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Identifying and Reaching Ethnic Groups in the City

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60 **IDENTIFYING AND REACHING ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE CITY**

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abstract

Immigrants are arriving in the United States in large numbers. We know the statistics, but what we do not know is who these people are, where they are living, and how we reach them with the Gospel. This article presents a strategy for identifying and reaching ethnic groups in the city. The first section provides information for locating internationals through research at the national, state, and local level. The second section examines issues related to urban ethnic church planting such as meeting felt needs, understanding worldview issues, dealing with preliterates, and training and partnering with other churches.

introduction

". . . [I]t has always been God's plan for the Church to go to the world, [however,] this strategy is only half of God's equation for reaching the people who don't have a personal relationship with Christ."[1] As one book title suggests, the world truly is at our door. The statistics are mind blowing. Over one million people were granted

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[1] Tom Phillips, Bob Norsworthy, and W. Terry Whalin, *The World at Your Door: Reaching International Students in Your Home, Church, and School* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), 29.

legal immigration status in the United States in 2009.[2] Nearly 100,000 were given refugee or asylum status.[3] Another 162,000,000 people were granted non-immigrant admission to the United States, mostly for education and business purposes.[4] Overall, nearly 164,000,000 people entered the U.S. in 2009 from every nation on earth. We know the world is at our door; there is no question about that. The questions are now who are these people, where are they in our cities, and how do we reach them with the Gospel?

This article will address these questions as well as raise additional questions that must be considered by those attempting to identify and reach ethnic groups in the city. The first part will provide information on locating ethnic groups in your city through research at the national, state, and local level as well as introduce several ethnographic research methods that are useful for ground level research. The second section will explore questions related to reaching ethnic groups such as what motivates immigrants to come to the U.S., should church planters plant multi- or mono-ethnic congregations, what role must orality play in church planting, and how does one train churches and develop citywide partnerships to reach internationals? The issues are complex and cannot be fully settled in one article; however, progress can be made by simply getting the conversation started.

identifying ethnic groups in the city

The statistics are overwhelming concerning the number of people coming to the United States. Statistics do not mean much, though, if church planters cannot identify actual peoples in their own city. Several tools are available to help church planters find ethnic groups in the city, beginning at the national level and working down to the neighborhood level.

research at the national level

Every year, the Department of Homeland Security is tasked to provide documentation for all people granted legal immigration, refugee, asylum, naturalization, and non-immigrant admission status.[5] The document they produce breaks down immigration by the immigrants' country of last residence, country of birth, state of current residence, gender, age, marital status, occupation, and so on. These categories are helpful for narrowing the search for a target people. One is

61

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[2] United States Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2009* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2010): 5, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2009/ois_yb_2009.pdf (accessed 9 March 2011).

[3] Ibid., 52.

[4] Ibid., 65.

[5] Definitions for each of these categories are available in the *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2009,* 1.

able to find large concentrations of a particular ethnic group in various states or identify certain types of immigrants, such as university students.

Missions strategists in particular can use the national report for fundraising or mobilization efforts. For example, it is difficult for Americans to get a visa to enter Iran for missionary purposes. Because nearly 20,000 Iranians legally immigrated to the U.S. in 2009, efforts can be launched to reach them here. The national report is a good place to begin because a vast amount of information is located in one place. The report narrows the search to a particular state or type of immigrant, and further research can be done at lower levels to focus the search even more.

research at the state level

Not all individual states keep a high level of statistical information on immigrants. My state of residence, Kentucky, maintains no accessible database. I called several departments in the capital city trying to obtain a breakdown of immigration by county or city. My inquiries resulted in no further information. Happily, not all states follow Kentucky's unhelpful model. A refugee database that lists admissions by every state in the U.S. is available, and it includes a contact phone number to get more detailed information.[6] These offices are usually connected with local level ministries and social services that can provide much more detailed information about internationals in the city. In addition to the refugee database, many state government offices do keep a record of immigration statistics and can offer help to the researcher in locating specific peoples in the city or county of choice.

research at the city level

Smaller cities may not keep immigration statistics at all, but this does not mean one cannot find valuable local information about ethnic groups in the city. A good place to begin at the local level is to do an internet search or scan the phonebook for Catholic Charity Services, ESL centers, and refugee centers. My search revealed that Louisville has a city government webpage specifically for immigrants and refugees.[7] From this page, I can find information about ESL classes, translation services, and social services all designed to meet the needs of immigrants to Louisville. A phone call or visit to any one of these organizations will no doubt yield contact information and provide practical ways to meet internationals. Louisville also has an organization called Kentucky Refugee Ministries that

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[6] U. S. Department of Health and Family Services, "State Refugee Profiles," http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/data/state_profiles.htm (accessed 9 March 2011).

