential. To maximize the possibility of an effective interview and record, some logistical issues need to be resolved.

One logistical issue is the location for your interviews. People need to be able to find it. It needs to be comfortable, free of distractions, and free of the possibility of being overheard. It is desirable to have an adjacent place where the next interviewee can wait. A church sanctuary, for several reasons, is usually the least desirable setting for interviews.

Another logistical issue involves the technology you will use in recording interview data. The modest range of options includes relying on memory alone, taking notes immediately after the conversation, taking notes during the conversation, audio recording the interview, and video recording.

No one should rely on memory alone! I often make notes immediately after an unplanned conversation, as when I find myself visiting with a new Christian sitting next to me on a plane, though even then I sometimes ask if I can write some notes while we talk. In planned interviews, I virtually always plan to take notes during the interview. While it takes more time to write key words and some verbatim comments than it has taken someone to say it, that is not usually lost time; while you write, they are thinking about what to say next.

It is not usually appropriate to electronically record an interview. The presence of a tape recorder will often intimidate the interviewee, and his responses will be guarded. In any case, a stack of tapes is a terrible retriev-

able system. It takes an extremely long time to listen to and take notes from tapes; since you will take notes anyway, do so during each interview. At the end of each day of interviewing, review your notes, and add what you can recall. This takes time and energy, so schedule it for a time when you will still have some energy!

There is one notable kind of exception to the "do not electronically record" rule of thumb. When you are interviewing senior professionals who are used to being recorded, and with whom you can contract only a limited amount of time, obtain clearance from them, and record the interview. When I have done telephone interviews with people like Robert Schuller, Bill Hybels, or Rick Warren, for instance, I have attached a recorder to the telephone. (Once I have taken notes from the recording, however, I do not archive the tapes for anyone's future use.)

During the interviews, then, you labor to record everything that may later be significant in your study. After the interviews, and following a day or two to get some distance from, and objectivity toward, the experience, you review your notes—several times. (Warning: If you wait much longer, however, some of the data will be "cold," and some of your notes will no longer make sense to you!) Gradually, some patterns will emerge, and some key insights will become obvious. (The more church growth lore you know, of course, the more equipped you are to perceive the patterns and the insights AND to perceive possible new insights as possibly new!)

In time, you are weeding out many of your notes. You are focusing on the 20 percent of the data that accounts for 80 percent of the significance. You are distilling some organized intelligence from the mountain of data.

Your penultimate goal is to write a case study of approximately six to twelve pages (single spaced), from the research in each church. The typical case study should present the story of the church and its achievements. It should include your major insights about the causes, principles, methods, ministries, policies, attitudes, and so on that other churches might learn from, complete with descriptions of key programs or ministries, with inspiring stories and quotations from leaders or converts who expressed a salient point more memorably than you can.

Since it is often academic folly, or hubris, to reach conclusions from a single case study, defensible theory emerges from reflection upon many cases, though plausible hypotheses may emerge from each case study.

## About the Author

George Hunter taught at SMU's school of theology, served as evangelism executive of his denomination, and taught at Asbury Seminary's school of mission and evangelism, where he also served as dean for 18 years. Hunter has published over 20 books on mission, outreach ministry, evangelism, church growth, and leadership. His best known books are *How to Reach Secular People* (Abingdon, 1992) and *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Abingdon, 2000, revised in 2010). His most recent book is *GO: The Church's Main Purpose* (Abingdon, 2017). He is now an Asbury Distinguished Professor, Emeritus and living in Kentucky.



 

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# THE CASE TO REDRESS EVANGELISM IN NORTH AMERICA

*Gary Comer*

— Editor's Note: This article is written as an "opinion piece" and is offered to stimulate a provocative discussion on how evangelism is viewed in our changing context. Responses to this article are encouraged and may be included in our next issues to help our readers explore the questions and challenges raised. Send your responses to Alan McMahan at alan.mcmahan@biola.edu.

***Abstract***

This article is a response to a warning made by George Hunter regarding the church's adherence to its own "folk wisdom." It explores the question of how the church could change, particularly in how it currently views evangelism, and how church leaders and members are unprepared to face the mission complexity unique to our time. It offers an alternative perspective with methodology that is theologically formed on the pattern of Christ, and built around the notion of spiritual influence. To that end, the kind of research that is most needed is discussed along with ideas on examining existing presuppositions.

Having attended last year's Great Commission Research Network conference, I wish to add my thoughts on a noted caveat made by presenter George Hunter. My relevancy radar began beeping upon hearing his call for continuing research to be done in the area of evangelism and especially over what he termed "folk wisdom." In this article, I delve into how this charge relates to gospel receptivity, a foundational tenet of church growth.

I realize I am not a familiar name or voice for the journal. I will be upfront with you in saying my ideas are not always popular in every leadership circle. Nevertheless, education perspective lurches forward by different, sometimes striking, points of view. Even if you disagree with my conceptual thoughts herein, I hope what I have written sharpens you in some way. Much of my story, the study of church growth and evangelism under Dr. Gary McIntosh's program, was supplemented from practitioner experiences and observation of others as a pastor, interviewer, outreach director of a large church, church planting coach, international mission trainer, and development consultant. You should know by way of introduction that I am the author of a book on evangelism with the strange title—*Soul Whisperer: Why the Church Must Change the Way It Views Evangelism*. I will be sharing the inspiration behind the treatise ahead.

Let me begin with safer, more secure footing, the sage words of an esteemed mentor. Hunter warned of a systemic problem, when our thinking and methods become locked tight in a closed box, stating, "Our inherited denominational folk wisdom can be so entrenched that very few church leaders are likely to accept *a much better idea* the first time they are exposed to it."[1] Not only are his words about our proclivity toward intransigence pertinent for today, but also, I predict, they will prove increasingly prophetic over time. Perhaps I see the issue as more prevalent than most. However, it is my conviction that the penchant against revision looms as the great barrier to the church's mission and future. Let me quantify why I say this.

Taking a snapshot of our rapidly shifting context, we have what I call the "1-in-5 rule" in play. According to the now-famous American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)[2] and Barna's follow up, 1-in-5 Americans identify as non-religious (the "nones"). Thom Rainer blogged on this cultural trajectory: "Every year another two million American adults become less receptive to the gospel, and less receptive to churches."[3] In addition, only 1-in-5 Millennials believe attending a church is important.[4] Almost any way you slice it, research tells us we are losing ground with the next generation. Add in the global picture, 1-in-5 people on the planet are presently Muslim. You may already know that Pew has predicted Islam will surpass Christianity

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[1] George Hunter, "One More Time: Why We Do Serious Research on the Ministry of Evangelism" (presentation, Great Commission Research Network Conference, October 2016).

[2] American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2008), principal investigators Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, Trinity College, Hartford, CT.

[3] Thom Rainer, "Five Reasons Growth May Be More Difficult in Your Church," March 13, 2017.

[4] Sam Eaton, "59 Percent of Millennial Raised in a Church Have Dropped Out—And They're Trying to Tell Us Why," *Faith It*, February 19, 2017.

as the world's largest religion somewhere after 2050,[5] mostly due to higher birth rates, but evangelistic anemia in regions is a contributing factor, for sure.

Do these 1-in-5 categories signal anything particularly significant? I believe they do. They represent groupings outside "the joining circle" of the attractional church. In the words of James White from *The Rise of the Nones*, "They are not seekers."[6] In a recent presentation on mobilization, Kevin Peck said their own Austin survey tallied, "71 percent of his community would not attend a church if they were invited."[7] It was not that long ago when the word from church leaders was that the unchurched were merely waiting to be asked by a friend. Involved with CRU (Campus Crusade) on his college campus in California, my son invited five outer friends to a ministry event and got five no's in reply. However, were they willing to have spiritual conversations with him? Absolutely!

The culture's rising ranks of unchurched are still reachable, just not the way we are geared or well equipped to do it. The challenge of what is occurring outside the church with its increasing complexity is compounded by what is happening on the inside. It is why Hunter's words are so relevant. Though we are reaching some in the mission stations across North America, the standardized attractional approach (reaching people via the service) and the focus on renewal (spiritual feeding will foster seeding) are not achieving the missional prowess in members now vital for our time.[8] As I write in my new book called *ReMission*, "Attraction is limited; renewal is a lie." In that work (in process at Whitaker House), I analyze our current scene helping church leaders rethink the mission empowerment equation. In short, we have vast numbers sitting under sound, biblical teaching for what can be years ad infinitum that remain virtually clueless on how to engage in mission-effectual ways. In my training with literally thousands of members, looking into the eyes and listening to their voices, the gap is glaring.

From the faces to facts, the training need for members looms large. Ryan Kozey's Christ Together study (60,000 sampled) revealed 73 percent of Christians had no effectual sharing relationships with non-Christians.[9] The

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[5] Bill Chappell, "World's Muslim Population Will Surpass Christians This Century, Pew Says," *NPR*. April 2, 2015. http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/04/02/397042004/muslim-population-will-surpass-christians-this-century-pew-says.

[6] James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 26–27.

[7] Kevin Peck, "Mobilizing Through Missional Communities" (presentation, Send Conference, February 19-20, 2017).

[8] Howard A. Snyder, *The Problem with the Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Dovers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1975), 17.

[9] Ryan Kozey, "Your Church on Mission: What's It Going to Take?" (presentation, Southwest Church Planting Forum, October 29, 2014).

reality we have to face is *Christians know the gospel but reach few with it.*[10] Those juxtaposed truths suggest another kind of knowledge is missing—what I am referring to is practical "know how"—the kind of savvy that is not assimilated by merely hearing a sermon or being in a small group Bible study.

Ask the average churchgoer to rate his mission quotient (MQ)—what he has acquired under the teaching ministry of his pastor—and you will get, "Mission quotient, what's that?" As the anti-human trafficking leader told me disparagingly, "You mentioned skills; I have no skills." Further, as the elderly woman complained, "They tell us all the time from the stage to go share the gospel, but they never tell us how." So many not knowing what to do have disengaged and gone mute—mission is something for others, not them. When Christ Together asked the number of unsaved people Christians were reaching towards, the most common response given, what we call the mode, was zero, according to Kozey.[11]

Though for decades, researchers have lamented the evangelistic vacuum that the answer has not been found in the diagnosis. The reason I see Hunter's words as apropos is the church continues to try to solve our mutual problem in the same way. From antidotal views in my region, pastors and their teams can be all consumed with flyers, marketing, events, and invites, trying to get more people to come to their church with less and less results. Though I understand their growth dream, I also see in it a great imbalance that is suctioning them away from an even greater vision. If you can allow me to illustrate graphically, it is like a rodent caught in a baited revolving door experiment; the pursuit becomes an addictive endless trap. I witnessed a prominent denomination converge after receiving news of a sizeable drop in membership and baptisms. To their credit, they recognized large percentages of members were disengaged from evangelistic mission. Yet, what did they do in response? They introduced a "new" gospel presentation device (the likes of *The Four Spiritual Laws*). Certainly, it was a well-intentioned redo by a godly group. I am sure there are stories to be talked up, but in the face of alarming decline, all they did was revamp an old approach that has proved not appealing to most church members and no longer conducive for reaching an increasingly authenticity-based, pluralistic, and more distant culture.

From consultations, most pastors and church leaders are aware of their members' mission incompetencies and would love to see their people more missionally engaged, but they struggle with how to execute. How can they get their flabby, spectating body reaching others? I believe there is a way to course correct. However, you will not get new results from doing the same

[10] Gary Comer, *Soul Whisperer: Why the Church Must Change the Way It Views Evangelism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 5.

[11] Kozey, "Your Church on Mission."



 

things. Hunter's intuition is right. We need better ideas. The church must change.

As an introduction summary, we have the 1-in 5s hitting on all cylinders, and the church is stuck in "folk wisdom" mud, especially when it comes to equipping, enlisting, and infusing members for outer influence. We need new training, vehicles, and structures that move high percentages of every church, group, or agency into viable evangelistic disciple making. In North America (and other regions as well), we need to make a fundamental pivot.

## THE NEED TO REDRESS EVANGELISM

First seeing the systemic problem while in my doctorate study, I thought, *Maybe we need to scrap it, our mode of thinking, for an entirely different approach*. Inspired by the writings and shoulders of others (Michael Green, George Hunter, and Hugh Halter), I led out from the peloton, hoping others would bite and follow. I attempted to help Christians see how they could approach evangelism in much deeper, more effective, and dynamic ways with every single person they met.

The first issue in dealing with the subject matter of evangelism is that you cannot even get to the subject because of what people already think about it. Ironically, what undermined the popularity of the Church Growth movement parallels the decades-long demise of evangelism—it is partly a perception problem. Despite the fact that McGavran integrated theology with theory and practice,[12] Christopher DiVietro chronicled the Church Growth movement's rise and fall from popularity noting that some leaders, such as Rick Warren, jumped ship when they perceived the Church Growth movement as too theoretical:

> I stopped using the phrase around 1986 because of the things I didn't like about the church growth movement . . . I don't like the incessant comparing of churches . . . Another thing I didn't like was the movement's tendency to be more analytical than prescriptive. Pastors did not write many of the church growth books; theorists wrote them.[13]

I recall facing perception resistance as an outreach director of a mega church; hearing how missional-minded members had outright rejected evangelism broke me. They saw the "telling" agenda as insensitive, unloving, and uncompassionate, nothing close to Christ—not caring at all about people's life

[12] Christopher DiVietro, "Understanding Diversification in the Church Growth Movement," *Great Commission Research Journal* (2017): 61.

[13] Rick Warren, "Comprehensive Health Plan: To Lead a Healthy Church Takes More Than Technique," *Leadership* 18 (1997): 22–29, http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/1997/summer/713022.html.

conditions or the world at large in which we live (and they were stereotypically right in some cases!).[14] The same glut feeling occurs when one's missionality is reduced to a church's corporatized brand, where you are asked to merely fill a serving slot, and finger-to-the-wind market principles guide the Spirit enterprise. Christians get the sick sense that something precious got lost. Josh Packard's research on those leaving churches counter-intuited, "The dechurched are leaving to do more, not less. The church isn't asking too much of people; it's asking the wrong things of them."[15] I have seen it. Cog. Machinery. Uncompassionate. Impersonal. Numbers. Brand. I'm outta here!

Another perception noted by DiVietro deplaning the Church Growth movement that matches evangelism's relegation is Hesselgrave's 1988 analysis in which he claims within the methodological emphasis there was "an absence of theological foundations" in evangelical mission periodicals.[16] Rainer concurred with his sharp assessment, "Methodology, once subservient to and a tool of theology, would now appear to be an end instead of a means."[17]

Taking heart with these criticisms, if we are to redress evangelism, we need to build it from a theological base. Our paradigm must possess enough depth and range of rooting theology to rectify the following two fronts in which we are losing the battle: (1) folk wisdom hindering perceptions, and (2) folk wisdom hindering efficacy. Both are derailing us. It explains in philosophic terms why I reframed evangelism in the way I did titling my treatise, *Soul Whisperer,* after the pattern of Christ. The new paradigm espousing Jesus' deft manners and methods was an attempt to re-enlist those who had abandoned evangelism (the missional camp), and one that would retool those stuck in antiquated thinking (the surface-y telling camp). On the practical end, we desperately needed something that was more natural and dynamic for Christians, to inspire effectual gospel movement from the sender to the receiver.

Nevertheless, behind the methodology, the body must first see that evangelism is not ancillary to their Christian discipleship, but rather central to their prime calling as participants of the *missio Dei*, followers of Christ who was, after all, the most compassionate, mission-minded person to ever grace this planet. What is failing between the pulpit's passion and the pew's practice is, in essence, the heart of what Christ lived and exemplified. It is the *why* over it all, the transformation he sought to impart to his inner circle

[14] Robert D. Lupton, *Compassion, Justice, and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), 15–17.

[15] Josh Packard and Ashley Hope, *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are Done with Church But Not Their Faith* (USA: Group), 133.

[16] DiVietro, "Understanding Diversification," 66.

[17] Thom Rainer, "Celebration of Criticism," *Global Church Growth* 30 (1993): 6.

during three years of real world engagement. Mission, the full, evangelistic sense of it, is ultimately about being Christ-like. It is all about our love and character formation extending outward to others.

Therefore, my aim was to deepen evangelism by building it theologically around the emulative pattern of Christ and by helping Christians to see how powerfully Jesus pinpointed his words to each individual he encountered. Infused with a completely new set of fluid skills, Jesus' ability to *draw the heart* was entirely opposite from our modern presentation thinking. We start with us; he started with them. His "soul whispering" encompasses intimate relationship with the Father always guiding, impassioned love for the lost, and the ability to read the deepest needs and storylines of every soul. In this, mission leads believers into maturation—living out the intimacy, heart, manners, actions, compassion, skills, and fruit of Christ in the world. One reader reviewed, "*Soul Whisperer*, using Jesus as a model, shatters the old methods by integrating evangelism with the very core of our life in Christ."[18]

## A NEW INFLUENCE PARADIGM

Clarifying distinction, the new paradigm is not based on the traditional telling motif but rather on the impetuses and parameters of influence. Here is where it gets controversial. Let me be quick to say, I am evangelical orthodox and favor full communication of the essential truths (the telling part) leading to faith decisions when the time is right to do so. From an academic standpoint, the demarcation between the two approaches is significant. Consider that if evangelism is about telling (the essential truths and their legal implications for salvation), then when you mention "evangelism," most rather quickly check out mentally. They already know how to explain the basic truths and make the pitch, so there is nothing to learn. Many have had training under a particular telling approach, such as, The 4 Spiritual Laws, Evangelism Explosion, Steps to Peace, Share Your Faith Without Fear, etc., and there is a whole slew of current "telling" renditions. While most churches and the majority of members may not choose these mechanisms today for various reasons (unnatural, forced, or ineffective), it is the reductionist way we all have been conditioned to think about evangelism that is, in my view, what is hindering the whole church from a much greater gospel movement.

You see, shift the conversation from "telling" to having "spiritual influence" with someone, and suddenly we have an enormous amount to learn. It is revolutionizing! Broad, anthropomorphic themes of healing, shame, honesty, brokenness, and authenticity (and sociological patterns of identity conditioning) are all factors to study under this faith formation umbrella.

[18] Amazon book review of *Soul Whisperer*, posted March 5, 2017.

Framing the wider target, Christians know little about how to influence many unsaved friends—how to help them *be able and want to* follow Jesus. Yes, *want*. In fact, I marvel over the gap even with pastors. I asked a pastoral friend if he had ever won the mind of an atheist to his faith. Never. Did he know anything about reaching a Muslim? Nothing. I sat in a gathering of pastors one day where someone mentioned how "church members would simply love those Muslims to Christ." I could not hold my tongue, interjecting, "You won't reach any Muslim by just showing love. We must be able to answer Islam." They all looked back in a blank stare. Oversimplifications do not help us reach peoples or cultures that begin more distant from Christ.

Breaking down Christ's influence approach makes it accessible:

Start where they are.
Read what they need.
Know where to take them.[19]

As to understanding the individual or group, two reads are vital. (1) What message is resonant (a dynamic skill called "the gospel key" that is developed in the book. We have a phrase, "The key precedes the cross.") (2) What processing is necessary. Both reads position the Christian into a place in which spiritual influence is more likely to unfold. We have thought in terms of telling when we need to think in terms of influence and process. Granted that the Spirit is over it all, what will it take to win over my friend, or that family, or that faith for Christ? Rarely is anyone reached by a simple, one-hit-wonder talking to a stranger with whom they have no ongoing relationship. Solid studies like the Vision New England Recent Convert Study make clear, relational influence the rule.[20] The cold approach does not give us the right angle for disciple making, which is the preeminent call (Mt 28:18–20).

Over the last year, I have been meeting regularly with our local mosque's Imam, and let me say, getting members on a learning curve to reach those farther out is vital in this era. Despite the political debate raging in America in contrast to Canada's open door policy, immigration will continue to bring the world to our doorstep. Yet, the church, for the most part, is unprepared. We must sharpen ourselves to penetrate the most distant rings with God's strategic expansionary gospel! To do that, the acquiring of processing insight is paramount.

Synced for the wider range and dynamic adaption, the book is a revisionist plea to return to the drawing board and reteach our members how to approach the all-important evangelistic task. It gives practical teeth to a beloved church growth principle, the receptivity concept elevated by

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[19] Comer, *Soul Whisperer*, 3.

[20] Vision New England Recent Convert Study, 2008, http://www.visionnewengland.org/partner/Articl...,,PTID14438%7CCHID114781%7CCIID2314274,00.html (1 of 2) [1/23/2008 9:04:49 PM].



 

Donald McGavran in *The Bridges of God*. As a leading pioneer and father of missiology, McGavran used his own India experiment to ask new, critical questions. How does the gospel seed and spread? How does it affect people movementally? One fact that should never be lost is that, as McIntosh details, every one of the movements to be studied began with a key individual being reached.[21] We do not simply reach masses; we reach individuals who reach others, then groups, then whole tribes. Thus, personal and group evangelism is not mutually exclusive from mass movements but rather the fire starter for them. In the church, every individual reached by a member opens the possibility to reach expanding circles. However, when the members have no clarity or skill development to fulfill their calling, the movement stops. That is our current sad picture with the majority of North American churchgoers.

While I was in India observing the Disciple Making Movements strategy in both urban and rural contexts, movement happened person-to-person and family-to-family. Of course, the more hierarchical and group oriented the culture, the greater potential for the gospel to advance through an extended family/group/culture member. To counterbalance, the more independent, global, and urbanized the world becomes (in 2009, the urban population surpassed rural areas and is expected to continue to rise[22]), the more individualized the gospel disseminates. I am not implying cultural and sociological forces are not factors in the population centers. The religious person holding to the faith of his heritage has a million familial reasons to do so, yet there is a difference of mindset and exposure in cities.

My astute African pastor friend Zachary King'ory told me about Nairobi, "In the cities, people are where they are regarding faith not by chance, but by choice." He is recognizing a scope of knowledge within urban environs. These are not people living with the zebras who have never heard of Christ or his church. They are aware and, I will add, wary of our aggressive approaches. They are also on social media. Did you notice the refugees of Aleppo tweeting during their horrific ordeal? They are already exposed to religions at some level. For the bulk, it is not that they have not heard that they do not believe; it is that they choose not to. Now I realize there can be rational and emotional reasons before you get to the motivational one, but if we do not teach members how to help their friends to see the value and relevancy of faith, we will not win their hearts to Christ.

The *Soul Whisperer* premise counter-intuits the traditional "telling paradigm," which has dominated the church mindscape (general folk wisdom)

[21] Gary McIntosh, "Donald McGavran: An Evangelistic Missionary," *Great Commission Research Journal* (2017): 34–35.

[22] United Nations Population Division, 2009, accessed November 14, 2016, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/urbanization/urban-rural.shtml.

and which does not give proper weight to receptivity factors inherent with individuals or groups. In other words, I tried to convey where we are falling down, saying, "The challenge we face with reaching most today is not in the telling, but the taking,"[23] and when it comes to gospel communication, "It's not about telling, it's about helping people to hear."[24] If we did not get to the place where people had truly heard the gospel in a resonant way—where they would want to respond and live it out (which includes journeying forward with others and sometimes includes their group, subculture, or tribe)—then we had not achieved anything at all. My polemic is that the Great Commission aim is not merely to tell but rather to influence—to initiate a faith formation process that makes real disciples. That was Jesus' true goal. It is why he so often said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus was an influencer, not a teller.

That means outside the staged proclamation context of our church services in much of the world today, we should put down our megaphones and dump our static formulas. The conversation starts with understanding their perspective, not our proclamation. We must first understand them to discern how they will hear our message. When I interviewed Joshua Stock, president of Snowboarders for Christ, he told me, "the last thing that his crowd (mostly Millennials) would receive is something that sounded like a pitch."[25] In postmodern culture, the authenticity of the Christian is essential to gospel conveyance. Make the shift. Stop presenting, start reading where they are, and let that guide your words. Thinking through what is receivable from us via our character and the particularization of appeal is a radical reversal, but it is entirely biblical and perfectly suited for our time.

Observing the many encounters Jesus had with individuals, a pattern emerges. Notice the disparateness between John 3 and 4, which includes a man of Jewish religious elite status seeking understanding and a common sinful Samaritan woman seeking water. How odd if Jesus had presented the same message. Of course, he did not. From his assessment of whom he was talking to, his words were pinpoint dialed to achieve dramatic results. The high-ranking leader heard something disturbing: all his great religiosity meant nothing. Boom! "He must be born again" (Jn 3:3–5). The Samaritan woman heard something thrilling: she could have "living water" welling up within her (Jn 4:13). He walked away pensive; she scurried away to tell a whole town! The pattern becomes clear: custom-dial your words to the storyline of each hearer. Notice how the words, in themselves, drew and created their receptivity. Notice too, that if Jesus had not given them each a picture, s/he would not have come up with it him/

[23] Comer, *Soul Whisperer*, ix.

[24] Ibid., 10.

[25] Joshua Benedict Stock (president of Snowboarders for Christ) in discussion with the author, February 22, 2014.



 

herself. Therefore, like Jesus, we are the ones who must paint that out for them.

Contrary to what is propagated popularly, the verbalization of the gospel can be vital to meaningful relationship and spiritual formation.[26] Yet, the vast church membership has little knowledge of Christ's mission manners, and thus, stumbles on how to relate and draw others toward spiritual desire. Consider a sampling of Jesus' pinpointed personal encounters:

| PEOPLE | NEED | SYMBOL | STORY |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nicodemus<br>JOHN 3 | INCEPTION | Birth | *Religious teacher learns he must begin all over again by God's Spirit.* |
| Samaritan Woman<br>JOHN 4 | INFILLING | Well | *Soul thirsting woman hears about experiencing "living water."* |
| Adulterous Captive<br>JOHN 8 | INSULATION | Scrawl | *An expose' question protects a guilty woman from self-righteous accusers & shame.* |
| Canaanite Inquirer<br>MATTHEW 15 | INSTIGATION | Dogs | *Derogatory words stir up a foreigner's exceptional faith.* |
| Zacchaeus<br>LUKE 19 | INCLUSION | Home | *Jewish tax-collecting outcast receives an inclusive invitation.* |
| Rich Young Ruler<br>MARK 10 | INCISION | Release | *The command to release riches seeks to scalpel an idolatrous heart.* |
| Hemorrhaging Woman<br>MARK 5 | INSTILLING | Knees | *A call out from the crowd cements her newfound faith.* |

Because the paradigm is dynamic with its "reading" component, it works in all contexts and cultures, from local to global, and is never usurped by the shifting landscape. I do not want to teach something for here that will not work there. We must train our people to be on mission everywhere. I apply the thinking with every non-believer I come alongside, whether in Orange County, San Francisco, London, Cairo, or Kolkata. The traditional telling approach touted in churches across the land (folk wisdom) is not sensitive to a person's starting point, has little regard for relationship building, and fails to imbue gospel resonance. It is a hit-and-miss kind of deal, and it mostly misses its target. Jesus' words, on the other hand, were personal and powerful, perfectly placed, and super impactful.

