

## INTRODUCTION

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*Alan McMahan, General Editor*

In 1955, Donald A. McGavran published a book entitled, *The Bridges of God*, that was to shake the assumptions and strategies of missionary practice in his day and would lead to the birth of modern missiology. Though McGavran's book may not have been the very first publication in the field, it was certainly one of the most significant, because it combined insights from both theology and the social sciences to examine how people actually came to Christ. What he found is that, in reality, the stories of conversion for large numbers of people stood in sharp contrast to the perceptions among missionaries as to the best strategies for bringing them to faith. Awakened by the insights in McGavran's books, missions leaders, pastors, academicians, and practitioners spanning several decades began to study the harvest with new fervor, armed with a host of new tools and driven by a passion to see the church of God grow worldwide. It was out of a sense of urgency and inquiry that the *Great Commission Research Journal*<sup>1</sup> was started with the mission to report on relevant research related to the practice of effective evangelism among unreached people. To this point, our first article is specifically directed.

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<sup>1</sup> Formerly titled, *Journal for the American Society for Church Growth*. It should also be noted that the *Great Commission Research Journal* works in concert with the Great Commission Research Network, an academic society formed to further research on the harvest.

George Hunter, one of the senior statesmen of the Church Growth Movement, reflects on his own journey into this field and his discovery of more than a dozen assumptions among evangelicals that are not helpful in evangelism. The recommendations he provides offer a counterpoint to the prevailing notions, based on careful research and observation of good practice. He concludes with a charge to the next generation to continue in the research in the much-neglected field of effective apostolic practice.

If some of the assumptions and strategies in missions and evangelism are unhelpful in practice, then so are some of the terms being used to describe the actors. Cecil Stalnaker explores the increasingly common tendency to describe all Christians as missionaries. Though the motive to awaken all believers to their evangelistic responsibility may be admirable, Stalnaker shows it is not descriptively accurate of actual practice, nor is it aligned with the biblical usage of the terms. He goes on to suggest options to bring more clarity in our discussion of this important role in the body of believers.

Drawing from history, Lenny Luchetti explores the external and internal motivations that drove John Wesley to invest himself so willingly in open-air preaching as a means of reaching the lost. In this study, Luchetti especially focuses on Wesley's theological understanding of God as love, and he relates how that translated into love and empathy for others. He, then, describes the implications for evangelistic preaching and teaching in the church today.

In the next article and continuing with a focus on history, we are pleased to provide the fifth in a series of excerpts from Gary McIntosh's biography on the life of Donald McGavran. In this installment, we witness McGavran transitioning from his role as a missionary in India to becoming a professor of missiology and his founding of the Institute of Church Growth. These early beginnings were critical both in consolidating the lessons learned on how the church was actually growing and in the laying of the foundation for a worldwide movement. You will find these pages to be interesting and informative.

Using John Kotter's eight-stage model for leading change as a helpful framework for understanding congregational change, Bob Whitesel proposes that a necessary change objective for many churches should be to move more toward a heterogeneous, multicultural model. He then goes on to describe five models of multicultural churches and the steps a church should follow to arrive at that destination.

A key problem that prevents many churches from achieving their God-given potential is the mishandling of conflict. William Henard examines this topic by defining conflict, demonstrating the prevalence of it in the church, and identifying the causes and issues that give rise to it. Recognizing that the presence of conflict is not necessarily bad if it is handled correctly, he provides helpful advice for dealing with conflict as it arises and preventing unnecessary conflict from arising in the first place. This is valuable advice that churches ought to consider.

With more and more churches in decline across the U.S., congregations are increasingly turning to outside consultants to provide clarity and perspective on the problems they face and to offer effective solutions to help them once again move toward strength. William Ingram and Denise Quigley offer advice on how to select a consultant or consulting firm and what kinds of questions are helpful to evaluate their approach.

Joey Chen, in our last article in this issue of the journal, focuses our attention on the established church that wishes to multiply its efforts by planting new churches. Limiting his attention in this article to the established church in the preparation stage, he suggests four directions toward which one should direct his gaze as he considers the prospect of planting a new church. This prior preparation can help the church planting effort start out on the right foot.

In addition to the articles the *Great Commission Research Journal* regularly features in each issue, it is our custom to include critical reviews of books that inform and expand our understanding of how people come to Christ and how churches grow in the midst of the contemporary challenges we face. Mike Morris, our outstanding book review editor, has worked with a team of reviewers to provide us a thoughtful synopsis and review of five helpful books on these topics that deserve your attention. Many thanks go to Mike Morris, as well as Aaron Perry, Joey Chen, Dustin Slaton, Jamie Booth, and David Srygley for their hard work in making these available to us.

Additionally, we appreciate the work of Gary McIntosh, our dissertation and theses editor for bringing to our attention six dissertations of note that relate to the topic of church revitalization. It is our hope that the dissertation abstracts included here will provoke you to further study in this important subject as most of us work in or know of churches in need of a fresh experience of growth and spiritual vitality.

Also, quietly in the background but vital to the publication of each issue is the work of Joy Bergk, the Biola Publications Manager; Laura McIntosh, our Technical Editor; Rachel Donawerth, the Editorial Office Assistant; and our fine editorial team. Many thanks for all they do.

We all hope you are informed and encouraged by the resources offered here as you continue your work for the kingdom.