[7] LouisvilleKY.gov, "Immigrants and Refugees, http://www.louisvilleky.gov/International/WhoWeServe/Immigrants+and +Refugees.htm (accessed 23 March 2011).

provides many services to refugees, including helping them find housing and jobs, helping them learn English, and providing money to help with the transition to the U.S.[8] Finally, local census offices can be of great help. Certain cities have planning commissions that organize census data collection.[9] A visit to their office may yield detailed information for specific neighborhoods or boroughs in the city. Since many cities already have services in place designed to find and help immigrants, the researcher need not reinvent the wheel when he or she can take advantage of work that has already been done.

One other tool I want to mention has great potential for identifying ethnic groups in the city. The North American Mission Board has compiled a website devoted to listing statistics and information on as many people groups in North America as possible.[10] This website allows the researcher to view statistics for every state and Canadian province. All nationalities, languages spoken, and ancestries found in the state are listed. By registering and obtaining special login information, the researcher is able to further find a breakdown of specific people groups in each major city within the state. A profile is provided of each people group. These profiles are user entered so some cities have more detailed information than others. In Louisville, for example, I can find detailed information about the Bosnian population. The page lists their heart language, primary religion, population, zip codes where they live, and paragraphs describing their daily life in Louisville, needs, beliefs, Gospel barriers, current efforts to reach them, and prayer guides. As noted, most of this information is user entered, and there is a need for church planters to continually update the site as new information is discovered. Information of this detail can only be found through personal field research.

do fieldwork and ethnographic research

Reports and statistics are helpful for ascertaining the general location of ethnic peoples in your city, but at some point, fieldwork needs to be done. How does one exegete the city? This can be done through one neighborhood and one life at a time.[11] Ethnographic research is both a process and an outcome.[12] As a process, the researcher is able to become a participant observer, learning the culture from an

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[8] Kentucky Refugee Ministries, http://kyrm.org/ (accessed 23 March 2011).

[9] See *Planting and Growing Urban Churches,* ed. Harvie Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), specifically chapters 1–3 for detailed information on the intricacies of urban research.

[10] North American Mission Board, "People Groups," http://www.peoplegroups.info/

[11] John Fuder, "'Exegeting' Your Community: Using Ethnography to Diagnose Needs" in *A Heart for the Community: New Models for Urban and Suburban Ministry,* ed. John Fuder and Noel Castellanos (Chicago: Moody Press, 2009), 72–73.

[12] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998), 58.

emic perspective.[13] This insider's approach allows for exploration of culture and worldview issues and often raises many new questions that need to be answered. Additionally, participant observation allows for the building of deep relationships during the research process. Relationships are essential for effective church planting but even more so when the target population come from a communal, relational culture. Along the way, the researcher will learn of valuable vocabulary, idioms, habits, community leaders, and places of residence that will be essential for the church planting process in the future. The time given to the process of thorough ethnographic research is not wasted time.

Ethnographic research is also an outcome of the process. The end goal is a cultural portrait that paints as close to a native's view of the culture as possible. The document will describe daily life and contain names, places, and observations. Ethnographies also contain analysis and interpretation of behavior that is vital for a contextualized church. Qualitative research looks at culture below the surface, rather than merely describing observable details.[14] Such reports are useful tools for training prospective workers and also for presenting in various churches and meetings for mobilization purposes. Once the researcher locates several members of an ethnic group in the city, he or she might explore several of the following places in the neighborhood to meet many more people.

Immigrants and refugees often congregate in apartment complexes in the city, many of which are part of a government housing program designed to help refugees transition into the U.S. Multiple complexes in Louisville are connected with Kentucky Refugee Ministries and house large blocs of ethnic peoples. The apartment complex in which I minister is home to twenty Nepali families and smaller numbers of Iraqis and Haitians. Finding a contact person in one of the apartment complexes will often lead the researcher to many more people within the group. A listing of apartments housing immigrants and refugees may be obtained through a visit to the local Catholic charity or social services facility.