Jesus' understanding of faith formation process is also developed in many passages. He circled back to "find" people he had healed, so faith formation can take place (see Jn 5 and 9). In Mark 7 and 8, Jesus gives a back-to-back, almost identical sequence of actions to achieve faith formation, showing how much he figured their human processing need. Again, it is not about telling; it is about journeying with them long enough, and with enough faith formational dialogue and demonstration, to get to the place that they could

[26] Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 15.

hear what you have to say. That is very different from the way the vast majority of Christians think about evangelism. They think it is throwing in a quick word here or there with someone in the moment, but that is insufficient to fulfill the disciplemaking call. The resultant fruit is nothing.

## CLEAR DEFINITION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

At the Exponential Conference, Ed Stetzer distributed a statistical handout and then offered a summary word, "The one thing they concluded was evangelism must be intentional."[27] Certainly there is value here. Trying beats untrying every time! In all fairness to Stetzer, I realize he was providing a thirty thousand foot point of view. That instance, however, was also a stark example of the ambiguity that is strangling today's church. Much of what congregations are doing in the name of evangelism is intentional and ineffective, sometimes even counterproductive, pushing people farther from faith. It is true. Twenty five percent of the churches in America's largest denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention (15 million members), reported no baptisms in 2012.[28] Staggering. Even church plants, our most mission-focused entities, can portray ineffectiveness. *Outreach Magazine* published an article stating that two-thirds of church plants leaned un-evangelistic, gathering primarily Christians.[29] Ouch! As a coaching director of a church-planting network, I perused reports from church planters for three years and observed miniscule evangelistic fruit and for some months on end, nil.

Back to my point, if we are to realize the members' evangelistic potential, how can we teach and raise the efficacy of anything if it is not well defined? If evangelism were everything (intentional), I would argue it is nothing. Nothing they can follow. Spiritual influence only gets dynamic when it gets specific. Using Michael Green's breakdown of evangelism word clusters, we should make a distinction between public proclamation of pastors and planters (platform: *Kerusso*, meaning, "To proclaim like a herald") and member process (interpersonal: *Martureo*, meaning, "To bear witness of facts and truths to be vouched for."[30]) Though the gospel message is the same, and there can be some overlap of principles, the way to effectually approach each is entirely divergent. I coach, "Like beer and wine, don't mix the two!"

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[27] Ed Stetzer (presentation, Exponential Conference, Mariners Church, Newport, CA, February 22, 2016).

[28] Rick Wilkins, "Is the Southern Baptists Decline Real," *Urban Christian News*, January 10, 2017.

[29] Lizette Beard, "Vanishing Evangelism: The Sobering Case of Church Plants and Evangelism," *Outreach Magazine*, July 21, 2016. http://www.outreachmagazine.com/features/18479-vanishing-evangelism.html.

[30] Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 48–70.

Along with the pattern of Christ, we need to give members a sound definition for evangelism that helps them understand precisely what they are called to practice**.** What you aim for is what you will get! The following is the four-fold definition from my book. (Notice it is based on "influence" not "telling.") Evangelism is "Partnering with God in the process of shaping the mind and heart to believe and follow."[31] The four dimensions give clarity to your people on what Jesus is calling them to be and do. Parsing it is helpful: (1) partnering with God (that is spiritual and exciting), (2) in the process (that means it is an ongoing, relational work), (3) to shape their mind and heart (that requires knowledge and skills), and (4) lead them to believe and follow (that is our end goal—not decisions, but disciples). This agency of the Father working intimately through each follower occurs when believers come alongside unsaved people they know or are getting to know to help them reach the place of belief and followership.

In dire contrast, Christians every day have golden gospel openings right before them, and yet they know not how to steward those opportunities. Most do not know how to get positioned relationally, how to frame the conversation, how to deepen bonds with unsaved people, how to dialogue and draw out vital information, or how to read needs and interpret faith's meaning. These are vital mission skills. They have to be taught and then practiced within real, situational engagement. If they are to embody them, it will require a commitment to those outside the faith, whereupon their character will grow in Christ's seeking love.

One of our *Launch Point* groups (my mission training curriculum for small groups) ended up leading five people to Christ within a six-month span (not typical by any means). Four of the five were outside the group, but with continuing relationship, we saw all but one successfully enfolded into church fellowships. By the way, this group of twelve from a per capita measurement just "out-missioned" most steeples in the land. The salvation stories were case studies in themselves.

One of our mission trainees met a Japanese woman whose American husband confessed to having been unfaithful with one hundred women. As she listened to this wife unload, she kept praying and asking repeatedly, "What is her need?" Hearing the overwhelmed feelings of utter shock, she noticed a massive planter close to their table, pointed to it, and said, "Maiko, you were not made to carry that planter, and you cannot carry this burden." She then talked with her about Jesus, the only One who could carry her burden. Like Christ's living water metaphor with the Samaritan woman, the planter metaphor became the communication piece that led to her faith. A week later when they met again, with tears streaming down her face, Maiko cried out in prayer, embracing her Mighty Savior!

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[31] Comer, *Soul Whisperer*, 149.

This trainee would instruct her group to apply the concepts, "We need to stop talking and draw out their thoughts and feelings first." Then notice how she was focused on the interpretation part: "What is her need?"

[32]

According to the training diagram, she creates a picture to show what a relationship with Christ would mean. Can you see what is happening here? She is working the skills. When we equip in churches, and when believers apply these skills, we found through story after story, they see fruit. Thus, the adage is clear: *skills precede the story*.

If your church members do not understand the concept of "framing," gospel relationship opportunities will fall by the wayside. We teach specific dialogue-line techniques to get the conversation moving in a relationship-building and spiritually open way. Establishing "safety" and inviting dialogue is necessary for influence to unfold. One day, I heard a friend's daughter say she was going to use her college speech course to present the gospel. I know how great that idea seems to many but not to me. Though this may sound almost heretical, my input to her was, "Don't do it!" I further explained why. Uninvited apart from relationship within a university context, it will likely distance the whole class from you. Instead, get alongside one or two unsaved women. Get to know them. Deepen your relationship through honest disclosure. Draw their true thoughts and feelings about faith and religion. Seek God to discover what his words would be for them according to their unique needs, drives, and dreams. Then share. The chances of having them hear you and respond to the gospel just elevated one hundred fold! Who would you want to impart the faith to your children, the random teller who shares and leaves or the relational influencer who invests and stays?

We also teach mission "know how" on reaching eight common types: God accusers, cultural Christians, moralists, pleasure seekers, progressives, theistic skeptics, atheists, and those from other faiths. These were case stories that we observed what it took to reach people from different perspectives and worldviews. (Paul Hieberts' *Transforming Worldviews* is a notable contribution[33].) Again, you do not appeal to or reel in disparate starting points the same way. In the book, I coined it "evangelistic mapping." Third most difficult part of Jesus' paradigm is *know where to take them.*

From my own journeys with two skeptics stepping into faith, God showed me how to work the process of reaching those who begin farther from God and belief, including atheists, agnostics, skeptics, or those from other religions. The method of stringing together multiple points, which I

[32] Ibid., 86–87.

[33] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*.

call "platform building," is the way to garner leverage for them to eventually stand and move forward in faith. God's Spirit has to break through, but it is a thrilling architectural work! Having clarity on what you are constructing is essential to getting to that holy moment.

I also stumbled into the recognition that both of my skeptic friends had made four faith-forming progressions. Many of us are schooled on the Engel's scale, which numbers a person's progress from gospel awareness, to repentance, to being a reproducing disciple.[34] Although I do prize how it highlights developmental process, I never found it very helpful from an evangelistic standpoint. Many skeptic or religious friends already know the gospel; telling will not do it. I needed something that revealed where the person was in his faith formation and where to focus next. During meetings with two skeptics side by side, God showed me something I had never seen before. I watched each journey through levels or progressions. The *Open to* > *Able to* > *Want to* > *Choose to* steps now guide me in faith formation with every evangelistic relationship I embrace.

[35]

| STEPS | "THE HANG UP" | HELP WITH... |
|---|---|---|
| **OPEN TO** | *Interest* | Asking |
| **ABLE TO** | *Reason* | Answers |
| **WANT TO** | *Motivation* | Appeal |
| **CHOOSE TO** | *Response* | Application |

Trainees find themselves saying, "Oh, that's where they are in the journey." Within our post-Christian climate, scores must be drawn into the first stage of being open to explore and needing wider "attraction building" conversations to help them enter the search phase (another skill). We are only scratching the surface here. It is developed in detail in chapters 14–17 of *Soul Whisperer*.

## THE RESEARCH WE NEED FOR CHANGE

I once read a missional book in which the authors admitted to not doing what they wrote about; it was what they aspired to do.[36] Another mission

[34] Will McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 49–50.

[35] Comer, *Soul Whisperer*, 200–204.

[36] Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church*: *A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 19.

lead said he had never gone on a missions trip; his calling was to point people there. I do not mean this to come across as judgmental, but I am not a fan. I have found that it is only after you get into the context of the unsaved and deep into relationship that the revolutionizing insights from God unveil.

Hunter's call for revisiting evangelism causes me to weigh in on which direction I think our research should go. In this new day and age of missionality, our research needs to leave the classroom and get closer to the hearts, minds, openings, barriers, and processes. Humbly recognizing that preaching inspiration is never enough, we must shift to firsthand learning at the safe houses, recovery rooms, community centers, temples and mosques, homeless shelters, businesses, neighborhood homes, clubs and coffeehouses, ball fields, and all outreach arms and extensions where believers come alongside unsaved persons and each particularized subculture. When I read J. Waskom Picketts' *The Confirmation of the Gospel*, I loved the many stories, like the Indian minister, seeing how Muslims had denigrated Christ's death and resurrection, had such a thoughtful, compelling, apologetic questioning on how the church's rise could have happened apart from it.[37] That kind of laser-sharp thinking occurs in the crucible of doing missions. Much clarity comes with intimate observational research, too.

During my doctoral study, the formal hypothesis approach was favored, in which an objective is made and then tested, enabling a conclusion to be drawn. If the conclusion is not laced with pre-interpretive bias, it can offer solid assessment, no doubt. However, in the evangelism arena, I believe what we need much more of is "participant observation" forms of research. This is when we get in close, which can be incognito, to see what is actually occurring as a participant and objective observer of both sides—message conduits and receptors. What is effective? Where are the breakdowns? What is needed to course correct? How does the church empower gospel fruition?

As an example, Josh Packard's "dones" inquiry was primarily based on this form of qualitative research. He makes a thoughtful point as to this choice, "People are used to seeing numbers explain the world around us. But numbers tell us very little, if anything, about people's experiences, interpretations, and processes."[38] Thus, his research relied on interview collection to form conclusions. This was also the main approach of J. Russell Hale, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away*, which synthesized the classic truth: "People can't hear until they have been heard."[39] Though data compilation can reveal big, sweeping trends, when it comes to evangelism, there is nothing like moving from black and white to the HD living color of

[37] J. Waskom Pickett, *The Confirmation of the Gospel: The Authenticating Role of Good Works* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers Malloy, 2016), 64–65.

[38] Packard and Hope, *Church Refugees*, 8.

[39] J. Russell Hale, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1977), 183.



 

true looks. It is why I believe research must lean in the "participant observation" direction, and church growth writers would do well to broaden their voices to include thinkers from various philosophical veins.

Regarding research angles, as I alluded to earlier, many of our missiological issues stem from our presuppositions regarding receptivity. In local and global contexts, it is general folk wisdom error to perceive receptivity as being (1) inside, (2) immediate, and (3) inviolable. I would argue that these assumptions undermine gospel dissemination everywhere. Consider three North American mission precepts that contain partial fallacies.

*Inside.* In the new 1-in-5 playing fields, the "belong-before-believe" mantra of today's attractional church must be reevaluated. Many are rising against it; I am not alone. As to its prominence, consider the 2014 *Outreach Magazine* article from Dan Kimball, where after describing the stories of eighteen people who were baptized, he writes, "In almost every case, the Sunday meeting is a major factor in a person's decision to follow Jesus." In the minds of leader legions, the church service enveloped evangelism.

It is true that belonging increases receptivity, and we should leverage the love of the Christian community for God's ultimate mission. Yes, we are talking about a "both and" here. Still, should this limiting view of how gospel influence disseminates moor our thinking? I once was with a staff member who told me about his atheistic neighbor friend who loved having conversations with him, but then the staff member offered his conviction with "belong-before-believe" as basis for not investing time with this person. I tried to get him to see differently, but to no avail. I wonder, how many leaders out there in church land are just like him?

*Immediate.* Church growth seeks those receptive. Although there are people coming towards us that we must explain Christ's intervention and lead to faith, the majority today begin farther outside our realm. I had a most provocative conversation with Kenyan-born John Njoroge of Ravi Zacharias's ministry team about this. While training in Kenya, John told me that what I was teaching, the idea of journeying with non-believers into the faith, was foreign there. He said, "Christians just share the gospel, and if they don't respond, they move on." Yet, John spoke of how the old forms of crusade evangelism were getting lesser and lesser results, and that atheism was suddenly on the rise in his country. He affirmed they needed the shift; they needed to learn how to create receptivity.

One of the most sobering takeaways from last year's Great Commission Research Network's conference was the message by George Martin who was candid enough to relay that there was little research to draw upon on reaching those of other religions.[40] Did your jaw drop, like mine? Where

[40] George Martin, "Growth in the Context of Demographic Change: The World's Religions Have Come to Us" (presentation, Great Commission Research Conference, October 2016).

have we been? Like the Samaritan woman looking down a well and seeing a man without a utensil to draw water, we must bridge distance with new tools. Researchers can seek increasing levels and layers of insight on how to reach a diverse religious world. We need more than testimonies. We need analysis that can lead to greater inroads for reproducing gospel fruitfulness.

*Inviolable.* Though our gospel of salvation of faith alone in Christ, his death on the cross, and glorious rise from dead will always be the cornerstone of our message, the church tends to be rigid with its scope of gospel-related communication. We can easily make quick judgments and misreads on people who are far more open than we have estimated. With the eternal life emphasis, we can fail to see how much Christ leaned into the spiritual benefits and blessings of faith that readily connect with North America's present-day thinkers. Why do we have so many non-believers who see our gospel as irrelevant to their lives? The onus for changing that view is on us! Research can play a vital role in shaping how gospel communication develops in the future years.

As to church planting, how adaptable and progressive can we be in penetrating the various cultural and subculture contexts? Avoiding syncretism in its forms, research could highlight innovating outer-bound structures and vehicles that bring a powerful, symphonic gospel into our mixed, multicultural world. How will they hear? Who will they hear? What will they hear? Certainly, mission successes will inform every scenario. The sky is the limit on what new data could unveil and unpack for the furtherance of Christ's mandate. With hindrances lying within our presuppositions, it is time to put past assumptions and current mindsets under renewed scrutiny.

## CONCLUSION

To some this side of the globe, perhaps there is no greater sports moment than what occurred in Lake Placid, New York, in the year 1980. The opening scene of the movie, *Miracle*, places coach Herb Brooks (HB) in a conversation with the US Olympic hockey selection committee (OC). Amid the intimidating talk of the Soviet's decades-long Olympic dominance, and even "spanking" the US pro All-Stars, in the film's recreation, Brooks pitches his vision to coach the amateur squad.

> HB: "The only way we can compete with the Eastern bloc teams is if we are willing to change."
> OC: "Change what?"
> HB: "Everything. Change the way we train. Change the way we prepare, and even change the way we schedule—it needs to be tougher. Longer. We also need to change the way we play the game." (He proceeds to propose a hybrid of the Soviet and Canadian systems showing exactly what he envisioned was necessary.) ". . . the highest level of conditioning, speed, creativity, and, above all, team chemistry."



 

If you are going to cut down a giant like the renowned Soviet Union's hockey machine, someone had to see what it would take. Someone had to believe it could be done. That person was a studious, tape-watching dreamer named Herb Brooks. Our research can get us there, to be the first to see what others need to see, and to size up how to take on a rising, 1-in-5 giant. What an honor to provide a window to something of such significance! The research Dr. Hunter calls for will open innovative ways for a new day of God's miraculous kingdom expansion.

Later in the film before the big showdown unfurls leading to the gold medal game, Brooks gives his pre-game speech: "Great moments come from great opportunity. And that is what you have here, boys." What lies before church leadership is opportunity of a pivoting segue in the church's history. As we head to a projected 9.7 billion world population by 2050, a time when more people will be outside and farther from the church's joining circle than has ever existed, and when Islam threatens to surpass our influence status on the globe, we are confronted with a vision question. *Are we willing to change to meet the new challenge head on?* We must embrace *better ideas* on how to approach, prepare, and practice gospel mission. It is not called the Great Commission for nothing. Greatness beckons. It is our moment.

### About the Author

Gary Comer received his D.Min. at Talbot Seminary. He is the author of *Soul Whisperer: Why the Church Must Change the Way it Views Evangelism*, and a four book *Missional Engagement Series*. His next book, *Re-Mission: Rethinking How Church Leaders Create Movement* is in process with Whitaker House publishers. Gary founded Soul Whisperer Ministries to raise the mission efficacy of churches, nationally and globally. Connect with Gary at: soulwhisperermministry.com. Twitter: gcomerministry.

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# THE LIFE OF DONALD McGAVRAN: FOUNDING A SCHOOL

*Gary L. McIntosh*

— Editor's Note: Gary L. McIntosh has spent over a decade researching and writing a complete biography on the life and ministry of Donald A. McGavran. We are pleased to present here the sixth of several excerpts from the biography.

***Abstract***

With the Institute of Church Growth in Eugene, Oregon, set to close in June 1965, McGavran was thinking of retiring to his small farm in Oregon. However, his plans changed when he was chosen to become the founding dean of Fuller Theological Seminary's new School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth in September of that same year. The story of McGavran's selection, as well as that of getting Alan Tippett back into the USA, demonstrates God's miraculous work in bringing about the establishment of the new school.

Just ten years following the founding of the seminary that bears his name, Charles E. Fuller, a well-known evangelist of the early twentieth century, spoke of a dream for a school of evangelism and mission in a sermon preached on the "Old Fashioned Revival Hour" in 1957. In that sermon he declared,

> But I'll tell you something that is on my heart—and in the night hours I have been awakened time after time to pray—and that is that God would somehow lay it upon the hearts of the people world-wide to stand by in prayer and help us to make the Missions



 

> and Evangelistic departments of the Fuller Theological Seminary the best, highest, truest training departments in all the world for missions and evangelism.[1]

Charles Fuller's dream began to take form in early 1964. Actually, the idea of a school of missions had been on President Hubbard's mind for several years, and with the plans for a school of psychology well underway, Hubbard decided that "the next move is to work toward the setting up of a school of missions."[2]

President Hubbard and C. Davis Weyerhaeuser, a board member, had already made an exploratory trip to Northwest Christian College in the early spring of 1964 to investigate the work of Donald McGavran. In a thank you letter to Ross Griffeth, Hubbard explained, "I will express my appreciation to Dr. McGavran who did a yeoman's service in seeing that Mr. Weyerhaeuser and I were made welcome and informed, not only concerning NCC but also the Institute of Church Growth, which strikes me as an unusually creative enterprise."[3]

By July of that year, President Hubbard started the process of appointing a committee to consider the appropriateness of establishing a school of mission. The principle members of the committee were William S. LaSor (professor of Old Testament), J. Christy Wilson Sr. (adjunct professor of missions), Clarence S. Roddy (professor of practical evangelism), Carlton Booth (professor of evangelism), Daniel Fuller (professor of hermeneutics), and R. Kenneth Strachan (chair). Daniel Fuller explained, "Our task is to think, to dream, and to construct a specific, detailed recommendation."[4] Hubbard asked that the committee's plan be finished by February 15, 1965. As the committee was to begin its work in the fall of 1964, Dan Fuller and Ken Strachan conversed privately about the first meeting's agenda and the new school. By August, they were tossing around the idea of starting an institute of world evangelism. In preparation for the committee's initial gathering, Fuller and Strachan[5] asked the members to think through seven key issues.

1. Is an Institute of World Evangelism needed?
2. What should be the goals?
3. What program of study should be suggested?
4. Should Fuller specialize in one field of Christian mission, becoming a strategic center for such studies?
5. What faculty should be provided?

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[1] Charles Fuller 1957 as quoted in D. Fuller (1972): 230.

[2] Daniel P. Fuller, letter to R. Kenneth Strachan, July 28, 1964.

[3] David A. Hubbard, letter to Ross J. Griffeth, April 22, 1964.

[4] Fuller to Strachan, July 28, 1964.

[5] Strachan became ill during the fall of 1964 and passed away in February 1965.

6. To what students should the program be geared?
7. What degrees should be offered?[6]

The committee thought it advisable to poll faculty, present students, alumnae (particularly those serving outside the USA), and key leaders and educators in the fields of evangelism and missions.

The faculty committee met each Monday afternoon to discuss the possibilities and potential curriculum and to interview missionary leaders in order to get a lead on how to establish such a school. At the December Urbana Missionary Conference, leaders of the evangelical missionary movements met twice to offer their advice on the new school.[7] Following the meetings in Urbana, the faculty committee decided it would be wise to organize a steering committee composed of fifteen or twenty missionary leaders to function in an advisory capacity. Daniel Fuller wrote to Arthur Glasser, home director of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, asking him to serve on the steering committee.[8] Donald McGavran served as executive secretary for the committee. Other members included Horace L. Fenton, chairman (Latin America Mission), Raymond B. Buker (Conservative Baptist Seminary), George Cowan (Wycliffe Bible Translators), Ted W. Engstrom (World Vision), Eric Fife (Intervarsity Christian Fellowship), Clarence Jones (World Radio Missionary Fellowship), Samuel Moffett (Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions), Paul Rees (World Vision), Jack Shepherd (Nyack Missionary College), Abe Van Der Puy (Station HCJB, Ecuador), Warren Webster (Conservative Baptist Mission), Christy Wilson Jr. (Presbyterian Mission), and C. Stacey Woods (The International Fellowship of Evangelical Students).[9]

Daniel Fuller revealed to Glasser that the decision had been made to move forward with the opening of a school of missions and world evangelism and that his father, Charles E. Fuller, was going to make a preliminary announcement on the "Old Fashioned Revival Hour" the following March 7, 1965. Billy Graham was going to pledge his support to the new school on the broadcast slated for April 4. Several members of the steering committee were also going to make short announcements of support on upcoming broadcasts to help raise the needed financial resources for the new school.

By January 1965, it became clear to Donald and president Griffeth that the Institute of Church Growth would close at the end of June. With Griffeth retiring in June of that year, Donald asked the board of Northwest Christian College whether they would continue to fund the Institute. The

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[6] Memo to committee members planning for a school of mission. No date but most likely sometime in August or September 1964.

[7] Daniel P. Fuller, letter to Arthur Glasser, December 17, 1964.

[8] Daniel P. Fuller, letter to Arthur Glasser, January 21, 1965.

[9] *Bulletin of Fuller Theological Seminary* (Spring 1965): 3.

board said no. To provide support for a new president, the board decided not to put more money into the Institute of Church Growth. However, the Lilly Endowment for the church growth study of Latin America was to continue into 1967, providing some funding.[10]

In spite of this discouraging news, Donald and president Griffeth continued to believe there was hope to keep the Institute going. One of the pressing issues was obtaining a visa for Alan Tippett, so he could return to the United States to start teaching in September 1965. At the time, the United States had strict entry quotas, which required a long application process. Tippett had previously been in the United States on a student visa, but now he needed a workers visa, which Northwest Christian College needed to request and process.[11] Unknown to anyone at the time, getting Tippett into the United States was going to take a minor miracle.

Responding to an invitation from President Hubbard, Donald traveled to Pasadena on February 18–19 to discuss the proposed school of evangelism. He attended a faculty meeting on February 19 with Charles Fuller, Dan Fuller, William LaSor, and President Hubbard. Following that meeting, the four unanimously decided to explore the possibility of getting McGavran and his Institute of Church Growth to come to Fuller as the nucleus of the school of mission. As a preliminary step, President Hubbard requested that Donald draw up a brief statement as to the kind of graduate school of world missions and evangelism he would envision for Fuller Theological Seminary (FTS). After giving Hubbard's request significant thought, Donald suggested that the unique graduate school of missions should place strong emphasis on four essentials.

> Training missionaries and nationals in harvesting **evangelism** with a minor emphasis on seed sowing evangelism, training men to know how churches grow, discovering by rigorous research what methods God has blessed to church multiplication, furnishing missionaries those knowledges and skills —language skills, understanding of younger Churches, nationalism, the science of man, the need for both Christian unity and doctrinal truth, etc.—which help them be effective witnesses in today's world.[12]

Donald envisioned a graduate school that would constantly renew itself through research in church growth, that would teach mission history as a record of church multiplication, and that would teach theology of mission as a biblical system of belief through which God propagates the gospel. He dreamed further,

> (1) that this Graduate School will take its stand squarely on the assumption that the salvation of men through faith in Jesus

[10] Notes of Donald McGavran, read and interpreted by Betty Ann Klebe on audio tape, September 19, 1990, transcribed copy September 20, 1990.

[11] Alan Tippett, letter to Ross J. Griffeth, February 24, 1965.

[12] Donald A. McGavran, *Purpose, Objectives, Curriculum and Staff for the Graduate School of World Missions and Evangelism* (unpublished proposal, March 5): 1965.

