

1-1-2013

Dissertations and Theses Notices

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Recommended Citation

McIntosh, G. (2013). Dissertations and Theses Notices. *Great Commission Research Journal*, 4(2), 292-298. Retrieved from <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj/vol4/iss2/14>

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Compiled by Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Each issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* features recent dissertations and theses of interest to our readers. Particular attention is given to publications that present research on evangelism, church growth, church planting and multiplication, missional church, emerging/emergent church, communication theory, leadership theory and other topics related to effective fulfillment of the Great Commission. Directors of doctoral programs, as well as graduating students, are encouraged to send notice of recent dissertations to Dr. Gary L. McIntosh, Dissertation Editor, at gary.mcintosh@biola.edu. Due to space limitations and the large number of dissertations published each year, only a few dissertations are featured.

This issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* features recent dissertations that focus on some aspect related to general church growth research.

"The Role of "Perfecting" in Donald McGavran's Church Growth Thought." Author: Spradllin, Matthew Donald, Ph.D., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012. 214 pages.

abstract:

This dissertation examines the role of "perfecting" in Donald McGavran's church growth thought. Chapter one introduces McGavran and the need for a study of his "perfecting" concept. Chapter two briefly gives McGavran's background and describes his discovery and definition of "church growth." This chapter also explores the experiences in McGavran's own life, which shaped his understanding of the perfecting task and motivated its incorporation into his church growth thought.

Chapter three theologically defines the terms "discipling" and "perfecting" as McGavran understood and used them. McGavran's rationale for using the term "perfecting" is examined, as well as why he chose the term "perfecting" as opposed to other terms. The chapter includes an analysis of McGavran's understanding of the relationship between discipling and perfecting. Chapter three concludes with a critique of the helpfulness of McGavran's choice and use of the term "perfecting."

Chapter four is an analysis of the church growth thinking that distinctively comprised McGavran's understanding and approach to perfecting. McGavran's belief that missions is to be evangelistic and ecclesiocentric is outlined and analyzed, and how it affected his understanding of the perfecting task is described.

Chapter five examines McGavran's methodology in relation to perfecting. The role of worship, Bible study, prayer, and evangelism in relation to perfecting and church growth is described. Chapter five focuses on the role of perfecting in the training of workers and how McGavran's methodological approach to perfecting differed from the missiology of his day.

Chapter six evaluates the role of perfecting in Donald McGavran's church growth thought, determining that it was shaped by his conviction that biblical perfecting teaches and produces church growth. Chapter six concludes that McGavran's understanding of the role of biblical perfecting in church growth is helpful in developing a perfecting strategy for effective missions and ministry.

"A Grounded Theory of Church Growth in Urban Poverty Zones." Author: Allen, Judson Derek, Ph.D., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011. 304 pages.

abstract:

This dissertation examines church growth in urban poverty zones and develops a grounded theory to explain the data. Urban poverty zones are impoverished census tracts located in cities of 500,000 or more, and the term is synonymous with the term inner city as defined by the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City. Chapter one details the educational and theological concerns that drive the research and gives a brief overview of the research design.

Chapter two reviews the precedent literature from the fields of church growth and urban ministry. This chapter also contains a theological section, which covers a theology of the city and a theology of the poor. It also contains a section that discusses the definition of urban poverty zone and inner city.

Chapter three reports the methodology used to explore church growth in urban poverty zones. Since very little existed in this field, the grounded theory method was used, and the procedures are explained in this chapter.

Chapter four relates the findings of the research, including the data's interaction with predetermined categories and the development of new categories and subcategories of data. Chapter four also includes story lines for each category and a story line for the main category of community restoration. This story line encompasses the grounded theory.

Chapter five presents the conclusions of the research, including key insights, the grounded theory, implications related to church growth research and urban ministry research, applications for practice in urban poverty zones, and suggestions for further research.

"Examining the Relationship Between Leadership Behaviors of Senior Pastors and Church Growth." Author: Burton, William H., III, Ph.D., Northcentral University, 2010. 128 pages.

abstract:

Church attendance in the U.S. is declining. The growth of mega church congregations gives the appearance that church attendance is increasing, when in actuality, attendance at 80% of churches in the U.S. is not increasing. Church

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leaders are not in agreement regarding the significance of pastoral leadership on
the problem of declining church population; many seminaries do not teach
leadership.

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to determine if a
relationship existed between the leadership behaviors of senior pastors and the rate
of church growth. The entire populations of churches within the Church of the
United Brethren in Christ and the Missionary Church denominations located
within the United States were surveyed (excluding church congregations that had a
change in senior pastoral leadership during the survey period). In the two
denominations, there were 376 pastors eligible to be studied. Data were collected
from 76 pastors using the Leadership Practices Inventory-Observer (LPI).
Kendall's Correlation Coefficient was conducted to determine the relationship
between the construct of leadership measured by the LPI and church population
growth. None of the five leadership behaviors were found to be significantly related
to church population growth. The highest regression coefficient scored 0.138
($p = .080$). Regression analyses were conducted by the researcher to attempt to
predict which of the five leadership behaviors would influence church growth.
None of the behaviors significantly predicted church population growth where the
highest R^2 scored 0.041 ($SD = .004$, $p = 0.081$). The regression analyses were
moderated for church size, and the results found by the researcher did not show
any significant relationship between leadership behaviors of senior pastors and
church growth where the highest R^2 scored 0.086 ($SD = .004$, $p = 0.075$). Future
researchers might consider studying denominations with more church
congregations or denominations with larger congregations.

