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Introduction

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Alan McMahan, General Editor

High above the Pacific Ocean en route to Hong Kong I am putting the finishing touches on this issue of the Journal reflecting on how the world has changed. Air travel, the Internet, and an increasingly globalized and interconnected cultures are changing how we carry out the Great Commission mandate and plant the church of Jesus Christ among every people group. Gone are the days when missionaries traveled for weeks aboard ship to arrive at a remote people group with whom the outside world had never had contact. Today, we navigate vast expanses of ocean for business or pleasure with hardly a thought about how far we have come.

Of course, the shrinking distances and the collision of cultures are no longer the experience of an elite few. Today, one has only to go shopping in the average city in the U.S. to encounter a multiplicity of ethnic groups each with their own worldview, preferred cuisines, and political and religious orientations. As the mixing of the world's peoples accelerates, familiar ways of growing the church and reaching the lost are growing less effective. New strategies are needed to deal with the increasing complexity that we can now encounter just outside our door.

This issue of the Journal was originally intended to feature the challenges and opportunities for evangelism that are unique to the rapid urbanization now taking place across the globe. However, for several reasons we have chosen to delay that topic until our next issue to focus now on what we are learning from doing ministry in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural environment. Whether churches are experiencing increasing diversity within their walls or desiring to be more effective in reaching the diverse people outside, the articles in this issue of the Journal will help bring new insights and perspectives on this important subject. Phil Stevenson's tireless work on the editorial staff has been invaluable in assembling these materials.

The first four articles open with a look at multi-cultural and multi-ethnic ministry. Art Lucero and Robert Weaver use Sunrise Church in Rialto, California as a case study to examine how friendship relationships develop in a multicultural church. Do tendencies toward homogeneity prevalent in the larger society also effect friendship networks in churches of high diversity? Their findings open up important realizations for those seeking to work with multiple people groups in a single congregation.

Parnell Lovelace, Jr. identifies a number of challenges present in multiethnic partnerships and yet points out the strategic and leveraged impact it can have on effective missional engagement with the community at large and the healthy dynamics it introduces to the local congregation.

The varieties of multiethnic churches are explored in Elizabeth Drury's article in which she suggests new categories and metaphors to describe the many different patterns in which multiple ethnicities interact with each other in a congregational setting. These metaphors aptly illustrate the dissimilarity between these models and show the inadequacies of quick classifications or sweeping generalizations. But Drury does more than differentiate between the types. She goes on to relate the functioning of multiethnic churches to Kouzes and Posner's material in the *Leadership Challenge*. The result is a thought-provoking analysis that challenges shallow thinking and provides helpful advice for overcoming the obstacles typical in leading diverse congregations.

As a result of his analysis of black university students and their church-going preferences, Dirke Johnson advocates for the development of mono-cultural churches as one of the best ways to reach Afro-Americans for Christ. While not dismissing the role that multi-cultural churches play, he provides something of a counter-point to multicultural proponents by offering sociological and theological reasons to make his case.

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Good missiology, out of which the church growth movement sprang, typically integrates history, theology, cultural studies, and strategy. The next two articles pick up on these supporting disciplines. Using excerpts from Charles Spurgeon's speaking and writing, attendance statistics from his church, and current assessments of modern church growth, Michael O'Neal reminds the reader of the critical centrality of conversion growth in the planting and growing of local churches. Phil Stevenson's helpful article follows to lay down a theology of church planting which has been sadly neglected in the literature of the subject.

Three more articles drawn from the global ministry context provide helpful insights from beyond the Western church. Combining his missions experience from Argentina with a biblical study in the book of Acts, Steven Estes explores how effective witness takes place using natural points of access available to the evangelist. Following McGavran's emphasis on reaching receptive people, Estes' article points out how these people may be readily available to each of us if we have eyes to see their need and the gospel's provision. John Easterling follows with another helpful case study from South Africa as he describes the historical development and dramatic turnaround of the Norwegian Settler's Church that led it to develop contextualized holistic ministries that served the poor and marginalized communities within its surrounding areas. Mark Alan Williams provides helpful reminders that in catalyzing church planting movements one must be careful to focus on multiplying trainers in culturally appropriate ways that do not lead to dependency or alien forms.

Two final articles wrap up this edition. Danny Von Kanel seeks to quantify indicators of church health that go beyond simple worship attendance and includes helpful thoughts for gauging progress toward spiritual maturity. Troy Bush's very interesting article forcefully pulls us into the rapidly expanding world of social media and vividly illustrates the multiple ways that texting, Facebook, and Twitter can be used to enhance evangelism and discipleship ministries especially in busy, urban contexts.

Scanning the horizon for the resources that helpfully inform church growth and evangelism strategies, J.D. Payne has assembled a series of book reviews from our fine panel of critical thinkers: Brian Honett, Allan Karr, Robert Garret, Jr., Bruce Carlton, Jeff Ritchey, Todd Robertson, and Steven Allen. Gary McIntosh expands this list with dissertation notices on eight research projects that represent stimulating contributions to our understanding of how God grows his church. Insights gained here can help focus the reader on useful resources to fine-tune strategies or push themselves into new ways of thinking and serving.

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As always this issue of the Journal will provoke us to reconsider formerly held paradigms, confirm what we have seen or instinctively believed, clarify next steps of engagement, or enhance our current strategies as we all seek to be effective in evangelism. It is my hope that the observations and recommendations found in these pages will improve our ability to navigate this increasingly multi-cultural and interconnected world.