> Christ is the chief purpose of Christian mission. (2) That the many good things done by mission today will not be permitted to obscure and hinder the supreme aim—that the Gospel be proclaimed and "multitudes be added to the Lord" in multiplying churches in every land. To the extent that the many good things provedly aid the supreme aim, they will be gladly used, but they will not be allowed to become ends in themselves. (3) That conventional academic disciplines, hallowed by use in other seminaries, will not be followed slavishly. Indeed, they will be followed only to the extent that they provedly contribute to propagating the faith in the radically new and radically old world of today and tomorrow.[13]

Donald hoped that the graduate school would offer a masters of theology degree and, as soon as possible, a doctor of theology. The school would group the curriculum under six major divisions: theology of mission, apologetics and comparative religions, history of missions, missions and culture, missionary methods and practices, and research in church growth. As for faculty, he suggested beginning with a dean, two professors, and two associate professors. They would divide their responsibilities as follows: dean with half-time responsibilities in teaching and directing research, professor of evangelism and church growth in Africa (anthropology, animism, and Islam), professor of evangelism and church growth in Latin America (sociology and Roman Catholicism), associate professor of evangelism and church growth in Asia (theology, Hinduism, and Buddhism), and an associate professor of history of church expansion (director of International House). Donald expected all professors to be engaged in research and writing, as well as being stimulating teachers. Further, he recommended funding for three teaching fellows and five research fellows. In summary, his vision of a graduate school of missions was to "find out all we can about how twentieth century men and populations are discipled and to teach all we find out to the end that the Church of Jesus Christ be extended to His glory—this is the kind of Graduate School of Missions I would like Fuller Theological Seminary to found."[14]

Donald wrote the proposal just two days before Charles Fuller publically announced the new School of World Mission on March 7, 1965. Fuller told his constituency that it was time to found a school of worldwide evangelism, which would operate as a department of Fuller Seminary. He asked that all his listeners prayerfully join him in carrying out this venture of faith. Clearly, the new school was going to open in the fall of the year, but much still needed to be accomplished—assembling an adequate library, hiring

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.



 

faculty, recruiting students, raising the necessary funding, and, most critical, hiring a founding dean.

The faculty committee's first choice for the founding dean was Samuel Moffett, a distinguished missionary to Korea. Similar to McGavran, Moffett was the son of missionaries and was born in Korea in 1916. He and his wife Eileen had begun service in Korea in 1955, just in time to take part in the rapid church growth in that country. The faculty committee, along with President Hubbard, negotiated with Moffett for three months. However, he felt that his work in Korea was not yet finished and that he needed to return. The committee then turned to its second choice, Christy Wilson Jr. Born and raised in Iran, Wilson worked as a missionary in Afghanistan from 1951 to 1974. He also felt the call to go back to Afghanistan and turned down the offer to become the founding dean of the new school.

Thus, the attention of the faculty committee and President Hubbard turned to Donald McGavran. Looking back in 1972, Daniel Fuller remembered,

> Early in 1965 our attention focused upon Dr. Donald McGavran, who several years before had founded the Institute of Church Growth in connection with the Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon . . . As the committee at Fuller Seminary carried on conversations with missionary leaders, the name of Donald McGavran and the term "Church Growth" kept coming up. Why shouldn't a school of missions primarily emphasize the question of why churches grow? With such an emphasis in the forefront, a school would be less prone to veer away from the task of evangelism than might be the case if its primary emphasis were, say, linguistics, or anthropology.[15]

Several aspects commended McGavran to the faculty committee. He was well prepared academically, had extensive missionary experience, and enjoyed extensive knowledge of many missionary fields. His theology was compatible with Fuller Theological Seminary's, and he had an understanding of the impact of social science on mission theory. The primary question was his age. At sixty-seven years old, some wondered whether he would provide the creative and imaginative leadership the new school needed. Others wondered if the new school would just become a high-class institute, as opposed to a solid academic institution. At least one person felt Donald's publications manifested a sort of fuzziness of thought, lacking the precision needed in a dean.[16] Nevertheless, Donald's clear vision for what a graduate school of world missions might look like won out. By April, he was the most likely candidate to become the founding dean.

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[15] D. Fuller (1972): 231.

[16] For an example of one person's thoughts, see Jack F. Shepherd, letter to Carlton Booth, April 23, 1965.

Part of the discussions between Hubbard and McGavran concerned the Institute of Church Growth. Donald wanted the Institute to move from Northwest Christian College to Fuller Theological Seminary. The truth was that Donald was not interested in coming to Pasadena unless Fuller was willing to take over the entire Institute of Church Growth, which included both himself and Tippett as professors. While having the Institute located right across the street from the University of Oregon, with its excellent schools of sociology, anthropology, and history, was positive, the fact that Oregon was on the edge of the United States limited the Institute's influence. This, plus the fact that financing and housing of the Institute at the college were uncertain after President Griffeth retired in June 1965, led Donald to believe relocating the Institute to Fuller Theological Seminary was a sound idea. He recognized that relocating it to Pasadena, California, would offer distinct advantages, among which would be abundant funds, better housing, an ability to grant MA and ThD degrees, a more centrally located campus for missionaries passing through, and, of course, the all-around strength that being part of the famed Fuller Seminary would bring. One negative was the Graduate School of Mission would have to teach the anthropology and sociology courses that were obtained through the University of Oregon, but that seemed manageable.

What sealed the deal for the faculty committee was a resounding recommendation from Arthur Glasser:

1. Dr. McGavran is obviously an extremely competent man in this field. His formal training (PhD) balances his practical experience, gained through years of service in India, and through extensive travels in all parts of the world.
2. Dr. McGavran is an enthusiast, a "vibrator," in the best sense of the word. He can convey a glow. He has the thrust to his personality that would qualify him as a leader.
3. Dr. McGavran is recognized as the most seminal thinker in the business of church growth, world evangelism, missionary methodology, etc. His books are widely read, and often quoted. . . . He would be bound to draw top-level missionaries to do furlough studies under his direction at Fuller.
4. I understand that as long as Dr. McGavran was located in Eugene, Oregon—off the beaten path—he was not reaching his fullest potential. But a move for him to Pasadena should automatically enlarge his teaching and leadership—in—research seminars, etc. By inviting him to Fuller we would be <u>helping</u> him: he would be grateful, and would give us the right sort of loyalty, etc.
5. In terms of sheer achievement overseas, and consequent orientation from a theoretical approach to strategy, he would appeal to mission leaders more than, say, Sam Moffett, whose accomplishments and interests are more pedestrian and traditional.



 

Glasser's only question was McGavran's theological stance, of which he knew little. The fact that the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association (EFMA) and the International Foreign Mission Association (IFMA) both endorsed Donald's workshops held at Winona Lake, Indiana, made Glasser feel all was well on this point.

In May 1965, David Hubbard extended an invitation to McGavran to move the Institute of Church Growth to Pasadena and to establish the School of World Mission as a school of Fuller Theological Seminary. Daniel Fuller immediately sent an invitation to Alan Tippet to join McGavran as a charter faculty member for the proposed School of World Mission as associate professor of missionary anthropology. Tippett was open to coming, but the most serious problem of all was whether he could even get into the country.

After Donald accepted the invitation, William LaSor sent an announcement to the steering committee on June 1:

> You will rejoice with us, I am sure, when we tell you that Dr. Donald McGavran has accepted the invitation to become Dean of the School of World Mission and Director of the Institute of Church Growth of Fuller Theological Seminary. He will take up duties here in September.
>
> This was clearly the leading of the Lord, for the continued existence of the Institute of Church Growth became an uncertainty at the same time that we became interested in Dr McGavran as Dean of our school. When it was made clear to him and to us that the Institute itself could be transferred to Pasadena and that he could continue the direction of its unique ministry both he and our committee recognized it as the hand of the Lord.
>
> The whole development is positively exciting. Instead of starting a new school and waiting for it to develop, we have in institute-in-being with its program already operating, its students already engaged in research projects, its publications already recognized as authoritative, and some foundation grants already made. Added to that is Dr. McGavran's infectious zeal for the new School of World Missions.[17]

As noted in the letter of announcement, everything came together when President Griffeth worked out the details to transfer the Institute of Church Growth from Northwest Christian College to Fuller School of Theology. Even though President Griffeth had worked hard to make the Institute of Church Growth a success at Northwest Christian College, he recognized that it had the best chance to flourish at Fuller. Thus, he graciously worked to make the move possible. In a letter to Alan Tippett, Griffeth wrote con-

[17] William S. LaSor, letter to Arthur Glasser, June 1, 1965.

cerning the Institute of Church Growth, "I wish that we might have kept it, but the success of the venture was its own undoing. We lacked the money to feed the critter adequately. Well, anyway we have started something. It is up to you and McGavran to keep it going great guns."[18]

Final details meant that Fuller Theological Seminary had to reimburse Northwest Christian College $9,100 for money already spent on research fellows, publication, and the Institute's library. President Hubbard worked at the arrangements for Fuller to pay reimbursement beginning in June. Northwest Christian College agreed to continue to pay the salaries of McGavran, Tippett, and their secretary, Betty Ann Klebe, through August 31. Most importantly, the full amount of the Lilly Endowment Foundation specified for the Latin American church growth study was to be transferred to Fuller on September 1.[19] Additionally, the *Church Growth Bulletin* was to transfer to Fuller along with the Institute of Church Growth, although Overseas Crusades would continue to publish it.

On June 9, a public news release of the new school read, "VETERAN MISSIONARY LEADER TO HEAD NEW GRADUATE SCHOOL AT FULLER SEMINARY." The announcement stated,

> President David Allan Hubbard of Fuller Theological Seminary and President Ross J. Griffeth and Dr. Donald McGavran of Northwest Christian College (Disciples of Christ) jointly announced today that the Institute of Church Growth, founded by Dr. Griffeth and Dr. McGavran at Northwest Christian College in 1960, the Institute's journal The Church Growth Bulletin, and the Institute's library will be moved to Pasadena and will become part of Fuller Theological Seminary's new program in world mission. Dr. McGavran will serve as dean of the Fuller School of World Mission and director of the Institute of Church Growth.[20]

As the announcement indicated, the formal name of the new school was the School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth. Those who feared that Donald's advanced age would result in a lack of innovation soon learned that such was not the case. In a letter written to the members of the steering committee, Donald declared, "I do not wish to develop a missionary training institution geared to 1930 or even 1960. Our training institution should fit missionaries to carry out the great commission in 1970 and 1980."[21]

Following this short word to the steering committee, Donald embarked on a speaking trip to Michigan, Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Columbia, Peru, Brazil, New York, and Indiana, lasting from June 23 to September 13. He left the responsibility for moving the Institute of Church Growth office

[18] Ross J. Griffeth, letter to Alan Tippett, June 12, 1965.

[19] David Allan Hubbard, letter to Ross J. Griffeth, June 2, 1965.

[20] News release from Fuller Theological Seminary, June 9, 1965.

[21] Donald McGavran, letter to members of the steering committee, June 18, 1965.

and the belongings of home to Mary and his secretary Betty Klebe. When he returned to the United States on September 13, it would be to Pasadena rather than to Eugene.

Donald was always a person to get things done, something President Hubbard and others at Fuller soon discovered. Letters were flying back and forth between McGavran and Hubbard during June, with the result that Hubbard was constantly issuing memos to various people at Fuller regarding the move of the Institute of Church Growth. One day a member of Hubbard's staff came into his office waving a handful of memos and commenting, "Everybody's working for McGavran!" When Mary McGavran and Betty Klebe arrived at Hubbard's office, he pointed to the sign on Donald's door that read "Private" and quipped, "Instead of 'Private,' that should say 'General.'" [22]

The whole matter of opening the School of World Mission and the Institute of Church Growth so quickly seemed no less than a miracle. Part of what made the turnaround workable was the existence of the program at Northwest Christian College. Essentially, the first semester of classes in fall 1965 was just an extension of what had already been going on in Eugene. The initial brochure advertising the new school and institute clearly stated,

> In transferring the Institute of Church Growth from Northwest Christian College to Fuller Theological Seminary and beginning the graduate School of World Mission, the administration announces that during the fall quarter the course of studies of the Institute of Church Growth will be followed. In the winter and spring the School of World Mission courses will be offered as supplementary.[23]

The first session of the School of World Mission found the following course offerings available:

| | |
|---|---|
| Principles and Procedures in Church Growth I | D. McGavran |
| Animism and Church Growth I | A. Tippett |
| Anthropology and Mission I | A. Tippett |
| Case Study in Melanesian Church Growth | A. Tippett |
| Church Growth in Latin America | William Read |
| Research Seminar in Church Growth | A. Tippett and D. McGavran |
| Research Methods | A. Tippett |
| Reading and Conference | Independent |
| Theology of Missions to Resistant Populations | Warren Webster[24] |

[22] Betty Klebe, letter to Donald McGavran, September 8, 1965.

[23] Brochure from the School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, September 1965.

[24] Registration form from School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth, September 1965.

Fourteen students in total, all missionaries representing twelve boards and eleven different countries, were hard at work, with each student carrying twelve units. An additional fourteen BD students were also enrolled that first quarter. Tuition was $21 per quarter hour. The faculty was comprised of McGavran, Tippett, and two lecturers, William Read and Warren Webster. During the second quarter, thirteen career missionaries and twenty-five BD students were registered.[25]

The on-time arrival of Alan Tippett from Australia was a minor miracle, as Donald explained in a letter to the steering committee on October 18:

> Alan Tippett's arrival in the United States on the first day of school was a miracle. His visa seemed impossible to obtain—the immigrant quota was filled up for three years. Through the intercession of Billy Graham with President Johnson a way was opened, and Alan Tippett is here!—a tower of strength, a first-class anthropologist, and an ardent missionary who takes the great commission seriously.[26]

Calling Tippett's on-time arrival a miracle was nearly an understatement. Since he was under contract to teach at Northwest Christian College, the college had to apply for the visa on his behalf. President Griffeth wrote a forceful letter to the American Consul in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, on March 9, 1965, informing them that Tippett had a confirmed contract, an assured salary, and a house for his family. In addition, he told the Consul that Tippett's coming in September 1965 was "absolutely essential." "Let me assure you," Griffeth wrote, "that in his specialty he stands alone. He cannot be replaced."[27]

Tippett was doing all he could to expedite copies of official documents—diplomas, transcripts of grades, and work records—to President Griffeth so he could forward them to the Consul, but these matters moved along slowly. In an attempt to help, Tippett wrote the American Consul in Australia only to discover that the quota year ended on June 30 and that Australia had already met its quota. While the Consul official was sympathetic, Tippett was informed that the school should be prepared to renew his petition for a visa several more times.[28] In fact, there was no chance of him getting into

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[25] Donald A. McGavran, "School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth: Report of the Dean on the Progress of the School—September 1965-April 1966." According to this report, the missionaries enrolled represented American Baptist, Conservative Baptist, Assemblies of God, Evangelical United Brethren, Evangelical Covenant, Missionary Aviation Fellowship, Latin American Mission, Mennonite Church, Overseas Missionary Fellowship, Overseas Crusades, United Presbyterian, and Wycliffe Bible Translators.

[26] Donald McGavran, letter to members of the steering committee, October 18, 1965.

[27] Ross J. Griffeth, letter to the American Consul, Australia, March 9, 1965.

[28] Alan Tippett, letter to Ross J. Griffeth, June 2, 1965.

the United States for the next several years, possibly not even before 1968! The Consul in Melbourne advised Tippett "not to sell any property or give up any job because there was just no way."[29]

Griffeth continued to do what he could despite the fact that he was retiring at the end of June, and, of course, that the Institute of Church Growth was going to be moved to Fuller. He genuinely cared for the future of the Institute and worked as long as possible to make sure Tippett could secure his visa. Griffeth was to meet to interview with an immigration official on June 17 in Portland, Oregon. He went to that meeting with great hope that he might be able to obtain a visa in time to get Tippett into the United States by September. The meeting resulted in the official approving Tippett for First Preference Quota immigration status. While this did not insure his admittance to the United States, it did give him some advantage in seeking admission. Yet, the lack of a confirmed entry visa left Tippett in limbo, not being able to make plans to pack, schedule transportation to the United States, or dispose of his lease. Griffeth's retirement escalated his uncertainty. As Donald was traveling in South America all summer, the continuing responsibility to get Tippett into the United States fell to President Hubbard.

On the surface, this appeared to be just another roadblock in obtaining Tippett's visa, but in hindsight, it proved to be providential. Hubbard called a Fuller trustee, Billy Graham, who in turn called President Lyndon Johnson directly at the White House. Not too long after that, an official from the State Department contacted President Hubbard and told him that he was going at this in the wrong way. The State Department official suggested that Fuller make a new application on behalf of Tippett for a non-quota visa as a minister of religion. As Hubbard had all of the needed information, he submitted a new application immediately. Evidently, information had already gone out to the American Consul in Australia to grant a visa to Tippett, and they were just waiting for the final word.[30]

Alan and Edna Tippett were unaware that all of this was happening in the United States. Alan was to begin teaching classes on September 28. When he visited the Consul on September 7, however, officials again gave sympathy but no encouragement. A week later, the Consul called and asked Tippett to return to the office. When Tippett arrived, the Consul announced, "I don't know how you did it."[31] Tippet had been granted a ministerial non-quota visa on a case presented to the president by Billy Graham. From that point until departure, Alan and Edna Tippet's life became a frantic pace of obtaining police clearances, finding flight connections, transferring money from the United States, getting medical exams for three people (their daughter Robyn would be coming along), and packing and storing their belongings.

[29] Tippett, *No Continuing City*, 318.

[30] Mary Ann Klebe, letter to Donald McGavran, September 8, 1965.

[31] Tippett, *No Continuing City*, 318.

They arrived in Los Angeles at 6:40 a.m. on September 28. Mary McGavran picked them up at the airport and drove directly to the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary, where McGavran had already started Tippett's class. He appeared in the classroom before the coffee break!

Most of the students enrolled at both the School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth were mid-term missionaries home on furlough. Sometimes a student attended the school for just one term, while others stayed for an entire year working on a master's degree. Non-degree students had to complete projects, but degree students were required to write a thesis. As the program grew, visiting lecturers shared the workload. Some of the early lecturers were Warren Webster, J.T. Seamands, Jack Shepherd, David Barrett, J.B. Kessler, and J. Edwin Orr, who eventually became a regular.

The theme of the Missions Conference that semester, held October 19–22, was *The Redeemed Community: Born to Care*. Cal Guy, professor of missions at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, was the conference speaker. Both McGavran and Tippett participated in panel discussions during the conference, with Warren Webster moderating both panels.

The largest project ever completed by the Institute of Church Growth was known as CGRILA (Church Growth Research in Latin America), and it commenced immediately in the fall of 1965. With a $54,000 funding from Lily Endowment, Inc., transferred from NCC to Fuller, they could not waste time in fulfilling research and publication responsibilities. Therefore, under Donald's tutoring, three research students—Bill Read, Harmon Johnson, and Victor Monterroso—were prepared during the first term to undertake the interviews and data gathering. The three were experienced missionaries from different parts of Latin America and from different denominations, but all three were fluent in multiple languages. Their job was to travel throughout Latin America for one year conducting interviews and collecting data on the growth of the churches. Tippett led them through a research methods class and then on a preliminary field assignment in Mexico for two weeks in December 1965. Donald insisted that they learn "how to keep the screws on their spending the budget funds."[32] After returning, they met with him to review and prepare for the real research trip to begin in January 1966.

• • •

President Alan Hubbard developed a ten-year plan for the School of Mission and Institute of Church Growth and presented it to the steering committee in early 1966. It revealed that the student body was to be limited to fifty career missionaries taught by a full-time faculty of six, along with several visiting lecturers. Ten thousand dollars was earmarked to create a notable

[32] Tippett, *No Continuing City,* 345.



 

mission library, and a separate facility to house the new school was in the planning stages.[33] Donald was already in the process of searching for the next member of the faculty. Notably, Donald "called attention to the need to find God's man to pick up the program a few years hence when he retires. The Dean should be a man of missionary experience and academic competence who has wide knowledge of many countries and is dedicated to the spread of the Gospel."[34] The committee was to submit names of suitable men.

Donald's mother Helen McGavran had been sixty-nine years old when her husband John had passed away in 1939. She continued to live with her daughter Grace in Indianapolis, Indiana, and later in Vancouver, Washington, where Grace worked as a freelance writer for several mission boards. Throughout the years, Helen carried on regular correspondence with all of her children, passing on news of her scattered family. She remained vigorous and healthy until just a few days before her death on January 10, 1966, in Vancouver, Washington. Donald flew to Vancouver from Pasadena, California, to see her. When he walked into her room, Helen briefly woke up and said, "Oh, Don, you have come." These were her last spoken words. She passed away that evening at the age of ninety-five, rejoicing in the achievements of her family, especially Donald and Edward. Edward Grafton McGavran became a leading figure in the field of public health and the dean of the School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina. He served as a member of the American Public Health Executive Committee and traveled widely around the world setting up schools of public health.

"Why Neglect Gospel-Ready Masses?" was published in the April 29, 1966, edition of *Christianity Today*. The article was a significant statement of Donald's church growth point of view, covering several salient aspects that critics, both then and now, continue to miss. The opening paragraph declared one of the major beliefs of the Church Growth School of Thought:

> The rise of receptive populations is a great new fact in missions. There have always been populations in which many are willing to hear the Gospel and become responsible members of Christ's Church. But today their number in all the continents has risen so sharply that they have become an outstanding feature of the mission landscape.[35]

While some observers of the missionary enterprise felt the day of missions was dead, Donald began saying that the decade of the 1960s was, in fact, the

[33] The total budget for 1966-67 came to $89,000. Of this $44,000 was for faculty, staff, and visiting lecturers; another $12,000 for research fellows; and $10,000 for library acquisitions.

[34] Donald A. McGavran, "School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth: Report of the Dean on the Progress of the School—September 1965–April 1966."

[35] Donald McGavran. "Why Neglect Gospel-Ready Masses?" *Christianity Today* (April 29, 1966): 17.

sunrise of missions. "To be sure," he admitted, "there are still many resistant and rebellious populations with faces set like flint against the Savior."[36] Yet, in his travels he saw the openness of people to the gospel from Brazil to Africa to Taiwan, and he believed that the concept of receptivity and resistance demanded a theological understanding. "Receptivity does not arise by accident. Men become open to the Gospel, not by any blind interplay of brute forces, but by God's sovereign will."[37] Thus, he believed it is a key principle of church growth thought that "Gospel-accepters have a higher priority than Gospel-rejecters."[38] According to Donald, this principle of receptivity and resistance had guided the early church. When the apostle Paul encountered resistance, he moved on toward those who were receptive. "It pleases God for the missionary enterprise to determine its main thrusts in light of the growth of the Church. The bold acceptance of church growth as the goal of Christian mission is a theological decision, the bedrock on which correct action in the fact of receptivity rests."[39]

Donald based such a theological decision on "both an acceptance of the Bible as the true, authoritative revelation of God and a living experience of Christ." Further, he affirmed that "the principles of church growth operate through the power of Christ and his Word and can be used effectively only by ardent, Spirit-filled Christians."[40] Based on this theological bedrock, he then listed six principles of church growth:

> The first is to increase evangelism everywhere, and especially among growing churches.
>
> The second principle of church growth is to multiply unpaid leaders among the new converts, training them to go out and communicate Christ to their unsaved relatives, neighbors, and fellow laborers.
>
> The third principle is to take full advantage of insights now available from the sciences concerned with man.
>
> The fourth principle of church growth is to evangelize responsive populations to the utmost.
>
> The fifth principle is to seek, without lessening emphasis on individual salvation, the joint accession of many persons within one society at a time.

The sixth principle of harvest is to carry on extensive research in church growth.[41]

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 18.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 18 and 29.

It was a certainty, Donald believed, that using the newly stated church growth principles would result in great numbers of the lost coming to faith in Christ and into his church.

Inauguration of Donald as Dean of Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth took place on Tuesday evening, September 27, 1966. The service was held in the seminary chapel, with Alan Tippet giving the invocation and William LaSor reading the Scripture. President Hubbard gave a charge to the new dean.

The fall of 1966 saw the new school off and running in high gear. To answer some of the questions the new school raised, Donald published two additional articles, both released in October. "The Church Growth Point of View and Christian Mission" was published in the *Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship*. Once again, Donald pressed the point that church growth is "rooted in theology. God wants church growth. He wants His lost children found. The multiplication of churches is theologically required."[42] He also addressed the priority of evangelism over social work and called for more church planting or multiplication as the means to reach the world for Christ. In his second article, also released in October 1966 in *World Vision Magazine*, he again focused on the goal of ministry. "One Goal or Many?" asked the question: *Are all Christian activities of equal value?* He concluded that there was one primary goal: every person on Earth must have a real option of accepting or rejecting Christ. This meant that "each [person] must hear it [the Gospel] in his own tongue and thought forms, and under such circumstances that becoming Christian is a real option to him."[43]

Underneath the umbrella of Fuller Theological Seminary, the new School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth (SWM and ICG) was able to grant a Master of Arts degree. The program had better financial support, accreditation was stronger, and the interplay of academic discussion was more energetic than had been the case in Oregon. Despite these new positives, however, life at the new school was far from ideal for McGavran and Tippett. They now had to establish themselves as peers relating to other professors at Fuller Theological Seminary, many of them professional theologians, and some highly critical of missionaries. This caused Donald and Tippett to feel they had to prove themselves at every point to the larger Fuller faculty. Then, too, the moving of the school from Northwest Christian College to Fuller Theological Seminary required the examination of the curriculum. NCC had rewarded graduates only a certificate in church growth, but at FTS, the accreditation of a graduate school had to be preserved. Thus, the

[42] Donald McGavran, "The Church Growth Point of View and Christian Mission," *Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship*, no. 13 (October, 1966): 8–13.

[43] Donald A. McGavran, "One Goal or Many?" *World Vision Magazine*, Vol. 10, No. 9 (October, 1966): 9 and 28.

standards in the new SWM-ICG were rigorous. Thesis expectations were high, grading was stiff, and reading demands were large. General standards were higher than at many colleges and universities.

Harold Lindsell, former professor of mission at Fuller, author of *A Christian Philosophy of Missions*, and editor for *Christianity Today*, delivered the Annual Lectures on Church Growth in 1966. Unknown at the time, the man destined to follow Donald as the main spokesperson for the Church Growth Movement—C. Peter Wagner—had recently made application for the new MA program in church growth studies. He was to begin his studies starting on September 20, 1967. Wagner's initial research idea was to study the Pentecostals in Chili, an idea endorsed by Donald, who wrote to Wagner in December 1966, encouraging such a study: "Be assured that I would love to have you do the Pentecostal study. It is a large gold nugget waiting to be picked up."[44] Little did they realize the direction Wagner's research would take the North American Church Growth Movement in the years ahead.

## About the Author

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[44] Donald McGavran, letter to C. Peter Wagner, December 27, 1966.

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# ENTREPRENEURIAL CHURCH PLANTING

*Jay Moon*

***Abstract***

Entrepreneurial church planting (ECP) explores innovative approaches for church planting in the marketplace. This article describes how entrepreneurial church plants leverage the networking and value creation provided by business in order to form communities of Christ followers among unchurched people. Biblical, theological, historical, and missiological support is provided to guide ECP planters. Four contemporary examples provide a paradigm of church planters that are typically suited for this approach to include the artist, social scientist, evangelist, and builder. These examples demonstrate the potential of ECP to break out of limited contexts and plant churches in larger networks of relationships in the marketplace.

