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# Rethinking Foreign Missions: How Churches Can Engage in Global Missionary Work Without Leaving Their Communities

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

RETHINKING FOREIGN MISSIONS: HOW CHURCHES CAN ENGAGE IN  
GLOBAL MISSIONARY WORK WITHOUT LEAVING THEIR COMMUNITIES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
STUART ALAN COCANOUGH

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2019

Portland Seminary  
George Fox University  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 18, 2019  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives

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## GLOSSARY

Many words are used and misused when talking about people from other countries.

Below are terms I will use, and what I mean by them.

- Immigrant – someone who has moved to another country permanently.
- Migrant – someone who has moved to another country but who may later return to a home country.
- Refugee – someone who has been brought to a country via the United Nations at the invitation of that country's government because of persecution or fear of harm.
- Asylum Seeker – someone who has fled persecution or fear of harm and arrives in a new country asking for protection. This person does not come via the United Nations refugee resettlement program.
- Unauthorized Immigrant – individuals who have entered a new country without permission or have overstayed a VISA.
- Foreign Worker – someone who is recruited to work in a new country on a non-permanent basis for a specific job.
- Foreign-born – someone who was born in one country but now lives in a another country. This person may be a naturalized citizen.
- Newcomer – A general term. This is someone who has not been living in a country for a long time.
- Foreigner –someone who is not a natural-born citizen of a country.
- International – a noun, synonymous with foreigner.

## ABSTRACT

For three hundred years, the modern missions movement has established a paradigm in which evangelical churches, denominations, and parachurch agencies have recruited, trained, funded, and sent missionaries around the world. Taking seriously Christ's command to reach the nations with the gospel, U.S. churches spend millions of dollars each year to send a few select missionaries to faraway nations, while most Christians are not engaged in cross-cultural ministry. But the world has changed. Now there are millions of foreigners living in the United States. I propose that evangelical church leaders consider a new strategy that involves training American Christians to minister to internationals in their own communities.

Section One of this dissertation will look at the current status of the United States with a record number of internationals living in and visiting U.S. cities.

Section Two will discuss the traditional ministries and strategies American evangelicals have utilized to engage foreigners.

Section Three will make the case for a new paradigm in which evangelical churches across America are actively involved in cross-cultural ministries focused on internationals. Special attention will be given to identifying potential problems encountered by churches who seek to develop strategies to minister to internationals.

Section Four and Five will describe my artifact. The proposal for a book entitled *Reaching the World (across the street)*. This easy-to-read handbook is targeted at church leaders looking for practical ideas for reaching internationals in their communities.

## SECTION 1

### A NEED FOR A NEW MISSIONS MOVEMENT

In this dissertation, I will demonstrate that the modern missions movement, born in the late 1700s, created a dualism in which a select few missionaries traveled to distant lands to share the gospel, while the vast majority of Christians stayed at home and supported them. I will argue that it is time for a new model.

#### **The Rebuke that Launched an Era**

"Sit down, young man; when God pleases to convert the heathen, He'll do it without consulting you or me."<sup>1</sup> The year was 1785. William Carey was a young pastor attending an area ministers' meeting. When the pastors were asked for suggestions as to the topic of the day's discussion, Carey proposed they discuss the responsibility of Christians to reach the nations with the gospel. While the topic of foreign missions would be viewed positively by Baptists today, the theological and social environment Carey faced was much different. In the late 1700s, Calvinist-leaning Particular Baptists felt the Armenian General Baptists had fallen into heresy. The theological rift was so massive that many Particular Baptists reacted by refusing to place any emphasis on evangelism. Their rationale was influenced by the popular writings of Joseph Hussey, a Congregationalist who proposed one could either believe in election or practice

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<sup>1</sup> J. T. K. Daniel and Roger E. Hedlund, *Carey's Obligation and India's Renaissance* (Serampore, West Bengal: Council of Serampore College, 1993), 11.

evangelism. Doing both was not an option.<sup>2</sup> John Ryland Sr., a prominent minister at the meeting, was the one who commanded Carey to “sit down.” Ryland seemingly intended to put this young pastor in his place. Instead, his words of rebuke were a catalyst, lighting a fire within William Carey. Carey’s response was to write a treatise that would challenge the church to engage in foreign missions: *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*.<sup>3</sup> This booklet, and Carey’s subsequent life’s work as a pioneer missionary in India, influenced pioneer missionaries including William Morrison, Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, and David Livingstone.

### **A Biblical Foundation for Missions**

Carey’s “enquiry” was based on Matthew 28:18-20, popularly known as “The Great Commission.” In this passage, the resurrected Jesus gives a command to His followers to “go and make disciples of all nations.”<sup>4</sup> This command is reinforced by similar accounts of Jesus’ final instructions recorded in Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20, and Acts 1. Furthermore, God’s heart for the nations can be seen throughout the Bible. In Genesis 12:3, God tells Abram “...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”<sup>5</sup> In Psalm 46:10, God is proclaimed to be “exalted among the nations.”<sup>6</sup> In Acts 2:5-11, the

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1991, 54).

<sup>3</sup> William Carey, *Enquiry to the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (S.l.: Outlook Verlag, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV).

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 12:3 (NIV).

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

gospel is being proclaimed at Pentecost to God-fearing Jews “from every nation under heaven.”<sup>7</sup> In Acts 10, God reveals to Peter that the gospel was also meant for the Gentiles. Moreover, in Romans 10:13-15, Paul challenges the church to send preachers by asking, “How can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?”<sup>8</sup> Finally, God’s promise to Abraham is revealed in Revelation 7:9 as heaven is described with “...a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”<sup>9</sup>

For evangelicals, these passages are a reminder that global evangelism is a core part of our identity. The names Robert Morrison, Hudson Taylor, David Livingstone, Lottie Moon, Adoniram Judson, C.T. Studd, Gladys Aylward, and Marie Monsen are held in high regard to this day as pillars of the modern missionary movement. For over 300 years, evangelicals have been taking the good news of Jesus to every corner of the globe in an attempt to reach as many people as possible. To facilitate this effort, large mission boards have been formed to recruit, train, support, and supervise missionaries on every continent. At the same time, hundreds of millions of dollars are raised every year to send and support these missionary families. For some Christians, missionaries are thought of as spiritual superheroes. Most Christians hold missionaries in the highest esteem, but many conclude, “I could never do what they do.”

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<sup>7</sup> Acts. 2:5-11 (NIV).

<sup>8</sup> Romans 10:13-15 (NIV).

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 7:9 (NIV).



### Mission Work is For a Select Few

From Carey's time to the present, a dualism solidified that presumed it was the job of the local church to win Americans to Christ, while missionaries were given the task of winning foreigners to Christ. Denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the Assemblies of God, and others separated their mission efforts into two separate mission boards: one responsible for missions in the U.S., the other for global missions. The terms, "foreign missionary" and "home missionary," emerged to designate those doing ministry in either domestic or international contexts. This paradigm was based on the premise that most people in the United States speak English, have similar Western values, and have at least a "Christmas and Easter" understanding of who Jesus is. Foreign missionaries, on the other hand, are uniquely gifted men and women who travel to exotic locations in order to introduce people to Jesus. While foreign missionaries were lifted up as evangelical superheroes, those who engaged in mission work in the U.S. were not thought of as "real missionaries." They have often been labeled as *church planters, social workers, evangelists, and strategists*.

Today, foreign missionaries are relatively scarce. For example, in 2017 the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), for whom global missions is a top priority, reported that there are 15,005,638 Southern Baptists and 3,551 overseas missionaries.<sup>10</sup> This means there is one overseas missionary for every 4,226 church members. To illustrate the rarity of missionaries, imagine if 8,452 followers of Christ were gathered together with

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<sup>10</sup> "The Southern Baptist Convention: A Closer Look," Southern Baptist Convention, accessed November 21, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/FastFacts.asp>.

Jesus at the Mount of Olives right before his ascension. As they listen intently, Jesus commands this group of disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations.”<sup>11</sup> Now imagine if, out of the 8,452 Christians gathered, that only one solitary couple steps forth to say, “We will go.”

Global missionary assignments are reserved for a select few. Foreign missionaries are so rare that many churches in America cannot name one single woman or man from their congregation who has served as a career missionary.

### **When the “Ends of the Earth” Move to “Jerusalem”**

Jesus told his followers in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”<sup>12</sup> Over the years, I have more than one sermon where the preacher made the application that “Jerusalem” represents our hometown, “Judea and Samaria” represents our region, and “the ends of the earth” refers to global missions. In this application of the Great Commission, Jesus is commanding his church to take the gospel to people who live at the ends of the earth. For over 300 years, evangelical missionaries have done just that. They have left their hometowns (Jerusalem) and have traveled to faraway places (ends of the earth) in order to reach people with the gospel and to plant thriving churches.

However, what if members of an under-evangelized people group immigrate to America? What if Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs come to study at a nearby

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 28:19 (NIV).

<sup>12</sup> Acts 1:8 (NIV).

university? What if foreigners who have never heard the gospel come to our towns as seasonal workers? What if our new neighbors are immigrants from Europe who have never had a friend who was a practicing Christian? What if the new student at my child's elementary school comes from a nominally Catholic, Latino family who has never heard what it means to be "born again?" What if people from the "ends of the earth" move to our "Jerusalem"?

### **A Changing America**

The small Tennessee town where I grew up had very little ethnic diversity. I do not remember meeting anyone who spoke a foreign language until I was in college. There were no restaurants in my hometown that served Chinese, Mexican, or Mediterranean food, not even a Taco Bell. Things have changed radically since then. On a recent visit to my hometown of Mount Juliet, Tennessee, I saw a Chinese reflexology salon, an Indian restaurant, and a convenience store with Arabic writing on the sign. The 1970 U.S. Census records only 4.7% of residents in the U.S. as immigrants.<sup>13</sup> By 2016, this percentage had increased to 13.5%.<sup>14</sup> Currently, there are 43.7 million immigrants living in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

*Figure 1. Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 1850 to 2016*

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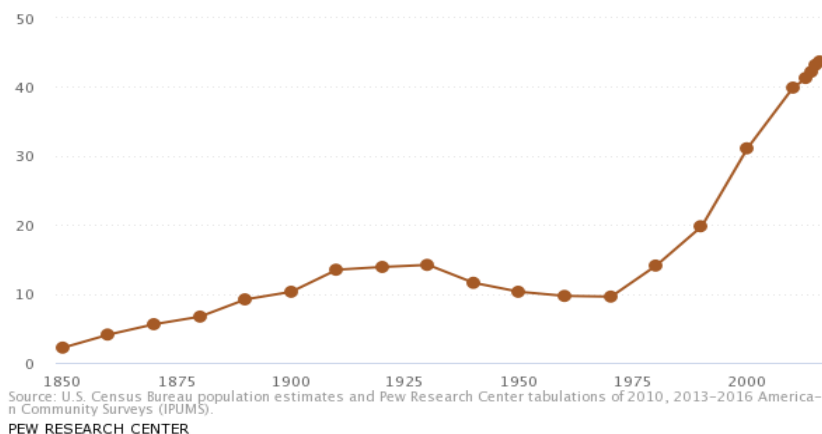
<sup>13</sup> "Chapter 5: U.S. Foreign-Born Population Trends," Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, September 27, 2015, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/chapter-5-u-s-foreign-born-population-trends/>.