Many large cities have international festivals every year. Louisville has several, and the events are excellent places to meet scores of internationals. Ethnic communities have booths set up to showcase their food and culture. Those hosting the booths are usually excellent resources for introducing the researcher to the culture. Appointments can be made for the researcher to visit homes or places of worship of the host, and these appointments can result in many opportunities for ministry.

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[13] There are various levels of participant observation, such as nonparticipation, passive, moderate, active, and complete participation. In a U.S. context, the researcher will likely maintain moderate participation, where a balance is set between insider and outsider status. The church planter may function more as a loiterer than as an active participant. See James Spradley, *Participant Observation* (Orlando: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1980), 58–62.

[14] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry,* 152–53.

Another place to meet internationals is the grocery store. One can simply open the phone book, look for ethnic food stores, and make a visit. Many such stores are found in Louisville, and the owners and employees are friendly and enjoy a visit from an American. Genuine interest in the food can lead to good conversation with the workers. A good idea is to invite an employee to your house in order to learn how to cook a dish from their country of origin.

Many cities are home to colleges and universities. These schools have various international clubs and cultural events that draw many ethnic peoples. A researcher may scan the website of a school in town and find contact information for someone leading one of the international clubs. Additionally, many schools have some kind of program designed to connect internationals with Americans for language and cultural instruction. The University of Louisville has such a program run by both the university and the local campus ministry. Many colleges also have a TESOL or ESL program for students who are accepted on a provisional basis, that they might learn enough English to enroll in an academic program. Such language programs are often looking for volunteers from the community to befriend internationals and help them with their English.

Apartments, festivals, grocery stores, and college campuses are all good places to meet internationals. The researcher should make a habit of conducting informal interviews whenever he or she encounters an international.[15] Immigrants are highly connected with others from their ethnic group, so interviews can lead to many more contacts. Taking the time to have a good conversation begins to build the relationship, and many internationals are open to having American friends. The researcher should not be afraid to be bold in asking to visit the international at his house or inviting him to visit the researcher's house. As this section of the paper has shown, one can begin to locate ethnic groups in the city by beginning with federal level reports and working down to the state and local level. These reports, along with ground- level fieldwork, should produce concrete locations of many ethnic groups in the city.

reaching ethnic groups in the city

Now that a prospective church planter can identify numerous ethnic groups in his city, he must develop a strategy to reach them. Urban ministry is very complex, and each situation carries its own contextual issues. Several general principles can be addressed to help the ministry get off to a good start, however. Important

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[15] For detailed information on ethnographic interviewing, see Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995). Chapter 5 is especially helpful for building conversational partnerships. The researcher approaches the interview with a loose structure in mind but oftentimes the interviewee will alert the researcher to further topics to be explored.

questions to ask include what are immigrants looking for in the United States, should a multi- or mono-ethnic church be planted, how should the Gospel be presented in light of orality issues, and how can churches best work together to accomplish the task of evangelizing the city? Each question raises subsequent questions, ad nauseum. Attuned church planters will at least know the right questions to ask before any ministry begins.

discover what immigrants are looking for

"I want a job to support my family, and one that has health insurance, too." Those words came out of the mouth of a recently arrived refugee from Nepal. While he and I try to bridge a large cultural gap, we share the desire to provide for our families. In Louisville, and many other cities, refugees and immigrants come looking for a better financial situation.[16] The first priority is finding a good job that pays the bills, supports extended family, and covers health care. Several skill sets are needed to secure a good job in the United States, and these needed skills provide a contact point between the international and the church planter.

The first new skill to be learned is the ability to speak English. Government-funded ESL programs can be found in many cities. These classes teach immigrants the basic vocabulary and grammar of the English language but are not enough to ensure a good grasp of the language. The communal nature of many immigrant cultures makes it difficult for individuals to practice immersion in American culture. Consequently, English skills only improve to a certain degree. Missionaries have succumbed to an isolationist model for centuries. It is exhausting to live fully among a people with whom one cannot understand or communicate. Immigrants are tempted to retreat to their apartments and spend most of their time with members of their own community. One way to help immigrants secure a good job is to help them improve their conversational English skills.