## INTRODUCTION

The thick trunk and knotted branches reveal a tree that was planted over fifty years ago. The dense, red leaves glow like a fiery sunset at dusk. Normally, families would enjoy having a picnic under the shade of a beautiful tree. What is unique about this particular tree, though, is that its treetop only rises knee high. Standing at slightly over two feet high, the bonsai tree looks just like an ordinary tree except for its unusually small size.[1] What has

[1] For a colorful portrayal of the beauty of bonsai trees, see http://www.bonsaiempire.com/blog/bonsai-movie.

limited the growth of this tree that would normally tower over a five-story building? Contrary to popular opinion, bonsai trees do not use genetically modified seeds to inhibit growth; rather, the small pot is the culprit. It stifles the roots, thereby restricting tree growth. The small container, then, is limiting the tree from growing twenty-five times higher than normal.

Is it possible that church planters are planting churches in pots that are too restricted? Perhaps we are limiting the multiplication of churches by limiting the locations where they are planted; churches are often planted in separate buildings that are disengaged from the daily flow of life. Especially since the Industrial Revolution, separate spaces have been designated for home, work, and worship. For someone to come to worship at church, then, he has to intentionally leave work and home activities and enter a separate building once or twice a week. Is this restricted venue unintentionally stifling the reach of the church?[2]

This article describes entrepreneurial church planting as an approach to break out of restricted pots by planting churches in the marketplace as a means to engage those who are outside the church. For example, instead of asking millenials to leave their normal gathering locations such as coffee shops, cafés, or pizza parlors, why not plant churches in these very venues? If these businesses do not exist, why not start one that creates value for others and serves as a venue for a church plant? Leveraging the capacity of business to develop networks through their value proposition, several churches are now being planted inside these businesses. This article draws upon the fields of church planting and entrepreneurship to provide:

1. A brief definition of entrepreneurial church planting (ECP).
2. A brief sketch of the biblical, theological, missiological, and historical basis for ECP.
3. Examples of ECP churches and their church planters, along with a paradigm for ECP planters.

## 1. Definition of Entrepreneurial Church Planting

Michael Moynagh uses the term "new contextual churches" to describe the Fresh Expression movement as, "Christian communities that serve people mainly outside the church, belong to their culture, make discipleship a priority, and form a new church among the people they serve. They are a response to changes in society and to the new missional context that the church faces in the global North."[3] Fresh Expressions differentiates itself from simple churches or organic churches by requiring the new church to remain vitally connected to a mother church. On the contrary, the "mixed

[2] A similar argument is made in Ken Hemphill and Kenneth Priest, *Bonsai Theory of Church Growth*, Rev. and Exp. ed. (Tigerville, SC: Auxano Press, 2011).

[3] Michael Moynagh and Philip Harrold, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM, 2012), 103–106, Kindle.



economy" approach allows the new church plant to maintain a vital connection to the mother church while still serving distinctive contexts, resulting in extremely diverse expressions of the church. Ideally, the new church plant should look quite different than the mother church and be situated in a unique context in order to reach the unchurched.

Entrepreneurial church planters then ask the following three questions:

1. "If large segments of the population (such as millenials) will not come to the existing churches, no matter how excellent the preaching, building, or programs, then what entrepreneurial approaches can be used to reach them?"
2. The next question quickly follows, "Where are these unchurched people already gathering in the marketplace, or what type of business ventures would draw them?"
3. The resulting question asks, "How can entrepreneurs form communities of Christ followers in the marketplace through Christ-honoring business ventures?"

With the above guiding questions as their marching orders, **entrepreneurial church planting is defined as entrepreneurial approaches to form communities of Christ followers among unchurched people through businesses in the marketplace.** Entrepreneurial church plants address the need to engage public society through the marketplace via entrepreneurial means. They either start new businesses or work within existing businesses to plant a church in the business venue. While many contemporary church planters are reluctant to combine entrepreneurship and church planting, entrepreneurial church planters are eager to combine the two in order to realize the synergy gained by joining forces.

## 2. Basis for Entrepreneurial Church Plants

### *a. Biblical/Theological Basis*

In contemporary North American culture, the traditional church has found it challenging to penetrate the marketplace. Moynagh notes, "It is not easy for the church to form Christian lives in work, volunteering and leisure when the formation takes place some distance away. The teaching of practices at church may have a level of generality that fails to engage with the specifics of a person's life."[4] Yet, there are biblical examples of church plants amidst this network of relationships (where people spend the majority of their waking moments) called the marketplace.

The apostle Paul, church planter extraordinaire, provides some helpful examples. Paul worked alongside Priscilla and Aquila as a tentmaker in Corinth, the political and economic center of Greece and the "transit point for all maritime trade between Rome and the prosperous Roman province

[4] Ibid., 3885–6.

of Asia."[5] While the details of this tent-making business venue are not clear, Keener notes, "multistory apartment buildings with ground-floor workshops were common; a number of urban artisans lived onsite, sometimes in a mezzanine level above their ground-floor shops . . . many sold from shops in their homes."[6] Keener then concludes that Priscilla and Aquila may have lived on the floor above their artisan shop.

While this business aspect of the apostle Paul is often cited to support the business as mission movement, what is less discussed is the church plant that resulted from this business activity. In Romans 16:3–5 and I Corinthians 16:19, we discover that a church met at Priscilla and Aquila's home, which was likely connected to their business, thereby making this a potent entrepreneurial church planting team. Paul praised Priscilla and Aquila when he noted, "They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful for them" (Ro 16:4). Certainly, this ECP approach was noteworthy in Paul's mind.

This was not an isolated incident for Paul, though. When Paul travelled earlier to Philippi, Lydia, a "dealer in purple cloth" (Ac 16:14), responded to Paul's message, and she and her whole household were baptized. Lydia then invited Paul and his companions to her home (Ac 16:15). If we consider again that her home and business place were likely connected, then Paul was actually visiting her business venue for an extended time of teaching and ministry. Paul again met this gathering of believers at Lydia's home/business in order to encourage them before travelling on to Thessalonica (Ac 16:40). It seems that Paul "stumbled" upon this entrepreneurial church planting approach in Lydia's business and later intentionally used this approach in Priscilla and Aquila's business.

While contemporary church planters may be reluctant to engage the marketplace, Jesus did not seem to have the same reticence. In fact, he overwhelmingly engaged in topics related to the marketplace and often visited there. In addition, most of the divine interventions in the book of Acts often appeared in the marketplace. This is depicted in Figure 1 below.[7]

Far from being a side issue, Greg Forster notes that the Bible places a great deal of importance of issues and concerns in the marketplace.

> The Bible speaks at length about work and economics. Our daily labor is the subject of extensive scriptural concern; passages running from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22 teach us to view our work as central to the meaning of our lives. We are taught to view

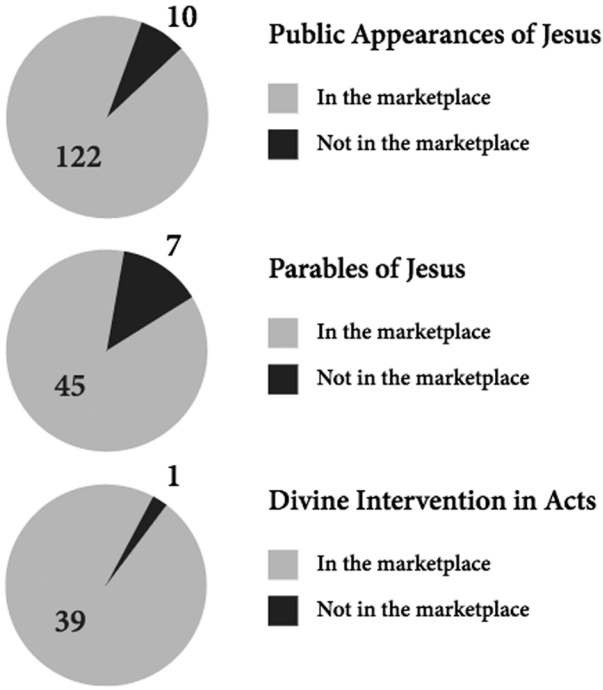
[5] Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 379.

[6] Ibid.

[7] R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 134.

**FIGURE 1.**

**Marketplace Engagement in the New Testament**




Source: R. Paul Stevens, "Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture," Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012, 134.

> our work as service to God and neighbor, to work diligently in an honest calling, and to persevere under the challenges of a fallen and broken world.[8]

While the Bible regularly and often speaks about the centrality of work in our lives, this is not often the topic of conversation from pulpits across North America. This leads Mark Greene to conclude, "The 98 percent of Christians who are not in church-paid work are, on the whole, not equipped or envisioned for mission . . . in 95 percent of their waking lives. What a tragic waste of human potential!"[9] What would it look like if "normal" Christians were to consider that it is God's plan for them to carry out their missional calling IN the marketplace and not in spite of it? How can they utilize their

[8] Greg Forster, "Introduction: What Are People Made For?" in *The Pastor's Guide to Fruitful Work and Economic Wisdom*, ed. Greg Forster and Drew Cleveland (Grand Rapids, MI: Made to Flourish, 2012), 9.

[9] Ibid., 6.

gifting, networks, and resources in mission with God through the marketplace to reach unchurched people? Instead of church planting strictly left to paid clergy, what could occur if those skilled in entrepreneurship were awakened to their role as church planters in the marketplace? Fortunately, we have historical examples to address this question.

*b. Missiological/Historical Basis*

Lesslie Newbigin and the ensuing missional church movement have pleaded for churches to regain their missional calling by finding their role in the *Missio Dei*. Newbigin states strongly, "A Christian community which makes it own self enlargement its primary task may be acting against God's will."[10] He then implores the church to

> go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusions which have remained hidden and to expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the gospel. But that will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society.[11]

Entrepreneurial church planters heed Newbigin's call to engage public life by utilizing their entrepreneurial capacities in the marketplace. The resulting businesses and faithful communities of Christ followers are to be a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom of God for the sake of those outside the walls of the existing church.

Dallas Willard recognized the tremendous potential of engaging the business world as he noted,

> What far too few either recognize or appreciate today are the opportunities available for spreading God's goodness, grace, and provision far and wide through the systems and distribution networks that exist as a direct result of industrial and commercial organizations and their professionals. Therefore the "business world" is a critical aspect that cannot be overlooked and must be fully appreciated as vital in God's plan to overcome evil with good.[12]

While not being naïve about the potential for abuse in business, Willard went on to explain the tremendous kingdom potential through business that is done with integrity, honesty, and transparency.

> Local businesspeople may be farther ahead in the ways of the kingdom than those leading a local church. Business is an amazingly

[10] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 135.

[11] Ibid., 233.

[12] Dallas Willard and Gary Black Jr., *The Divine Conspiracy Continued: Fulfilling God's Kingdom on Earth* (New York: Harper One, 2014), 201.



> effective means of delivering God's love to the world by loving, serving, and providing for one another. God loves the world (John 3:16), and because he does, he has arranged the enterprise and organization of business as a primary moving force to demonstrate this love throughout human history. Thus, the field of business and its unique knowledge fall perfectly into what can and should be understood as an essential realm of human activity that can and must come under the influence and control of God's benevolent reign.[13]

## 21ST CENTURY CIRCUIT RIDERS?

Time does not permit a review of the movements in church history whereby entrepreneurs have successfully engaged in mission, resulting in church planting. Movements such as the Nestorians, Moravians, and Wesleyans provide fruitful examples. A few brief sketches of the Wesleyan movement should suffice to demonstrate that the ECP approach has a trustworthy record of accomplishment.

John Wesley realized that there were large groups of people not coming to the church (this should sound familiar to contemporary readers living in Western contexts). Instead of waiting for them to come to the church, he realized that he needed to go where they were already gathering. He visited the marketplace, brickyards, and coal mines in order to bring the gospel to those who were unchurched instead of asking them to clean up and come into the church. Timothy Tennent notes,

> His [John Wesley's] favorite venue for preaching was graveyards and market places . . . Markets were good because there was often a cross at the market. In 18th century England it was not unusual for a cross to be placed in the trading markets as a sign to remind people of the importance of honesty in public trade. So, Wesley could be outside in a very public place, and yet preach under a cross . . . Wesley's famous line, "All the world is my parish" is rooted in these new realities: Closed pulpits and their decision to move beyond formal parish lines to embrace a rather bold ecclesiology.[14]

While hesitant at first, Wesley noted that this practice, gathering communities of Christ followers among unchurched people in the marketplace, resulted in a movement. Wesley's own business (yes, he was a businessman

[13] Ibid., 203.

[14] Timothy Tennent, "Homiletical Theology" (presentation, Opening Convocation Address, Asbury Theological Seminary, September 2016), http://timothytennent.com/2016/09/13/my-2016-opening-convocation-address-homiletical-theology/.

and theologian!) earned a profit that is estimated at four to five million dollars in today's money.[15] He realized the great good[16] that this business profit could provide in his sermon on "The Use of Money."

> In the hands of his children, it [money] is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked: It gives to the traveller and the stranger where to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of an husband to the widow, and of a father to the fatherless. We may be a defence for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain; it may be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yea, a lifter up from the gates of death![17]

Reflecting on the missional significance of business and money in the marketplace, Wesley concluded in the same sermon, "It is therefore of the highest concern that all who fear God know how to employ this valuable talent; that they be instructed how it may answer these glorious ends, and in the highest degree."[18]

Entrepreneurial church planters are cut from this same cloth, as they seek to employ their business ability and connections in order to form Christ-following communities in the marketplace. The spark generated by Wesley's entrepreneurial approach eventually spread like a wildfire on the American frontier as Methodist circuit riders traveled to locations where pioneers lived and worked. Instead of waiting for pioneers to come to the existing

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[15] David Wright, *How God Makes the World A Better Place: A Wesleyan Primer on Faith, Work, and Economic Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 2012).

[16] As a businessman and theologian, Wesley was not naïve about the potential harm of wealth, as noted in other sermons (e.g., "The Dangers of Riches"). This is instructive for contemporary contexts. Wesley saw the good and bad, yet was willing to explore this potential for kingdom benefit. Theologians that I have talked with that have personally owned their own business often have a very different perspective on profit, markets, and the general potential for businesses to create flourishing societies than those who have not owned a business.

[17] Wesley's sermons are available at http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-theological-topic/. Several of his sermons dealt with topics related to money, including:

- Sermon 87, "The Danger of Riches" (1 Ti 6:9)
- Sermon 112, "The Rich Man and Lazarus" (Lk 16:31)
- Sermon 50, "The Use of Money" (Lk 16:9)
- Sermon 51, "The Good Steward" (Lk 21:2)
- Sermon 108, "On Riches" (Mt 19:24)
- Sermon 126, "On the Danger of Increasing Riches" (Ps 62:10).

[18] Ibid.



 

churches, circuit riders preached at local gathering spots to form communities of Christ followers. Kenneth Kinghorn notes,

> Eighteenth-century conference minutes listed the preaching places precisely. Sites included taverns, cabins, stores, poorhouses, forts, barns, woodland clearings and riverboats. On one occasion, a circuit rider preached in a gambling house. A layperson said, "In Jesus' time some made the house of God a den of thieves, but now the Methodists have changed a den of thieves into a house of God . . . By the mid 1800s, American Methodism had become by far the largest and most spiritually influential religious body in the nation.[19]

The parallels between the eighteenth century Methodist circuit riders and twenty-first century entrepreneurial church planters are compelling. Both saw their missional calling and were willing to engage the locations where people outside the existing church were gathering. Both were pioneers, willing to take risks in the marketplace so that the church could fulfill her role as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom of God. Both recognized the potential of entrepreneurial experiments and decided to employ their talents for the kingdom of God. Is it possible that entrepreneurial church planters are the twenty-first century equivalent of the eighteenth century Methodist circuit riders with the potential to once again transform the spiritual landscape of North America? A few contemporary examples illustrate the possibilities.

### 3. Contemporary Examples of ECP Churches and Their Church Planters

There are many examples of these twenty-first century "circuit riders" called entrepreneurial church planters in the US and UK.[20] For the purposes of this paper, four sketches are provided to illustrate a proposed paradigm of the type of church planters that may be suited to this approach. A description of the framework will set the stage for introducing ECP examples.

Michael Goldsby, entrepreneur and educator, developed a paradigm to describe the characteristics of entrepreneurs.[21] Contrary to the popular stereotype, many entrepreneurs are NOT highly caffeinated, Type A, aggressive, extroverted, lone ranger personalities. After studying many entrepreneurs, Goldsby noted that they were different from others in

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[19] Kenneth Kinghorn, "Offer Them Christ," *The Asbury Herald* 117, no. 1 (2007): 13.

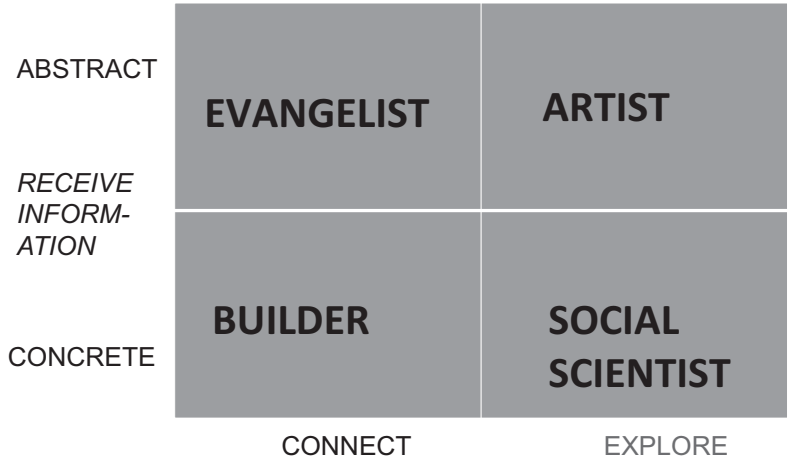
[20] The US Director of Fresh Expressions shared with me recently that over 100 Fresh Expression churches in the US alone have been started in the last few years. Asbury Theological Seminary is collaborating with Fresh Expressions for further research.

[21] Michael Goldsby, *The Entrepreneur's Tool Kit*, The Great Courses (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2014), CD.

the way that they both received new information and then acted on that information, resulting in four different types of entrepreneurs. I modified Goldsby's model to describe entrepreneurial church planters in Figure 2 below:

**FIGURE 2.**

**Types of Entrepreneurs**




A. Artist (Abstract Explorer): The artist type of entrepreneurial church planters gathers abstract information such as preferences, values, ideals, aspirations, and dreams. Once they receive this information, they act on this by exploring new ideas and possibilities. Chris Sorenson is an example of an artist entrepreneurial church planter who planted the Camp House in Chattanooga, Tennessee.[22]

The Camp House is a coffee shop and café that serves high quality coffee and food throughout the day. The week that I visited, the Camp House advertised evening entertainment with a cover charge each night. Sitting at one of the tables scattered throughout the building on a Saturday evening, I enjoyed local musicians along with fifty to seventy-five people, most of whom were millenials. The lighting near the coffee bar reflects a more contemporary appeal, while the lighting and artwork become more "ancient" closer to the stage, which

[22] For more information, see http://thecamphouse.com/.



displays a Byzantine mosaic in the background. This artistic expression of the "ancient-future" church motivated Chris and the church planting team.

On Sunday mornings, the tables are moved to the side, and rows of chairs are arranged to accommodate the approximately150 people who attend the Anglican worship service. This ECP has now replicated itself in two other coffee shops in Chattanooga, with further expansion plans already in the works.[23]

B. Social Scientist (Concrete Explorer): The social scientist type of entrepreneurial church planter gathers concrete information such as facts, figures, and demographics but then utilizes that information to explore possible connections with other people and places. Bob Armstrong is an example of a social scientist who started the Blue Jean Selma church[24] and the Arsenal Place Business Accelerator in Selma, Alabama.

Judge Armstrong observed the significant problems related to poverty, unemployment, and racial concerns. As a result, he started a church and business incubator as a kingdom strategy to overcome these pressing issues in the city. Six businesses have been incubated so far. The first business, G Mommas Cookies, has now expanded due to its widespread success in sales at all of the Cracker Barrel restaurants nationwide and in Wal Mart stores across the southeastern United States.

Blue Jean Selma church gathers a very diverse group of two hundred people each week. Armstrong notes, "We are black, white, rich, poor, middle class, addicts, bank presidents, the mentally handicapped, doctors, lawyers, blue collar workers, unemployed, young, & old. We are fully integrated."[25] Using the information about the tensions in the city, the Blue Jean Selma church is transforming the city as they incubate and connect various businesses in the city.

C. Evangelist (Abstract Connecter): The evangelist gathers abstract information such as preferences, values, ideals, aspirations, and dreams, like the artist does. Where the evangelist differs from the artist, though, is that the evangelist uses this information to connect people to one another. Sean Mikschl is an example of the evangelist church planter in Nicholasville, Kentucky.

Sean intentionally works alongside servers, waiters, and waitresses at a local restaurant in order to understand them through authentic relationships that form through working together. What is unique is that his church meets at 11 PM on Thursday evening, since they get off work at that time and are available to gather. What is even more intriguing is that this simple church meets at a local bar, since

[23] http://mchatt.org/.

[24] For more information, see http://bluejeanselma.wixsite.com/bluejean.

[25] Bob Armstrong, "A Proposal for The Millennial Project 2016" (Unpublished, 2016), 1.

previous venues, including Sean's own home, did not prove to be appealing in the past. While this group has varied in attendance, about fifteen people regularly gather for prayer, worship, and Scripture teaching.

D. Builder (Concrete Connecter): Like the social scientist, the builder gathers concrete information such as facts, figures, and demographics. The builder differs from the social scientist, though, in that the builder uses this information to connect people and places together. Lonnie Riley exemplifies the builder church planter in Lynch, Kentucky.

Riley observed the deep poverty and despair when he first moved to this former coal-mining town. He initially started to serve the needs of the community through simple acts of kindness, such as trimming hedges and giving away cookies. Gradually, he obtained several buildings in order to start fifteen different businesses and ministries to include a coffee shop, gas station, hotel, retreat center, fitness center, veterinary clinic, bike rental, community center, educational facility, horse stable, and trolley ride service. This led to a church plant, the Community Christian Center, and revitalization of other churches in the community. Riley describes this experience,

> What started off as a meeting of the Meridzo Center Ministries staff has evolved into a safe and friendly public place for people from all walks of life to gather together for praise and worship, Bible study, and warm family fellowship—all in the name and the loving Spirit of Jesus Christ.[26]

This ministry has resulted in significant transformation of the Lynch community as recently portrayed in the documentary, *It's Only Cookie Dough*.[27]

## CONCLUSIONS

After serving the Anglican Church in the UK for many years, former Bishop Graham Cray concluded, "The long established ways of doing church are working less and less."[28] As a result, he was instrumental in forming the Fresh Expressions[29] movement in the UK, which has spread to the US and other areas.[30] Innovative approaches for church planting are needed to stem the decline of the church's influence in the Western world.

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[26] http://meridzo.com/community-christian-center/.

[27] *It's Only Cookie Dough* (Lynnwood, WA: Sentinel Group, 2016), DVD.

[28] Graham Cray, conversation with the author in York, England, January 2017.

[29] ECP is a subset of Fresh Expressions since not every Fresh Expression is engaged in the marketplace, though some are.

[30] For example, Sang Rak Joo's forthcoming dissertation research at Asbury Theological Seminary documents the increased social capital resulting from recent ECP in South Korea.



 

This article recommends church planters consider the potential of the marketplace to create large networks based upon authentic relationships through mutual exchange. I am not suggesting, however, that the churches should be operated as businesses; rather, I am suggesting that businesses can be operated with a focus on church planting. ECP must have a double bottom line: missional purpose and financial viability. I am NOT encouraging simply one or the other. If there is not a missional purpose, then ECP can devolve into a business that does not seek to worship God (like Jesus condemned in John 2 when he cleansed the temple). If ECP are not financially viable, then they will not last. By focusing on both missional purpose and financial viability, entrepreneurial church planting will likely open new possibilities for church planters, to include:

1. Teams: Unlike the common myth of a lone tycoon working silently in his garage, most entrepreneurs require a team. Cooney noted, "It is arguable that despite the romantic notion of the entrepreneur as a lone hero, the reality is that successful entrepreneurs either built teams about them or were part of a team throughout."[31] ECP has the potential to energize and engage laity in the church who beforehand did not see their vital role in the kingdom. Chris Sorenson, planter of the Camp House, confided in me, "If I had to do this church plant all over again, the first person that I would hire would be an accountant!" How many accountants in the church presently see their vital role in using their skills for the mission of God? ECP can energize the "secular professionals"[32] in the church so that they now have a front seat at the church planting discussion table.
2. Ecclesiology: While great advances in theology have been gained throughout the history of the church, its very survival has required cultural adaptation.[33] If the cultural straight jackets are laid aside, and new ideas are explored for the shaping of the church, then new possibilities for the flourishing of the church can be realized. In short, the bonsai plant can break free from the small containers that limit growth, and the same seed can be planted among less restricted locations for wider reach. While care has to be taken to ensure the church's fidelity to her identity, the mission of the church requires a deep engagement with the surrounding culture, including the vast network of relationships called the marketplace.

[31] Thomas M. Cooney, "Editorial: What Is an Entrepreneurial Team?," *International Small Business Journal* 23, no. 3 (2005): 226.

[32] Consider the vital fields in which businesses engage that can now be energized to fulfill their missional calling, such as finance, accounting, management, marketing, to name a few.

[33] A.F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY and Edinburgh, Scotland: Orbis Books and T&T Clark, 1996).

3. Lay/Bi-vocational Ministry: While the employment of full-time pastors will not end, ECP can consider the value of pastors remaining connected to their own circles of exchange in the marketplace. For example, an ECP that started because of a tech startup found that the business addressed some of the most pressing needs for jobs in the city. As a result, the pastors did not want to leave their work for full-time pastoring; otherwise, this would remove them from the very context to influence the surrounding culture.[34] At the very least, ECP allows church planters and their stakeholders to explore various questions and options for the employment and compensation of church planters.

A good question is better than a good answer, since good questions may lead to further discovery. Since this discussion of church planting in the marketplace is ongoing, I would like to conclude with the following set of questions for church leaders and planters to continue the conversation:

- When/how does your church engage issues in the marketplace?
- What messages are the laity hearing about their role in the marketplace to fulfill their missional calling (e.g., biblical, theological, missiological, and historical sources)?
- Who are the entrepreneurs in your church?
- How could these entrepreneurs be engaged to form teams that reach the unchurched in the marketplace through ECP?