<sup>14</sup> "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," Migrationpolicy.org, April 6, 2017, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>.

<sup>15</sup> Abigail Geiger, "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants," Pew Research Center, September 14, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/14/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

## Foreign-born population in the United States, 1850-2016

*Foreign-born population, in millions*



To put this in perspective, these numbers are roughly equal to the population of Canada with the population of Hong Kong added to it. When American-born children living in immigrant households are factored in, this number rises to over 60 million. Altogether, one-fifth of our nation's population is an immigrant or the child of an immigrant.<sup>16</sup>

What is even more remarkable is that many of these families are coming from the same countries where evangelical mission work is either illegal or restricted. For example, in 2016, the top three countries of origin for new immigrants coming into the U.S. was India (126,000), Mexico (124,000), and China (121,000).<sup>17</sup> Both China and India have long histories of deporting Christians for engaging in mission work. Surprisingly, more Asians than Hispanics have immigrated into the United States since

<sup>16</sup> Paul Bedard and Damian Dovarganes, "US Immigration Population Hits Record 60 Million, 1-of-5 in Nation," Washington Examiner, October 16, 2017, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/us-immigration-population-hits-record-60-million-1-of-5-in-nation>.

<sup>17</sup> Abigail Geiger, "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants," Pew Research Center, September 14, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/14/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

2010.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the Pew Research Center predicts that by 2055, Asians will replace Hispanics as the largest minority group in the U.S.<sup>19</sup>

Since 1980, when the federal Refugee Resettlement Program was formed, about three million refugees have been resettled in the United States.<sup>20</sup> Historically, the United States has led the world in refugee resettlement. Because of this, more and more Americans have neighbors who were born in faraway countries, including Afghanistan, Nepal, Iran, Bangladesh, Burma, Cuba, Sudan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Iraq, and Vietnam. Missiologist J.D. Payne points out that, "The United States has an estimated 360 unreached people groups, making it the country with the third largest number of unreached peoples."<sup>21</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people have moved from places where evangelism is restricted, to a country with more evangelical churches than any other nation. In addition to this, many of our nation's universities are now hosting a large percentage of international students. In the 2016-2017 academic year, there was a record 1.08 million international students in the United States.<sup>22</sup> This is more than twice the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 Million to U.S.," Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, June 18, 2018, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/modern-immigration-wave-brings-59-million-to-u-s-driving-population-growth-and-change-through-2065/>.

<sup>20</sup> Abigail Geiger, "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants," Pew Research Center, September 14, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/14/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

<sup>21</sup> "Reaching Unreached Peoples in North America," Missiologically Thinking, September 04, 2015, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.jdpayne.org/2015/09/reaching-unreached-peoples-in-north-america/>.

<sup>22</sup> "Reaching Unreached Peoples in North America," Missiologically Thinking, September 04, 2015, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.jdpayne.org/2015/09/reaching-unreached-peoples-in-north-america/>.

number of international students who were in the U.S. during the 1999/2000 school year.<sup>23</sup>

Before the 1964 Immigration Act, the United States saw many immigrants coming from Europe who had Christian backgrounds. However, since 1964, many Asian, North African, and Middle Eastern immigrants have come to America. Today, the United States is home to many Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Confucian, Jewish, and Muslim families, many from countries closed to traditional missions.

### **The World Has Changed, but the Church has Not**

In a 2016 Lifeway Research survey of pastors, 86% agreed that “Christians have a responsibility to care sacrificially for refugees and foreigners.” Yet, when asked about whether their church was involved locally in ministry to refugees, 72% of them admitted their church had never discussed the topic.<sup>24</sup> The old paradigm of American churches sending a few heroic missionaries to faraway places was created before there were millions of non-Christian foreigners living in the United States. This survey can lead one to believe that internationals are “invisible” to many church members. For example, I recently interviewed a young woman who was born in the U.S. to refugees from Cambodia. Even though she spent her teenage years in Dallas, Texas, a city with hundreds of large churches with active youth ministries, she reported, “I was never once

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<sup>23</sup> "Enrollment," IIE: The Power of International Education, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Enrollment>.

<sup>24</sup> Bob Smietana, "Churches Are Twice as Likely to Fear Refugees as to Help Them," Christian History, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2016/february/churches-fear-refugees-lifeway-survey-world-relief-vision.html>.

invited to a church, a Bible study, or a Christian event. I just assumed churches were places for white people to hang out.”<sup>25</sup>

The current relationship between churches and foreign missionaries resembles a televised professional football game where a few players are engaged on the field while millions of fans cheer them on. There are millions of evangelical Christians in the U.S. who pray for missionaries overseas, support them financially, and even spend a week working alongside them on a mission trip. Yet, these church members do little to share the love and message of Jesus with newcomers to America who live in their communities.

The original modern missions movement was based on the premise that Christians living in Europe and America had to travel to distant lands in order to share the gospel with those who had never heard the message of Jesus. I believe it is time for a new missions movement—where global missionaries and American church members actively partner to share the gospel with Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Atheists, and others, whether they live in Mumbai or Cincinnati.

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<sup>25</sup> Name withheld for security reasons, interview by author, Arlington, Texas, March 7, 2018.

## SECTION 2

### TRADITIONAL MINISTRY TO INTERNATIONALS WHO LIVE IN THE UNITED STATES

Over the years, churches have enacted a variety of methods to minister to internationals, especially those who were already Christians. This section will explore the most common strategies churches have employed to reach and disciple newcomers to America.

#### **A Brief History of Immigration in the United States**

The U.S. is famously known as a nation of immigrants. Native Americans are presumed to have migrated across a land bridge from Asia. Explorers, persecuted religious groups, European indentured servants, African slaves, and even deported criminals are all part of the origins of America. From 1880 to 1930, over twenty-three million immigrants came to the United States.<sup>26</sup> As Europe became more industrialized, farmers and unskilled laborers migrated to America in search of work. By 1910, almost one-fourth of the population of American cities was foreign-born.<sup>27</sup>

In the mid1880s, thousands migrated from Guangdong, China and settled in California, many fleeing civil war and famine. Some Chinese immigrants became victims of violence in California as locals resented them for taking agriculture jobs and fled to “Chinatowns.” Then in 1882, the U.S. Congress passed the *Chinese Exclusion Act*,

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<sup>26</sup> Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 2.



virtually halting immigration from China.<sup>28</sup> This was the first law passed for the express purpose of preventing a specific ethnic group from immigrating to the United States.

Immigration between Mexico and the United States goes back centuries. In 1848, Mexico's northern provinces were ceded to the U.S. at the end of the Mexican-American War. All at once, around 75,000 Mexicans became immigrants to the United States without leaving their homes.<sup>29</sup> Most immigration ceased after the 1929 stock market crash. During the Great Depression, the U.S. government deported over 500,000 citizens because of their Mexican-origin.<sup>30</sup> With the onset of World War Two, and later the Korean War, migrant workers were once again a necessity. With so many men deployed overseas, immigrants were once again needed to keep the U.S. economy afloat. The 1942 Bracero Program saw an estimated two million Mexicans, mostly men, enter the U.S. to provide labor.<sup>31</sup> After World War Two, provisions were made for immigrants from Europe and the Soviet Union. After the revolution in Cuba, hundreds of thousands of refugees escaped to the United States.

By the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement revealed the dramatic discrepancy between whites and non-whites in terms of postwar prosperity. Attached to new civil rights legislation were laws that reformed immigration. The Immigration Act of 1965

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<sup>28</sup> "Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)," Our Documents - Interstate Commerce Act (1887), accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=47>.

<sup>29</sup> "Many Truths," PBS, accessed December 13, 2018, [http://www.pbs.org/kenra/usmexicanwar/aftermath/many\\_truths.html](http://www.pbs.org/kenra/usmexicanwar/aftermath/many_truths.html).

<sup>30</sup> "In the 1930s, We Illegally Deported 600,000 U.S. Citizens Because They Had Mexican Heritage," Timeline, September 8, 2017, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://timeline.com/in-the-1930s-we-illegally-deported-600-000-u-s-citizens-because-they-had-mexican-heritage-f0c5d589a5c3>.

<sup>31</sup> "Bittersweet Harvest: Introduction/Introducción," National Museum of American History, September 25, 2013, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/bracero/introduction>.

repealed national-origin quotas which strongly favored white Europeans.<sup>32</sup> Since 1965, more than half of all immigrants came from Latin America and one-fourth emigrated from Asia.<sup>33</sup> The Pew Foundation estimates that by 2065, there will be 159 million Americans who will be first or second generation immigrants (36% of the total U.S. population).<sup>34</sup> At the 2016 National Multiethnic Church Conference, Dr. Soong-Chang Rah stated that if immigration immediately stopped, the U.S. would still become majority non-white in this century because of the higher birth rate of minority groups.<sup>35</sup>

### **Charity Work with Immigrants**

Christians have been at the forefront of compassion-focused ministries with immigrants for centuries. The Old Testament law instructed God's people to leave some food behind in the fields for foreigners.<sup>36</sup> Jesus' teaching that true Christians care for "the least of these"<sup>37</sup> has led the church to care for foreigners as an act of worship. Many of the early church fathers, including Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Ambrose,

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<sup>32</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> "Latin American, Asian Immigrants Make Up Most of Post-1965 Immigration," Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, September 23, 2015, [http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/modern-immigration-wave-brings-59-million-to-u-s-driving-population-growth-and-change-through-2065/ph\\_2015-09-28\\_immigration-through-2065-10/](http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/modern-immigration-wave-brings-59-million-to-u-s-driving-population-growth-and-change-through-2065/ph_2015-09-28_immigration-through-2065-10/).

<sup>34</sup> Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, "Main Session Address," Lecture, Mosaix Third Annual Multi-Ethnic Church Conference, Dallas, Texas, November 2, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Leviticus 19:9-10 (NIV).

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 25:40 (NIV).

and others taught that caring for the poor was an essential mark of an authentic Christian.<sup>38</sup>

In Germany today, the Lutheran Church is active in the care of refugees. Martin Luther, himself, was a refugee and had to flee his homeland in fear for his life. As one writer put it, “Millions of Germans feel attached to Luther and, to many of them, his example urges their country to welcome refugees.”<sup>39</sup> In Texas, the state where I live, three agencies work with the U.S. government to help refugees get settled in local communities,<sup>40</sup> all Christian agencies with ties to local churches or denominations. Whether in the provision of food, clothing, or housing, many churches have been generous with resources meeting vital needs for immigrant families. Of course, meeting needs is not an end in itself. As one Assembly of God missionary warns,

We should not view compassion as a platform or entry point for gaining people’s trust. If compassion is not genuinely part of our life in Christ, our actions become disingenuous. We find ourselves in the awkward and unbiblical position of feigning love in order to preach about love — a position completely foreign to the life and ministry of Jesus.<sup>41</sup>

Caring for the basic needs of those new to America can be a valuable way for churches to live out the “great commandment,” which says, “Love your neighbor as

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<sup>38</sup> Rupen Das, “A Compassionate Community: What did the Early Church Teach that Made Christians ‘Lovers of the Poor?’” *Journal of European Area Studies* 17 (2017), 6-10.

<sup>39</sup> Jim Willis, “Germans Are Welcoming Refugees as a Way to Honor Luther’s Legacy,” *Christian History*, September 25, 2017, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/september/germans-are-welcoming-refugees-as-way-to-honor-luthers-lega.html>.

