

Alan McMahan, General Editor

Two years ago we moved our family from New York to Southern California to take up a new teaching opportunity at Biola University. Though the move covered a distance of many miles, it was not unfamiliar to us given the fact that each of our last four moves involved distances that were equal or greater. But every move brings a fresh start, new challenges, and greater opportunities. The house me, my wife, and two sons moved into was 51 years old at the time but it might as well have been new. It was freshly painted, newly carpeted, in good repair. I especially remember the flowers that seemed to bloom everywhere around us and I appreciated the fact that it was all on flat ground after living 9 years on a hillside where every trip to the car or the bathroom involved a flight of stairs.

In many ways the Journal you are now holding in your hands is like that house. This inaugural issue of the Great Commission Research Journal represents a fresh start, a new beginning, the promise of greater things. It has its roots in the past, standing on the firm foundation established by its predecessors, yet looking toward the future with an optimism and purpose that is expansive and wide and full of new challenges and opportunities.

The Great Commission Research Journal, Biola's newest academic publication, will represent the next generation of thinking on how to engage in

effective evangelism that grows the church and builds the kingdom. Standing on the shoulders of its predecessor, the Journal for the American Society for Church Growth, the Great Commission Research Journal will seek to capture the best thinking, and report on the latest trends and most effective means being used by the church to bring people into a personal relationship with Christ and incorporate them into a body of believers where they can be nurtured and commissioned for service.

Already major changes with the Journal have occurred. The most obvious is the Journal's new name with its new cover design and layout. The length of the Journal has been increased and the inclusion of the book review section and the dissertation abstracts will be a common feature. Less obvious is the expansion from a single editor (how did you do it Gary?) to a multi-editor team and robust support from Biola's academic publication department.

4 In the future, more changes are forthcoming. We are moving toward increasing our international reporting as we assemble a team that can identify and cultivate emerging research from the global church. We are moving toward a being a refereed journal as we recruit expert peer reviewers in a variety of contributing disciplines who can evaluate and recommend the best from the pool of submitted articles. We are developing a webstore where back issues can be accessed, printed as needed and even bound into compilations for use in classes and seminars. We will become more active in our recruitment of the best researchers and writers who can report on issues of practical benefit to our readership. These are exciting days with much to hope for.

This issue of the Journal goes back to the roots of the Church Growth movement with a reflection on the role Donald McGavran played in the development of the field of modern missiology. McGavran's clarion call to emphasize the primacy of evangelism among missionary endeavors redefined 100 years of missionary practice and eventually set the stage for the church growth movement in the United States. McGavran's philosophy has historically been the point of orientation of this Journal and the professional association (Great Commission Research Network) with which it is affiliated. It is only fitting that this inaugural issue of the Journal begin with a reflection on the roots of the movement.

The next two articles represent theological and biblical studies on themes related to church growth. The first of these articles by Michael Waldrop explores the theological compatibility between the church growth movement and a Calvinist understanding of soteriology with its emphasis on election over against the pragmatism of church growth thinking. Waldrop shows that what many assumed

was a historical theological conflict can be harmonized, and shows how this has been accomplished by leading evangelical thinkers.

The second of these articles by Allen Quist explores the critical issue in leadership succession as revealed in Matthew's gospel. Based on his study he offers five principles and five ethical responses that should guide churches as they undergo times of transition created by changes in leadership.

The four articles that follow relate in some way to church planting strategies. The first two articles are written by Journal editorial team members. Phil Stevenson looks at church planting from the macro perspective of a whole denomination and goes on to identify blockages and suggest strategies that empower church planting movements. J.D. Payne looks at the ethical dimensions of church planting and provides a dozen guidelines that should guide our efforts in order to stay faithful to a kingdom ethic.

The next two articles focus on training and assessment strategies used to equip and select church planting candidates. Specifically, Hansung Kim examines how Korean church planters express their perceptions regarding their church planting education and their observations about what elements were most effective. Hutz Hertzberg and Francis Lonsway compare church planter candidate assessment tools and evaluate their relative strengths and weaknesses.