Abraham Kuyper famously claimed, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"[35] Entrepreneurial church plants attempt to live out this bold assertion by planting churches in the marketplace where Jesus says, "Mine!"

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[34] A forthcoming PhD dissertation by Samuel Lee at Asbury Theological Seminary documents this ECP. For a partial description, see Samuel Lee, "Can We Measure the Success and Effectiveness of Entrepreneurial Church Planting?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 40, no. 4 (October 2016): 327–45.

[35] Abraham Kuyper, *Goodreads*, a, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/385896.Abraham_Kuyper.



 

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## About the Author

Jay Moon, along with his wife and four children, served 13 years as a missionary with SIM in Ghana, West Africa, among the Builsa people, focusing on church planting and water development. He is presently a professor of evangelism and church planting and the director of the Office of Faith, Work, and Economics at Asbury Theological Seminary. He has authored two books, with a third scheduled for release in fall 2017, entitled, *Intercultural Discipleship: Learning from Global Approaches to Spiritual Formation*, in the Encountering Mission Series. In addition to his participation in church plants, Jay has three small businesses and has completed his MBA in May 2017.

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# HIGHER EDUCATION AS MISSION

*Lewis Edwards and Kenneth Nehrbass*

***Abstract***

While missiologists have been paying attention to business as mission, few have studied the value of securing teaching positions in foreign secular universities as a missionary method. This article bases "Higher Education as Mission" on the Apostle Paul's four-fold taxonomy for reaching the educated and uneducated at home and abroad. Teaching in universities can be a legitimate platform for gaining an entry point in restricted access countries. More than that, as Christian scholars pursue excellence in their own academic fields, they can model to the future elites of societies what it means to follow Jesus in every aspect of our lives.

While the apostle Paul's calling was to be an ambassador to everyone, he imagined reaching people in distinct categories. Paul said, "I have a great sense of obligation to people in our culture and to people in other cultures, to the educated and uneducated alike" (Ro 1:14 NLT). This fourfold taxonomy of peoples is more than just a creative way to express "everyone." Paul wanted the Roman people to know that he feels obligated to people of all classes of society, including all education levels, in all parts of the world "to preach God's Good News" (Ro 1:15).

In this article, we will describe how "Higher Education as Mission" can reach one of Paul's categories of people—the most educated abroad. First, we will outline why secular universities are a prime place for this type of outreach and will briefly discuss some advantages and perspectives regarding Higher Education as Mission. Then we will raise some of the dangers of



 

the method and will discuss the future of higher education as a method for reaching elites abroad. We will begin with the apostle Paul, who was one of the greatest missionary strategists.

## THE APOSTLE PAUL'S FOUR CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE

Stan Wallace suggested that in Romans 1:14, we see that the apostle Paul sensed an obligation to preach the Good News to four categories of people.[1] The first category is the uneducated people in Paul's own culture. While he could have increased his social capital by only pursuing the educated people in Rome, Paul made it clear that he felt obligated to preach the Good News to both the educated and uneducated there. Jesus' ministry was a great example of treating both equally. Jesus talked with women in lower classes, he dined with hated tax-collectors, and he challenged the wealthy and the educated religious. Uneducated people are not as popular in any society, and Paul wanted the people in Rome to know that he felt an obligation to the often forgotten uneducated. All people in Rome were within Paul's target audience to preach the Good News.

Second, Paul felt a sense of obligation to preach the Good News to the uneducated in other cultures. Despite the enormity of the Roman Empire at the time, Paul felt an obligation to reach those who were even beyond Rome with the Good News.

Third, Paul felt a sense of obligation to the *educated* people within the Roman culture. Some versions of this verse use the term "civilized world" or "Greeks" instead of "this culture," and some use "wise" instead of "educated." Nevertheless, Paul felt obligated to preach the Good News to these elites at home.

The last category of people Paul was obliged to reach was the educated in *other* cultures. Paul helped Roman Christians understand that people of other cultures are just as important as the Romans. In sum, Paul tried to highlight the idea that all people, no matter their culture or educational achievements, are equally important to him and to God.

## ARE CHRISTIANS REACHING THESE FOUR CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE?

Do Christians in today's world feel this same sense of obligation as Paul? What has been the Christian response to reaching the four categories of people Paul described in the first chapter of Romans?

Many ministries and organizations are working on reaching the most uneducated people at home by distributing food and clothing and provid-

[1] Stan Wallace, "Global Scholars 101," *Global Scholars*, accessed November 4, 2016, https://www.global-scholars.org/global-scholars-101/.

ing housing needs to the homeless. Furthermore, there are ministries that develop trade skills, such as carpentry, for those without such education. Similarly, there are many ministries that focus their efforts on the uneducated abroad. Many organizations provide relief efforts in times of natural or civil disaster. Some send teachers to provide basic education and training in health, finance, and the arts. Still others work to provide theological training in contexts where such education is not available. While there is always more that can be done in this area, many ministry organizations focus on the uneducated in other cultures.

By contrast, fewer ministries focus on the educated people either locally or abroad. Some college-age ministries within local churches focus on ministering to university students, and a few para-church organizations focus specifically on ministering to university students and faculty. However, fewer ministries seek to minister to the educated in other cultures.

Some of the para-church university ministries have international reach and have been successful in preaching the Good News to university students. However, few strategically place Christians in positions of influence among the educated in other cultures. What kind of influence would a Christian economist have on economists in other cultures? Might a Christian geophysicist be God's mouthpiece to geophysicists in other cultures? In the university, can Christian professors have influence on students inside and outside the classroom, which leads to sharing the Good News? Churches and Christian mission organizations need to feel the sense of obligation that Paul felt and find ways to preach the Good News to them. All four categories need attention, but this category is lacking the same attention as the other three.

## UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ARE IN A PERIOD OF OPENNESS

The time one spends at university is a state of openness in which there are reformulations of the learner's understandings and shifts in his outlooks.[2] The liminality among university students is a key opportunity to introduce them to Christianity and the Good News. First, university students are entering adulthood. During this time, young adults are forming opinions, shaping values, creating lasting friendships, and developing their minds. Second, the university students are usually separated from their parents by geographical distance. This separation can open greater opportunity for the students to ask questions about life, society, and God. Third, the university experience challenges students to think deeply, to study, to research,

[2] Jan Meyer and Ray Land, "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Epistemological Considerations and a Conceptual Framework for Teaching and Learning," *Higher Education* 49, no. 3 (2005): 373–388.



 

and to write. These challenges bring on stress and uncertainty, and many students need someone they trust to give advice. Fourth, many university students respect their professors and can be transformed by such influential persons.

## UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ARE EVERYWHERE

In 2011, approximately 183 million students were enrolled in universities worldwide.[3] Since the United States had approximately 20.3 million university students in 2013,[4] this means there are approximately 160 million university students in other cultures. This is a large target audience of people who are especially open to trying out new ideas like Christianity.

## THE UNIVERSITY-EDUCATED GO ON TO HAVE INFLUENCE

The educated population in the world is the population involved in policy making, which affects society. If policy makers, leaders, and instrumental influencers are Christians or had exposure to the positive effects of the gifts of the Spirit, society may change in a positive way.

This is one of the primary reasons why it is important to have Christian educators in secular universities. Being an educator, not just a campus minister, is a great opportunity to address the educated in other cultures. Christian educators in the United States should heed Paul's great sense of obligation to the educated in other cultures and find ways to connect to them.

One misunderstanding about Christian educators in secular universities is the need for formal theological training prior to being sent out as an ambassador of Christ, which is not necessary to share the Good News with the educated in other cultures. Theological training is beneficial, but the Christian church must not require it for those who are called by God to preach the Good News to all people in all cultures. Instead, a thorough vetting process should be in place to make sure the one who goes is a Christian who correctly understands God's story.

God can and will use Christian educators in all disciplines to share the Good News to the educated in other cultures. Christians who teach engineering can have great influence on non-Christian engineering students through various means. Some of these engineering students will go on to have significant influence in others' lives. Likewise, Christians who teach business can

[3] Wolfram Alpha Knowledgebase, 2016, accessed December 6, 2016, http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=how+many+students+in+the+world/.

[4] National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 105.20," 2015, accessed December 6, 2016. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/ dt15_105.20.asp?current=yes.

make an impact on future business leaders who might influence hundreds or thousands of people. No matter the discipline, Christian educators in secular universities can have significant influence for today and the future.

## THE WHOLE FAMILY CAN MINISTER TO THE MOST-EDUCATED

In addition to all that Christian educators can do in reaching the educated in other cultures through teaching and research, their family members can also participate in the work by inviting students to the home, by going out for a picnic with students, by helping with laundry or other personal needs of students, or simply by being safe people with whom to talk. I (Lewis) am the spouse of one such educator. When we first moved to a new culture, I did not know what I would do with my time. Before long, some university students learned that I have a particular skill that they wanted to learn. Five years later, I see how God has used me and my skill to address the obligation to reach the educated in other cultures with the Good News. I have many opportunities to share Jesus' love with the students. This is just one way which God allows me, as family of the educator, to be involved in reaching the educated in another culture.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AS A BUSINESS-AS-MISSION MODEL

Some Christian educators in overseas, secular universities see their work under the umbrella of business-as-mission (BAM). In this case, their "business model" is to educate students in a given discipline. Yet, unlike most BAM cases, Christian educators do not need to become experts on local laws to start and operate their own businesses, because the universities where they work have already worked out these regulations. Also, the university is sometimes willing to help with the transition period of obtaining a visa, moving to a new country, and settling into a home.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AS A PLATFORM MINISTRY MODEL

Some might see Christian educators in overseas, secular universities as a platform-model ministry. Platform ministries are those ministries that give the missionary a platform from which they can minister. This is similar to the BAM approach; however, the university platform is not seen as a ministry in and of itself. It is simply the catalyst to get the missionary among the target people and can give status in the community. Those who engage in platform ministry often make a clear distinction between their occupation and ministry. Most of the ministry opportunities cannot happen at work, but work is the platform that gives the missionary a context to fulfill this "obligation" to preach the Good News to the educated people in society.



 

## HIGHER EDUCATION AS A HOLISTIC MINISTRY MODEL

Some see higher education as a holistic approach to missionary work. Holistic ministry focuses on people's whole state of being instead of only their spiritual state. Many Christians and missionaries focus primarily on conversions. The task for these missionaries is to share the Good News with non-Christians. A holistic ministry focuses on a person's soul, but also the mind, body, and overall well-being. The rationale for holistic ministry is rooted in the understanding that God created human beings, not just souls, so Christians should care for the whole person.

Christian educators care both for people's minds and their futures. Education is mind-engaging activity in which people learn, gain knowledge, and develop understanding. Students' minds grow and develop, and new ideas are brought to light. Minds and knowledge are valuable to God. In Proverbs, it is written, "The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly," (Pr 15:14 NIV). Later in Proverbs, the writer again noted the importance of gaining knowledge, "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out" (Pr 18:15). There is great value in gaining knowledge. The writer of Proverbs stressed the immense value of knowledge when he wrote, "lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel" (Pr 20:15). When the Pharisees asked Jesus, "'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: '"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment."'"

John Piper wrote a book dedicated to the importance of using the mind titled, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God*.[5] In this, Piper explores how Christians can love God through engaging the mind. God values minds, and a holistic ministry will value them, too. Additionally, when the students graduate from university and enter the workforce, they can initiate change. Thus, for an educator to participate in developing the minds of people means that the educator is involved in future change. Lord willing, such changes will be God-honoring changes in local communities and in the world. This leads to the final method of community transformation.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AS A COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION MODEL

Others see the work of Christian educators in overseas universities as a way to bring about Christ-like community transformation. They provide quality education, positively influencing the lives of future leaders, shaping the worldviews of the future generation, and softening a generation to the person and work of Jesus. First, quality education will bring about posi-

[5] John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

tive change in society. Second, the upcoming leaders of a society will steer their community in the future. The leaders will evaluate existing policies and seek to implement new policies. Having a positive influence on future leaders while they are in university will shape how they will make those decisions.

Third, the Christian educator can provide biblical teachings on various topics within the classroom that will shape the worldviews of the next generation. This leads to the fourth way Christian educators bring about community transformation, and that is through softening a generation of hearts to Jesus. Exposing university students to Jesus, his life, and his teachings will serve to soften their hearts toward him in the future. As a generation of university students enters society and starts families of their own, they will have had exposure to Christians and to Jesus, which God may use to turn a generation (or more) toward himself. The work of an educator has immediate and long-term effects, and God can water the seeds planted during the university experience in innumerable ways in the future.

## HISTORY SHOWS THE SUCCESS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AS MISSION

History has seen the great value of universities—the educated in all cultures. Many important discoveries have happened on university campuses. Additionally, universities have been an epicenter of change in Christian thought and missions. Hodge wrote an online article about how most of the universities in the United States and United Kingdom that started around the period of Enlightenment originally were faith-based, Christian institutions.[6] In fact, some of the most prestigious universities have a strong Christian heritage that has diminished in recent decades. Christians need to re-enter the arena of world-class scholarship through excellent teaching and research around the world.

Universities have seen great revivals with long-lasting effects. Ministries such as InterVarsity and the Urbana Conference are some of the results of what God has brought about through university students. The students who engaged in these great revivals were committed to seeing God work through them and through their university to change the world. I believe the university can continue to be the place where great revivals occur and where world-changing ministries begin.

Many missionaries understood the importance of higher education. Christian missionaries have founded universities around the world that have resulted in societal change, especially in East Asia. Woodberry noted

[6] Bodie Hodge, "Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Oxford—Once Christian?" *Answers Magazine*, June 27, 2007, accessed November 13, 2016, https://answersingenesis.org/christianity/harvard-yale-princeton-oxford-once-christian.



 

several societal changes that were brought about because of the higher educational institutions that were started by missionaries.[7] These changes include increased social mobility, new opportunities for women, promotion of health and hygiene, and printing presses built for books, which resulted in increased literacy in society. Perhaps this method of founding new universities is not feasible like it was in the past. However, Christian educators can continue to foster new societal changes through engaging the educated in other cultures by teaching in universities and supporting student-led programs that may lead to revivals and global change.

## DANGERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AS MISSION

Every strategy or approach has its down sides. Obviously, teaching in secular universities does not fit the image of the "real" missionary who pioneers unchartered territories, or creates written languages, or plants churches.

Also, Higher Education as Mission is a relatively new method of reaching people around the world with the Good News, and therefore does not have significant missiological research behind it. Some may argue that the focus is on teaching and not on "real" ministry. Rather than bifurcate the sacred (ministry) from the secular (work), we should recognize that God sees both as ways to glorify and worship him (e.g., 1 Co 10:31). Third, there may not be a need for foreign educators in certain universities. This is a possibility in some contexts; however, many universities worldwide are hiring educators. While some university educators are qualified at home, they may be unskilled at teaching cross-culturally.

The true value of the Higher Education as Mission method can be difficult to measure. How do you measure community transformation? Given that traditional mission organizations are funded by donors, they want to be able to show in measurable ways if and how they are effective. Higher Education as Mission relies heavily on relationships, and relationships are difficult to measure, though not impossible. Thorough reports from the field that summarize teaching experiences and the development of significant relationships will provide insightful information to measure the effectiveness. Many of the results of years of teaching students and influencing their lives with the Good News of Jesus will be reaped in future years through slow and subtle community transformation.

Although there are most likely more critiques of this method, the Higher Education as Mission method is not going to address the totality of the missionary enterprise. It will not reach many in the world who are suffering

[7] Robert Woodberry, "The Social Impact of Missionary Higher Education," *Christian Responses to Asian Challenges: A Glocalization View on Christian Higher Education in East Asia* (2007): 99–120.

physically from poverty and poor conditions. Many methods and ministries are already working in this arena. The purpose of this method is to provide one way that Christians can address the significant obligation to reach the educated in other cultures.

## THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AS MISSION

Many highly educated Christians will desire to work and teach cross-culturally as their life's ministry. Governments will continue to recruit educators from the West to raise their country's level of education. Many of these universities will provide Christians with access to highly restricted contexts through work visas as long as they are teaching.

To be effective, Christians in higher education need to close the gap between their work-life and ministry-life so that their work and ministry integrate. Christians who pursue advanced degrees should strive to work at high-caliber institutions that are recognized around the world.

The model of Higher Education as Mission can be replicated for other vocations and industries. For example, Po recognized that lay professionals in many vocations have opportunities to share the Good News in restricted-access contexts.[8] Christians who are highly skilled physicians will be able to connect with other respected physicians around the world, just as businesspeople can connect with other businesspeople. Christians must be creative and find ways to continue to reach the educated in other cultures. The need is great, but the laborers are few.

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# ORTHODOX BACKGROUND BELIEVERS: LISTENING AND LEARNING

*Cameron D. Armstrong*

***Abstract***

Evangelical church and organizational leaders in majority-Orthodox Romania often find themselves at a loss in understanding how to conduct outreach to Orthodox people. Often the cultural differences between Orthodox and evangelical Romanian Christians seem impassable. One approach is that of listening and learning from the transformational narratives of evangelical Christians converted out of Orthodoxy. The following article moves in this direction through qualitative analysis of conversion stories by four Romanian Orthodox background believers. Five common themes that arise from the data are discussed. The article concludes by offering an initial "evangelism rubric" to better posture evangelical groups to begin outreach among Romanian Orthodox people.

My stomach must have growled rather loudly. The Romanian Orthodox monk speaking with my wife and me kindly finished his sentence and invited us into the monastery's quaint kitchen to continue our conversation over lunch. Visibly stunned and at a loss for words, my wife politely accepted, and soon we sat speaking over a meal of lentil soup and fish. The monk and I exchanged a cordial, back-and-forth conversation about the differences between Orthodox and Protestant theology. Both of us were admittedly surprised by the competence in explaining our own religious traditions and respectful grasp of the other's. Before becoming a monk at the famous Putna Monastery, Father Alex had studied law in Bucharest and

had visited multiple Protestant churches. As I recall that unique lunch from two years ago, one phrase spoken by the monk reverberates in my mind: "I appreciated the Protestant emphasis on the Bible, but as I looked around at the Romanians worshipping in those churches, I could not help but think they were turning their back on their culture."

Father Alex's thoughts are indicative of how, for many Romanians, turning from Orthodoxy to another religious tradition involves a certain degree of cultural transformation. No longer do Romanians behave and worship the same way, and the results are certainly noticeable to friends and family. Following the social science definition of Harrison and Hunter that "culture" is the sum total of a society's underlying attitudes, values, and beliefs, the mental and practical transformation that takes place after one shifts from Orthodoxy to evangelicalism may be considered cultural in nature.[1] Such cultural transformation is what Protestants call *conversion*, since it is foundationally a religious decision that is worked out in one's value system and subsequent life choices.

Unfortunately, little research exists exploring the issue of how Romanian evangelicals with an Orthodox background came to the decision to convert. In my research, I could find only one source on the subject, and even that deals only with Orthodox theology in evangelism.[2] Therefore, the following study is intended to begin filling this gap, based on interviews with four Orthodox background believers (OBBs). I will first offer a broad-brush picture of the situation of Orthodoxy and evangelicalism in Romania. Then I delineate five major themes drawn from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with four OBBs, who I will call Mihai, Iosif, Mihaela, and Adriana. Finally, I conclude by sketching a potential "evangelism rubric" that evangelical churches may use in their outreach to Orthodox people.

## ORTHODOXY AND EVANGELICALISM IN ROMANIA

According to the 2011 census, Romania is 86 percent Eastern Orthodox, or simply Orthodox. Further breakdown by the National Institute of Statistics Romania declares that evangelicals make up roughly 6 percent of the population. Yet, the 6 percent figure also includes groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Unitarians.[3] Eastern Orthodoxy in Romania goes back thousands of years to the first few centuries after Jesus' death. Longstand-

[1] Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington, *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), xv.

[2] Matt Spann, "Witnessing to People of Eastern Orthodox Background: Turning Barriers of Belief into Bridges to Personal Faith," (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX, 2001).

[3] National Institute of Statistics Romania, "What Does the 2011 Census Tell Us about Religion in Romania?" (Bucharest, Romania: National Institute of Statistics Romania, 2013), 4.

ing tradition, emphasis on the mystery of God, and the Orthodox desire to ignite all five senses (touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell) make Orthodox services exceptionally memorable and powerful.[4] Evangelicalism in Romania, on the other hand, is only about five hundred years old, having taken a foothold a generation or so after the Protestant Reformation began in 1517 in Central Europe.[5] From its inception, the evangelical movement upholds biblical authority as central, often advocating for a renunciation of art and imagination in response to excesses in Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The Protestant evangelical tenet of *sola Scriptura* makes for undeniably passionate preaching.

Theologically speaking, perhaps the most significant distinction between Orthodoxy and evangelicalism is the concept of personal choice. According to Orthodox doctrine, a person becomes an Orthodox Christian through baptism.[6] Baptism is usually performed for infants in Orthodox families. In contrast, evangelical Christians maintain that people must be old enough to choose for themselves whether or not they wish to believe and be baptized.[7] For the purposes of this study, however, I have chosen not to interact with Orthodox theology. Only at certain points while developing common themes from my interviews will I delve briefly into Orthodox belief. Multiple, solid resources are available to explain key theological differences.[8] In this article, I am especially concerned with Orthodox versus evangelical behavioral practice, specifically in conjunction with the conversion process.

A recent study by the Pew Foundation classifies the Orthodox countries of Eastern Europe as "believing and belonging, without behaving."[9] In other words, less value is placed on living according to Eastern Orthodox ethics as to that of mentally believing that one's religious affiliation to Orthodoxy defines him culturally. In essence, this landmark study gives firm data demonstrating the old adage: "To be Romanian is to be Orthodox."

Yet, as the following themes from the interviews explain, the practical application of Orthodox theology is often lacking among its adherents.

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[4] Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

[5] Keith Hitchins, *A Concise History of Romania* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014).

[6] St. Athanasius Orthodox Academy, *The Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 217.

[7] Robert Letham, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy, A Reformed Perspective* (Geanies House, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, Ltd, 2007).

[8] See Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy;* Letham, *Through Western Eyes*.

[9] Pew Research Center, "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," May 10, 2017, accessed May 24, 2017, http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/.

Such desires for moral living were in large part what initially drew the interviewees to seek God in evangelical expressions. As mentioned above, however, conversion from the majority faith to a minority faith is not without a price. Thus, family ties among OBBs become strained or even severed, as OBBs are sometimes mocked for renouncing their "Romanian-ness" for a Western-looking, minority faith.

## MEET THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS

Before developing the major themes that arose out of the interviews, it would be helpful to give a brief word about the interviewees themselves. Further detail will be given below in the five subsequent themes. Doing so assists in limiting the study's findings to Romanian men and women of similar age ranges, namely twenty to thirty-five years old. Also, for the sake of anonymity, names have been changed.

*Mihai* is thirty years old and became an evangelical Christian at the age of fourteen. Before becoming an evangelical Christian, Mihai's family rarely went to church and hardly ever spoke about Christianity. Following the dramatic lifestyle change brought about by his father's conversion, Mihai slowly began the process himself. Although an introvert, Mihai now avidly serves on his church's worship music team and enjoys aiding others in exploring how to share the gospel in the workplace.

*Iosif* works for an evangelical Christian organization. Presently in his early thirties, Iosif converted out of Orthodoxy at nineteen in what he describes as "a process" that first began with his older sister's conversion. After his own conversion, Iosif's family quickly noticed his regard for a more moral lifestyle, and although they did not become evangelicals themselves, Iosif's parents did encourage him forward. A hard worker with a strong passion for evangelism and university students, Iosif lives to see Romanians reached with the life-changing message of the gospel.

Working as a psychologist among special needs children, *Mihaela* is thirty-one years old and became an evangelical believer as a teenager. Strained relationships, specifically with her parents and former boyfriends, caused Mihaela to have an "up and down" journey toward full commitment to God and the evangelical expression of Christianity. Besides working with children, Mihaela's passion is to reach other Romanian women wrestling with abusive relationships.

The final interviewee, *Adriana* is twenty-three and became an evangelical Christian only two years ago. After the death of her beloved grandfather, with whom Adriana lived for many years, she found solace in going to church and reading the Bible. Like Mihaela, however, Adriana's parents do not understand why she converted, although they have slowly begun to accept her lifestyle change. To date, Adriana has not been baptized as an evangelical believer, but she wishes to soon.

## CONVERSION THEMES

As mentioned above, five common themes arise from the interviews I have conducted with Mihai, Iosif, Mihaela, and Adriana. The themes are (1) influence of a near acquaintance, (2) existing spiritual interest, (3) frightening life crises, (4) desire for community, and (5) acceptance by immediate family. On the whole, these themes also appeared in this order in each interviewee's conversion narrative. Each theme will be discussed in turn.

*Theme One: Influence of a near acquaintance.* Interestingly, all interviewees maintain that a family member or close friend was instrumental in first introducing them to evangelical Christianity. Mihai recalls that, after his father changed jobs, some evangelical Christian coworkers attending the local Baptist church first invited him. Afterward, Mihai's father began attending regularly and slowly began renouncing his alcohol addiction. In Romania, consuming alcohol is taboo for evangelical Christians. Obviously, this delighted Mihai's mother, who had borne the brunt of her husband's alcoholic fury for years. So, she happily obliged when her husband asked to bring Mihai and his mother to the Baptist church. Mihai humorously admits that at first he was "dragged along" and felt the three hour service intolerable.

For Iosif, the noticeable conversion of his older sister to evangelical Christianity left a strong impression on his teenage self. Although the sister would not forcefully preach at him about hell or eternal damnation, Iosif's sister would often ask him questions and ask him to read from the Bible or other biblically based literature. Slowly, Iosif began reading the Bible for himself and considered his sister's words. Like Mihai, however, it was the visible change of his family member that found its mark.

Both female interviewees, Mihaela and Adriana, trace their initial introduction to the evangelical community through close childhood friends. For Mihaela, the kindness of two evangelical classmates attracted her to their church. Adriana's best friend took her to church after the tragic death of Adriana's grandfather and also encouraged her to attend an evangelical church in Bucharest, where she attends university. Although their conversion stories are by no means the same, Mihaela and Adriana find a kinship in a similar journey in their search for God.