<sup>40</sup> These agencies are Catholic Charities, World Relief, and Refugee Services of Texas.

<sup>41</sup> “Enrichment Journal - Enriching and Equipping Spirit-filled Ministers, If God’s Creation Was ‘Very Good,’ How Could Evil Arise?” accessed December 2, 2018, [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201404/201404\\_106\\_Compassion\\_Evangelism.cfm?fbclid=IwAR0gUN9p2Cpw2lhI4\\_pBaBc3aPFiZEv1fR7eB81QNYZVAYTqsY0uOzTTRzc](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201404/201404_106_Compassion_Evangelism.cfm?fbclid=IwAR0gUN9p2Cpw2lhI4_pBaBc3aPFiZEv1fR7eB81QNYZVAYTqsY0uOzTTRzc).

yourself.”<sup>42</sup> However, if a church’s ministries only target refugees and immigrants who are financially insecure, a host of other newcomers to America are ignored. For example, every year 80,000 well-educated, foreign workers enter the United States to find employment in the U.S. via the H1B Visa program. Twenty thousand of these have master degrees. From 2005 to 2017, the U.S. has issued over one million H1B visas to engineers, physicians, and other specialized workers.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, these foreign workers and other newcomers to America, such as international students and foreign-born spouses of U.S. citizens, are often overlooked by churches who solely equate international ministry as taking care of the poor.

Many churches are involved in effective ministry with newcomers to America. Nevertheless, it is possible that many of these ministries, whether hosting ethnic congregations or meeting the basic needs of under-resourced immigrants, keep internationals in an “us and them” matrix in which the average church member does not build relationships with foreign-born people. If evangelical churches in America are to formulate missional strategies with the goal of making disciples among diverse groups living in their communities, they may have to take risks. Donating hand-me-down clothes to refugees is one thing, but fully integrating internationals into our lives and our churches is quite another.

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<sup>42</sup> Mark 12:31 (NIV).

<sup>43</sup> "H1B Visa Total Cap Stats from FY 1990 to 2018, Trend Plot until 2018," RedBus2US, August 24, 2017, <https://redbus2us.com/h1b-visa-total-cap-stats-from-1990-to-2017-trend-plot-until-2017/>.

## Models of Ethnic Church Partnerships

Traditionally, churches have employed a variety of methods to support Christian work among internationals in their cities. The Rocky Mountain District of the Evangelical Free Church of America has identified “Five Levels of Ethnic Church Planting.”<sup>44</sup> Utilizing their terminology, I will evaluate the advantages and disadvantages these models of cooperation between established churches and new ethnic congregations.

### *The Unengaged, Monoethnic Church*

A 2013 *LifeWay Research* study found more than 85% of pastors surveyed believed their church should strive for racial diversity, yet 86% of these pastors admitted their churches were made up of predominately one ethnic group.<sup>45</sup> The former director of Lifeway Research, Ed Stetzer, summed up this finding, “Everybody wants diversity...but many don’t want to be around people who are different.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "The Five Levels of Ethnic Partnership," RMD Church Planting, accessed November 21, 2018, [http://www.rmdchurchplanting.org/?page\\_id=868&fbclid=IwAR1fetpOLrxu49-On4UCFseuvLmMgMnITZN5RXwJY5tlb3RFiRXpnm](http://www.rmdchurchplanting.org/?page_id=868&fbclid=IwAR1fetpOLrxu49-On4UCFseuvLmMgMnITZN5RXwJY5tlb3RFiRXpnm).

<sup>45</sup> "Research: Racial Diversity at Church More Dream Than Reality," LifeWay Research, January 17, 2014, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2014/01/17/research-racial-diversity-at-church-more-dream-than-reality/>.

<sup>46</sup> "The Changing Face of the American Church," Facts & Trends, October 2, 2014, <https://factsandtrends.net/2014/10/02/the-changing-face-of-the-american-church/#.VC6tEGSgnCI>.

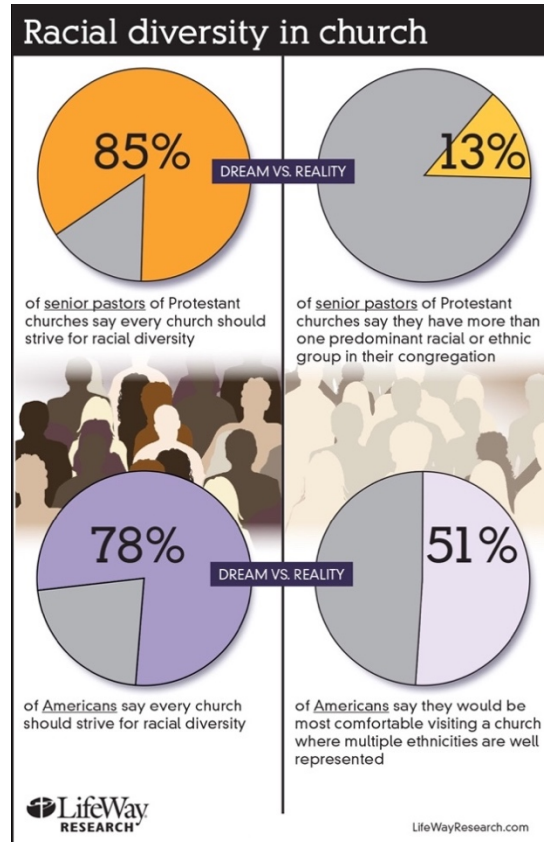


Figure 2. Racial Diversity in the Church

Historically, churches in America were formed by groups of people with a common heritage. A Mennonite church would crop up in a community of Swiss immigrants, while a Catholic church would be established among Polish people. In addition to this, racial segregation produced a dynamic in which a white Baptist church would be built on Main Street, while a black Baptist church emerged on the outskirts of town. During the Jim Crow era, black churches became a vital part of the social life of African Americans. For example, Mt. Gilead Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, was formed in 1875 by former slaves. The church even constructed an indoor pool because

there was no place in the city where black children were allowed to swim.<sup>47</sup> In the years of the civil rights movement, African American churches provided a much-needed shelter from the storms of social change. This historic evidence reveals that many churches today are monoethnic because they were formed when America was a much more racially segregated society than it is today.

A recent theory of why most churches in America are mono-ethnic focuses on a theory young ministers learn in seminaries. The Homogeneous Unit Principle, formulated by Dr. Donald McGavran, a former missionary to India, stated that, “People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers.”<sup>48</sup> Church growth specialist, C. Peter Wagner, widely spread McGavran's ideas. Over the past few decades, many young seminary students were taught that churches grew the fastest when they were made up of people from the same cultural, ethnic, and economic background. Some Christian leaders are now questioning the homogeneous unit principle. The conversation has moved from “Does it work?” to “Is it biblical?” or even “Is it ethical?” Sociologist Michael Emerson even concluded that homogenous churches strengthened racial division.<sup>49</sup> A 2010 survey of churches in America only classified 4% of U.S. churches as “multi-racial.”<sup>50</sup> Since ministry to internationals usually means connecting with people of

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<sup>47</sup> Mitch Mitchell, "Not for Sale: Aging Fort Worth Church No Longer on the Market," Star-Telegram, accessed December 2, 2018, <https://www.star-telegram.com/news/local/community/fort-worth/article101616492.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 163.

<sup>49</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 161.

<sup>50</sup> "2010 National Survey of Congregations," Faith Communities Today, accessed April 24, 2018, <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/2010FrequenciesV1.pdf>.

a different ethnicity, it is understandable why many churches have a difficult time engaging in cross-cultural ministry.

### *The Ethnic Church Host*

Some established churches who desire to make an impact among immigrant populations allow an ethnic church to use the church's facilities. While some Christian internationals come from evangelized nations where they can openly practice their faith, others come to America from nations hostile to Christians. In fact, some followers of Christ are resettled in the United States because they are persecuted Christians. For a variety of reasons, it is not uncommon to find newly immigrated church leaders forming small congregations in their homes. Often, these house churches outgrow their space, and established churches are asked to become host churches. By choosing to host an immigrant congregation, local churches can provide a valuable gift to the kingdom of God without adding a staff member, getting into issues of theology/church polity, or paying a salary.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for negative issues to develop between the host church and the new ethnic congregation. This type of arrangement is an "us-them" situation in which the host church controls how generous they will be with the ethnic church. When problems arise, the host church can feel unappreciated. For example, one pastor writes about his church's experience hosting a Korean congregation,

Clean-up was hit-and-miss. They would meet at all hours without prior scheduling. Half the choir robe closet was appropriated without asking. The last straw was the overwhelming stench of rotting, half-eaten fish left over from a fellowship dinner. The odor clung to the primary classroom for days. In the confrontation which followed, the trustee chairman resigned. Though the Koreans



finally departed, the host congregation was left scarred and bitter. ‘Never again,’ the pastor told me.<sup>51</sup>

When an established church agrees to host an immigrant congregation, the relationship can easily morph into a “parent-child” model in which the host church has all of the power and resources, while the ethnic congregation does not have any incentive to mature into a church with its own standing.

### *The Ethnic Partnership Church*

The paradigm of the “ethnic partnership church” is a healthier version of the host church model. In this model, both churches are organized as autonomous congregations, but their level of partnership and communication is at a high level. Speaking of this model, veteran pastor Dr. Ralph Wilson, recommends:

Beyond an initial statement of Christian convictions, both the host and guest congregations need to understand clearly from the beginning the privileges and responsibilities that go along with sharing. For this purpose, a written covenant or agreement should be prepared in the languages of both congregations.<sup>52</sup>

Ethnic partnership churches often form relationships by connecting with one another in programs such as joint worship services, holiday events, or summer children’s activities. The pastors and church leaders from both churches regularly meet with one another to communicate both struggles and victories. When the established church enters into a partnership with a young, healthy ethnic church, positive relationships can form. For example, the First Presbyterian Church in Las Cruces, New Mexico, shares its building with a Spanish-speaking congregation, a Korean congregation, and a group of

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<sup>51</sup> Thanksgiving and Pilgrim Paintings and Artwork, accessed November 21, 2018, <http://www.joyfulheart.com/church/share.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> Thanksgiving and Pilgrim Paintings and Artwork.

African Christians. The pastor, Norm Story, sees this arrangement as a valuable opportunity for his church. Story states, “It’s a chance for us to learn how other parts of the world function. We never would have had those relationships otherwise. It’s an earthly picture of what God’s eternal kingdom will look like.”<sup>53</sup>

While ethnic partnership churches are usually autonomous and mono-ethnic bodies, these congregations are moving in the right direction of seeking mutually beneficial relationships with one another. In this model, the two congregations see themselves as friends, as opposed to having a sort of parent-child relationship.

### *The Ethnic Incubator Church*

The Rocky Mountain District of the Evangelical Free Church of America defines the ethnic incubator church as “...nurturing the development of a growing organism...by creating a favorable environment for growing, development, and protection.”<sup>54</sup> The ethnic incubator model requires a high level of commitment on the part of the established church. In this model, the immigrant church and its leadership is mentored and equipped with the goal of developing into a healthy congregation. These congregations may be semi-autonomous “mission churches” of the established church. The goal is for the ethnic group to be a “church plant” which relocates later as an autonomous congregation.

