

CCDA's Contribution to Urban Missiology

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ABSTRACT:

The Christian Community Development Association is one of the largest associations of urban church and parachurch ministries in the United States. Founded by John Perkins and Wayne Gordon, this association has been largely built around practitioners seeking racial reconciliation in their communities. In addition, CCDA has sought to develop the poor and marginalized by operating under eight principles: Relocation, Reconciliation, Redistribution, Leadership Development, Listening to the Community, Church-Based, (W)holistic, and Empowerment. These principles have set the framework for how many missionaries have entered into urban communities around the United States. With the increasing urbanization on a global scale, this panel will discuss CCDA principles and the need for CCDA practitioners and urban missiologists to work together.

One of the most heartbreaking aspects of my job was having to ask a young woman and her children to move out of the house. Leslie¹ was one such young woman. She had been in and out of the home three times which was the maximum allowed according to our policies. I let her live at the house a fourth time on the condition that she stay marijuana free. A few months later I had to ask her to leave after she tested positive for marijuana use. A few months after that, her landlord broke into the garage space she was renting with her two children and raped her.

While I'm not sure if letting her stay with us at New Creation Home would have ultimately prevented the situation, I had to take a hard stop and ask myself, "What are the bigger issues happening beyond our policies and programs?"

New Creation Home Ministries (NCHM) houses pregnant and parenting teenage mothers ages 13-22 and their children. NCHM has two residential homes and hosts a community-wide parenting class and Bible study for the young mothers in the neighborhood. The families at NCHM are homeless or housing-insecure, so the residents are a transient population. For every one step they took forward toward independence, they would often be pushed two or three steps back in a moment of crisis. Crisis seemed to dictate their every move.

As a practitioner, someone deeply entrenched in the day-to-day emergencies of the girls we served, I had little time to look at our missiological approach to teen moms. I took the model given to me, a model that was developed out of the needs and response of the community from, might I add, a person outside of the community. But after several incidents like Leslie's, I needed to find answers (or at least better questions) around the systemic injustices and relentless difficulty the young single moms faced.

After serving 15 years in full time urban youth ministry, it was time for me to return back to academia. My staff and I spent each day putting out one proverbial fire after another. It was a ministry of emergencies and we had little time to reflect on our model. At best, we could evaluate the existing programs, but that didn't answer the revolving door of young mothers in crisis. Part of my leaving the field for academia was to take the opportunity to research and consider the larger

1 Name has been changed.

approaches of how we do ministries, particularly in urban settings, particularly to marginalized groups like teen moms.

Because of my limited capacity in an urgent driven ministry, I realized I needed more partners to not only survive, but to thrive. I needed to partner with churches to support us locally through finances, prayers, and volunteers. I needed ministry partners to share our resources with and to come around our girls like a caring village. In hindsight, I also needed academic partners to help me develop a missiological approach that considered not only the immediate needs of our families, but also their larger spiritual, sociological, and psychological needs. We need deeper critiques of ministries, not just evaluations of programs, in order to further strengthen existing ministries, as well as encourage creativity toward new forms of missiological approaches.

Practitioners and missiologists need to work together because our contexts are not static. Immigration and incarceration are just a few ways our urban contexts change the landscape. Therefore, our missiology must also keep up with these changing landscapes in order to help equip practitioners in the field.

In part, missiology's goal is to become a "service station" along the way. If study does not lead to participation, whether at home or abroad, missiology has lost her humble calling ... Any good missiology is also a *missiologia viatoria* —"pilgrim missiology." (Verkuyl 1978: 6, 18)

In other words, our missiology needs to hit the road somewhere. When I saw the theme of this conference; the dialogue between academia and practitioners I immediately thought of my connection with CCDA. The Christian Community Development Association offers that rubber and road connection to urban missiology. CCDA offers a network of urban ministry practitioners, who intimately know the needs of their neighbors in low-income, urban North America.

While little has been written about CCDA ministries in missiology publications, the dialogue between CCD practitioners and missiologists could create a mutually beneficial dialogue that strengthens both arenas. As missiologists, we need to build relationships with practitioners such as the ones in CCDA to

help inform and shape our theories. In turn, the practitioners of CCDA also need relationships with missiologists to help evaluate how urban missions is being done, and whether or not their praxis needs a theological or missiological tune up, to borrow Verkuyl's service station analogy.

To clarify, I am not discussing missiologists and practitioners as if they are two different people. For example, Jude Tiersma Watson has proven one can live out both fields simultaneously and do it very well. Rather, I am discussing them as two different modes of operation. When I was in the field, I had little time to reflect and research, and now that I am in academia, I have very limited time to serve in the field. One can do both, but praxis and theory are centered and occupied in very different ways.