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"Biblical Strategy and Shift to Spiritual Driven Church Growth." Author: Kim, Chang Kyu,
D.Min., Liberty University, 2010. 137 pages.

abstract:

The purpose of this project is to present the biblical standards, principles,
components, and methods of spiritual discipline for twenty-first century churches'
conversion from human efforts and program-oriented church growth to spiritual-
driven church growth similar to the early church.

The early church is studied as the best model of a spiritual-driven church. It is
assumed that modern churches are trying to achieve growth much like the early
church. The biblical study of the early churches in the Bible and the results of a

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survey of growing churches in Washington are analyzed to provide biblical concepts and methods for a spiritual-driven church.

"Effective Evangelism in the City: Donald McGavran's Missiology and Urban Contexts."

Author: Walters, Jeffrey Kirk, Sr., Ph.D., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011.

295 pages.

abstract:

296 This dissertation examines the missiology of Donald A. McGavran as it applies in urban contexts. Chapter one introduces the research question by examining the current state of global urbanization and urban missions. Alongside the study of urban missions is an outline of the rise of Donald McGavran's church growth thought through the twentieth century, including the rise and decline of the Church Growth Movement's missiological emphasis.

Chapter two includes a more in-depth biographical study of Donald Anderson McGavran and an outline of his church growth missiology. The biographical section surveys McGavran's missionary career and the development of church growth thought. The chapter concludes with an outline of key principles of church growth missiology.

Chapter three presents an overview of McGavran's understanding of urban missions, including a survey of his writing and teaching directed specifically at urban missions. Because much of McGavran's influence on cities came through his students at the Institute of Church Growth and the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary, the chapter includes a brief outline of his students' work.

The final three chapters go more deeply into three key elements of McGavran's urban missiology that have application to contemporary urban ministry. Chapter four addresses McGavran's contention that research is a key to church growth, with an emphasis on his advocacy of urban research.

Chapter five explains McGavran's understanding of evangelism in urban contexts. Within this understanding, three important facets of evangelistic strategy are addressed: people movements, the Homogeneous Unit Principle, and church planting.

Chapter six delves into McGavran's work related to "holistic" missions and his understanding of the relationship between social ministry and missions.

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McGavran's leadership in the conciliar/evangelical debates is addressed, as is his own work related to social justice issues.

Chapter seven answers the final research question, "How might McGavran's teachings be applied in urban contexts today, if at all?" The dissertation concludes with a summary and reinforcing insights from McGavran's teaching on urban missions.

"The Effect of Pastoral and Staff Leadership Training on the Growth of the Southern African-American Church." Author: Pickett, Dwayne K., Ph.D., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011. 142 pages.

abstract:

The purpose of the dissertation was to determine the impact of pastoral and staff leadership development on the southern African-American church in the following areas: (1) church growth—worship attendance, Bible study attendance, and church membership census; (2) community development—ministries that reach into the community and the level of participation in such ministries; and (3) economic growth—income from tithes and offerings, special fundraising, and intra-church nonprofit organizations. The research was done using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Thirty-five leaders from seven African-American churches participated in the study by providing information regarding their educational and professional background and by completing MLQ surveys on themselves and their peers in order to identify leadership characteristics. Also, each of the seven churches provided data on its growth.

Analysis of the data obtained suggests that a connection exists between training and development, church growth, community development, and economic growth. Suggestions given included ways to improve current methods of development or to create new methods.

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"An Analysis of Factors Affecting Revitalization of Evangelical Covenant Churches." Author: Wahlstrom, Charles David, D.Min., Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, 2012. 307 pages.

abstract:

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine The Evangelical Covenant Church's (ECC) proprietary set of ministry resources for revitalization known as VERITAS, as to its relevance and effectiveness in revitalizing stagnant or declining local churches. A critical component of VERITAS is its *Ten Healthy Missional Markers*. These ten markers formed the basis of a survey that was offered to sixty-nine Evangelical Covenant Churches. These churches experienced five years of stagnation or decline in average worship attendance from 2000 to 2005, followed by five years of numerical growth in average worship attendance from 2005 to 2010, at a constant annual growth rate that met or exceeded that of the denomination as a whole. Churches that participated in VERITAS and those who had not were included in the survey.

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The survey employed both qualitative and quantitative means to address the thesis question, "Does VERITAS include the critical revitalization factors identified by ECC pastors who have led their churches through a successful revitalization process?" While the results of the project affirmed that VERITAS does indeed include the critical factors that affected revitalization in the experience of Covenant pastors who actually led their churches through a revitalization process, statistically there was no correlation between the objectively measurable data and a church's experience of revitalization.

The hypothesis generated from the qualitative data affirmed the thesis, but the quantitative data was unable to disprove a null hypothesis. Pastors identified some of the markers as being more significant than others, namely: the centrality of the Word of God, a compelling Christian community, and a culture of godly leadership. Other strong undertones mentioned in the process of revitalization included perseverance and the sovereignty of God.

In keeping with its stated purpose, this study attempted to contribute to a better understanding of the factors that affect church growth and church health in ECC churches by tracking the effectiveness of denominational efforts on revitalization through the ministries of VERITAS. The discoveries of this study are applicable to many churches seeking to understand revitalization in their ministry context.