When I served as the youth pastor at Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church, Virginia, our church hosted a variety of multilingual congregations, including groups

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<sup>53</sup> Jessica J. Schroeder, "Two Churches, One Roof," Christian History, October 11, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2018/fall-state-of-church-ministry/two-churches-one-roof.html>.

<sup>54</sup> "The Five Levels of Ethnic Partnership," RMD Church Planting, accessed December 2, 2018, [http://www.rmdchurchplanting.org/?page\\_id=868&fbclid=IwAR1fetpOLrxu49-On4UCFseuvLmMgMnITZN5RXwJY5tlb3RFiRXpnim3Pb4](http://www.rmdchurchplanting.org/?page_id=868&fbclid=IwAR1fetpOLrxu49-On4UCFseuvLmMgMnITZN5RXwJY5tlb3RFiRXpnim3Pb4).

who worshipped in Spanish, Korean, and Arabic. These pastors were paid staff members who were accountable to Columbia's senior pastor. There are a lot of unique ways that the incubator model can take shape. Some of these immigrant churches take up their own offerings and pay their own staff, while other groups turn their offerings over to be processed by the primary church that pays their pastor a salary. No matter how the details are worked out, the success of this model requires a long-term commitment of time and effort by the leadership of all groups.

### *The Multiethnic Church*

In 2001, sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith published *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*.<sup>55</sup> The primary focus of this book was to identify ways in which separation between black and white evangelical churches perpetuated racial inequality. This book was a wake-up call to many church leaders. In Emmerson's analysis, only 7.5% of churches in America are classified as multiethnic, which Emmerson classifies as having at least 20% diversity in their attending membership.<sup>56</sup>

Pastor Mark DeYmaz and sociology professor George Yancey came together in 2003 to form Mosaix, a network of multiethnic churches. A national focus was placed on the movement when the cover of the April 2005 edition of *Christianity Today* read, "All

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<sup>55</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> "Catalyzing the Movement," Mosaix Global Network, accessed April 25, 2018, <https://www.mosaix.info/About/catalyzing-the-movement>.

Churches Should Be Multiracial.”<sup>57</sup> From 1996 to 2017, the percentage of multiethnic churches in America had increased from 7.5% to 13.7%.<sup>58</sup>

While there are some distinct advantages for Christian immigrants who join multiethnic churches, the sacrifices many make can be significant. The most noteworthy often entails language. Immigrants to America who are not proficient in English face many challenges when attending an English-speaking church. Internationals will often want to pray or study the Bible in the language in which they are proficient. They may yearn for opportunities to sing worship songs in their first language. Understanding a fast-talking preacher who utilizes a vocabulary above their level of comprehension might be confusing and cause feelings of isolation.

Many newcomers to America have strong feelings of cultural loss. Though they may love America, they have enduring cultural customs and values they seek to pass on to their children. They may want to worship in a music style unique to their culture. They may want to wear a special ethnic outfit to church without feeling awkward. In some cultures, worship service prayer times are long events when everyone prays out loud at the same time. Usually, immigrants sacrifice many cultural preferences when attending an American-style church, even one considered multiethnic.

### *The Path of Least Resistance*

Most of these traditional models of cooperation involved minimal engagement by members of established churches. Just because a church decides to allow a Spanish

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<sup>57</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., "All Churches Should Be Multiracial," ChristianityToday, accessed April 25, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/april/22.33.html>.

<sup>58</sup> "About Mosaix," Mosaix Global Network, accessed April 25, 2018, <http://www.mosaix.info/>.

speaking congregation to meet in their building on Saturdays does not require the average church member to do anything differently. Even if the church leaders of both congregations meet regularly, opportunities for the church members to form relationships with one another is minimal. Instead of seeing themselves as working together to take the gospel to the nations, established church members may view their role as that of charitable landlords, allowing foreigners to share their space, but not partnering in any other way.

### SECTION 3

#### A NEW PARADIGM – GLOBAL MISSION WORK IN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

While many Americans are unnerved by the migration of so many people from around the globe, some Christians have a unique perspective. Baptist minister J.D. Payne writes:

As kingdom citizens, we understand that the Lord of the nations is working out his will in the universe, and the migration of peoples to other lands is not a serendipitous occurrence. Such is particularly true with the migration of the world's least reached people groups to areas of the world where they can freely encounter the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>59</sup>

#### **Challenges for Missionary Sending Agencies**

The International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is one of the largest evangelical missionary-sending agencies in the world, with 46,000 churches sending around 3,800 active missionaries into the mission field.<sup>60</sup> With over 15 million Southern Baptists in the United States, IMB missionaries do not need to write letters to supporters asking for finances. They are fully funded through both regular and special offerings by SBC churches by what is known as the "Cooperative Program."<sup>61</sup> While the Cooperative Program often provides a steady stream of funding to SBC missions, on August 27, 2015, Southern Baptists were stunned when newly elected IMB

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<sup>59</sup> Jervis David Payne, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012).

<sup>60</sup> "Southern Baptist Convention," Southern Baptist Convention, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/entities/imb.asp>.

<sup>61</sup> "Southern Baptist Convention: A Closer Look," The Southern Baptist Convention, accessed December 5, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/cp/>.

President David Platt revealed a 21 million-dollar deficit and a need to cut at least 600 staff positions in order to balance the budget.<sup>62</sup> Six months later the International Mission Board announced that 1,132 missionaries and other employees had resigned, almost double their goal.<sup>63</sup> Shock waves rippled across the evangelical missionary community. Was this an adjustment because of bad financial decisions made in the past, or was this a “new normal” due to higher costs of living on the mission field and decreasing missions giving? Would more missionaries need to leave the field due to financial reasons?

One look at forecasts for the future of the church in America will uncover some grim content. For example, *Outreach Magazine* predicts that, by 2050, U.S. church attendance will be half of what it was in 1990.<sup>64</sup> In projecting the future of mission offerings, the 2016 “State of the Plate” survey gives cause for concern. This report showed that six of the ten churches and ministries showed “flat or decreased giving.”<sup>65</sup> Trends of decreased church attendance and decreased giving are sure to have mission agencies concerned. A related factor is that many locations where missionaries can best connect with the most people are large urban cities in Asia or Europe, where the cost of

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<sup>62</sup> Bob Smietana, "Southern Baptists Will Cut 600 to 800 Missionaries and Staff," ChristianityToday, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/august-web-only/southern-baptists-will-cut-800-missionaries-imb-david-platt.html>.

<sup>63</sup> "Southern Baptists Lose Almost 1,000 Missionaries as IMB Cuts Costs," ChristianityToday, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2016/february/southern-baptists-lose-1132-missionaries-staff-imb-cuts.html>.

<sup>64</sup> "7 Startling Facts: An Up Close Look at Church Attendance in America," Church Leaders, November 28, 2018, <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/139575-7-startling-facts-an-up-close-look-at-church-attendance-in-america.html/5>.

<sup>65</sup> Samuel Ogles and David Fletcher, "'State of the Plate' Report Shows Giving Trends," Church Law & Tax, accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.churchlawandtax.com/blog/2016/december/state-of-plate-2016-report-sheds-light-on-church-giving-tre.html>.

living is rising. The necessity of living among the people whom they seek to reach may mean living in cities which have a high cost of living.

Another negative trend mission agencies face is the expulsion of overseas missionaries. In 2017, the *New York Times* reported that Compassion International, which had been in India for 48 years and provided regular assistance to 145,000 needy Indian children, had been expelled from India.<sup>66</sup> India has also refused to renew visas for missionaries.<sup>67</sup> While data is not readily available, missionaries have reported to me that many coworkers in China have also had to leave. Some of the nations which once tolerated Christian foreigners who were engaged in ministry are now deporting them if missionary work is suspected.

### **A New Paradigm for Global Missions**

At present, overseas missionary funding may have hit a ceiling. Yet it appears serendipitous that U.S. missionaries are returning from the field at the same time that millions of families from under-evangelized people groups are resettling in America.

Given the facts above, might we conclude that God is doing something new in the area of global missions? Could it be that the old paradigm characterizing foreign missions as a unique calling for a select few should make way for a new paradigm? Should evangelical churches begin to train their people to reach out to Buddhists, Hindus, Jews,

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<sup>66</sup> Ellen Barry and Suhasini Raj, "Major Christian Charity Is Closing India Operations Amid a Crackdown," *The New York Times*, March 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/07/world/asia/compassion-international-christian-charity-closing-india.html>.

<sup>67</sup> "MPs write to PM, HM on Non-extension of Visa to Missionaries," *Nagaland Post*, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.nagalandpost.com/ChannelNews/Regional/RegionalNews.aspx>.



Muslims, and cultural Christians who have moved into their communities? Should churches and mission boards focus on unreached/under-reached people groups, no matter where these families live? Could missionaries live out their callings in New York or Texas? Should churches and mission boards pay attention to the millions of international students and foreign tourists who are “under the radar” of traditional mission efforts?

Imagine if pastors and other Christian leaders begin to teach, preach, and promote mission work to internationals living in the United States with just as much fervor as they do when they discuss overseas missions. Imagine if local, state, and national evangelical entities placed as strong an emphasis on reaching internationals in the U.S. as they do on traditional foreign missions. Imagine if missionaries strategized and supported one another no matter where they lived. For example, a missionary living in Vietnam could share strategies and resources with a church that is ministering to Vietnamese immigrants in Portland, Oregon. Imagine if the missionary family working in Vietnam came to Portland when it was time for a U.S. furlough while volunteers from the Oregon church traveled to Vietnam throughout the year in order to keep the work going.

This is not suggesting a decrease of mission efforts overseas. It would be unwise to recommend that churches and parachurch ministries cease sending missionaries to every nation on the globe. Of the 17,004 distinct people groups on the planet, 7066 of them (41.6%) are classified as unreached, meaning that outside help is needed for this group to hear the gospel. There are 3.13 billion people in the world who have almost no active witness for Christ.<sup>68</sup> The reality is that there are millions of people on our planet who will be born, live their lives, and die without ever meeting a follower of Jesus.

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<sup>68</sup> "Joshua Project," Joshua Project, accessed December 6, 2018, <https://joshuaproject.net/>.

Dedicated missionaries are still needed to move to these countries. However, at current levels, these faithful men and women are not numerous enough to be the only strategy. Take the Assembly of God (USA) denomination as an example. They currently have over 13,000 churches that support 2,700 missionaries. This means thousands of Assembly of God churches do not have church members who are serving overseas as missionaries. Might some of these churches begin engaging internationals in cross-cultural mission efforts within their communities?