The fact that immigrants from the same cultural and linguistic background tend to congregate in the same neighborhood or apartment complex provides opportunity for onsite conversational English clubs. The apartment complex where the Nepalese that I work with live has a community room we can reserve for free. The room is on the Nepali's territory and is perfect for weekly meetings. The Nepalese do not want a formal English lesson; rather, they want to practice their English. We begin with a story from God's Word and then have a short vocabulary review with new words introduced from the Bible story. We then break into small

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[16] Economic migrants constitute the vast majority of the rise in global migration. At least ninety-one percent of all migrants do so for economic reasons. See Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 48–49.

groups and apply the new words to everyday life situations. We also review the Bible story as the opportunity presents itself, but the main point of the time is to help the Nepalese with their conversational English. They would not come if we only focused on storying. We are meeting a real need by helping with their English, but we are also laying a foundation for the Gospel through Chronological Bible Storying.

Once a more solid grasp of English is attained, we move to the next stage and provide a résumé and interviewing workshop. Many immigrants come from ascribed status and collective cultures where it is not appropriate to brag about oneself. The résumé and job interview expectations in the United States are just the opposite—they demand that one paints oneself in the best light and proves job capability. Two distinctly different worldviews are operating. The point of the résumé and interview workshop is to help the immigrant learn the skills needed to secure a job in the U.S. We print several résumés for the immigrants and then do mock job interviews, encouraging the immigrant to speak with confidence and not be afraid to promote past achievements, education, and skills. The first time we finished a workshop, all the refugees took their newly minted résumés and rolled them up for easier carrying! How were they to know that the condition of the paper on which the résumé is printed speaks as loudly to a potential employer as the content on the paper? We must think through our sometimes silly cultural norms for interviewing and be sure to educate the immigrants on proper protocol.[17]

67

Again, our ultimate goal is to plant a healthy, reproducing, contextualized church. The first step is to build a good relationship with the immigrant community, and helping them gain skills needed to secure a job is an important part of the process. Once the people see we love and care for them, they are much more receptive to the Gospel message. Immigrants and refugees come looking for a better life, better jobs, and more opportunities for their children. We as missionaries must meet them where they are in order to gain a hearing for the good news of Jesus Christ.

decide whether to plant a multi- or mono-ethnic church

Immigrants often gather in the same neighborhood or apartment complex in order to maintain relationships and to ease the tensions of culture shock. As noted above, an apartment complex with a population of immigrants provides an easy

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[17] Immigrant communities are unaware of countless social and cultural differences in their adopted land. Paul Hiebert suggests that missionaries can function a mediatory role for those being reached. U.S. culture is performance based and has little sympathy for those who cannot play the game properly. See Paul Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 178–86.

place to begin a ministry. This convenience also brings several inherent challenges. For example, there are Nepalese, Iraqis, Haitians, Chinese, South Asian Indians, and several African peoples living in the complex at which I minister. We focus mainly on the Nepalese, but oftentimes Iraqis will come to our weekly conversation club. We are faced with the decision of whether to plant a mono- or multi- ethnic church.

The first question to be settled is whether there is a biblical command that a church be mono- or multi-ethnic. Once the biblical issue is settled, a strategy can be implemented to reach the target population. A vast amount of writing and debate on the homogeneous unit principle and church planting is available, and an entire paper (or lifetime) is needed just to flesh out the issues. In light of space constraints, I will state where I stand on the issue. I fully believe the Gospel breaks down barriers that are the result of sin. I also believe that God delights in the diversity He has allowed to flourish on the earth. However, there is not sufficient biblical evidence to prove definitively that either mono- or multi-ethnic churches are the model. Some go so far as to claim that it is sinful to plant a mono-ethnic church. I do not agree with this assertion. God has given us the freedom to examine the cultural context and plant a church that will reach the greatest number of people within a given ethnic group. Sometimes this can be done by planting a multi-ethnic church; other times a mono-ethnic church will reach the greatest number within the target people. In light of my conclusion, I want to introduce a number of questions that need to be dealt with when considering whether to plant a mono- or multi-ethnic church.

