

INTRODUCTION

Alan McMahan, General Editor

The purpose of each issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* is to communicate the recent thinking and research related to effective church growth and evangelism. In doing this it follows in the path made popular by Donald A. McGavran and his colleagues beginning around 1955 when McGavran's first book, *The Bridges of God*, was published. Since then, much research and writing has focused around the theme of how we may advance the cause of the Great Commission by winning men and women to Christ, and planting and growing healthy, multiplying churches. This issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* follows in this tradition by reflecting on history, theology, contextual trends, and effective strategies with the goal to improve our effectiveness in carrying out the Lord's mandate to us to "go and make disciples of all nations."

In the opening article of this issue we feature Dr. George Hunter's presentation given at the annual conference of the Great Commission Research Network that met in Fort Worth, Texas in October this past year. In this article he comes back to ask the central question that should remain clear but often does not for many churches, "What is Your Main Business?" Is it true in practice what we believe to be true by intent regarding the main business of the church? Hunter exposes the gap between what we say and what we do and suggests ten themes actually driving most churches.

The two articles that follow, look back historically to examine the theology and methodology of John Wesley as it related to mission and evangelism.

Dr. Bob Whitesel compares the methodologies of Wesley and McGavran and sets them in their apparent parallel contexts. John Marsh follows with a look at Wesley as an Anglican and how his personal awakening into missionary practice led to his development of ecclesiological structures and practices that are instructive for churches today. In both of these articles, there are significant lessons for guiding our thinking and planning.

Dr. Gary McIntosh follows with another article of historical importance on the life of Donald McGavran. As the second installment of a soon-to-be published biography, Gary outlines the formative years in McGavran's life from birth up until the time he departed with his wife to serve as missionaries in India in 1923. The events recounted here would set the stage for McGavran to begin his work that would eventually give birth to one of the most impactful evangelical church growth movements in modern times.

A fresh examination of McGavran's theological constructs of "harvest theology" and "search theology" is offered by Dr. Gordon Penfold with the goal to see how these theological positions should inform our efforts to transform plateaued or idle churches. Dr. Penfold's experience in leading turnaround church bootcamps brings perspective in thinking about how theology informs vision and eventually strategy.

In another article emphasizing the spiritual factors that relate to healthy church growth, "Bill" Ingram examines the vital role that prayer plays in planting new churches and revitalizing plateaued churches. His suggestions for starting an intercessory prayer ministry serves as a reminder that human effort alone will never result in healthy growth. Enduring ministry that produces transformational results is God's work and His power is received through prayer.

Wrapping up our articles in this issue is Matthew Costner's fine study on how to reach the next generation of young adults that statistics show the church in North America is rapidly losing. His review on national and international trends provides an insightful look at the challenges faced by the church as it seeks to reach the rising generations. He goes on to suggest that the resources available among our more mature believers may provide the key for discipleship that benefits the younger and older alike.

As in every issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal*, book reviews are provided by our team of talented writers to alert you to significant works that will inform your study and your ministry effectiveness. This issue features books reviewed by Anthony Svajda, Grace Morris, Ken Pierce, Bill Ingram, Paul Gould, and Ariel Lee. Their helpful insights into the value of these works will point you to publications you may not have yet considered and will broaden your perspective.

Much appreciation goes to our team of writers, editors, administrators, and assistants: Gary McIntosh, Mike Morris, Brian Miller, Laura McIntosh, Joy Bergk, Stephanie Faulkner, Michael Teng, and others who make each issue of the *Journal* possible. It is our desire that this effort helps move us toward greater effectiveness in our proclamation of the Good News!