### **Prioritizing Diaspora Missions in the United States**

Reaching people outside of their country of origin is not a new strategy. Dr. Enoch Wan, Professor of Intercultural Studies at Western Seminary, defines “diaspora missions” as “Christians’ participation in God’s redemptive mission to evangelize their kinsmen on the move, and through them to reach out to natives in their homeland and beyond.”<sup>69</sup> Diaspora missions strategies have been utilized for years to reach out to migrant/displaced groups around the world (i.e., Syrians in Jordan, Vietnamese in Hong Kong, Sudanese in Kenya). Diaspora missiology not only looks at reaching people who are migrating; it also focuses on empowering diaspora people who are Christians. For example, there are scores of Filipinos and Chinese Christians working in Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist countries around the world. Many of these men and women believe they are called of God to lead people to Jesus in countries hostile to Westerners. On November 14, 2009, The Lausanne Movement (a global network of mission organizations) made an

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<sup>69</sup> Enoch Yee-nock Wan, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies: Western Seminary, 2011), 6.

appeal for “church and mission leaders to recognize and respond to opportunities in world evangelization presented by the realities of the global diaspora...and to mobilize, train, deploy, support, work together with, and empower diaspora kingdom workers.”<sup>70</sup>

One mission organization taking diaspora theology and applying it to the United States is Global Gates. The mission of Global Gates is “to see gospel transformation of the world’s most unevangelized people groups who have come to global gateway cities, and through them reach their communities around the world.”<sup>71</sup> Global Gates was founded by missionaries who returned from overseas assignments to the United States, only to find an abundance of unreached people groups living here. Currently, Global Gates has missionaries working in cities across the U.S., including Washington D.C., New York, Chicago, Houston, San Francisco, and the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

Chris Clayman, a co-founder of Global Gates, asserts that “the next challenge for missionary pioneers is reaching busy, hidden, influential unreached peoples who have migrated to cities,” yet he asserts that currently “American Christians are much better at missions among unreached peoples overseas than in our own homeland.”<sup>72</sup> Many Global Gates missionaries serving in American cities came directly from overseas missionary assignments. They are utilizing international missionary strategies with the goal of starting church-planting movements in U.S. immigrant communities.

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<sup>70</sup> "The Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology," Lausanne Movement, September 22, 2014, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/the-seoul-declaration-on-diaspora-missiology>.

<sup>71</sup> "About Us," Global Gates, accessed April 25, 2017, <http://www.globalgates.info/about-us/>.

<sup>72</sup> Chris Clayman, "Reaching the Nations through our Cities," *Great Commission Research Journal* 6, no. 1 (2014): 6-21.

### **A New Way of Thinking: “Upside Down Missions”**

For more than 300 years, evangelicals have sent a select few, highly-trained missionaries to the farthest corners of the globe while the majority of Christians stayed home as supporters. Today, an unprecedented migration of peoples is occurring. Around 244 million migrants exist in the world today. Of these, over 46 million are living in the United States.<sup>73</sup> While the majority of these are living in major cities, immigrant families have also settled into suburbs and small towns. Americans are keenly aware that foreigners are no longer “over there.” On a short trip to the local grocery store, many Christians will shop alongside immigrants from China, Guatemala, Congo, or Nepal.

Imagine if today’s Christians would see themselves as bona fide missionaries to their new neighbors. With some training and very little financial investment, hundreds of thousands of faithful Christ-followers could begin sharing their lives and their faith with international families in their own homes. Instead of treating overseas missionaries like spiritual superheroes, local churches could form relationships with missionaries in order to learn from them. For example, with today’s technologies, veteran missionaries in Asia can coach church members in the U.S. about Chinese religions and culture via video conferencing. Missionaries who come back to the U.S. on furlough can teach foreign language classes at local churches. Seminary professors who train missionaries how to be successful evangelists in non-Western cultures could begin to share these ideas with church members in the U.S. Instead of millions of unengaged church members sending a

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<sup>73</sup> Phillip Connor, "International Migration: Key Findings from the U.S., Europe and the World," Pew Research Center, December 15, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/15/international-migration-key-findings-from-the-u-s-europe-and-the-world/>.

few thousand missionaries overseas, the concept of “Upside Down Missions” hopes those few thousand missionaries will return home to find millions of U.S. church members doing cross-cultural mission work in their communities.

### **Benefits of Reaching Internationals in the United States**

The strategy of cross-cultural evangelism to immigrants, temporary workers, migrants, students, and tourists in the United States has numerous advantages. Many of these are practical and rational. Once again, a reduction in overseas missions staff is not recommended, but the points listed below indicate why American churches should consider developing cross-cultural ministries focused on people in their communities.

#### *Sending Missionaries Overseas is Expensive*

In 2012, the Evangelical Free Church reported that the average cost to support a missionary family overseas was \$10,338 per month.<sup>74</sup> Although this is much higher than other agencies report, it reinforces the point that sending American missionaries can be expensive. While the concept of recruiting 100,000 new missionaries to move overseas would entail the raising of billions of dollars, the idea of training 100,000 U.S. church members to reach out to foreigners in their cities is an affordable possibility.

#### *The Gospel can be Shared Freely in the United States*

In countries like Malaysia, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia, any form of evangelism is illegal. In countries like China, Russia, and Laos, Americans cannot share the gospel

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<sup>74</sup> “What is the Average Missionary Salary?” Be a Fully Funded Missionary, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://beafullyfundedmissionary.com/what-is-the-average-missionary-salary/>.

freely. In contrast, visitors and migrants from the most oppressive countries can be evangelized while in America without any legal restrictions. While it would be illegal to pass out Bibles to people in Casablanca or Beijing, Christians in Orlando, Las Vegas, or New York can hand out Bibles to foreign tourists who have little access to scriptures.

Along the same lines, many families who have come to the United States as refugees from countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and Eritrea have never had a Christian friend. And as missionaries are being forced to leave India, almost two million Indian-born people are now living in the United States.<sup>75</sup> Churches in America have a serendipitous opportunity to reach out to people in our communities who are coming from the same nations where options for missionaries are decreasing.

#### *Internationals Seem to be More Open to the Gospel when in America*

Some people come to the United States from nations where ethnicity or nationalism has a connection to a particular religion (or atheism). These people do not have a worldview that can conceive of converting to Christianity. In some cases, to do so would mean to face harsh consequences. However, when someone moves to the United States, their worldview can change. In America, internationals discover a wide assortment of freedoms and choices. New arrivals to America appear to be more receptive to the gospel than immigrants who have been in the U.S. for many years.<sup>76</sup> For an abundance of reasons, men and women who may not be open to Christianity while

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<sup>75</sup> Phillip Connor, "India Is a Top Source and Destination for World's Migrants," Pew Research Center, March 3, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/03/india-is-a-top-source-and-destination-for-worlds-migrants/>.

<sup>76</sup> Carlos G. Martin, "Missions in Our Backyard: Evangelism Among Newly Arrived Hispanics to the United States," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 13, no. 1 (2017).

living in their home countries, find themselves curious about Jesus when they move to America. For example, approximately one-third of all Asian American adults no longer identify with their parents' religious beliefs.<sup>77</sup> It seems people coming from Asian countries may be very receptive to the gospel. *The Christian Post* reports that thousands of Chinese university students are becoming Christians while studying in the United States.<sup>78</sup> The same people who may be rejecting the witness of missionaries overseas may say "yes" to the gospel when they move to America.

*Those who Respond to the Gospel Might Return to their Home Country as Christian Leaders*

One of the best reasons that churches, denominations, and mission agencies should consider prioritizing mission work among internationals living in America is that they have the potential of returning to their own country as evangelists and church planters. It is difficult for American missionaries to conduct evangelism in many Communist, Hindu, and Muslim countries. In contrast, migrants from these "closed" countries who choose to follow Christ may one day be able to return to their home countries as evangelists and church planters.

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<sup>77</sup> Joseph Liu, "Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, July 19, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-overview/>.

<sup>78</sup> "Thousands of Chinese Students Accepting Christ in America," *The Christian Post*, accessed December 7, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/thousands-of-chinese-students-accepting-christ-in-america-157598/>.

*This Model Allows for More Christians to Become Involved in Cross-Cultural Ministry*

The current status of the majority of American Christians being uninvolved in cross-cultural ministry does not seem to be congruent with Jesus' command for His people to reach the nations. By recruiting tens of thousands of Christians to engage in global evangelism in their communities, more men and women will have the privilege of sharing the good news with families who have never heard the name of Jesus. By eroding the divide between *foreign missionary* and *faithful Christian*, the Great Commission becomes something more and more church members have an active role in following.

**Barriers to Reaching Foreigners in the United States**

The concept of reaching migrants in the U.S. is nothing new. However, it appears that the church in America seems far more committed to reaching Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Atheists who live outside of our borders. Churches seem to be more interested in funding specialists to move overseas rather than directly engaging foreign-born people residing in our communities. Below are possible reasons a church may not want to engage in cross-cultural ministry.

*The Church in America is Facing New Challenges with Old Structures*

The founding of most U.S. mission organizations happened at a time when America was more homogenous. If a couple felt called to reach Hindus, they had to travel to South Asia to do so. Denominational mission agencies would send their cross-cultural missionaries overseas while focusing their stateside work on church planting or meeting social needs. These structures remain today.



For example, take a look at the way Southern Baptists are equipped to reach Afghan people living in California. More than 40,000 Afghan people are living in the San Francisco Bay area.<sup>79</sup> Some of them are newly arrived immigrants due to the U.S. Special Immigrant Visa Program. This federal program awards those who have assisted U.S. military and embassies overseas. In addition to local Baptist churches, there are mission leaders focused on evangelism and church planting connected with the San Francisco Peninsula Baptist Association, the California Baptist Convention, and the North American Mission Board. However, it is another Southern Baptist agency, the International Mission Board, that is best equipped to reach those recently moved to California from Afghanistan. Since International Mission Board missionaries are focused on overseas mission work, they are not assigned to the largest Afghan population on this side of the globe. Simply put, the structures many denominations and mission organizations have in place were created at a time when America was comprised mostly of English speakers with a Judeo-Christian background.

### *Universalism and Political Correctness*

A 2008 Pew study revealed that 65% of Americans believed that many religions could lead people to eternal life.<sup>80</sup> Church members who believe that Muslims, Hindus, Jews, or Buddhists have a way to heaven without Christ will probably not be interested in committing their lives to reach immigrants in their communities. Within America's

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<sup>79</sup> Somali Community in US: Demographics, accessed December 7, 2018, [http://www.allied-media.com/Afghan\\_American/afghan\\_american\\_demographics.html](http://www.allied-media.com/Afghan_American/afghan_american_demographics.html).

<sup>80</sup> Joseph Liu, "Many Americans Say Other Faiths Can Lead to Eternal Life," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, December 17, 2008, <http://www.pewforum.org/2008/12/18/many-americans-say-other-faiths-can-lead-to-eternal-life/>.

politically correct society, sharing the gospel can be seen as culturally insensitive. Evangelistic efforts may be difficult under such conditions.

One example relates to how the media covers cross-cultural evangelism. In the Fall of 2018, members of an isolated tribe killed missionary John Chau on a remote island in Southeast Asia. Upon his death by the hand of natives, much debate arose about the ethics of cross-cultural missions. For example, the *New York Post* ran an opinion piece which quoted anthropologist, Sydney Possuelo, who said, “Those who seek to change their culture, their gods or their beliefs are practicing a form of violence.”<sup>81</sup> Across social media, Christians differed in their views of John Chau. People debated whether Chau was a modern-day hero or a misguided fanatic. This discussion reveals the wide variety of opinions among American Christians about cross-cultural ministry.