The city is diverse; there is no doubt about that. While large cities like Chicago, New York, and San Francisco have distinct ethnic communities like Chinatown, Little Italy, and so on, many cities have no clear ethnic boundaries. Cities like Louisville have sections of town where immigrants and refugees tend to live, but many ethnic groups are represented in the same geographical area. Many people would seek to plant a multi-ethnic church because of the close proximity of peoples sharing the same apartment.[18] Also, immigrants and refugees seem to have many things in common that may trump their cultural affiliation. Functionally, distinct people groups sometimes come together in the city to form a sort of urban tribe. The urban tribe phenomenon needs to be treated as a new people group. Refugees in parts of Louisville share refugee status, they are all trying to find jobs,

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[18] John Leonard states that it is fact that immigrants congregate and form new communities that recreate their home culture, thus showing the importance and power of homogenous groups. He then argues that church planters should plant multi-ethnic churches based on biblical evidence. See John Leonard, "Hybrid Church Planting Among North African Muslim Immigrants Living in France" in *Globalization and Its Effects on Urban Ministry in the 21st Century,* ed. Susan Baker (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 218–19.

68

they attend the same ESL classes, they shop at the same grocery store, and they live in the same apartment complex. In sum, do they have more in common with each other than with their ethnic identity? If so, it makes sense to plant a multi-ethnic church since a new homogenous group has arisen—those sharing refugee status. Immigrants try to take advantage of their situation in order to find stability and jobs. If mixing with other ethnic groups allows a sense of stability, they might set aside their cultural distinctions based on current affiliations. However, if given the chance, would these people revert to their respective mono-ethnic communities?

Some research indicates that multi-ethnic communities that originally group around a common affinity will indeed revert to mono-ethnic and mono-linguistic communities once a sufficient number of their ethnic group arrives in the city. For example, historically, immigrants to Mumbai, India, lived in ethnically diverse communities upon arrival. The northern part of the city was the industrial center, and immigrants would cluster in neighborhoods within walking distance of the factories where they worked. At first, the immigrants had more in common with each other than they did with the ethnic villages they left. In fact, the caste system was not able to be enforced as strictly because of the ethnic diversity. In time, though, as more and more immigrants arrived, mono-ethnic and mono-linguistic communities formed around the factories, and the caste system was again enforced.[19]

Grant Lovejoy, International Mission Board orality expert, is finding that some multi-ethnic churches experience splits once a critical mass of mono-ethnic peoples arrives in town. Even church plants focused on East Africans have split as a sufficient number of tribals arrive. The church service had been in Swahili, the trade language of Eastern Africa, but after the split, the individual mono-ethnic churches worshipped in their home/heart language.[20] Such splits do not always occur, but as multi-ethnic church planting becomes more popular and the congregations are given enough time to gain a larger number of people from the same ethnic background, more mono-ethnic groups are leaving the multi-ethnic church context to form their own church.

An important question is whether the church planter will be prepared for such a split or not. Will he insist on a multi-ethnic church as the only true expression of Gospel unity? Or will he allow the Gospel to reach the largest number of people possible within each ethnic group? Such questions must be settled on the front end of church planting in order to avoid unnecessary heartache later. The mono- or

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[19] Anthony Casey, "A Missiological Portrait of Bombay, India" (unpublished paper, 2010), 3, accessible at: http://culturnicity.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/bombayfinal.pdf.

[20] Interview by the author, 23 February 2011. Specific cities and churches are omitted in this article because of the sensitive nature of the effects of church dysfunction.

multi-ethnic church planting discussion leads us to the next issue. Many immigrants and refugees come from primary or secondary oral cultures, and Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) is commonly used to reach them with the Gospel. The church planter must decide what language to story in and how to address worldview issues, especially in the multi-ethnic context.

consider orality issues

Oral communicators are found in every cultural group in the world. Sixty to seventy percent of the world's population prefers a non-literate approach to learning.[21] In the recent past, many churches welcomed immigrants and ethnic peoples but did nothing to accommodate their oral preference. The pastor preached his same three-point sermon and used linear logic and reasoning to argue someone into seeing that they were a sinner in need of the Gospel. More recently, however, church planters, especially, are utilizing CBS and orality-based discipleship methods to reach ethnic groups in the city. The first question must be: in what language should the story be told? Many agree that a native speaker using the group's heart language is best. What if there are no believers in the target group, though, and the church planters do not speak the language? Is English an acceptable substitute? After all, many immigrants are desperately trying to learn English already. Why not help their efforts by storying in English?

