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## Introduction

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Alan McMahan, General Editor

This journal, like its predecessor, the Journal for the American Society for Church Growth, owes its heritage to the pioneers of a movement that captured the imagination of the evangelical world and ushered in an era that emphasized the completion of the Great Commission and the planting of thousands of local churches. Even now, decades later, scholars and researchers continue to reflect on the impact of that effort with a view of informing current research and practice. In this issue we are pleased to offer four articles that examine the work of Donald McGavran who is recognized as the founder of this church growth movement that changed the course of history.

In exploring this topic we begin by enlisting the help of one of the most prolific authors in the area of church growth, Elmer Towns, who reviews the success and failures of the movement and issues a challenge to the church to re-capture some of the originating principles that led to its success. Towns' article will highlight the enduring value of the movement's principal insights in light of today's contemporary ministry landscape.

Gustavo Suárez explores Donald McGavran's understanding of conversion, with its emphasis on conversion growth and the centrality of the local church. Tracing out the historical roots of McGavran's convictions, Suárez examines the

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significant contributions of his missiology and concludes that methodology more  
than theology shaped his thinking on how people came to Christ.

Noting the new phenomenon that rapid, global urbanization is now presenting  
to the growth of the church, Jeff Walters probes McGavran's writings to  
understand his missiology for the city. Reflecting on McGavran's "eight keys for  
discipling urban populations" Walters comments on the usefulness of these  
insights for today's ministry. Perhaps you would agree that these insights are more  
relevant now than when they were first composed. Urban ministers today would do  
well to reflect on how these insights would strategically shape their strategies for  
more effective urban impact.

Rounding out this emphasis on McGavran, we include Gary McIntosh's  
address to the Presidential Banquet at the Great Commission Research Network's  
(GCRN) gathering in October, 2012. In that presentation Gary suggests ten ways  
that McGavran's teaching and writing historically influenced the church in North  
America and how it continues to influence thinking decades later.

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Also in keeping with the theme of the last GCRN Conference, Kent Hunter  
addresses the issue of church turnarounds by looking at the historical trends of  
receptivity and resistance and the relationship between smart strategies and  
spiritual health. He then identifies three models for implementing change that  
leads to turnaround. These are valuable words from a veteran in church consulting  
that should stimulate new thinking about how we intervene in struggling  
churches.

Suggesting a different strategy than what is typically presented in a church  
growth oriented publication, David Dunaetz examines the stressors faced by urban  
church planters and then offers recommendations on coping mechanisms that lead  
to missional effectiveness. By giving attention to the health of these urban pioneers  
David suggests that churches and the people who plant them will be productive  
and life-giving.

The next two articles make more direct reference to effective evangelism  
strategies being used in cross-cultural contexts around the world. These studies  
offer important glimpses into the ways the gospel is advancing in mission contexts  
abroad, yet it is instructive for church growth strategies in North America as well.  
Lessons from the mission fields abroad have always played an important role in the  
formation of a robust missiology from which church growth thinking emerged.

Jennifer Jagerson explores how people in oral cultures (whether produced by  
illiteracy or chosen as media preference, as in the case of the urban rappers) can be  
reached through bible storytelling methodologies. In this insightful article Jennifer  
demonstrates how evangelists can be equipped to be bearers of the good news in a

## McMahan: Introduction

way that is faithful to the text of scripture and powerful in the lives of the hearers. It offers a challenge to those of us who may be overly reliant on the written word or propositional teaching for the winning and discipling of new believers.

John Easterling offers a case study of two different urban church planting strategies that emerged in mission efforts in the Bangkapi district of Bangkok, Thailand. Shaped by both the passions and calling of the church planters as well as the specific context in which they ministered, John shows how two very different strategies produced fruit in a difficult and resistant region where Christ had never been proclaimed.

In each issue of the Journal we also feature book reviews that reflect on published works that offer valuable knowledge, perspectives, and strategies that inform mission and evangelism efforts in North America and around the world. In this issue we are pleased to offer reviews of four such books provided by Joshua Henry, Dwight Baker, James Farrer, and William Ingram. Much appreciation is extended for their reflections on these important publications.

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Also included in this issue are the notices furnished by Gary McIntosh regarding the dissertations and theses that represent significant contributions to the study of evangelism, church growth, and church health. Gary highlights the significance of seven of these studies in this section.

Finally, I would be in error if I were not to express profound appreciation to Phil Stevenson who has served as the Article Editor for North America for this Journal since its beginning in the summer of 2009. Phil has recently accepted a new role as Director of Church Health/Fitness and Leadership Development for the Wesleyan Church and so has had to withdraw from this role with the Journal. Over the last three years Phil has put in many hours of service to this publication while maintaining great patience and optimism. His work to recruit outstanding contributors and work with them to refine their articles to ready them for publication was significant. His work in serving the larger community of teachers, researchers and practitioners in the fields of evangelism, church planting, church growth and missions is much appreciated.

It is also my privilege to welcome Dr. Mike Morris as our new Book Review Editor. Mike is Assistant Professor at the Roy Fish School of Evangelism and Mission at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Mike has been a pastor, a church planter, a missionary, and educator with specialization in evangelism, church growth and missiology. Already Mike has been busy as he works with a wide variety of Book Review contributors. I have appreciated his joyful spirit and keen discernment and am looking forward to working with him on this publication in the years to come.

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Clearly it takes a team to generate the publication you hold in your hands. I am privileged to count them as my colleagues. As you read through the pages of this issue of the Journal it is my hope that you will learn from these men and women who have contributed to our mutual understanding of how the church can reach and disciple the peoples of earth. May your understanding of the God we serve and the church he uses in the building of his kingdom be enriched and may your ministry be multiplied!