Today's presentation is an introduction for some of you, to CCDA so I will share a little of its history and founding principles as a way to encourage building partnerships and creating dialogue with more CCD ministries.

As one of the largest communities in urban North American ministry today, the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) hosts over 3,000 people at their annual, national conference. The association is made up of hundreds of churches and para-church ministries from rural and urban settings.

While Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz established academic practices of urban missiology, John Perkins and the founding board members were gathering urban practitioners from around the country to meet, refresh, and equip for the important work of developing communities in a holistic manner. CCDA formally began at a meeting at the Chicago O'Hare airport, but the story truly began with two men by the name of John Perkins and Wayne Gordon.

John Perkins grew up in the 1930's and 1940's in rural Mississippi (Perkins and Gordon 2013: 16). Early on, he intuitively recognized the need for redistribution of economic wealth and power. "Redistribution" would later become one of the first of three R's that established the CCDA philosophy. The second R developed when his brother Clyde, who had come back from World War II, died at the hands of a white police officer. It was in the midst of his anger and hate that the seeds for CCDA were planted. Perkins committed to what would later be another component to Christian Community Development; reconciliation.

Soon after, Perkins moved to California where he developed relationships with Christian businessmen. Through those relationships he got involved in bible studies, prison ministries, and missions. In time, he began to feel the call back to his community in rural Mississippi. Another key component to CCDA formed because of this; relocation.

Wayne Gordon would hear John Perkins speaking while Gordon was a student at Wheaton College in the 1970's. Deeply impacted by Tom Skinner's book *Black and Free*, Gordon felt a call to serving the African American community. While at Wheaton, Gordon ministered in what was then called the "inner city" of Chicago in African American neighborhoods (2013: 24).

Gordon went on to live, teach, and coach in the North Lawndale community of Chicago. It was at the high school where he earned the nickname "Coach" as he is still called today. His initial desire was to teach bible studies to high school kids, but that ministry became a church and the church became a community corporation, complete with legal and medical services, a recovery program, and a gym just to name a few. To visit Lawndale today, one will find blocks of buildings owned by the Lawndale Christian Corporation. The church's presence and impact through the non-profit arm is not only evident in its physical presence, but also in the faces of the people they serve. The impact of Coach's almost 40-year ministry in the neighborhood is undeniable.

Gordon's advisory board consisted of John Perkins, Dolphus Weary, Tom Skinner, Bill Leslie, Mel Banks, and Ray Bakke. The advisory board meetings would soon become mini conferences at their Lawndale site in Chicago. Just a few years before these mini-conferences, Perkins was also establishing a network of his own in Jackson, Mississippi.

At the urging of his board, Perkins began to form a national network of urban ministers whom he had connected with through his speaking opportunities. They started the Jubilee Conference in Jackson, Mississippi, which would later become the template for the CCDA conference (2013: 28). The natural connections of urban practitioners at these conferences gave people the encouragement and equipping they needed, and soon a larger network would be formalized. In 1989, a gathering of fifty urban ministry leaders, both men and women, met at the O'Hare airport, to officially form the Christian Community Development Association.

John Perkins became the board chair and Wayne Gordon would soon become the President of CCDA.

One of CCDA's greatest contributions to urban missiology as well as to urban practitioners, is the philosophy of CCDA, explained by the eight key components. This philosophy of urban ministry continues to form and shape urban ministries across the US today, as well as other cities around the world. Because of the constraints of time, I will limit my description to the three principles, first developed by John Perkins.

Redistribution is the one of the first principles. Not to be mistaken for the idea of economic socialism, CCDA bases its understanding of redistribution on Psalm 24, that all is the Lord's. Redistribution should be an act of loving our neighbors by sharing, rather than a government function. In addition, redistribution is an act of social justice that goes beyond sharing money, but also advocating for justice in prison systems, housing policies, and education.

Under this key component, missiologists have an opportunity to bring theological and sociological research and reflection that can inform and undergird the redistribution efforts of practitioners.

Reconciliation is the next principle. CCDA focuses on reconciliation in three parts: people with God, people with people, and people groups with people groups (2013: 62). CCDA's commitment to reconciliation begins with recognition that there is a race problem, inclusive of the abuse and mistreatment of Native Americans and Africans brought to North America as slaves. "The goal of reconciliation is not to persuade or be persuaded, but rather to understand and to be understood and respected... Reconciliation is impossible without a willingness to request forgiveness and to forgive." (2013: 67) While this was a much-needed conversation over the past forty years and beyond, today there is question as to whether or not "reconciliation" has enough teeth to repair the damages around racial injustice in the United States. For example, Jennifer Harvey, author of *Dear White Christians: For those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (2014), argues that a paradigm of reparations is needed before we can fully consider a paradigm of reconciliation. Reconciliation assumes that both parties have equal power and equal stake in asking for and giving forgiveness.