### *Fear of Those Who Are Different*

Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, some Americans have grown to resent immigrants, especially those coming from the Middle East. Popular television and radio commentators paint a picture that immigrants, especially refugees, pose a threat to the American way of life. The internet contains an abundance of reports of immigrants coming to America to commit crimes, impose their religion on our children, or even change our laws. Many Christians see foreign-born people as cultural invaders. Some Christians may view their faith through the lens of their politics instead of allowing

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<sup>81</sup> Scott Wallace, "Isolated Tribes Need Protection from Western Arrogance," *New York Post*, December 1, 2018, <https://nypost.com/2018/12/01/the-sentinelese-tribe-needs-protection-from-western-arrogance/>.

scripture and the Holy Spirit to shape their worldviews. As Christopher Catherwood puts it,

...our prime loyalty should not be with a political/geographical location called a country, but with the worldwide, multinational, transcultural, interracial body established by Jesus when he was here on earth: the Christian Church. Our citizenship, as the Bible describes it, is in heaven and that is where our principal identity should lie.<sup>82</sup>

Ethnocentrism is nothing new. It is natural for people to fear what is different. Even though the Bible is clear about loving foreigners, it is easy for Christians to make excuses when given opportunities to engage in ministry with people they may view as potential enemies.

#### *A Misunderstanding of Spiritual Gifts*

I am amazed at how many times I have heard spiritual gifts brought up as an excuse to not engage in ministry. Spiritual gifts, with lists found in the Bible in Romans 12, and I Corinthians 12, are given to the Christians for the purpose of service to others.<sup>83</sup> It is not uncommon for the topic of spiritual gifts to be brought up in the context of “I can’t do that, it’s not my gift.” Instead of enabling someone to serve God, spiritual gifts become a “pass” for not doing ministry. A fellow minister recently confided in me that he believed he was fired from his church for spending too much time engaged in ministry with immigrants. Reflecting on this, he said,

No church I have ever worked at encouraged people to actually befriend immigrants. Sure, they packed shoeboxes and donated to food pantries and sponsored initiatives directed at the poor and marginalized, but it always stopped

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<sup>82</sup> Christoph Catherwood. *Whose Side is God on? Nationalism and Christianity* (London: SPCK, 2003), xiv.

<sup>83</sup> 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV).

at giving money and things. There was never any relationship cultivated simply for the sake of love. If anything, they'd balk at that charge. They'd say 'We give money. Some people do the relationships, and others fund ministry.'<sup>84</sup>

Imagine if a pastor preached, "If you volunteer to clean the church building, you don't need to share the gospel" or "If you teach a Sunday School class, there is no need to put anything in the offering plate." Spiritual gifts were given to amplify our ability to do ministry, not to be used as an excuse to keep from living the Christian life. Leviticus 19:34 reads, "The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."<sup>85</sup> In speaking of the Day of Judgment in Matthew 25, Jesus tells the good sheep, "I was a stranger and you invited me in."<sup>86</sup> The Bible is clear, in both the Old and New Testament, that reaching out to foreigners is not meant to be a unique ministry. It is a mark of God's people.

### **Identifying the Foreign Mission Field within the United States**

From the years 2014 to 2015, it is estimated that over three million immigrants, both legal and unauthorized, came to the United States.<sup>87</sup> There are currently over 42 million foreign-born people living in the U.S. Some Christian leaders are pointing to this

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<sup>84</sup> Name withheld for privacy reasons, interviewed by author, Fort Worth, Texas, December 7, 2018.

<sup>85</sup> Leviticus 19:34 (NIV).

<sup>86</sup> Matthew 25:35 (NIV).

<sup>87</sup> Steven A. Camarota, "New Data: Immigration Surged in 2014 and 2015," Cis.org, August 2015, <http://cis.org/New-Data-Immigration-Surged-in-2014-and-2015>.

immigration as an answer to prayer as they see the mission field coming to America.<sup>88</sup> If local churches partner with experienced missionaries in order to evangelize and make disciples of internationals in their communities, a new era of global mission work can take root.

When a foreign missionary arrives in a new land, one of the first steps taken is to identify groups for focused ministry and to learn as much as possible about their lives. If a local church decides to develop strategies to engage in ministry with newcomers to America, a good starting place is to identify the types of internationals in their community. Church leaders can start this process by discovering the various reasons why people come to the United States. This information often reveals ministry opportunities.

### *Foreign Tourists*

In 2015, 77.5 million tourists entered the United States.<sup>89</sup> These tourists come from every corner of the globe and every religious background. Some come from countries where evangelism by missionaries is illegal. There are cities in America that see over one million foreign tourists every year. In 2013, the top five cities foreigners visited were San Francisco (3,044,000), Orlando (3,716,000), Los Angeles (3,781,000), Miami (4,005,000), and New York (9,579,000).<sup>90</sup> Churches in these areas have a unique opportunity to share the gospel with visitors from all over the globe.

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<sup>88</sup> Jervis David Payne, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 18.

<sup>89</sup> "International Arrivals- 2012 Year-To-Date Analysis," accessed December 8, 2016, <http://travel.trade.gov/view/m-2015-I-001/table1.asp>.

<sup>90</sup> "The 10 Most Visited Cities in the United States by Foreign Travelers (2013) - Page 2 of 2," Traveler's Digest, August 30, 2014, <http://www.travelersdigest.com/7528-10-most-visited-cities-in-the-united-states-by-foreign-travelers-in-2013/2/>.

### *International Students*

During the 2015-2016 academic year, more than one million international students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. China, India, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Japan, all majority non-Christian nations, collectively sent 617,342 students to the U.S. during the 2015-2016 school year.<sup>91</sup> Some of these students may one day become leaders in their home countries. For example, Prince Albert II of Monaco, Shinzo Abe of Japan, Vincente Fox of Mexico, Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore, and Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel were all educated in the United States.<sup>92</sup> Other students come from influential families. For example, Xi Mingze, daughter of Chinese President Xi Jinping, graduated from Harvard in 2014 after attending the university under a pseudonym. Only a small handful of people knew her identity.<sup>93</sup>

Though many international students come with a desire for relationships with Americans, 75% report never being invited to an American home.<sup>94</sup> Churches located near universities may have a unique opportunity to reach the nations via students coming from Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Communist backgrounds.

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<sup>91</sup> "International Students in the United States," International Students in the United States, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.iie.org/Services/Project-Atlas/United-States/International-Students-In-US>.

<sup>92</sup> "List of Heads of State Educated in the United States," Wikipedia, November 14, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_heads\\_of\\_state\\_educated\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_heads_of_state_educated_in_the_United_States).

<sup>93</sup> Evan Osnos, "What Did China's First Daughter Find in America?" *The New Yorker*, June 19, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/what-did-chinas-first-daughter-find-in-america>.

<sup>94</sup> "Home Page," Isihome, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.isionline.org/Home/ChurchPartners.aspx>.

### *Temporary Workers*

Temporary workers often hold of a non-immigrant visa. While a lot of these visas are for agricultural jobs (H-2A) and seasonal workers (H-2B), other visas are given to more highly educated workers, such as specialty workers (H-1B), executives (L1), international trade workers (E-1), workers related to U.S. investment (E2), registered nurses (H-1C), and non-immigrant trainees (H-3).<sup>95</sup> Many family members of workers are here on an H-4 visa. Holders of H-4 visas cannot usually seek employment in the U.S. This can place a strain on families when spouses, some of them with advanced degrees, must put their careers on hold. Ministry opportunities are a strong need for H-4 visa holders who feel disconnected from society because they cannot work.

In addition to the circumstances described above, some international students graduating from American universities retain their student visa and work in the United States for twelve months after graduation with the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program.<sup>96</sup> My wife and I recently went on a vacation to Mount Rushmore. After seeing the monument, we stopped at a local coffee shop. The young man who served me coffee that day was from Taiwan. I made a point to mention that I had been to his country. He was ecstatic to meet someone who had been to his homeland. Many cities that have seasonal work, like beaches and amusement parks, hire young adults from overseas. In 2017 the U.S. government's Exchange Visitor Program (J-1 Visa) brought over 300,000 internationals from over 200 nations to the U.S. in 2017 for temporary work. Eighty-six

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<sup>95</sup> "Temporary (Nonimmigrant) Workers," USCIS, accessed December 8, 2018, <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-nonimmigrant-workers>.

<sup>96</sup> "Working in the USA | Study in the USA," International Student, accessed December 9, 2018, [https://www.internationalstudent.com/study\\_usa/way-of-life/working-in-the-usa/](https://www.internationalstudent.com/study_usa/way-of-life/working-in-the-usa/).

percent of these were under the age of 30.<sup>97</sup> Many of these are young adults looking to make friendships with Americans. Churches that are located in tourist areas might develop young adult ministries that focus on J-1 Visa holders.

### *Permanent Resident Workers*

Holders of a “green card” are not U.S. citizens, but are authorized to live and work permanently in the United States. Cardholders have usually been hired by U.S. companies who sponsor them. An initial green card is only good for two years. Cardholders must then petition for a ten-year green card, which is required to be renewed every ten years.<sup>98</sup> Some green card holders eventually become citizens. Many Permanent Resident Workers are in the process of assimilating into the United States. Green card holders may seek out churches that provide advanced English as a Second Language classes and U.S. citizenship classes.

### *Family Members of Immigrants*

Since 1965, family unification has been an essential principle in U.S. immigration policy.<sup>99</sup> U.S. citizens may petition to have green cards given to spouses, children (including adult children), parents, and even siblings. Permanent residents may only petition to have spouses and children under the age of 21 accepted as permanent residents. While there are limits to most visa programs, there are no limits to the number

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<sup>97</sup> "Facts and Figures," U.S. Department of State, accessed December 8, 2018, <https://j1visa.state.gov/basics/facts-and-figures/>.

<sup>98</sup> "Green Card Processes and Procedures," accessed December 8, 2018, <https://www.uscis.gov/greencard/green-card-processes-procedures>.

<sup>99</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 23.



of family visas extended to spouses, minor children, and parents of U.S. citizens. It is not uncommon for a lone family member to come to America via a work visa, send money home to their family in their home country, and eventually bring the entire family to the United States.

Foreigners who marry U.S. Citizens may apply for a green card. Contrary to popular assumption, someone who marries a U.S. citizen does not obtain citizenship automatically. Foreigners married to members of the U.S. military or those who travel extensively for business may feel isolated if their spouse is away for extended lengths of time. Relationship building activities targeted to these spouses is an important area in which churches can provide ministry.

Family member unification visas also apply to spouses met through the internet. Foreign women have traveled to the United States in order to meet their new husbands since the 1800s. During that time, the Western part of the U.S. consisted mostly of men. Marriage brokers had catalogs of “mail order brides” from Asia. Men in America could “order” a wife from the catalog. Many of these women were fleeing poverty and war. There are approximately 10,000 marriages to “internet brides” in the United States every year.<sup>100</sup> These women come from Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America with the top two countries being Russia and the Philippines. Because immigrant spouses are married to Americans, they might not want to attend immigrant churches. Church leaders should be aware of the negative stereotypes about internet brides and work to make sure these women feel accepted.

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<sup>100</sup> "17 Incredible Mail Order Brides Statistics," HRFnd, 2015, <http://healthresearchfunding.org/17-incredible-mail-order-brides-statistics/>.

### *Diversity Visa Recipients*

The U.S. government awards 50,000 green cards every year to online applicants who are coming from countries that are under-represented in U.S. immigration. The requirements include the equivalency of a high school diploma and two years of work experience. Currently, residents of Africa or Europe receive 80% of diversity visas.<sup>101</sup> There has been much discussion as to the rationale behind the diversity visa program among politicians over the years. Even if the program is eventually done away with, the fact remains that there are hundreds of thousands of immigrants living in the United States from lesser known countries such as Latvia, Azerbaijan, or Ivory Coast because of this program.

