

Alan McMahan, General Editor

It was my privilege, upon the launch of the inaugural issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* in the summer of 2009, to follow on the heels of my predecessor, Gary L. McIntosh, who was the long-term Editor for the *Journal for the American Society for Church Growth*. In my opening article for that issue I reflected upon the history of the church growth movement and its place in the mission practice of the church to research and report on the means for effective evangelism to further the completion of the Great Commission. In that article I also outlined six major challenges for the movement as it seeks to engage new, emerging realities facing the church. This issue of the Journal starts by addressing the first of these challenges, the challenge of reinvention. To keep the evangelistic mandate prominent in ministry strategy, new paradigms and strategies will need to be adopted.

The first three articles in this issue reflect on the mutations that have taken place in evangelistic strategies and in ministry models over the last several decades to ask the hard questions of what we may need to do differently in resourcing churches and newly emerging movements. Elmer Towns opens the dialogue by summarizing three different evangelistic paradigms that have dominated the landscape in the last 70 years and concludes with eight observations that emerge

from that study. Bill Easum goes on to outline six different “conversations” that are currently underway that seek to address the role of the church in the world and suggests a core issue that all must speak to if they are to be relevant and effective in the years to come. Bob Logan reminds those that have identified themselves as part of the church growth movement that they will need to return to their roots, develop a learning posture, and come alongside ministry leaders in new ways if they are to reverse the patterns of aging and institutionalization.

The next article by Gary McIntosh takes the reader back to the early days of church growth research by reviewing the lessons learned in India about what happens as the church responds to a crisis. In so doing, Gary speaks to the theme of the recent annual conference of the Great Commission Research Network in New Orleans, entitled “Outreach in the Whirlwind.” He concludes with observations on the relationship between evangelism and social action. Daniel Rodriguez follows with an interesting study on ministry to U.S.-born, English dominant Latinos and shows how the evangelism and church planting models as traditionally done in the U.S. has missed a generation of Latino immigrants in the U.S. with the gospel. His article illustrates effective new models of engagement through case study of local churches in Los Angeles, Chicago and Miami.

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The next two articles approach the subject of church growth from theological, historical and philosophical perspectives. Mark Baldwin explores the church growth movement from a Holiness perspective by discussing the biblical and theological developments that tie the two together and concludes with a review of church planting models used through history by those in the Holiness tradition. David Drury compares and contrasts the church growth movement with the emerging church movement by placing the “fathers” of each movement, McGavran and Newbigin in a kind of dialogue in order to expose the perspectives and limitations of each paradigm. He then suggests ways to move ahead constructively using the insights from each camp.

The last three articles provide resources and models that are helpful for developing strategies for evangelism, church planting, and church intervention. J.D. Payne provides statistics and maps to indicate the least reached areas of the U.S. and Canada and discusses the need to prioritize areas of high need and high receptivity. Sample PowerPoint slides follow the article and more are available online. Robert Logan offers a case study of an emerging house church network and shares the life commitments and lessons needed to sustain it. Bob Whitesel details a five-stage, four trigger process model to describe the changes experienced in a local congregation. The article is presented in honor of Eddie Gibbs whose

retirement punctuates two decades of involvement with this fellowship and whose contribution to the church growth movement has been laudable.

Occurring now as a regular feature, this issue of the Journal includes book reviews on six publications that are sure to make a contribution to our understanding of how churches are changing to meet the needs of their contexts. Special thanks goes to Lloyd Grant, Tom Harper, Keith Stone, Robert Strong, Will Brooks and James Cho for their good work in reviewing these books. Gary McIntosh concludes this issue by reviewing nine dissertations and theses that offer insights on the church growth, evangelism, leadership, church multiplication and so on.

Included in the pages of this issue and every issue are many helpful insights, models and strategies that will benefit the researcher, teacher, practitioner, and consultant who desires to enlarge their understanding of how God is building His church. It is our hope that from the time spent here, effective practice will emerge that will reach men and women with the Gospel and introduce them into the fellowship of the church. May God make it so.