*Theme Two: Existing spiritual interest.* Every narrative reached back to the time before the interviewees' conversion, and one by one, there was evidence of spiritual interest from childhood. Even though each family showed little to no interest in discussing spiritual matters or going to church beyond Christmas and Easter, the four men and women I interviewed thought deeply about the supernatural. Mihai explains that, because Orthodox religion was taught in school, and sometimes the class would attend a nearby Orthodox church, the reality of hell often echoed in his mind. Generally, the class would be asked to confess their sins to the priest, but Mihai would

become frightened that God would damn him for an unconfessed sin. "And the older I got, the more scared I would get," Mihai remembers sadly.

Adriana also recalls going from time to time as a child to the Orthodox church to confess sins, although her attitude was somewhat more critical than Mihai's towards confession. Adriana observes that she was always interested in God, but after the eighth grade, she gave up trying to figure out how to live like a Christian. All that changed, of course, when her grandfather died. Pausing for a moment, Adriana summarizes, "I felt hopeless. I mean all those emotions that I kept for all those years just like blew away. So I always told to my best friend, 'I have a hole.'" Such hopelessness led Adriana's friend to invite her to church, where the healing process began.

Iosif and Mihaela have little memory of attending the Orthodox church, especially with their parents. Once, Mihaela lived with her grandmother for a time, and they would always attend the Orthodox church together. All her life, however, Mihaela had a sense that the evangelical church taught the truth and was "always convinced that one day I would repent." Growing up, Iosif only went to the Orthodox church "once or twice a year, during Easter," but beyond learning the Lord's Prayer, religion was not discussed in the home. Yet, after Iosif's sister became an evangelical Christian, Iosif entered a multiple-year period of wrestling with the desire to also convert.

*Theme Three: Frightening life crises.* Each interviewee became quiet for a moment recalling the awe of a frightening life event that ultimately led to conversion. Because these events make up such a strong portion of each interviewee's narrative, I will spend considerable more time relating them. Further, such crises may be considered the "crescendo" of the transformations.

After attending the Baptist church for several months, Mihai was asked to attend a nearby evangelical Christian camp. Excited, Mihai smilingly tells of the massive tents for the campers and well-trimmed soccer fields and volleyball courts. Says Mihai, "I found it awkward at first. We had prayer groups in the mornings and the afternoons. We prayed before each dinner. We sang weird songs. I guess by that time I was getting used to it." The week-long camp culminated on a stormy Thursday evening, in which the camp pastor spoke about Christ dying for the sins that are taking people to hell. Mihai again recalls, "I was like, 'I know that. I can't do anything about it.' And then he said that we can have a relationship with God and talk to him and ask him to forgive our sins, and that's all we need to do. And by believing that he can and will forgive our sins, then that's it." So when the altar call came. and the group was asked who would like to take this step, Mihai quickly said yes. Mihai's fears of an inescapable hell instantly dissipated. Mihai vividly adds that immediately, the storm ceased and the sun came out, and "it was like redemption in nature. Quite symbolic."

Iosif also attended an evangelical Christian camp in high school but, though he enjoyed the clean fun, still wanted to "be free and see the world." After years of wrestling with the claims of the Bible and the truth of his sister's words, it all culminated his first year of college. Although he liked to

attend the meetings of a Christian organization for students, Iosif would often leave the meetings and go directly to partying and drinking with his friends. At one point, one of Iosif's friends was beat up and spent time in the hospital. After his friends retaliated, Iosif was caught in the crossfire of a battle between his friends and some older students. One night, some "scary guys" came looking for him to beat him up, thinking that he was part of the retaliating group. Relates Iosif, "And that was the moment that I got scared for my life. I looked at my life and saw that I was a mess inside . . . I was like humbled in a way through that situation, and I think that was the moment when I said I really want to follow God with all my heart." Iosif gave up drinking and became even more involved with the campus Christian organization, finding happiness in his new life.

Mihaela's "frightening event" occurred after multiple harsh relationships with abusive men. One particular boyfriend appeared to be a faithful Orthodox Christian, even taking interest in Mihaela's fixation with evangelical Christianity. It soon became clear, however, that Mihaela's boyfriend actually had psychological problems. At one point, he even threatened to commit suicide. Three times Mihaela asked God to give her a sign that she should break up with him, and after God provided precisely what she requested, she finally did. "It was hard because I felt guilty before God and thought God was punishing me because I wasn't helping him," Mihaela whispers. In the end, after hours spent with both evangelical Christian friends and in personal Bible study, Mihaela proudly exclaims, "I got better all the way." As mentioned above, Mihaela now views her role in God's kingdom as helping other women escape from similar pasts.

Finally, Adriana's world was turned upside down with the death of her grandfather. Having grown up with him living in the same house, Adriana believes that her grandfather's death truly set her on the trajectory to life in Jesus. When she first entered her friend's church, Adriana recalls beautifully, "I felt like a peace inside me. I felt like the pain on my shoulders just went away. Finally I felt happy and alive, because before that I didn't feel alive, kind of like a robot." Adriana began reading her Bible regularly with a fervent desire. She also began attending an evangelical church every Sunday, where she appreciates the fervor and continues to grow in her devotion to her newfound faith.

*Theme Four: Desire for community.* Another common thread among each conversion story is the strong desire to be part of a faith community. After the interviewees' conversion experiences, it became clear to them that they needed to be around other like-minded people. Perhaps the most striking examples of the four interviews come from the narratives of Iosif and Mihaela.

After attending the evangelical Christian camp in high school, seeing normal guys and girls who appeared especially genuine in their faith, Iosif said to himself, "Yeah, maybe I want to try this." Further, Iosif continued attending the prayer meetings of a campus evangelical Christian organization, participating in their events, and enjoying the pleasant atmosphere that he did not find elsewhere.



 

Mihaela, too, notes how she kept coming back to evangelical churches after every rough and humiliating experience. In her youth, Mihaela's parents physically restrained her from joining an evangelical church, even declaring that she would have to move out if she tried. Now, Mihaela is deeply committed to her evangelical church and friends.

*Theme Five: Immediate family acceptance.* While baptism in an evangelical church constitutes a stark rip from one's Orthodox background, it is interesting that the interviewees found that their immediate family members slowly began to accept their new identity. Their parents may not comprehend the decision to convert, much less desire to follow, yet they have come to appreciate the positive effect the conversion has made. Of course, Mihai's parents' conversion played an integral role in his own, since they all joined the evangelical church at approximately the same time. Mihai's Orthodox relatives may not fully understand the change, but they clearly notice differences in Mihai's family's actions. For example, Mihai's father gave up drinking, often prays aloud at family gatherings, and loves to talk about Christianity.

The dramatic change brought about in Iosif's life as a result of his conversion gave his parents great pause. Iosif recalls that, even though his parents did not attend, his mother became so excited about his giving up alcohol and exorbitant lifestyle that she would often wake him up on Sunday, so he would not to be late for the evangelical church. In addition, Iosif's father, who said he would never enter an evangelical church, came to see him be baptized. Of course, Iosif's older sister encouraged him every step of the way, and even today Iosif's family and his sister's family attend the same church and remain close.

Mihaela's parents are not evangelical believers either, but they cannot help but wonder at the remarkable way Mihaela's life has changed. Seeing the transformation of their daughter, from living in fear and guilt in abusive relationships to exhibiting the confidence of a Christian woman with impeccable intelligence, Mihaela's mother and father are proud of her. Unfortunately, Mihaela's father still struggles with alcohol, and her mother personally wants nothing to do with Christianity. However, Mihaela's father did attend her baptism, even though it was several hours' train ride, both out of fascination and love for his daughter.

Like Mihaela, Adriana's parents show little signs of interest in evangelical Christianity. Each time Adriana returns to her hometown during a break from university, she knows questions about her faith may arise. Adriana muses, "But they've kind of started to accept that I'm going [to the evangelical church] . . . They tell me I'm different. Like, 'you are not you.' It's like, 'What? But I'm still me.' Yeah, I think the way I think and the way I act is different from what I used to. Now I kind of know what I believe."

To summarize this section on the five themes, several propositions are clear. (1) Near acquaintances, specifically family members, greatly influenced the conversion of OBBs. (2) The OBBs interviewed already main-

tained a heightened awareness to spiritual matters. (3) Frightening life crises ultimately led to making the conversion decision. (4) Desire was strong for a healthy community that took seriously the call to ethical living. (5) Acceptance by immediate family members, based on the sustained positive change of lifestyle, assists the OBB because they do not have to deal with a clean, full break from family.

## POTENTIAL EVANGELISM RUBRIC

Based on the common themes gleaned from interviews with the four OBBs, I offer the following "evangelism rubric." Ideally, the rubric could potentially be used by evangelical churches and organizations in outreach. The evangelism rubric sets as its foundation two key Bible verses (1 Pe 3:15 and 2 Co 2:15) that uphold the need for both effective spoken evangelism and ethical Christian practice. Each element will be briefly explained below.

**Reproducible Evangelism Rubric in Majority-Orthodox Romania**

| | Poor | Fair | Strong |
|---|---|---|---|
| Relationships with Orthodox neighbors | | | |
| Biblically-centered worship services | | | |
| Knowledge of gospel | | | |
| Ability to articulate gospel/testimony in "non-churchy" words | | | |
| Judgment-free atmosphere | | | |
| Enjoyable outreach activities | | | |
| Transparent relationships | | | |
| Ethical living among members | | | |

**Verbal Evangelism (Word)**

*"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have." 1 Peter 3:15*

**Ethical living (Deed)**

*"For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." 2 Corinthians 2:15*

Based on the twin realities that spoken evangelism should be confirmed through ethical Christian living, evangelical churches and organizations seeking to reach Orthodox people with the gospel may use this grid to evaluate their practices.[10] Leaders should ask if their members maintain a solid witness in both areas by working through the rubric's eight elements. Yet before giving a quick description of each element, it should be noted that I do not claim the list to be exhaustive, nor are the elements placed in a specific order of gradation. The rubric is merely offered as a response to the interviews and should be adapted as further research becomes available.

Moving from bottom to top, churches should evaluate to what degree their members *live ethically* according to Scripture. Each interviewee noted fondly how s/he found a high degree of ethical living in the evangelical churches s/he visited, which was quite attractive. *Transparent relationships* refer to the extent that church members are willing to allow one another into their whole life. Seeking an authentic, faith-based community drove the OBBs both to search for and continue in the evangelical church. Especially younger generations, like those interviewed, long for communities that are not filled with "professional Christians" but instead are made up of men, women, and children ready to learn and grow together.

Both Mihai and Iosif joyfully place evangelical Christian camps as central to their conversion journey. Evangelical churches and organizations should cultivate other *enjoyable outreach activities,* where both introverts and extroverts, young and old, can have clean fun that is also attractive to non-evangelicals. Likewise, evangelical churches should cultivate a *non-judgmental atmosphere* in which all types of people are welcome and feel comfortable. Also related to atmosphere is church members' ability to use "*non-churchy" words* as they interact with non-evangelicals, adding to the comfort level of all and eliminating potentially awkward insider versus outsider conversation. Especially in communicating the gospel and the story of one's conversion to evangelical Christianity, non-evangelicals are often found scratching their heads in confusion due to the insider language of the evangelical church. Regrettably, insider, "churchy" talk made both Mihai and Iosif uncomfortable for a time when they first entered the evangelical church.

Next on the rubric is the element of *knowledge of the gospel,* returning to one's ability to know and articulate the transforming message of Jesus Christ. Preaching should be geared towards church members being able to reproduce in their own words what was delivered on Sunday, so that those outside the evangelical community may hear and be saved. For example, each interviewee was initially astounded at the simplicity of believing that Christ's sacrifice atones once and for all for sins, and thus the doctrine of

[10] Duane Litfin, *Word Versus Deed: Resetting the Scales to a Biblical Balance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

complete forgiveness should be emphasized. As Mihai brilliantly put it, "It's like you go to school and there's this huge bully that you know you'll meet at the end of classes, and there's no avoiding it. But at one point along the way here comes a huger guy that can beat up the bully." *Biblically centered worship services* need to be just that—centered on the Scripture and not on putting on a show that will attract as many new people as possible. It is God's Word that pricks hearts, as evidenced by the testimonies of those interviewed.

Finally, if an evangelical church desires to increase their outreach to Orthodox people, leaders must encourage and model the maintenance of *relationships with Orthodox neighbors.* It is because of evangelical Christians like Mihai's father's coworkers, Iosif's sister, Mihaela's schoolmates, and Adriana's best friend that the process of turning to evangelical Christianity began. These believers were willing to become personally involved in the lives of their Orthodox friends and family, allowing their Orthodox neighbors to watch up close how they lived out their faith. Evangelical Christians would do well to remember, as expressed by European missiologists Van De Poll and Appleton, "people need time to find out what the Christian faith means in their life situation."[11]

I propose this evangelism rubric for evangelical church and organizational leaders to seriously evaluate both themselves and their membership. Again, it is by no means an exhaustive list. However, using this rubric could be a solid, first step in understanding what areas leaders need to focus on if outreach to Orthodox people is truly an objective.

## CONCLUSION

Interviewing these OBB friends was not a chore for me. Indeed, it is an honor to recount their conversion stories. Due to their unique background in the Orthodox tradition, OBBs are poised to assist evangelical Christians in understanding how to conduct outreach, if only leaders might take the time to listen. This article may be considered a first step in that direction.

Returning to my experience at Putna Monastery, the winsome Orthodox monk with whom we had lunch maintained that to give up on Orthodoxy is to change cultures. In the sense that conversion is a change of values, beliefs, and assumptions, the monk is quite right, but that is not how OBBs see it. They are still Romanian, with a common language and heritage like any Romanian Orthodox person. As Adriana says, "But I'm still me. Yeah, I think the way I think and the way I act is different from what I used to. Now I kind of know what I believe." What has changed is conversion, which the crossover evangelicals aptly call a "new birth."

[11] Evert Van de Poll and Joanne Appleton, *Church Planting in Europe: Connecting to Society, Learning from Experience* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 5.

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# LEADING THROUGH GROWTH: THE ROLE OF THE LEAD PASTOR IN THE LARGE CHURCH

*Stephen Grusendorf*

***Abstract***

In order to be an effective leader, the large church lead pastor must recognize and respond to the ever-shifting organizational dynamics of his church. This article highlights the distinctive organizational dynamics of large churches as opposed to churches of other sizes. It will seek to identify the unique responsibilities that leading a large church places on the lead pastor. Finally, this article will describe the particular organizational perils and opportunities present as the lead pastor transitions a church through the various stages of organizational growth.

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership is complex. Today's leaders need to hold in tension the power they wield over and trust they need to gain from their followers.[1] To be successful, the modern leader needs to develop strong relational and administrative acumen. Church leadership is no exception to this prevailing reality. Lead pastors are increasingly required to be both relationally and technically proficient.

[1] C. Green, "Why Trust Is the New Core of Leadership," *Forbes,* April 3, 2012, http://www.forbes.com.

The leadership responsibilities of the local lead pastor are many. At any given time, the lead pastor is responsible to manage the staff of a church, cast vision for the organization, effectively preach and teach the Word of God, lead a board, manage a budget, and assimilate new individuals into the organization. These responsibilities all hinge on the lead pastor's ability to exercise his or her leadership well. As a local church grows, the importance of this fact is only exacerbated.[2]

In order to be an effective leader, the large church lead pastor must recognize the ever-shifting organizational dynamics of his church. The purpose of this article is to properly define at what point a church might be considered "large." It will highlight the distinctive organizational dynamics of large churches as opposed to churches of other sizes. It will seek to identify the unique responsibilities that leading a large church places on the lead pastor. Finally, this article will describe the particular organizational perils and opportunities present as the lead pastor transitions a church through the various stages of organizational growth.

## ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS OF LARGE CHURCHES

This section of the research deals with defining and explaining the unique traits of a large church. It first focuses on adequately determining the appropriate threshold for considering a church to be large by tracing the development of various church size classification taxonomies. It then considers the structure of a large church staff with a particular focus placed on the role of a lead pastor within the large church.

### A Review of Church Size Taxonomies

The characteristics of a church change along with the size of the congregation. One aspect of a church that grows increasingly complex the larger the congregation becomes is organizational structure. McIntosh offers an excellent overview of the various ways individuals have grouped churches by size (Figure 1).[3] While authors have used differing terminology, what must be discovered is a general point at which a church is considered sizeable enough to be "large."

Schaller, one of the first to group churches based on size, initially suggested that a large church was any church with 200 or more congregants. Over the years, Schaller continued to observe churches and classify them

[2] L Schaller, *The Multiple Staff and the Larger Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1980); L Schaller, *Growing Plans* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1983); G.L. McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What Got You Here Won't Get You There* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009).

[3] McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*.

**FIGURE 1**

**Summary Comparison of the Breakdown of Church Sizes According to Church Growth Writers**

| Schaller (1975) | Womack (1977) | Schaller (1980) | George (1991) | McIntosh (2009) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30-35 | 50 | <35 | 35 | 35 |
| 70-85 | 90 | 35-100 | 50 | 85 |
| 115-135 | 120 | 100-175 | 100 | 125 |
| 175-200 | 200s | 175-225 | 200 | 200 |
| | 300s | 225-450 | 400 | 400 |
| | 600 | 450-700 | 800 | 800 |
| | 1,200 | >700 | 1,000 | 1,200 |
| | | | 3,000 | 3,000 |

(McIntosh, 2009 p. 127)

based on their size.[4] He amended his original classification in 1980 and offered a more detailed taxonomy of churches based on size. For Schaller, a church with 225 or more congregants was large. Schaller also suggested two greater categories beyond what he defined as a large church. These two categories were the huge church, which had 450 or more congregants, and the minidenomination church, which had 700 or more congregants.

Another early categorizer of churches by size was David Womack who suggested grouping churches at the 280, 400, 600, 800, and 1,200 marks.[5] Womack noted that observable plateaus in church growth often occurred at or near each delineation. Womack deduced from the observation that one of the problems facing churches that have plateaued is that the strategies of church organization that had allowed them to grow needed to change as the church grew larger.

In the 1990s, Carl F. George offered another taxonomy of churches based on the size of their congregation.[6] In this early work, George noted that a large church was one that had 200 or more congregants. He named three grander categories, as well. Later, George further defined his taxonomy and suggested grouping churches at the 200; 400; 800; 1,000; 3,000; 6,000; and 30,000 marks.[7] He observed how church growth was related to overall

[4] L Schaller, *Hey, That's Our Church!* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1975).

[5] D.A. Womack, *The Pyramid Principle of Church Growth* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1977).

[6] C.F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1991).

[7] C.F. George, *How to Break Growth Barriers: Capturing Overlooked Opportunities for Church Growth* (Grand Rapides, MI: Baker, 1993).

population growth trends. He also suggested that "churches have more in common by their size than by their denomination, tradition, location, age, or any other single, isolatable factor."[8]

After offering an excellent overview of the development of the categorization of churches by size, McIntosh proposed his own taxonomy.[9] McIntosh suggested grouping churches at the 200; 400; 800; 1,200; 3,000; 6,000; and 10,000 marks. McIntosh particularly noted how the role of the lead pastor changes predictably in each grouping. He also noted that effective leadership is a critical component for a church to successfully move from a smaller classification to a larger one. He argued that churches have more in common with secular organizations than many might think at first.[10]

## A Synthesis of Key "Large Church" Identifiers

With a variety of differing taxonomies, it is important to select a clear mark by which one can understand a church to be large no matter the language used to describe it. Three points help determine this number. First, the number must take into account the significant sociological shifts and population trends that have occurred in the United States as they relate to religion in the past three decades. Some of the earlier works, particularly that of Schaller and Womack, did not take into account the global population growth and culture trends that would take place in the decades following their research, a point Schaller later admitted.[11] Second, the number should be large enough that the church requires multiple paid staff in addition to the lead pastor.[12] Finally, the number should require a clear change in organizational structure that reveals the lead pastor must transition from a manager to a leader.[13]

### *Sociological Shifts and Population Trends Related to Religion in the United States*

One way to understand how sociological trends have influenced what most people consider a large church can be understood by reviewing the development and growth of megachurches within the United States. In the year 2000, the Leadership Network commissioned a study of some of the larg-

[8] Ibid., 129.

[9] McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*.

[10] Ibid., 116–121.

[11] L Schaller, *The Very Large Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000).

[12] George, *Prepare Your Church*; G.L. McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Bringing out the Best in Any Size Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revel, 1999); McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*.

[13] C.C. Green, "Pastoral Leadership, Congregational Size, Life Cycle Stage, and Church Culture: A Grounded Theory Analysis," ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text database (3170687), 2005; McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*.

est Protestant churches in the United States.[14] In this particular study, Scott Thumma served as the principal researcher. Since then, the Leadership Network and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research have commissioned several more studies focused on these churches.[15] David Travis and Warren Bird later joined Thumma in this research. They have become respected leaders within the field of those who study the largest Protestant Churches within the United States.

The widely accepted standard for a church to be considered a megachurch is a Sunday attendance of 2,000.[16] In the 1970s, there were approximately 50 megachurches in the United States.[17] In a 2011 survey of megachurches in the United States, the Hartford Institute for Religion Research identified 1,611 megachurches.[18] When compared to United States census data, the growth of megachurches in the United States is actually outpacing the growth of the general populace.[19] In the past three decades, there has been a massive growth of very large churches within the United States.

Several scholars have attempted to pinpoint the reasons for such growth since the 1970s. Ellingson suggests three reasons for the growth of megachurches.[20] First, he states that religious consumerism has allowed for the growth of the megachurch. The megachurch is growing faster because it can produce the desired religious goods demanded by religious consumers more quickly than smaller churches can. Second, Ellingson suggests that the church as sect theory fuels megachurch growth. In his opinion, the megachurch is able to create a clear culture tension between itself and secular society. Lastly, Ellingson suggests that organizational dynamics explain the explosive growth of the megachurch. In this way, he proposes that the mega-

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[14] S.L. Thumma, *Megachurches Today 2000: Summary of Data from the Faith Communities Today 2000 Project* (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2001).

[15] W. Bird and S. Thumma, *A New Decade of Megachurches: 2011 Profile of Large Attendance Churches in the United States* (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011); S. Thumma and W. Bird, *Not Who You Think They Are: A Profile of the People Who Attend America's Megachurches* (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2009); S. Thumma and W. Bird, *Recent Shifts in America's Largest Protestant Churches: Megachurhces 2015 Report* (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2015); S. Thumma and D. Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2007); S. Thumma, D. Travis, and W. Bird, *Megachurches Today 2005* (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2005).

[16] Thumma and Bird, *Recent Shifts*.

[17] S. Ellingson, "New Research on Megachurches," in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. B.S. Turner (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

[18] Bird and Thumma, *A New Decade*.

[19] Ibid.; P.J. Mackun et al., *Population Distribution and Change: 2000 to 2010* (US Census Bureau, 2011); Thumma and Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*.

[20] Ellingson, "New Research."

church approach is fundamentally different than the approach of smaller churches in that both the leadership and the laity seek to involve new people in the organization on a regular basis and are willing to change methodology in order to stay relevant with their communities.

Chaves suggests that the growth of the modern megachurch is economically driven.[21] He notes that the problem facing churches is the same problem faced by other struggling organizations like the orchestra and the theatre. The church has no ability to reduce its overhead through efficiency. Chaves points out that a preliminary analysis of financial data collected by 20 denominations revealed that real giving did not keep pace with the actual costs of churches. This means that many churches have been forced to curtail ministries and programs. The one notable exception is the megachurch. The megachurch is able to keep offering programs because it has the financial resources to do so. Chaves argues that the data supports a reality in which people of a consumerist culture will go to the church that offers more choices and avoid the church with fewer choices.

Among other points, Karnes, McIntosh, Morris, and Pearson-Merkowitz note that the growth of megachurches is strongly and positively associated with population and urbanization.[22] They note that in order for megachurches to thrive, they need *both* an adequate population from which to draw and an adequate infrastructure to support the populations' attempts to join the megachurch. Because the United States population is growing more numerous and more urbanized, accessibility to megachurches is also growing.[23] Thumma and Travis note that 80% of the population within the United States lives within a ninety-minute drive from a megachurch.[24]

How has this reality and all the research changed the thinking of people as it relates to religion in the United States? Thumma and Travis suggest that all of this focus on the megachurch has fundamentally altered what people think is the structure of a typical church.

> The predominance of small churches contributes to the general mental picture of churches in our culture. The assumption is that the 'typical' church is a small organization that is fortunate if it has one full-time pastor. . . . In the last century, with the increasing urbanization, research has focused more on larger churches and in some ways has shifted the mental image. In many denominational and congregational studies, the mental picture of a representative

[21] M. Chaves, "All Creatures Great and Small: Megachurches in Context," *Review of Religious Research* 47, no. 4 (2006).

[22] K. Karnes et al., "Mighty Fortresses: Explaining the Distribution of American Megachurches," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 2 (2007).

[23] S.L. Colby and J.M. Ortman, *Projections of the Size and Composition of the US Population: 2014–2060* (US Census Bureau, 2015).

[24] Thumma and Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*.

> church is one that has a few staff members in addition to a pastor and has an attendance of around three hundred. These mental images of the 'typical' church carry considerable power and influence when one begins to assess the place of the megachurch.[25]

Furthermore, Thumma and Travis also put forth that while many smaller churches exist, fewer people worship in these smaller churches than in churches with 300 or more in attendance on a Sunday morning. More pragmatically, they argue, "the top 20 percent of churches account for 65 percent of the total resources that might be found in churches in the United States."[26] The United States is growing more populous and urban. Research, resource allocation, and the cult of personality all have conspired to transform society's view of the common church.

*Trends in Hiring Paid Staff Within the Local Church*

In his research, McIntosh notes that in order for a church to break the 125 barrier, it needs to place an additional pastor on its staff.[27] However, upon further investigation, the ratio at which a church should add a second pastor seems to have shrunk over time. In the 1960s, the ratio was one pastor for every 350–500 congregants.[28] In the 1980s, the ratio was drastically decreased to around one pastor for every 100 congregants.[29] Later, McIntosh increased the number of congregants to 125 partly due to the pragmatic reason that, in his opinion, most churches struggle to finance such a ratio.[30]

Recent research conducted by Warren Bird highlights the fact that the larger a church becomes, the lower the staff to church attendance ratio actually becomes.[31] In summary, it seems that churches have approximately one professional staff member for every 125 Sunday morning worshippers until they reach mega-church status or slightly below. At this point, the ratio tends to decrease the larger a church becomes.

McIntosh considers a church of 200–400 people to be a midsized church. In order for the midsized church to grow, it must add professional staff.[32] He

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[25] Ibid., 5.

[26] Ibid., 6.

[27] McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*.

[28] M. Anderson, *Multiple Ministries: Staffing the Local Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1965); H.J. Sweet, *The Multiple Staff in the Local Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1963).