The third key component is relocation. “The concept of relocation is best understood in terms of what [CCDA] call a ‘theology of presence’ – a theology that lies at the heart of God’s relationship with humanity.” (2013: 46) This component is of particular interest in missiology as it gives different language for the sending of God’s people by differentiating between relocators, returners, and remainers. “Relocators’ refer to people who are not indigenous to the community; ‘returners’ and ‘remainers’ by contrast, are indigenous residents.” (2013: 48) The terms returner and remainer help describe urban missionaries like myself who grew up in the immigrant communities of South Seattle (as David Leong has researched), left for education, and then returned to similar low-income communities with a call to serve the people with whom I most identify.

The important aspect of relocation is that the person becomes a part of the community they wish to serve. They have a vested interest in the well-being of their neighbors. CCDA encourages a theology of place under this principle. Hunter Farrell, in his keynote asked us, “Can missiology re-engineer itself? Can we pivot?” Working closely with CCDA practitioners is what will help us make the necessary pivot in urban missiology today.

Missiologists have the opportunity to tie together public missiology, ethics, and praxis in a cross-disciplinary way. Missiologists are positioned well to bridge the necessary (but still abstract) academic thought to the practical, yet limited capacities of practitioners. The partnership of a missiologist who brings theological and sociological research into urban ministries is one that exemplifies the Body of Christ in action.

Practitioners can’t live in the urgent all the time, but academics can’t live in theory all the time as well. We need to do a better job with partnering with our local practitioners. One practical way we can accomplish this is to offer theological training to our local urban practitioners. We can offer training and insight to their staff and volunteers.

For example, as a doctoral student, I haven’t had the bandwidth to be as directly involved in urban youth ministry as I have in the past, but I was able to volunteer with my friends at YouthFirst in South Central LA, to help train their part-time staff. This has not only added to their training resources without increasing their budget and therefore fundraising efforts, but it also keeps me grounded in terms of what I am studying and researching in academia.

When I volunteer with YouthFirst leaders, my interlocutors are not just Harvie Conn and Roger Greenway, but Twuance, Chayanne, and JayJay who are at the middle schools and high schools every day. They know what's going on in Inglewood and Westchester. They are the ones who help me shape and test my missiologological theories. They are the ones who ask and inspire the pressing questions.

CCDA offers missiologists an escape from ivory tower naval gazing. I know that may sound heavy handed, but this is coming from my life as a practitioner from 2000 to 2015 when I needed resources to share with my board and staff. The only books that I could find that could help our context were from CCDA practitioners. CCDA practitioners are publishing books for fellow practitioners, but if I can be candid, they can be theologically and missiologically thin because that's not their starting place for reflection.

There is a dearth of urban missiologological writing relevant to the urban context today. My esteemed panelists aside, we need more David Leong's and Daniel Hodge's and dare I say Joyce del Rosario's. CCDA offers us as urban missiologists a place to ask the bigger questions with practitioners and create with them innovative models for mission. CCDA offers missiologists essential interlocutors in the arena of urban missions. Whether it's around issues of short-term missions or gentrifying the hood in the name of Jesus, we need to be in dialogue with one another as partners in the mission to critically think about the implications of such practices.

Furthermore, we need greater missiologological agility to keep up with practitioners who have been advocating, counseling, and ministering to people who have been directly impacted by executive orders, appointments, and acquittals that regardless of where you land politically, still has a deep and painful impact on immigrants and people of color in our cities today.

At the end of the day, it's not about creating a new model of communication theory based on the sociological findings of grounded theory research. It's also not about ministry models that operate in isolation, answering to urgent needs with little time for deeper self-reflection. It's about the Leslie's in our cities. It's about how to walk in the pain and the mess with young women like Leslie. It's about surrounding the Leslie's in our cities with a village of people contributing their resources and expertise in partnership with one another.

I mis-titled this panel and presentation a little. I still think, CCDA has contributed to urban missiology, but both have operated generally apart from each other. A better title would have been the needed dialogue between CCDA and Urban Missiology. There is a dearth in urban missiological writing and connecting with CCDA practioners, better yet, working alongside of them will help us reflect, create, and innovate models of mission that address the present and urgent issues for the urban landscape today.

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