### *Refugees*

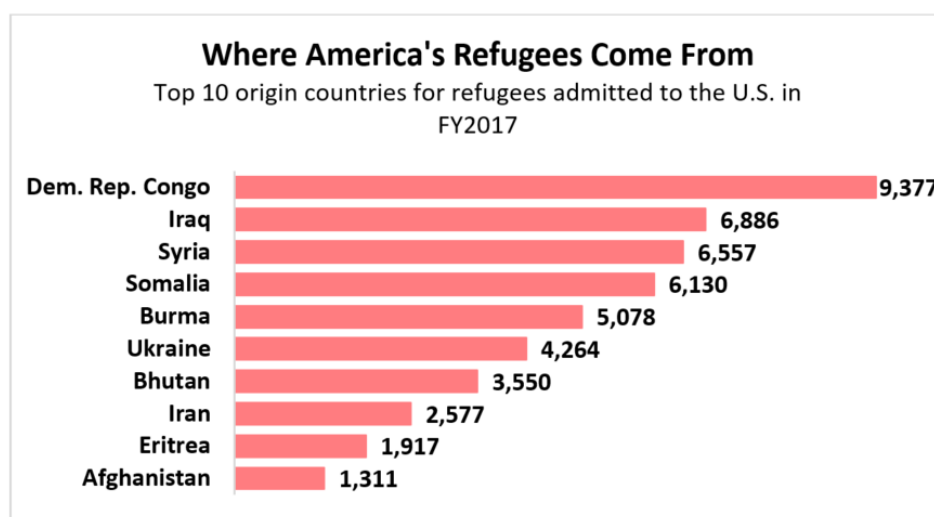
Much controversy surrounds the subject of refugee immigration to the U.S. The United Nations 2017 report claims 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, the highest on record. While the majority of these people are forced from their homes while staying in their countries, those who flee home countries because of persecution, war, or violence are classified by the United Nations as “refugees.” In 2017 the United Nations identified 25.4 million refugees, 52% of which were children.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> "The Diversity Visa System: A Fact Sheet," American Immigration Council, 2016, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/diversity-visa-system-fact-sheet>.

<sup>102</sup> "UNHCR Global Trends - Forced Displacement in 2017," UNHCR, accessed December 9, 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2017/>.

In the fiscal year 2016, the United States welcomed 84,995 refugees into the United States from 79 different countries.<sup>103</sup> In fiscal year 2017 less than 54,000 refugees were accepted by the United States.<sup>104</sup> Even though refugee numbers have dropped, there are still many refugee families in communities across America.



*Figure 3. Where America's Refugees Come From*

(<https://immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-u-s-refugee-resettlement/>)

Most of these refugees were fleeing political, ethnic, or religious persecution. The U.S. government brought additional families to America via the Special Immigrant Visa program.<sup>105</sup> Some came from Iraq and Afghanistan after serving the U.S. military and embassies as translators and intelligence gatherers. Even as reductions continue in the

<sup>103</sup> "Fact Sheet: Fiscal Year 2016 Refugee Admissions," U.S. Department of State, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/10/262776.htm>.

<sup>104</sup> Susan Fratzke, "Top 10 of 2017 – Issue #6: In Wake of Cuts to U.S. Refugee Program, Global Resettlement Falls Short," Migration Policy, December 14, 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/top-10-2017-issue-6-wake-cuts-us-refugee-program-global-resettlement-falls-short>.

<sup>105</sup> "Special Immigrants," accessed December 9, 2018, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/special-immigrants>.

U.S. refugee resettlement program, about three million refugees have come to the U.S. since 1980.<sup>106</sup>

The religious background of refugees is a topic of much discussion in our society. Since 2002, the majority of refugees settled in the U.S. have identified as Christians. In the fiscal year 2016, the number of Muslim refugees settled in the U.S. grew to a slight increase over Christians,<sup>107</sup> though this number dropped back in the fiscal year 2017.<sup>108</sup>

Fear of refugees from Muslim majority countries has put some conservative Christian leaders at odds with some conservative politicians. Atlanta pastor Bryant Wright, former President of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote a letter to Georgia Governor, Nathan Deal, criticizing Deal's executive order to deny services to refugees from Syria.<sup>109</sup> In an interview with *60 Minutes*, Pastor Wright explained why his church actively ministers to refugees:

The government has decided 10,000 Syrian refugees are coming. That's not our decision. Isn't it better to reach out and love these folks than to give them the cold shoulder? Which approach do you think might cause a Muslim refugee to be more sympathetic to Islamic terrorism? Which approach? To me, it's a no-brainer.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Key Facts about Refugees to the U.S.," Pew Research Center, January 30, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/30/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/>.

<sup>107</sup> Phillip Connor, "U.S. Admits Record Number of Muslim Refugees in 2016," Pew Research Center, October 5, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/05/u-s-admits-record-number-of-muslim-refugees-in-2016/>.

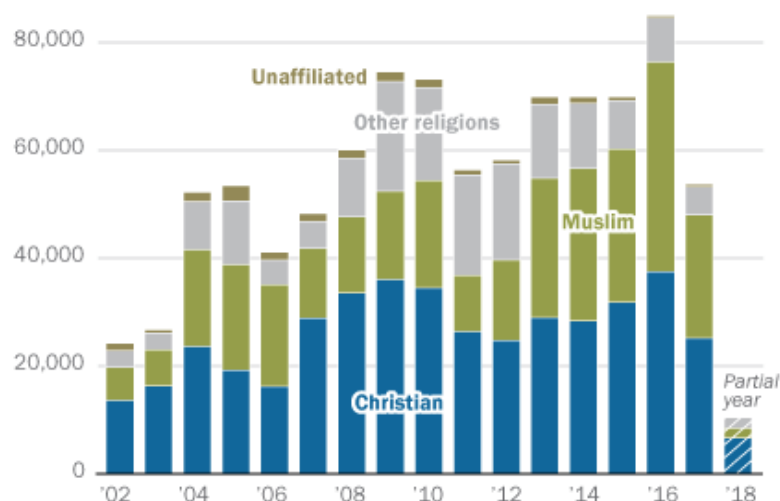
<sup>108</sup> Phillip Connor, "Muslim Refugees Admitted to US down Sharply in Fiscal 2018," Pew Research Center, May 3, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/03/the-number-of-refugees-admitted-to-the-u-s-has-fallen-especially-among-muslims/>.

<sup>109</sup> "Governor Nathan Deal Backs Down On Attempt To Ban Syrian Refugees From Georgia," CBS Atlanta, January 4, 2016, <https://atlanta.cbslocal.com/2016/01/04/governor-nathan-deal-backs-down-on-attempt-to-ban-syrian-refugees-from-georgia/>.

<sup>110</sup> Bpnews.net, 2016.

## Number of Muslim refugees entering the U.S. has shrunk the most so far in 2018

*Refugee arrivals by religious affiliation, fiscal year*



Note: Fiscal year is Oct. 1 through Sept. 30. Fiscal 2018 is partial only (Oct. 1, 2017-March 31, 2018). Data do not include special immigrant visas and certain humanitarian parole entrants. Refugee admissions with unknown religious affiliations not shown.

Source: U.S. State Department Refugee Processing Center, accessed April 20, 2018.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

*Figure 4. Refugees by Religious Affiliation*

([http://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/FT\\_18.04.20\\_RefugeeReligion.png](http://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/FT_18.04.20_RefugeeReligion.png))

Even with these voices, fear potentially keeps churches from reaching out to refugees, especially those from Muslim countries. Research by Lifeway claimed that Protestant churches “are twice as likely to fear refugees as to help them.”<sup>111</sup>

Ed Stetzer, of *Christianity Today*, offers a challenge to church leaders:

Much of the wrong information embraced today is fueled by ignorance. As leaders, we must encourage our people to learn about the refugee process and reflect on what scripture calls us to live out. We will then be able to have conversations that can lead to changed thinking.... We must remember that God’s

<sup>111</sup> LifeWay Research, 2016.

word can combat fear. Fear is motivating many people to say, do, and advocate for things today that they otherwise wouldn't have.<sup>112</sup>

It is noteworthy that the United States is bringing refugees to our nation from areas where traditional missionary efforts are difficult, or even illegal. Church leaders who have a missional mindset view the immigration of non-Christians to America as an opportunity and a blessing.

### *Unauthorized Immigrants*

Eleven million unauthorized immigrants live in the United States, which is over a million more people than the population of Sweden. Unauthorized immigrants perform one-fourth of all agriculture jobs and at least 15% of all construction jobs in the United States.<sup>113</sup> The United States has a long history of utilizing workers from Mexico and Central America. Even though illegal immigration from Mexico has been in steady decline since 2007, drug wars and political instability in Latin America have caused men, women, families, and unaccompanied children to travel north to seek a new life (see Figure 5).

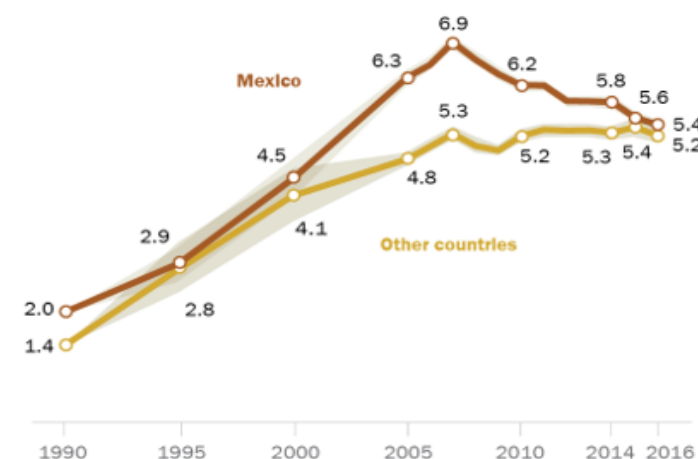
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<sup>112</sup> "The Narrative of Fear Surrounding Refugees: Preparing Ourselves for the Conversation," The Exchange | A Blog by Ed Stetzer, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2016/december/narrative-of-fear-surrounding-refugees-preparing-ourselves-.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstad, Jeffrey S. Passel, and D'Vera Cohn, "5 Facts about Illegal Immigration in the U.S.," Pew Research Center, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/03/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>.

### U.S. unauthorized immigrant total declines from Mexico but is steady from other nations

*In millions*



Note: Shading shows range of estimated 90% confidence interval.  
 Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented U.S. Census Bureau data.  
 See Methodology for details.