[29] Schaller, *The Multiple Staff*.

[30] G.L. McIntosh, *Staff Your Church for Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 39.

[31] W. Bird, *Leadership Networ/Vanderbloemen 2014 Large Church Salary Report: An Executive Summary of Research Trends in Compensation and Staffing* (Leadership Network, 2014).

[32] McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*, 149.



 

suggests that in order to break the 400 barrier, a church needs to hire a third full-time pastor. According to McIntosh, this hire should take place sometime when a church has 300–400 in attendance. In addition, the third pastoral hire, often a pastor of education, should have as his primary focus that of finding and keeping new people engaged in the life of the church.[33] Thus, according to the research, a true pastoral staff, one that includes multiple professional staff beyond the lead pastor, likely originates when a church has between 300–400 Sunday morning worshipers.

*The Impact of Organizational Change Within the Local Church*

As churches grow, they experience significant organizational change.[34] Figure 2 identifies some of the significant organizational changes that occur within churches as they grow. Several clear organizational metaphors aptly describe the church as it grows. This section will seek to articulate how the large church is organizationally different than churches of other sizes. In order to do so, it will first observe how both small and medium churches operate, next it will review how the medium to large transitional church operates, and finally it will reveal how the large church operates. Further-

**FIGURE 2**

**Mcintosh's Typology of Church Sizes**

| Factors | Small Church | Medium Church | Large Church |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Size** | 15-200 worshipers | 201-400 worshipers | 401+ worshipers |
| **Orientation** | Relational | Programmatical | Organizational |
| **Structure** | Single Cell | Stretched cell | Multiple Cell |
| **Leadership** | Resides in key families | Resides in committees | Resides in select leaders |
| **Pastor** | Lover | Administrator | Leader |
| **Decisions** | Made by congregation, Driven by history | Made by committees, Driven by changing needs | Made by staff and leaders, Driven by vision |
| **Staff** | Bivocational or single pastor | Pastor and small staff | Multiple staff |
| **Change** | Bottom up through key people | Middle out through key committees | Top down through key leaders |

(McIntosh, 1999 p. 130)

[33] McIntosh, *Staff Your Church*, 26–27.

[34] McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All.*

more, this section will summarize the key transition point within the growth of a church at which the lead pastor must significantly change his approach to leadership in order to allow the church to grow in a healthy manner.

### The Small-Sized Church as a Family

McIntosh suggests that when considering the small church, one needs to envision it as a large extended family.[35] What keeps the small church functioning properly is genuine relationships within the church family. As in a typical family, celebration plays a significant role in small churches, and one should not be surprised to find the members of a small church celebrating many of life's milestones together.

Because of their importance, relationships often drive the decision-making process in the small church. Thus, in order for the lead pastor of a small church to lead effectively, he must be adept at developing and nurturing key relationships within the church family.[36] What one quickly discovers, however, is that as a church grows, the way it is led must change in order for leadership to continue to be effective.

### The Medium-Sized Church as an Organism

In his classic work, *Images of Organization,* author Gareth Morgan suggests that an organization acts as an organism when it does the following two key things: first, when it focuses on advancing its mission while developing its human capital, and second, as it advances its mission in light of its unique environment.[37] He goes on to argue that in order for an organization to succeed as an organism, it needs to develop interrelated sub-systems within the organization and allow for managerial variance within each sub-system.[38] However, while managerial variance may exist, the successful organization as organism will still ensure alignment among its subsystems in order to "identify and eliminate dysfunctions."[39] When healthy, the medium-sized church functions as an organism.

Figure 2 notes that the medium-sized church is often programmatically oriented, led by a committee, and administrated by pastoral oversight. In many ways, the medium church functions like Morgan's organism. In the medium-sized church, each various ministry exists to meet a particular need within the local environment. For instance, a church might offer an addiction recovery program in order to deal with high levels of alcoholism within the local community.

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] G. Morgan, *Images of Organization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006).

[38] Ibid., 39–54.

[39] Ibid., 39.



 

Medium-sized churches most likely have a small staff that includes a second full-time pastor. However, the likelihood that the second full-time pastor will be able to manage all ministry programs is impractical for two reasons. First, the most common church hire for a second pastor is the position of youth pastor.[40] These pastors are typically not entrusted with the care of adult programs. Furthermore, the ability of a single pastor to oversee all the programs, youth and otherwise, of the church grows increasingly unlikely the larger a church grows. Thus, the medium-sized church would normally place a committee over an addiction recovery program or any other adult ministry in order to direct the ministry and details of that program. The lead pastor of the medium-sized church would regularly connect with the committee in order to stay up to date on the effectiveness of the ministry and to monitor the needs of the program relative to the larger organizational goals of the church. This process would repeat itself for each major program functioning within the local church. In the end, the lead pastor is responsible to make sure that the various programs within the church are aligned to the overall mission of the medium-sized church. Furthermore, the lead pastor would be responsible to deal with dysfunction when it appears in the various programs of the church.

The healthy, medium-sized church should resemble an organism. This means that the medium-sized church is highly aware of and responsive to its unique environment. It means that the medium-sized church creates various programs to meet the needs of those it hopes to serve and that the programs function as sub-systems within the organization. There is a reasonable amount of variance among these programs in order to meet the particular mission of the program. At the same time, the lead pastor seeks alignment among the various programs of the church by administrating each sub-system. However, as the medium-sized church grows and transitions into a large church, it faces the danger of becoming a machine.

### The Medium to Large Transitional Church as a Machine

As a church grows, it faces unique organizational and leadership challenges. Schaller notes that both growth and decline do not occur in a smooth, linear fashion, but rather, growth and decline may be visualized as a stair step in which churches regularly hit plateaus which require them to do things differently.[41] Furthermore, Schaller argues that what works for one church size may not always work for a church of another size. One unique challenge that churches face as they transition from being a medium-sized church to being a large church is the risk of becoming an organizational machine.

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[40] McIntosh, *Staff Your Church*.

[41] Schaller, *Hey, That's Our Church*, 41–47.

Morgan notes that an organization functions as a machine when the primary concern of the organization becomes meeting predetermined goals in the most efficient manner possible.[42] One of the primary differences between the organism and machine metaphors, as laid out by Morgan, is their ability to adapt to their environment. The organization that functions as a machine is at a significant disadvantage when it comes to changing in order to meet the unique needs of its environment. Furthermore, the organization that functions as a machine can contribute to the development of oppressive bureaucracy and can actually harm those within the organization because it places organizational goals above the particular needs of those within the organization.[43]

As a medium-sized church grows, it faces the need to adjust the way it functions. The medium-sized church is able to respond quickly to the unique needs found within its environment. However, as the church grows, it can no longer rely on more and more programs to sustain its growth. It needs to transition to a more individualized approach to growth. Where growth came through key programs in the past, future growth will come through the word of mouth communication of those who attend the church. If this transition is not realized, the likelihood that the medium to large transitioning church will become an organizational machine greatly increases. McIntosh notes that churches are never static; they are always growing or shrinking.[44] If churches cannot master the needed growth transitions, they will, by default, shrink. It is imperative then, that the medium to large transitional church avoids becoming a bureaucracy-driven, organizational machine.

The medium to large transitional church becomes an organizational machine when it struggles to let go of a growth model that holds programs as the key to growth. If a church becomes too big, the program approach begins to become more important than the people who run them. This means that increased turnover, within both the volunteers who run certain programs and the participants who are involved in these programs, will become a reality. The larger the church becomes, the more difficult it will also become for a church to adapt to the needs within the environment.

### The Large Church as a Culture

Morgan identifies that an organization functions as a culture when it successfully develops shared meaning and value among its organization.[45] Further, an organization as a culture requires that the organization has sufficient

[42] Morgan, *Images of Organization*.

[43] Ibid., 26.

[44] McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*.

[45] Morgan, *Images of Organization*.



 

buy-in to the shared meaning and values among its members. Morgan also notes that an organization that is functioning as a culture recognizes that the relationship between an organization and its environment is shared—that is it is socially constructed.

Figure 2 identifies the fact that the large church is organizationally ordered, leader led, and top down in its approach to decision making. Vision becomes increasingly important in the large church as it is the primary driver of change and decision-making. The large church seeks to define what the shared values of the church are and then helps its members internalize those particular values through various venues, such as through membership classes and select church-wide programs. The large church is also concerned with developing a relationship with its environment that is shared. It seeks to have a healthy relationship with the community in which it is situated. This relationship is often forged by the lead pastor who spends time interacting with those who are in positions of influence outside the church itself.

The healthy large church develops as a culture. It works to develop shared meaning among those involved with the church. It works diligently to imprint its shared values into every person who regularly attends the church. It also seeks to develop a harmonious relationship with its environment.

## EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE LARGE CHURCH LEAD PASTOR

From the above review of organizational change that occurs in the growing church, it has been demonstrated that the role of the expression of leadership by the lead pastor is dynamic. The function of the lead pastor will change given the size of the church. In medium-sized churches, a lead pastor needs to function as a manager or administrator of various programs and committees. However, as a church grows, the lead pastor needs to shift focus. Rather than managing programs, the lead pastor of a large church needs to focus on casting a common vision and ensuring that the vision is embedded within the various individuals who constitute the church. This transition seems to take place as a church enters into the 300–400 range of Sunday morning attendees, as will be further demonstrated below.

### A Review of the Changing Roles of the Lead Pastor Based on Church Size

Literature dealing with both church growth and pastoral leadership notes that a significant leadership shift needs to occur as a church becomes a large church. This transition seems to take place when a church has 300–400 regularly attending members. While the numbers vary slightly between authors, experts do agree on the basics of what type of shift is required.

Green has done some considerable work in understanding the veracity of the various classifications first put forth by Routhauge and adapted by

Crow.[46] Routhauge originally categorized Nazarene churches into four main groups based on size. Crow later redeveloped the groupings, keeping their size classifications while changing their titles.[47]

Originally, Routhauge noted that a significant change occurred in pastoral leadership as a church transitioned between being a family enterprise church (150–350 members) and a corporate enterprise church (350+ members) as can be seen in Figure 3. For the smaller church, "the pastoral work of the clergy is carried out in the setting of administration."[48] However, in the larger church, the lead pastor becomes the symbol of unity and stability for the church."[49] Green agrees with this observation, noting that "organizational complexity increases with size, the way pastors function is reshaped, new and different pastor skill sets are required, and congregations exhibit very different expectations."[50]

In his discussion of how the lead pastor needs to change as a church transitions from being a smaller church to being a larger church, Green

**FIGURE 3**

**Comparison of the Lead Pastor's Role Based on Size of Church**

| Role of the Lead Pastor in a Extended Family Enterprise Church (150-350) | Role of the Lead Pastor in a Corporate Enterprise Church (350+) |
|---|---|
| Sustain physical points of contact with parishioners. | Ministers *through* others. |
| Be present in times of crisis. | Willing to sacrifice relationships for the sake of the vision. |
| Desire to know everyone. | Narrow the scope of relationships to strategic contacts. |
| Relate to larger body through structure. | Relate to the larger body through communication (i.e. - preaching) |
| Manage specialized leaders (i.e. - children's pastor, youth pastor, etc.) | Define mission, vision, values |
| | Oversee business aspects of the church |

[46] C.C. Green, "Church Size: Reframing Our Understanding and Conversations," *Associaton of Nazarene Sociologists and Researchers* 23, no. 15 (2007); C.D. Crow, "Enduring Cultures of Laity," *Church of the Nazarene* (1997); A.J. Rothauge, *Sizing up a Congregation for New Member Ministry* (Produced for the Education for Mission and Ministry Office: Seabury Professional Services, 1984).

[47] Crow, "Enduring Cultures of Laity"; Rothauge, *Sizing up a Congregation*.

[48] Rothauge, *Sizing up a Congregation*, 18.

[49] Ibid., 26.

[50] Green, "Church Size," 5.



 

noted several important milestones. "Essential qualities in the Corporate Enterprise church included the following: the ability to release ministry to others; trusting others with ministry tasks, responsibilities, and authority; delegation."[51] The role of the lead pastor at this level also shifts in that he spends more of his time interacting with key staff, the governing board of the church, and the community in which the church is situated.

McIntosh titles a church of 200–400 individuals as the "managerial church."[52] One of the key characteristics of a church of this size is that lead pastors function as an administrator of the organization. They may have at their disposal a small team, but they are primarily responsible for making sure each committee accomplishes the right work. They manage the work. However, for a church to grow larger, "the senior pastor must begin thinking as a leader more than an administrator."[53]

McIntosh names a church of 400–800 an "organizational church." At the 400 mark and above, a church is required to take on a certain level of organizational complexity that requires the lead pastor to lead. The lead pastor begins to spend less time directly overseeing or running ministry and more time casting vision for the future to a skilled team of staff and volunteers.

George argues that a large church must slowly begin to hire staff whose primary role is to develop other leaders.[54] McIntosh agrees, suggesting that in the church of 400 or more, the lead pastor begins to function as one who trains other leaders.[55] The larger the church grows, the further down the organizational structure the leadership development travels. Large churches are those that have a staff focused on developing teams to do ministry.

### A Review of the Unique Competencies of the Large Church Lead Pastor

It has been demonstrated thus far through the literature that a church transitions to being a large church at some point between having 300–400 regular attendees. As a church approaches this transition, it is important to note what competencies the lead pastor must gain or sharpen. The core competencies of the lead pastor of a large church should be focused. The large church lead pastor must cast vision for the board and staff.[56] The larger the church, the greater the expectancy on the part of the membership that the lead pastor will actively cast a vision for the future.[57] He must lead through

[51] Green, "Pastoral Leadership."

[52] McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*.

[53] Ibid., 150.

[54] C.F. George, *The Coming Church Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994).

[55] McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*.

[56] Green, "Pastoral Leadership"; McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*; Schaller, *Growing Plans*.

[57] McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*.

developing relationships with other key leaders within the church.[58] The lead pastor must also lead through effectively communicating and by functioning as the church figurehead within the community.

*Leading Through Strategic Vision Casting*

The large church lead pastor must be skilled in casting a strong vision for the future. Thumma and Bird note that larger churches are almost twice as likely as smaller churches to say that they have a clear purpose and mission.[59] In his discussion of the large church minister, Keller suggests that not only must the large church minister be a vision caster, but he must also be a vision keeper.[60] In this way, Keller suggests that two key ways the large church pastor keeps vision is through intentional assimilation and intentional staff hiring. As it relates to assimilation, the large church minister must cast vision for potential new members ensuring that they have a solid understanding of the type of church they are seeking to join. As it relates to hiring staff, the large church minister must not only look for skill and tenure, but according to Keller, must also look for a vision fit since the large church only does two or three key things very well.

Generally, the larger the church, the more the lead pastor is independent of any denominational ties as it relates to casting vision.[61] One particular place that this is clearly seen is in the area of global missions. The smaller denominational church most often participates in denominationally developed mission programs while larger churches will often create their own partnerships or programs. This is not to say that this is done against the wishes of the denomination, but rather in most cases, the larger church is more directly involved in the strategic development and vision casting of the mission initiative. This, in turn, requires the large church lead pastor to be a strategic thinker and vision caster in a variety of settings beyond the walls of the church.

Vision casting also includes the concept of strategic planning. Shah, David, and Surawski note that larger churches are more likely than smaller churches to engage in strategic planning.[62] Furthermore, among the churches that do utilize strategic planning, Barna notes that large church pastors are more interested than pastors of smaller churches in measuring

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[58] Ibid.; George, *The Coming Church Revolution*.

[59] Thumma and Bird, *Recent Shifts*.

[60] T. Keller, "Leadership and Church Size Dynamics," *The Movement Newsletter*, 2006.

[61] S. Gramby-Sobukwe and T. Hoiland, "The Rise of Mega-Church Efforts in International Development: A Brief Analysis and Areas for Further Research," *Transfomration: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 26, no. 2 (2009); Keller, "Leadership."

[62] A.J. Shah, F.R. David, and Z.J. Surawski, "Does Strategic Planning Help Churches?: An Exploratory Study," *Coast Business Journal* 2, no. 1 (2004).



 

demographics, revamping financial processes, and working with fundraising consultants.[63] The larger the church, the more the lead pastor must be adept at reading numbers, engaging experts and/or consultants, and crafting long-term strategies for the church.

*Leading Through Relationships with Other Leaders*

The large church lead pastor must develop a core leadership team that supports him in running both the staff and daily ministries of the local church. For the large church at the lower end of the scale, this may simply be one or two other associate pastors who, in turn, run a core team of volunteers. For the lead pastor of a large church at the higher end of the scale, this team is a critical group of executive pastors or associate lead pastors who help run the rest of the staff and set vision with the lead pastor. This process of ministering through a key team is actually a critical part of the process of the lead pastor transitioning from the role of manager to the role of leader.[64] In figure 4, McIntosh illustrates how the lead pastor's role changes as the church grows increasingly large.[65]

Not only must the large church lead pastor relate to the governing board of the church, but he also must begin to rely on the collective leadership of a governing group. Malphurs suggests that a governing board should be primarily focused on praying, monitoring, deciding, and advising with and for the lead pastor of the large church.[66] He points out that the governing board

**FIGURE 4**

**The Changing Nature of the Lead Pastor's Shepherding Role**

| Church Size | Senior Pastor's Shepherd Role |
|---|---|
| Up to 200 | Shepherd all people personally |
| 200-400 | Shepherd all people through volunteers |
| 400-600 | Shepherd all people through leaders |
| 800 or more | Shepherd all people through pastoral staff |

(McIntosh, 2000, p. 77)

[63] Barna Group, "How Pastors Plan to Improve Their Churches," https://www.barna.org/barna-update/congregations/560-how-pastors-plan-to-improve-their-churches#.VpRk1lIoQfF.

[64] J.T. Hawco, "The Senior Pastor/Executive Pastor Team: A Contemporary Paradigm for the Larger Church Staff," Covenant Theological Seminary, http://www.xpastor.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/hawco_john.pdf, 2005).

[65] McIntosh, *Staff Your Church*.

[66] A. Malphurs, *Leading Leaders: Empowering Church Boards for Ministry Excellence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005).

is ultimately responsible for the church but invests most of its authority into the lead pastor. In this situation, the lead pastor must relate well to the governing board. He must guard against micromanagement while avoiding the pitfall of getting ahead of the governing board.

The relationship between lead pastor and board is particularly dynamic. "There is no single determinant of board power and influence *over senior managers*."[67] However, the lead pastor would do well to develop informal relationships with board members while at the same time provide the right amount of information for board members to be well-informed decision makers. One of the key markers of an effective board-manager relationship is the ability for the board to be comfortable and informed enough to ask the right questions of senior management.[68]

*Leading Through Communication*

The large church lead pastor needs to be able to communicate effectively in a large group setting.[69] Communication is a critical aspect of leadership. Hackman and Johnson broadly define communication as "the transfer of symbols, which allows individuals to create meaning."[70] They further suggest that "leadership is human (symbolic) communication that modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs."[71] Communication is what builds and develops the relationships necessary for leadership to exist.[72]

The large church lead pastor must be a highly effective communicator on the stage. A brief glance over job descriptions for large church lead pastors reflects expectancy on the part of large churches that their lead pastor has extensive experience and skill in the discipline of preaching. A survey of large church pastors done by the Leadership Network note that the majority of large church pastors choose to identify as "preacher-teacher" rather than pastor.[73] The same study noted that pastors of the largest churches

[67] C. Cornforth, "Power Relations Between Boards and Senior Managers in the Governance of Public and Non-Profit Organisations," in *2nd International Conference on Corporate Governance and Direction* (Henley Management College, UK: 1999), 26.

[68] Ibid.

[69] McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*; Schaller, *Growing Plans*.

[70] M.Z. Hackman and C.E. Johnson, *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*, 6th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2013), 5.

[71] Ibid., 11.

[72] A. DuBrin, *Leadership: Research Findings, Practice, and Skills*, 8th ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2015); G.B. Graen and M. Uhl-Bien, "Relationship-Based Approach to Leadership: Development of Leader-Member Exchange (Lmx) Theory of Leadership over 25 Years: Applying a Multi-Level Multi-Domain Perspective," *Management Department Faculty Publications* Paper 57, (1995).

[73] W. Bird, "Teacher First: Leadership Network's 2009 Large-Church Senior Pastor Survey," http://www.leadnet.org.



 

spend more time preaching and more time in sermon preparation than do pastors of smaller churches.

Recent research also notes that the larger a church becomes, the more likely it is that the church, and by necessity its lead pastor, will be adept at utilizing social media for religious purposes.[74] In her discussion, Foegenay notes that large churches are more likely to utilize Facebook and Twitter for community among their congregants. A 2013 Barna report effectively supports this research by noting that large church pastors are among those who utilize both Twitter and Facebook most frequently.[75] Further, this same Barna study noted that most large church lead pastors believe that social media would comprise "a significant part of their ministry" in the next two years. Thus, the large church lead pastor must be able communicate effectively both in person and via social media.

*Leading by Functioning as the Church Figurehead Within the Community*

Finally, the large church lead pastor must connect well with the community in which the church is situated. Rananaware conducted research that sought to discover whether Mintzberg's model of leadership roles applied to church leadership.[76] In his research, he concluded that 90% of pastors play the role of figurehead in the church and represent the church to the entire community. He also noted that 100% of pastors play the role of spokesperson for the church. As spokesperson, the pastor is required to represent the church well within the community, society in general, and within the denomination if applicable.

While all pastors fill the roles of figurehead and spokesperson, the larger a church becomes, the more vital it is that the lead pastor functions exceptionally well in these roles. The larger a church becomes, the more well known it is to the community in which it is situated, the denomination of which it is a part, and society in general. McIntosh notes that part of the function of the large church lead pastor is brand management.[77] One of the key functions of the large church pastor is to ensure that the church develops and keeps a solid reputation within the community. He must be comfortable interacting with key political, social, and religious leaders within the community, and he must be ready to engage with clarity and warmth those who would

[74] K. Fogenay, "A Christian Mega Church Strives for Relevance: Examining Social Media and Religiosity," ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text database (1553232), 2013.

[75] Barna Group, "The Rise of the @Pastor," https://www.barna.org/barna-update/congregations/615-the-rise-of-the-pastor#.VpRlUFIoQfF.

[76] V.S. Rananaware, "Leadership Roles: Application of Mintzberg's Leadership Roles to the Church Leadership," *Intercontinental Journal of Human Resources Research Review* 3, no. 11 (2015).

[77] McIntosh, *Taking Your Church*.

confuse the brand of the church. By doing so, the large church lead pastor will ensure that the church is understood correctly in the community.

## THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF LEADING THROUGH GROWTH

The research above has demonstrated that a correlation exists between the size of a church and the function of the lead pastor. As a church grows, it is important for the lead pastor to think differently about ministry and leadership. As the role of the lead pastor changes, he or she must guard against certain organizational land mines while seeking to develop other organizational opportunities through leadership.

### Leadership That Creates Psychic Prisons

Large church lead pastors must constantly fight against allowing their leadership to turn their organization into what Morgan refers to as a psychic prison.[78] Morgan suggests that a psychic prison is simply an organizationally or self-constructed version of reality that competes with actual reality.

Large church lead pastors can create psychic prisons by allowing groupthink to become part of their organizational culture. Groupthink occurs when a group of people seeks decisional harmony over making the right choice. This can occur when the lead pastor fails to recognize the power of position as it relates to teams. Those in power can cause those who are not in power to communicate less frequently and less honestly if they are not intentional about the way in which they communicate.[79] When large church lead pastors underappreciate the amount of power they are perceived to hold, they may accidentally allow their staff or board to think that the only right way is the lead pastor's way, thus paving the road for groupthink to exist.

Another way large church lead pastors create psychic prisons is by allowing the church to function as the patriarchal family. This occurs when the large church lead pastor is allowed to take the place as the family patriarch. Churches that exude male dominance and male values alone are churches that may have fallen victim to this danger.

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[78] Morgan, *Images of Organization*.

[79] C. Anderson and J.L. Berdahl, "The Experience of Power: Examining the Effects of Power on Approach and Inhibition Tendencies," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83, no. 6 (2002); T.G. Pacleb, "The Relationship Between Leadership Styles, Leader Communication Style, and Impact on Leader-Member Exchange Relationship Within the Banking Sector in the United States and the Philippines," ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text database (3583465), 2013.



 

### Leadership That Creates Domination

Large church lead pastors must also guard against allowing their organization to become an "instrument of domination."[80] An organization becomes such when it consistently places the goals of the organization above that of the people within them. At times, a large church lead pastor may exploit an organization's staff in the hopes of advancing the mission. This may be observed in high levels of turnover, in higher than normal rates of failing health, or even by the presence of failing marriages or troubled families within the staff of the organization.

### Leadership That Creates Transformation

Ultimately, large church lead pastors must become efficient at managing complexity. When complexity is managed well, the lead pastor will create organizational transformation. Morgan suggests one way that leaders can manage complexity well is through the creation of "new contexts."[81] For an organization, context is simply the structural patterns and parameters that help define how the organization relates to itself. Thus, the large church lead pastor needs to be adept at creating stable spaces within the organization that can allow for self-organization (referred to as decentralization by McIntosh) to occur. When done well, this will allow the church to respond uniquely in each situation in order to meet the particular needs within the church. For instance, the lead pastor should seek to create a relatively stable worship environment in which the ministry team of the church can adapt to various contingencies that present themselves. One week, a national catastrophe may occur, such as was the case on September 11, 2001. This would demand a certain response on the part of the ministry team in order to effectively minister to the people in a Sunday morning service. Another week, the organization may launch a new building fund campaign. In this scenario, what worked as a response for a tragedy like 9/11 would not work for the kickoff of a major fundraising initiative. The lead pastor must create a stable environment that allows for those within the organization to self-organize and meet unique and varied needs as they arise.

## CONCLUSION

Leadership in the modern world is indeed complex. However, the large church lead pastor need not be overwhelmed by the complexity of the task. With a clear understanding of the organizational dynamics at play, the large church lead pastors can successfully transition their church no matter the

[80] Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 293.

[81] Ibid.

size or situation it faces. By focusing their leadership in the key areas of vision casting, leader development, and large group communication, and by functioning as the organizational ambassador, the chances for organizational success only increase. Further, by implementing the right decisions, large church lead pastors can help their organization avoid the negative attributes that would surely induce decline.

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## About the Author

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# BOOK REVIEWS

Robinson, Elaine A. *Race and Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012. 104 pp. $10.99.

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, PhD, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Christian Ministry at Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University in Marion, IN.