In some situations, there is little choice but to use English. In Louisville, there are no Christians in our Nepali community. None of us involved in church planting speak Nepali. In another part of town, a South Asian Indian storying group meets. The stories were initially told in Hindi because the majority of the people attending understood Hindi. It was discovered later that many of the Indians were straining to fully understand Hindi, and more people actually understood English better than Hindi. The storying is now done in English. In both cases, it would be best to story in the heart language, but in the first example, no believer knows Nepali. In the second example, there are so many heart languages represented in the group that it would not be feasible to story in them all.

My team has a storyset recorded in Nepali. We tell the story in English, and the Nepalese read along. Then we play the story in Nepali so everyone can hear it in their own language. We tell the story in English in addition to Nepali for two reasons. First, we can be sure the story is biblically accurate because we have a literal translation in English. Some groups will have a native speaker translate and tell the story, but in that case, the church planters can never be certain the story

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[21] David Claydon, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (International Orality Network: Lima, NY, 2005), 3.

remains faithful to Scripture. Syncretism can occur if incorrect words are substituted for biblical concepts, and the planter will be the last to know about it. The second reason we tell the story in English is because the Nepalese want to learn English. Using the story in English helps them read along and hear American pronunciations. This method is not without its problems, however. The Nepalese have a hard time remembering the story in English because their English skills are not very good. They can remember the story much better in Nepali, but we have no believer equipped to follow up on the story in that language. We have resorted to using the Nepali/English hybrid as a temporary solution. Our goal is to bring in a Nepali believer to reinforce the story in Nepali and ask follow up comprehension and application questions.

The second question to be answered is how to address worldview issues. In a mono-ethnic setting, it is a matter of doing adequate field research to discover the worldview issues and then contextualize the story set to address needed issues. In a multi-ethnic setting, the issue is vastly complicated. My team seeks to primarily plant a church among Nepalese who are Hindus. However, we very often have Iraqi Muslims attend the conversation club, because it is in the community room of their apartment complex.[22] We have a hard time turning the Iraqis away. If both groups are present, how do we address polytheistic Hindus and monotheistic Muslims at the same time? When we show that God is one, we have the Muslims cheering, and the Hindus are offended. When we show that God is three persons, we have the Hindus cheering, and the Muslims are offended. How do we handle the story of Abraham and Isaac when we have Muslims present? Such dilemmas go on and on.

Our present attempt at a solution is to alter our story set if both groups are present, so that the story is more general. We might tell the story of Abraham and his son rather than of Abraham and Isaac. After the main story time, we have a short English lesson based on new vocabulary from the story. Then we attempt to split the people into common language or religion groups for more personal discussion. We might have different follow up questions for the Hindus than we would for the Muslims. It is not always easy to split the group, however. Many times, Hindus and Muslims will be at the same table, and we do the best we can to practice English and address the story. Those working in a multi-ethnic church planting situation by choice or by circumstance need to decide ahead of time whether to story to the whole group and then split up for discussion, or whether to

71

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[22] Paul Hiebert suggests that urban ethnic peoples are most easily evangelized by starting different churches for each sociocultural group. However, no church can keep people out for not being in the "right" group. See Paul Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 351.

split up first and tell contextualized stories to each group. What are the implications of keeping the group together, regardless of worldview differences? What are the implications of splitting the group up? Such are the complex issues church planters face in a diverse city.

train churches and cevelop partnerships

Cities are diverse ethnically and culturally. Most cities, especially in the U.S., are also diverse ecclesiologically. Large cities have large numbers of churches. Some of these churches desire to reach the ethnic groups that are at their door steps. Mobilizing and training churches to reach ethnic groups raises a number of important questions that must be addressed. The first question deals with cross-cultural issues inherent to ethnic church planting. The second question relates to how to develop partnerships within the city.

Horror stories abound where well-meaning churches made serious cultural faux pauxs while attempting to reach immigrants. Last year in Louisville, a cultural festival was put on by the city. The event attracted thousands of immigrants and refugees. One well-meaning church sent a team to the event to share the Gospel. The church's evangelism van pulled up, and six members jumped out, gathering a group of Nepalese around them. The team began telling the Nepalese they must believe in Jesus right now, or else they would go to hell. Much to the church members' delight, all of the Nepalese professed faith and signed a card indicating their decision. The team moved on and delivered their gospel bomb to the next group with similar results. A few weeks later, several members of that church attended a Nepali story group where ethnic church planters had been faithfully laying a foundation for the Gospel for months. The visiting church members derided the church planters and told them all they needed to do was preach about hell, and the Nepalese would repent, just as they had at the cultural festival. Little did these church members realize, but none of the "decisions for Christ" the Nepalese made were genuine. They had only gone along with the show in order to not be embarrassed by saying no to the evangelists who obviously wanted a certain response.