The last three articles cover a potpourri of topics relating to evangelism in the U.S. and abroad. Joshua Rhone examines the problems that arise when the church's benevolence becomes a coercive in their zeal to acquire converts. Danny Von Kanel offers eight keys to turning congregational apathy towards growth into excitement. And, drawing from his experience in Japan, Michael Wilson grapples with how to encourage new believers to remain in fellowship with extended family members who may continue to worship at the family altar with the goal to introduce them to Christ.

The final two sections of the Journal will become regular features in every issue. In the Book Review section four books are reviewed with the goal of evaluating their contribution to the dialogue on how to minister in rapidly changing times. Reading through these reviews allows you to quickly capture the essence of the work, evaluate its relevance for ministry, and guide you as you seek help for the journey.

In the Dissertation and Theses section, Gary McIntosh offers abstracts on eight dissertations and theses that focused on some aspect of Donald McGavran's life and thought. Browsing these abstracts will demonstrate quickly demonstrate the profound impact McGavran had on American missiology and how significantly he challenged the prevailing paradigms of the day.

In these pages you will always find much that will challenge your assumptions, provoke your thinking and refine your practice. Representing the latest thinking of the academic community and connecting it to effective leadership and evangelism will be our goal.

If you haven't yet subscribed to the Journal, this may be the best time to do so. If you are already receiving the Journal on a regular basis, invite your friends to get in on the ground floor as we expand our capacity to address key issues of ministry and outreach. These are exciting times! Help us build a strong Journal.

Though this Journal is new in so many ways, a great debt of gratitude is offered to John Vaughan, the founding editor, who started publishing the Journal in 1991. Gary McIntosh followed in his steps and served as the editor, and along with his wife, Carol, the distributor and office manager for the last 14 years. Together they made the Journal of the American Society for Church Growth a valuable contributor to the research and dialogue about how people come to faith in Christ and how churches grow. Without their prior effort, the new Great Commission Research Journal likely would never have been published.

Following in this effort by picking up the sponsorship for the Journal is the Cook School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University. Under the leadership of Dean Douglas Pennoyer, the school has made an academic and financial commitment to not only continue the publication but to significantly expand its quality and scope. With robust support from the Marketing and Academic Publications offices at Biola the new Journal will be stronger and more useful than ever. Special thanks goes to Irene Neller, Joy Bergk, and Brenda Janoian for their support in this initiative.

Also critical to the publication of the Journal is the close cooperation with the Great Commission Research Network (the new name of the American Society for Church Growth). The men and women of this professional organization represent

the leading experts, authors, consultants, teachers, researchers, pastors and denominational officials working in the fields of missiology, church growth, theology, evangelism, leadership, and ministry. Through their research and experience they provide the actionable knowledge and keen insight that makes this Journal a valuable resource for academics and practitioners alike. Through their support of this Journal and their annual conferences (i.e. November 2009 in New Orleans) the Great Commission Research Network disseminates the latest thinking and research for taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

8 Finally, it is my continuing privilege to work with a highly qualified team of editors. Phil Stevenson heads up the North American Desk and draws from a rich experience in leadership as Director of Church Growth for the Wesleyan Church. J.D. Payne is the Book Review editor and has been the Director for Church Planting Center at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Gary McIntosh continues on in an editorial role as the Dissertation Editor. Gary is a prolific writer, editor of the McIntosh Church Growth Network Newsletter, and a professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot School of Theology. Laura McIntosh does a fine job as our Technical Editor. This team brings a great strength and rich perspective to this effort.

With this great team of sponsors, writers, and editors we are looking forward to an expanding role as a ready resource in the task of completing the Great Commission. As readers and subscribers your support is appreciated!

Alan McMahan—General Editor  
Cook School of Intercultural Studies, Biola University