Abingdon's *Horizons in Theology* series aims to produce short, theologically robust contributions to key subjects in light of theology. Entries in the series range from a theological consideration of preaching to globalization, music, and violence. Elaine Robinson, Academic Dean at Saint Paul School of Theology at Oklahoma City University, has contributed to the series with a volume entitled *Race and Theology*. A perusal of Robinson's work suggests that she is primed to contribute the volume, as she is engaged in asking critical questions about important subjects and the way they pertain to the state of the local church. Race is a pressing issue, more so today than when the book was published, and Robinson's volume is a helpful introduction to the intersection of these two subjects.

*Race and Theology* has four chapters, each with a distinct purpose. Robinson first orientates the reader, giving definitions and descriptions of the book's topics. Next, she names the concern of racism, that people are considered less than human (or less human than others), in the practice and perpetuation of unhealthy and unequal relationships or affairs. Third, Robinson illustrates this practice with a cursory survey of the history of the United States of America. Finally, Robinson sounds a hopeful note, suggest-

ing changes and a kind of reformation of theological consideration of race that includes being conscious of the issue, performing theology in the prophetic tradition in light of this consciousness, and making practical changes in our practical theology, including worship and music.

Let's examine these four chapters in slightly more detail. Robinson begins by naming racism as a valuation of the other person in light of superficialities, such as skin color, eye shape, clothing, or hair texture (16). The practice is not limited to individual expressions of value, but it also includes systemic injustices that are perpetuated because of explicit racisms and racist privileges of the past (21). The effects of such racism can be found in economics, religion, and politics, or, as the foreword says so remarkably, racism is seen when certain races are "poorer and hungrier" than others (4). The foundations of these practices emerge from an impoverished or misguided theological anthropology. Robinson utilizes the black theology of James Cone to affirm that a theological anthropology proffered by the powerful will not resonate with those without power, so long as injustices persist (30). Instead, Robinson suggests, in light of Latino/a theology, that theological anthropologies must be developed in concrete existence, where God is encountered. While other cultures might not require that race become part of the language of theological anthropology, the concrete life and history of the United States of America requires its presence. Race is an integral part to being human in the American context, if God is to be found and understood in our concrete existences. With this in mind, Robinson accesses womanist, liberation, mujerista, and Native American theologies of being a person (30–42). Robinson does not find therein a center, but a valuation of the human person through engaging the history and lived experience of various people. The failure of white theology, in Robinson's view, is that persons have not been considered racially; indeed, the white race may be seen as the representative race or as not a race (22). As a result, churches have not always been places of affirming the value of the human person in light of race, but have perpetuated injustices, not always raising questions and criticisms from the other's point of view and the other's experience. In chapter four, Robinson offers suggestions to combat the current state of affairs. One suggestion is that we must become aware and appreciative of various cultures. We must become black, red, and yellow with God. This is not to propose race as an "ontological condition," but as an appreciation of the goodness and grace of God in various locales, among various peoples (87). The gospel of Jesus Christ is the foundation of this varied appreciation. It alone is the impetus, and theology alone is the foundation for this fresh consideration.

Readers seeking a quick introduction to relevant vantage points and helpful discussions will appreciate Robinson's concision in *Race and Theology.* Practitioners and theological educators of evangelism will find key issues presented in accessible ways, with passion but appropriate gentleness



 

and humility. Theological anthropology will become a key consideration when thinking missionally or evangelizing. Readership will be limited, however, mainly to US contexts. The book's illustrations focus on such histories as the Civil War and Jim Crow laws. Racism is presented and considered as "America's Original Sin." Thus, readers from other Western nations will need to contextualize the book's illustrations, while appropriating its ideas and concerns. Further, readers will want to challenge, at points, Robinson's anthropology for its orthodoxy. Of course, such challenging is not of Robinson's anthropology, but of the anthropologies Robinson accesses. For example, Robinson notes the Native American theological anthropology that blurs the lines between human and non-human so that "people" might be considered as a category beyond human beings (39). Readers may also question the methodology of Robinson's sources for theological anthropology, for instance, whether starting with dehumanization, even before Scripture and tradition, is appropriate (42). Such concerns, when framed as questions, will push conversation and deepen mutual understanding, even if there is not consensus. One gets the idea that Robinson would consider such conscientization a helpful development and a theological corrective to racism and its effects.

*Race and Theology* will be best utilized in US courses on evangelism and cross-cultural ministry, and in church groups with appropriate guides for understanding and implementing theologically rooted, redemptive practices for our day.

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McIntosh, Gary L. *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016. 187 pp. $15.99.

Reviewed by Garrett R. Eaglin. Eaglin is an undergraduate student at Biola University. He has served as a leader in youth ministry. He is currently earning a BA in Biblical & Theological Studies and a minor in Great Books of the Western Tradition from the Torrey Honors Institute.

In the present-day church, it is often difficult to determine its unified mission, priority, role, focus, and context. It is equally difficult to articulate the relationship between the gathering of the faithful community of believers and its proclamation of the gospel to those outside of that gathering (i.e., the relationship between church attendance and evangelism). Gary McIntosh (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) has written *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today* as an attempt to discover and outline the true relationship between faith, evangelism, and the modern church.

McIntosh notes that the church has lost its connection between missional thinking and evangelism. He hopes to offer a corrective in this book by engaging in the biblical and practical questions pertinent to evangelism

in a case study on new converts connected to local churches. This is all purposed to relocate evangelism to the core of local church ministry, or rather, to reveal that every aspect of the local church ministry is actually within the scope of evangelism. McIntosh then closes with practical advice and principles to maximize the local church's effectiveness in facilitating the integration of new converts within its walls.

McIntosh's main thesis is that evangelism has historically held the highest priority in the church's mission and practice. He accomplishes this by integrating a rich theology of the incarnation and kingdom with the local church; by way of this connection, we learn that God's economy is always one of revealing and accomplishing his salvation purposes, and evangelism is one image of that dynamic. McIntosh uses a trichotomous view of evangelism to outline how doing things in the name of the Lord (presence), presenting the gospel message and facilitating in its reception (proclamation), and facilitating discipleship (persuasion) are all unified levels of evangelism and are not disparate. Evangelism defined thusly then becomes the primary mission of the local church—spiritual, moral, and academic formation all take place in this evangelistic dynamism for the sake of preparing the church for the coming King and kingdom.

McIntosh further demonstrates his thesis of the centrality of evangelism to the life of the local church by conducting a survey analyzing the means by which people are led to faith in Christ. McIntosh compares his survey with a survey conducted by Arn's Institute for American Church Growth in 1980. McIntosh's survey discovered that friends and family members are the categories with the highest percentages (McIntosh 58.9%; Arn 75–90%), with the pastor and church staff as the second highest (McIntosh 17.3%; Arn 5–6%), and a crusade in third place (McIntosh 12.5%; Arn 0.25–0.5%). The disparity in the percentages demonstrates a significant change in how the means of effective evangelism have undergone a significant shift from the family to the church in the last three decades. McIntosh then recommends specific principles to apply in the church that aim toward three accomplishments: (1) the worshipers' personal investment in the lost, (2) an atmosphere in the local church that is conducive to evangelism, and (3) worshipers sufficiently trained in evangelism.

McIntosh then focuses on the retention of new converts in local churches. He discovers six principles common to churches that have high retention rates among all generations; these principles are arranged around four key tenets: (1) connection/integration (small groups, service, etc.), (2) clarity (defined mission, vision, intention, etc.), (3) instruction (Sunday school, church school, doctrine, etc.), and (4) relevance (applicable, passionate, and well-delivered sermons, culturally relevant atmosphere, etc.). McIntosh's practical principles at the end of this section clearly reflect that. The book ends with a list of ten principles of effective evangelism that seek to sum up the conclusions of McIntosh's study in an easily applicable format.



 

Although McIntosh clearly articulates the problem throughout the book while offering helpful solutions, he fails to provide sufficient support for the thesis that social justice, the proclamation of the gospel, and discipleship are all forms of evangelism. Describing the connection of social justice and discipleship with the word preached would seem to be a better-suited analogy. The three-tiered nature of it (social justice, then proclamation, then discipleship) seems ad hoc, as well. This places discipleship at a greater importance than social justice without a clear justification. If my church has the option of sending a doctor on a medical mission to Ramadi, should I tell him that his work is a lower level (but still necessary) form of evangelism than my Sunday morning message? This is where I think it would be helpful if McIntosh restricted this dynamic so that evangelism only refers to the verbal proclamation of the gospel, while social justice and discipleship are distinct from, yet intimately related to, evangelism. This would emphasize McIntosh's main points while avoiding the ad hoc hierarchical dynamic.

Despite this weakness, McIntosh still accomplishes his goal of relocating the gospel and its proclamation to the center of the life of the church. The principles at the end of each section are extremely applicable for pastors, church staff, and laypersons alike. They illustrate specific examples and give particular advice—avoiding the common trap of offering overly broad advice that somehow simultaneously applies to everything and nothing.

McIntosh's *Growing God's Church* accomplishes the retrieval of evangelism from the realm of ancillary, optional activity and returns it to the core of the life of the local church, and his method is convincing. Anyone who reads this and applies the principles to his church will likely see results due to the specific, practical, gospel-centered, and relevant nature of the advice. This is equally relevant to pastors, church staff, and laypersons, but the bulk of its applicability will resonate with a pastor and evangelist.

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Dreher, Rod. *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation.* New York: Sentinel, 2017. 262 pp. $15.00.

Reviewed by April Berg. April is an MA in Missiology student at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. She seeks to see peoples across the continent of Asia come to know Christ as Savior and Lord and to be taught the Scriptures within the community of faith, both present and past. She earned her BA from North Greenville University.

Due to technological innovations and globalization, the world today is in constant flux. U.S. culture in particular is shifting, becoming more relativistic and anarchistic. How are Christians to respond to the culture? How are we to maintain our Christian identity, raise up the next generation, and engage the lost, all at the same time? Dreher proposes that Christians learn from the Rule of Saint Benedict, applying his principles in Christ-focused communities

that are grounded in the traditions of the faith and engaging the world, not with worldly methods, but with consistent countercultural witness to Christ in daily life. He notes that "instead of looking to prop up the current order, [Christians] have recognized that the kingdom of which they are citizens is not of this world and have decided not to compromise that citizenship" (18).

Dreher begins by setting up the problem, namely that Christianity is disappearing in the West (8), and even within the churches, a "mushy psuedoreligion the researchers deemed Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD)" has spread (10). This context of societal collapse is remarkably similar to the end of the Roman Empire, the time of Saint Benedict and barbarian control (12–17). The move away from early orthodox Christianity began in the fourteenth century and continues to the present. Dreher examines the historical movements that changed the West, including the rise of nominalism, the Reformation that ended ecclesiastical authority, the Enlightenment and Modernity, capitalism, and the Sexual Revolution (23). Dreher believes that the best method of addressing all these historical changes, to draw us back to biblical belief, is through the principles in Benedict's Rule, "disciplining one's life to live a life to glorify God and help others" (54). Dreher then applies the principles he draws out from the Rule to the areas of politics, church, community and family, education, work, sexuality, and technology. This Benedict Option, pulling away to focus on Christ and ordering our lives under his lordship before going out to show love in the world, is "a call to undertaking the long and patient work of reclaiming the real world from the artifice, alienation, and atomization of modern life" (236).

Dreher makes a clear case for why methods we have used for so long as American Christians to try to keep Christian values as the mainline of U.S. society will no longer work. He notes that politics is no longer a viable option because neither major party is Christian in its morality and beliefs (80); nor will political leaders be able to end "cultural forces that have been separating the West from God for centuries . . . by a single election, or any election at all" (99). He also argues that both parties are based on an anthropology opposite to that of the Bible (90). Likewise, public education fails to correct the cultural pitfalls because at its core, it promotes liberalism and nihilism (145). Instead of allowing children to stay in schools that want only for the students to earn good incomes, make excellent grades, or tow the social line (Dreher goes into some detail here about the LBGT ideals promoted in public schools now) (155–160), he proposes beginning classical Christian schools that "provide them with an education that is rightly ordered—that is, one based on the premise that there is a God-given, unified structure to reality and that it is discoverable" (146). Christians find themselves unable to trust in the government, the schools, or even technological innovations to help raise their children in the faith. Christians are now the minority in the U.S. (99), an idea which is stated in the book with seriousness but without inducing panic.



 

The positive proposals offered in each applicative area are based on the Rule and are doable. The classical Christian schools mentioned above are possible to start and already have a growing reputation for producing excellent thinkers. Dreher offers practical advice for applying the Rule in each chapter along with examples of people doing so. For example, in the technology chapter, he suggests people limit online activity after a certain point in the day and instead do something with their hands that restores "our sense of connection with the real world" (233). The group Reboot participates in a "digital Sabbath" with the same concept, except they set aside a whole day to be without technology (228). Dreher succeeds in making the complex concepts of combatting Western anti-Christian sentiments with Benedictine ideals approachable for the average Christian layperson.

Dreher emphasizes correct doctrine, historical patterns, and faith traditions as means of ordering our life under Christ in a way that strengthens us to withstand the cultural changes. However, this mixture of history and faith concepts sometimes confuses his objective. Is he trying to keep Christianity afloat, or is he trying to keep the West afloat? He is just as quick to suggest studying the Greek heroes as the Scriptures and saints (160). The book is heavily reliant on U.S. and Italian examples, so how far does its use extend to the rest of Europe? Furthermore, what about the East—does that hemisphere not have challenges to Christianity from liberalization and globalization? These questions are not sufficiently addressed in the book, although his argument is excellent for specifically U.S. Christianity and civic awareness.

Dreher also at times seems to renege on his positions. For example, throughout the book, he condemns the growth of the LBGT movement among youth. He notes that the idea of gender as a choice is taught in media and the classroom (156). However, towards the end of the book, he discusses gay Christians as a valid group in the church. Given, he does say that this group should practice chastity and should not have the option of marriage (213), but his sudden inclusion of homosexuals is a strange backtracking. One supposes that he could mean Christians who struggle with homosexual attraction, but this definition is not clear. Nor is his position clear on whether or not homosexuality is a part of a person or a culturally induced concept, a position that would explain any presuppositions in the writing about this topic.

Finally, Dreher ensures that no one considers the Benedict Option to be a means of withdrawing into the wilderness with no evangelism possible. He notes that the Option "still less is . . . a plan for constructing communities of the pure, cut off from the real world" (236). The original Benedictine communities on which the Option is based did not forsake evangelism: "These monasteries kept faith and learning alive within their walls, evangelized barbarian peoples, and taught them how to pray, to read, to plant crops, and to build things" (15). One of the principles in the Rule is that of hospi-

tality. This principle is for the monks to invite the world into the monastery, where they are strong in Christ, in prayer, and in community, and to share their peace and hope with the strangers (72–73). They are called to invite people alongside them in their withdrawal (living incarnationally) and to share Christ. The idea is that while the cultural majority raves around us, we stand strong in Christ and locally share who he is and what he does for us. Our lives ordered to God will attract the lost and reveal the futility of their lifestyles. Then they will come to Christ and possibly start new communities (and churches?) in their places of life.

The Benedict Option is not an outdated rehashing of an ancient monastic system, nor is it a doomsday crier book about the end times signaled by cultural collapse. Instead, this Option is a means of engaging the world with Christ by living out a consistent lifestyle centered on prayer and the Scriptures. Dreher hopes that when Christians know who they are and where they have come from, and live out this information every day, slowly culture will be affected for the better, and more people will come to know Christ.

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Paas, Stefan. *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. 316 pp. $34.00.

Reviewed by John P. Thompson, D.S.L., Assistant Professor of Missiology & Leadership and Director of the DMin Program at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He planted a church in Tulsa before joining the faculty at ORU. He also leads Global Equip, a ministry training leaders overseas.

In an attempt to bolster Christianity in the West, most denominations have placed great emphasis on church planting. Stefan Paas brings a powerful, critical evaluation of our contemporary, popular beliefs about and motives for church planting. His context and focus is on the secular regions of Europe, especially in the northwest and historically Protestant quadrant of the continent. However, his analysis has relevant application throughout the Western world that is marked by a Christian heritage. Paas is a self-described "skeptical advocate" of church planting. He believes in the enterprise but confronts the theological underpinnings, proof-texting, and current statistics in much of the current rhetoric used to advance the cause. This book is a healthy counterweight to the plethora of church planting literature.

Stefan Paas writes as a church planting insider and scholar immersed in both the experience of church planting and in the academic study of evangelism and church planting. He participated in two church plants in The Netherlands, leads church planter assessments, supervises students desiring to church plant, serves in several church planting networks, and consults with denominations. He is the J.H. Bavinck Professor of Church Planting and Church Renewal at VU University Amsterdam. Furthermore, he has been an integral member of an ecumenical dialogue on evangelism in



 

Europe sponsored by the World Council of Churches and helped publish *Sharing Good New: A Handbook on Evangelism in Europe* this year as one of three editors and author of several chapters. His books, articles, and courses center on missiology, church planting and renewal, Christian mission in Europe, and political theology. This depth of academic prowess, along with personal, practical engagement in European church planting initiatives, is evident throughout *Church Planting in the Secular West*.

The book consists of five lengthy chapters that provide a simple structure overall; yet, each chapter is complex and content-rich. The first chapter lays an insightful foundation exploring the concept of church planting and the way it has morphed over the last two thousand years. Chapters two through four address the three primary motivations for church planting. Chapter two examines the rise of confessionalism in Europe and its belief that better churches are needed. Chapter three assesses the drive for more churches that has arisen out of church growth theory. Chapter four addresses the argument for new, innovative churches to reach a changing world. Finally, chapter five concludes the book, offering a more nuanced defense of the need for church planting in Europe.

Paas provides a historical sketch of the meaning of "church planting" that expands the reader's understanding and illuminates current assumptions. In the New Testament, Jesus talked about sowing the gospel or the kingdom, and Paul referred to the church as a field, a temple, or a building. However, the New Testament does not speak directly of church planting. The term was first used in the second century by Irenaeus who meant the institution of the universal church, not local congregations. Many centuries later, Protestants began to think of church planting in terms of multiplying local congregations in contrast to the Catholic concept of extending the Catholic Church. Although their concept of what was planted differed, both Protestants and Catholics held a classic church planting model until the last century, a model that included "a three-stage process of evangelism (conversion), gathering (baptism and community formation), and planting (constitution)." A century ago, however, Rolland Allen's passion to avoid paternalism and speed up evangelism on the mission field led to collapsing the second and third stage together. Planting indigenous churches instead of mission stations would enable the church to multiply faster. Donald McGavran and his Church Growth Movement then added the final step of compressing the first two stages of evangelism and gathering. Consequently, the church became an instrument of evangelism instead of a result of evangelism, given McGavran's insistence that (local) church growth is the best measure of evangelism. Evangelicals fully embraced this paradigm and the church growth mantra that planting churches is the most effective way to do evangelism. Paas believes compressing the classical three-step model of evangelism, gathering, and constitution/planting into a single movement of evangelism-as-planting weakens and relativizes ecclesiology as well as

truncates our approach to evangelism. Paas raises serious questions with his analysis of this reductionism in the church planting process with which all church planters in the West should wrestle. I, personally, was a former church planter who planted a church out of a deep passion for evangelism and the belief that church planting is the most effective way to do evangelism. I found this book to be both sobering and helpful in shedding light on some residual concerns from my own past church planting experience. Other readers involved in church planting will benefit as well from the thoughts of Paas.

Paas also discusses the church planting assumption that better churches are needed, which has its root in the Protestant quest for confessional purity. Protestantism gave rise to confessionalism, where churches define themselves by their core convictions (confessions). Paas describes how four revival movements (Anabaptists, Baptists, Moravians, and Methodists) spawned confessional church planting in Europe. These movements held a critical view of existing European churches and sought to re-evangelize the continent. Positively, these early church planters mobilized the laity for mission, which was actually an early form of a missional understanding of the congregation. Paas, however, points out that these revival movements succeeded in a Christian culture, which is not the current reality in the secular regions of Europe. Consequently, we must shift from a revival approach to a truly missionary approach. Paas rightly warns that fighting with other Christian traditions could be detrimental to the whole Christian enterprise in a post-Christian culture and calls church planters to work in unity with existing churches. He suggests first seeking to do mission work in association with existing churches instead of having a preconceived goal to plant a new church. Furthermore, he observes that church planting is usually concentrated in areas with nominal Christian populations instead of finding bridges to truly secular Europeans. The classic model of planting churches recognized the need for laying a cultural frame of reference to even have a religious conversation with people. Just focusing on church planting ignores this important cultural work as part of the process and ends up steering church planting toward Bible belt regions in Europe.

Paas offers a strong dose of realism for those engaged in church planting in the West. He examines the limitations and errors in studies often touted as proof that new churches grow faster than older ones and that small churches grow faster than large churches. He points out that the church is not growing in many places in the world, and we should not naively believe that church planting is the cure-all. In Western Europe, the external supports that encourage participation in church have been stripped away, and consequently, Paas says we must not expect to draw multitudes like in the revivals of the past. He challenges church planters to go to difficult places and to not have unrealistic expectations. Paas is self aware, telling the reader that he may seem too critical for some. The book does not have the opti-



 

mistic tone of most (or perhaps all) church planting books. The author naturally displays a more European approach of caution and realism. His systematic dismantling of studies and their statistics, for example, may feel discouraging to an American reader, but it is honest, brutal, and realistic in representing a European postmodern perspective.

Paas, however, does offer hope. He suggests that one of the greatest values of church planting is its potential for innovation. Finding innovative ways to bring the gospel into a secular culture is a strong rationale for church planting. It is not the replication of church models too often the mainstay of church planting today, but actual innovative experimentation that could offer potential hope for the future. Based on innovation theory, he suggests the need to create free havens, laboratories, and incubators for experimentation. Here the three-stage model of church planting can again provide an important framework. Haste to call everything a church, as in the one-stage model of evangelism equals planting, does not allow free space on the margins to truly experiment, to innovate, and even to fail.

*Church Planting in the Secular West* unpacks the motives today that underlie most church planting in the West, revealing the historical roots and unexamined assumptions. Such a treatise is extremely beneficial for all those connected to church planting initiatives, enabling the reader to examine his/her own assumptions and to develop greater self awareness. This book will likely challenge and consequently strengthen the reader's ecclesiology and missiology. Truly, we can learn much from Stefan Paas and from the European experience, as the subtitle of the book suggests.

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# GREAT COMMISSION RESEARCH NETWORK GREATCOMMISSIONRESEARCH.NET

*(Formerly: The American Society for Church Growth)*

*What is the Great Commission Research Network or GreatCommissionResearch.net?*

The Great Commission Research Network is a worldwide and professional association of Christian leaders whose ministry activities are based on the basic and key principles of church growth as originally developed by the late Donald McGavran. Founded by renowned missiologists George G. Hunter III and C. Peter Wagner, the GreatCommissionResearch.net (formally the American Society for Church Growth) has expanded into an affiliation of church leaders who share research, examine case studies, dialogue with cutting-edge leaders, and network with fellow church professionals who are committed to helping local churches expand the kingdom through disciple-making

*Who Can Join the GCRN?*

GCRN membership is open to all who wish a professional affiliation with colleagues in the field. The membership includes theoreticians, such as professors of church growth, and practitioners, such as pastors, denominational executives, parachurch leaders, church planters, researchers, missions leaders, and consultants. Some members specialize in domestic or mono-cultural church growth, while others are cross-culturally oriented.

*Why Join the GCRN?*

The GCRN provides a forum for maximum interaction among leaders, ministries, and resources on the cutting edge of Great Commission research.

The Annual Conference of the Great Commission Research Network (typically held in early November each year) offers the opportunity for research updates information on new resources and developments, as well as fellowship and encouragement from colleagues in the field of church growth. Membership in GCRN includes a subscription to the *Great Commission Research Journal.*

*How Do I Join the GCRN?*

For further information on membership, the annual meeting and registration, please visit www.greatcommissionresearch.com

*Membership Benefits*

- Network affiliation with leading writers, consultants, denominational leaders, professors of evangelism and church growth, pastors, church planters, researchers, and mission leaders
- Subscription to the Great Commission Research Journal
- Discounts for Annual Conference Registration
- Listing of your contact information on the GCRN website in our Membership Directory

*Membership fees (includes the Journal and all the benefits above):*

$49.00/year—**Regular Membership** / $59.00—Membership outside the US

$29.00/year—**Student/Senior Adult (65+) Membership** / $39.00—Membership outside the US

## The Donald A. McGavran Award

Once a year, the Great Commission Research Network (formerly the American Society for Church Growth) presents the Donald A. McGavran Award to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the Church Growth Movement in the United States.

**The award recipients to date are:**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Win Arn | 1989 | John Ellas | 2003 |
| C. Peter Wagner | 1990 | Rick Warren | 2004 |
| Carl F. George | 1991 | Charles Arn | 2005 |
| Wilbert S. McKinnley | 1992 | John Vaughan | 2006 |
| Robert Logan | 1993 | Waldo Werning | 2006 |
| Bill Sullivan | 1994 | Bob Whitesel | 2007 |
| Elmer Towns | 1994 | Bill Easum | 2009 |
| Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr. | 1995 | Thom S. Rainer | 2010 |
| George G. Hunter, III | 1996 | Ed Stetzer | 2012 |
| Eddie Gibbs | 1997 | Nelson Searcy | 2013 |
| Gary L. McIntosh | 1998 | J.D. Payne | 2014 |
| Kent R. Hunter | 1999 | Alan McMahan | 2015 |
| R. Daniel Reeves | 2000 | Steve Wilkes | 2016 |
| Ray Ellis | 2002 | Art McPhee | 2016 |

## The Win Arn Lifetime Achievement Award

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eddie Gibbs | 2011 | John Vaughan | 2014 |
| Elmer Towns | 2012 | Gary McIntosh | 2015 |
| George G. Hunter III | 2013 | | |

## ASCG/GCRN Past Presidents

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| C. Peter Wagner | 1986 | R. Daniel Reeves | 1997–1998 |
| George Hunter III | 1987 | Ray W. Ellis | 1999–2000 |
| Kent R. Hunter | 1988 | Charles Van Engen | 2001–2002 |
| Elmer Towns | 1989 | Charles Arn | 2003–2004 |
| Eddie Gibbs | 1990 | Alan McMahan | 2005–2006 |
| Bill Sullivan | 1991 | Eric Baumgartner | 2007–2008 |
| Carl F. George | 1992 | Bob Whitesel | 2009–2012 |
| Flavil Yeakley, Jr. | 1993 | Steve Wilkes | 2013–2014 |
| John Vaughan | 1994 | Mike Morris | 2015–2016 |
| Gary L. McIntosh | 1995–1996 | | |

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