Without training, churches will begin reaching ethnic groups on their own initiative. These churches can sometimes do more harm than good, however. It is crucial that those trained in cross-cultural ministry provide training sessions for other churches in the city. In Louisville, we have workshops on worldview identification and CBS every few months. We offer training to individual churches who desire to reach ethnic groups in their neighborhoods. We attend associational meetings and ecumenical gatherings in order to find out which churches want to

72

reach ethnic groups and to offer cross-cultural training to the churches. Just as missionaries preparing for the field receive in-depth training, so must local churches that are crossing cultural boundaries with the Gospel. Providing cross-cultural training also begins to address our second question—that of how to develop city-wide partnerships between churches reaching ethnic groups.

Even in a relatively small city like Louisville with a metro population of around one million, it is difficult to know of all the efforts being made to reach ethnic groups. Many resources are not being used efficiently because churches are not connected. Recently, in another part of the city, a Nepali dinner fellowship took place. Unfortunately, I was unaware of it until the day it happened. I had no time to invite my Nepali friends who live in a different part of the city. In order to avoid such situations, we have developed a networking system on Facebook called "people groups Louisville" in order to provide information and resources for those in the city doing ethnic church planting. In addition, a new interdenominational networking group has been formed that meets bi-monthly. We have only had one meeting so far, but over fifty people attended. Several of us were surprised to hear of others in town who were attempting a similar ministry, about which we had never heard. These meetings are intended to provide prayer, encouragement, opportunity, and resources for anyone reaching ethnic groups in the city. We passed a sheet around that asked each person to name one other person who might be interested in a partnership. We hope to slowly build a base that will allow for healthy networking, training opportunities, and partnerships.[23]

One major benefit of a network is the ability to share resources. For example, the Nepali story set my team is using originated with a missionary in Nepal. A student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary knew the missionary and asked for the story set to use with a Nepali ministry in Louisville. I found out about this ministry and asked for the story set to use in the community in which I minister. At the networking meeting mentioned above, I discovered another church who is attempting to reach Nepali refugees in their neighborhood but do not have a story set and are not familiar with CBS. The networking meeting allowed me to both pass on the story set and also to offer training to use it properly. Several groups in Louisville are reaching out to Iraqi refugees. No one has a Creation to Cross story set in Iraqi Arabic. We have emailed missionaries on the field and have not found a complete story set, either. We have agreed to combine resources and personnel in Louisville and write and record an Iraqi Arabic story set. Once the

73

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[23] For more information on the difficulties and benefits of urban networking, see Harvie Conn's *Planting and Growing Urban Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), chapter 9.

story set is finished, we can offer it to other groups in town doing a similar ministry.

It may seem obvious that churches need training in cross-cultural ministry and that networking and partnerships are helpful. Many cities have no such partnerships, however, or they are ineffective. We all need to be reminded and challenged to give time and resources to developing training and other tools to help the Gospel reach more people in our cities. Creating a Facebook page is a simple first step. Hosting multiple networking and training sessions throughout the year is even better. Sometimes all it takes is one or two people to step forward to organize an event, and good follow up can ensure future effectiveness.

conclusion

74

Identifying and reaching ethnic groups in the city is a complex issue. Just getting started is often the hardest part. Thankfully, much information is available to help locate internationals. A bit of time and a lot of practice is necessary to make sense of the hundreds of pages of statistical reports, websites, and field notes. The end result is well worth the effort. It saddens me to hear that tens of thousands of internationals come to the U.S. and never have a real friendship with an American, let alone ever hear the Gospel. The world is at our door. We as church planters must find the people in our cities, finalize our biblical convictions on issues like multi-ethnic church planting, and then develop a strategy to plant healthy, contextualized, reproducing churches. It is my prayer that this article will help that process along. Beginning the discussion is the first step in reaching the goal.

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