"U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Total Dips to Lowest Level in a Decade"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

*Figure 5. Decline in Unauthorized Immigration*

(<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/03/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/>)

In fact, the Pew Foundation reports that more Mexicans are leaving the U.S. than arriving. In 2017, authorities apprehended more non-Mexicans at our Southern border than Mexicans.<sup>114</sup>

The topic of Latino immigration is a complex issue for many reasons. One reason is that many unauthorized immigrants are parents of U.S. citizens, having had children after arriving in the United States. Other unauthorized immigrants may be married to a U.S. citizen or a green card holder. Some Latinos claim the political officials in their countries of origins are so corrupt that there is no way for them to immigrate without

<sup>114</sup> Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, "What We Know about Illegal Immigration from Mexico," Pew Research Center, December 3, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/03/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/>.

paying thousands of dollars in bribes. In the book, *The Next America*, researcher Paul Taylor asserts that, with an aging population and low birth rates among white Americans, the United States economy needs hard working, immigrant workers.<sup>115</sup>

While this rationale finds sympathy with some, others believe illegal immigration threatens our identity as a nation built on the rule of law. Some immigrants who immigrated to the U.S. via our legal system resent unauthorized immigrants. In a recent interview, one immigrant from Lebanon criticized migrants illegally coming into the United States. She stated: “I came here legally, waited my turn, filed documents, paid for my applications, and abided by and respected the laws of this great country. I am thankful I was given this opportunity to be here, and I try to be worthy of this trust every day.”<sup>116</sup>

One common form of illegal immigration is related to those who overstayed visas. In 2016, it was reported that authorities were investigating a list of more than 10 million visa overstays.<sup>117</sup> Some of these may be in the process of seeking asylum, applying for a work visa, or a family unification visa.

Pastor Mark DeYmaz struggled when he realized his church was ministering to families who were in the country illegally. He sought advice from immigration officials. DeYmaz writes:

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<sup>115</sup> Taylor, 121.

<sup>116</sup> Deroy Murdock, "Fence-Climbing Illegal Aliens Cut in Line as Legal Immigrants Wait in Obscurity," *National Review*, May 4, 2018, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/05/legal-immigrants-vs-illegal-immigrants-cutting-line/>.

<sup>117</sup> Stephen Dinan, "Illegal Immigrants Who Overstay Visas Hardly Ever Caught, Feds Admit," *The Washington Times*, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jun/14/illegal-immigrants-who-overstay-visas-almost-never/>.



I learned that a church is not required by law to know or determine the legal status of its members...a church's leaders do not in any way violate the laws of the land when they minister to or involve undocumented immigrants in their church.<sup>118</sup>

I believe that church leaders who serve in areas where there is a significant number of unauthorized immigrants should deal with these issues honestly and biblically. Seeing everyone as worthy of God's love, leaders must find ways to minister to people. Even so, pastors must be aware of appropriate laws and respect them.

### *Asylum Seekers*

Unlike refugees, asylum seekers are foreigners fleeing from harm who arrive in the United States before asking for assistance. Asylum seekers may file claims while they are already in the U.S. or at a port of entry, identifying a credible fear of persecution. In 2016, over 115,000 affirmative asylum applications were filed, with only 11,729 of them granted asylum that year.<sup>119</sup> Traditionally, more asylum seekers come from China than any other country.<sup>120</sup>

Once asylum seekers arrive in the United States, they complete the required paperwork with the Citizenship and Immigration Services Department. In the weeks that follow, asylum seekers are not able to work until their applications are approved. After that, they may secure a temporary work permit for the months or years it takes for their cases to be granted a decision by a judge. Many applicants have risked their lives to get to

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<sup>118</sup> Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 117.

<sup>119</sup> "Refugees and Asylees," Department of Homeland Security, April 30, 2018, <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/refugees-asylees>.

<sup>120</sup> "Asylum in the United States," American Immigration Council, November 27, 2018, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/asylum-united-states>.

the U.S. because of threats to their safety. Some are well educated and have viable job skills. Unlike refugees, who are invited to the United States and provided resources to get started in their new homeland, asylees may have few resources. Churches who reach out to asylum seekers may find out they have basic needs such as food, clothing, and housing. Language training and employment are also frequent needs of asylum seekers.

### *Victims of Human Trafficking*

The U.S. Department of State estimates that between 14,500 and 17,500 persons are trafficked into the United States each year.<sup>121</sup> Human trafficking takes many forms. Victims might be sex trafficked (i.e., prostitution, pornography), labor trafficked (i.e., agriculture, domestic work), or a combination of both (i.e., massage parlor, nightclub). Worldwide, an estimated 71% of all human trafficking victims are female, and one third are children.<sup>122</sup> Victims trafficked into the United States who cooperate with authorities may apply for a T-visa to keep from being deported.<sup>123</sup> Victims of human trafficking may come to the United States as refugees, migrants, or even students, and then be coerced into sex work or unjust labor. The ACLU reports that immigrant women and children are particularly vulnerable to being coerced into labor or sex work because of their limited

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<sup>121</sup> "Fact Sheet: Distinctions Between Human Smuggling and Human Trafficking 2006," U.S. Department of State, January 1, 2006, <https://www.state.gov/m/ds/investigat/hstcenter/90434.htm>.

<sup>122</sup> "Majority of Trafficking Victims Are Women and Girls; One-third Children – New UN Report | Refugees and Migrants," United Nations, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/majority-trafficking-victims-are-women-and-girls-one-third-children---new-un-report>.

<sup>123</sup> "Questions and Answers: Victims of Human Trafficking, T Nonimmigrant Status," USCIS, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status/questions-and-answers-victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status-0>.

education, poverty, inability to speak English, isolation, and lack of familiarity with their rights.<sup>124</sup> It was estimated that in 2016, 403,000 people were living as modern slaves in the United States. The great majority of them were women and children.<sup>125</sup>

The church has a long history of seeking justice for the abused. The first step to helping victims of trafficking is to admit that human trafficking is a widespread problem in the United States. In 2017 *The Atlantic* magazine published an article called, “My Family’s Slave.” The author, a Filipino-American, chronicled his life being raised in the United States by a Lola, a woman who was given to his mother as a “gift” while in the Philippines. The author writes,

To our American neighbors, we were model immigrants, a poster family. They told us so. My father had a law degree, my mother was on her way to becoming a doctor, and my siblings and I got good grades and always said ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’ We never talked about Lola.<sup>126</sup>

Human trafficking can take a wide variety of forms. It dehumanizes victims who desperately need God’s love. Churches who work with immigrants may find themselves with the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus to victims of human trafficking.

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<sup>124</sup> "Human Trafficking: Modern Enslavement of Immigrant Women in the United States," American Civil Liberties Union, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.aclu.org/other/human-trafficking-modern-enslavement-immigrant-women-united-states>.

<sup>125</sup> "United States," Global Slavery Index, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/country-studies/united-states/>.

<sup>126</sup> Alex Tizon, "My Family's Slave," *The Atlantic*, June 26, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/06/lolas-story/524490/>.

## Principles for Cross-Cultural Evangelism

Many newcomers to America come with unique languages, cultures, foods, traditions, religions, and worldviews. Missionaries who move to remote parts of the globe usually engage in culture and language training before they begin mission work. In the same way, Christians seeking to do cross-cultural ministry in the U.S. might learn some of the ways non-westerners think and live. Social scientist David Livermore writes, “Americans continue to fare poorly in effectively crossing cultures in ways that cause the people they encounter to feel loved and respected.”<sup>127</sup> The remedy, according to Livermore, is to develop *cultural intelligence*. This is a learned skill that allows someone to “better reflect the love of Jesus in what we say and do as we encounter people who see the world differently than we do.”<sup>128</sup> The following material outlines a few of the non-Western concepts that are valuable for Christians who seek to engage internationals.

### *A Different Understanding of Time*

When I was in college, I served as a “summer missionary” in the Philippines. I lived with a Filipino family and had an abrupt introduction into their daily life. On my first Sunday, I received a lesson on the Filipino concept of “time.” The pastor told me that the church service began at 9:00 AM. I arrived at 8:45 AM only to find the church building abandoned. Around 9:30, three women arrived and began to play piano and sing. Slowly, as the songs reverberated through the neighborhood, families trickled in.

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<sup>127</sup> David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 23.

<sup>128</sup> Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*, 15.

Eventually, the congregation grew to over 100. Finally, after two hours of singing, the pastor showed up and began to preach.

For many people outside of the Western world, time is measured in events, not minutes. In their book, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, authors Randolph Richards and Brandon O'Brien discuss the concepts of time.<sup>129</sup> The ancient Greeks had two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. While *chronos* refers to sequential time, *kairos* signifies an event (i.e. harvest). While most Americans are focused on chronological time, many people in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America are more focused on events. When Americans engage in ministry with internationals, it may be frustrating to make an appointment only to have a guest show up an hour late. The message "Let's meet for coffee at 1:00 PM" might be heard as, "Let's meet for coffee sometime between lunch and dinner."

### *Mixed-Gender Relationships*

In America, men and women work together, study together, and engage in meaningful conversation with one another. This dynamic would not be acceptable in many cultures around the world. There are many countries in the world where men and women do not mix socially. A Hindu temple, Muslim mosque, or Orthodox church may have men and women segregated with separate areas for worship. While this may seem unjust and unnecessary from our point of view, effective ministry to some people groups

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<sup>129</sup> E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 137-151.

may need to happen in the context of same-gender relationships. For some, Bible studies and other meetings may be more effective as “men only” or “women only” experiences.

### *Individualist Versus Collectivist Cultures*

While Western societies tend to be more individualistic in orientation, Eastern societies tend to be more collectivist. Collectivists are group-oriented people who “get their identities from membership in a group: family, nation, or community. Individualists get identity from what they do.”<sup>130</sup> These two worldviews have deep implications for evangelism. Americans generally view conversion as a deeply personal, individual decision. In the East and much of Africa, conversion is a decision an entire family, group of friends, or entire community will make together. For example, in India, Christians are outnumbered in almost every region. But in Nagaland, in Northern India, missionaries have seen entire communities come to Christ in a relatively short amount of time. Christians now make up 88% of the population of Nagaland.<sup>131</sup> While the idea of collective conversion seems unusual from our western point of view, take a look at Acts 16:31-34 (emphasis added):

They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you **and your household.**’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to **all the others in his house.** <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and **all his household were baptized.** The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—**he and his whole household.**<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Rawson, 66.

<sup>131</sup> "Nagaland Religion Census 2011," accessed December 11, 2017, <http://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/13-nagaland.html>.

<sup>132</sup> Acts 16:31-34 (NIV).

A collectivist worldview has profound implications for many areas of life. For example, an African immigrant may send large amounts of his income to family members in Africa, even if it means he cannot pay his bills. In some Asian cultures, the older siblings will drop out of school to earn money so younger siblings can attend college. Collectivist-oriented people value being a part of something bigger than themselves. Western evangelistic presentations which make individualistic appeals for “you to go to heaven” are less effective with someone focused on the needs of their extended family.

#### *Casual Relationships Versus Deep Relationships*

Many Americans live busy lives while maintaining an abundance of shallow relationships. In contrast, many immigrants place a high value on deep relationships. In the U.S., a typical lunch among friends might involve meeting at a restaurant for 45 minutes. For many immigrants, a lunch meeting (usually at a home) can take two or three hours. While spending this amount of time can produce valuable ministry results, many American Christians find this difficult. Engaging in cross-cultural ministry can be time-consuming and is not recommended for those who are impatient or inflexible.

#### *Understanding Honor/Shame Cultures*

A significant development in cross-cultural ministry is the identification of honor/shame cultures. This developing area of study is bringing together anthropologists, missionaries, and theologians. In his book, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guild, Shame, and Fear Cultures*, Jayson Georges explains that:

Honor is a person's social worth, one's value in the eyes of the community. Honor is when other people think well of you, resulting in harmonious social bonds in

the community.... Shame, on the other hand, is a negative public rating: the community thinks lowly of you.<sup>133</sup>

Honor/shame cultures are prevalent in much of Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa. Understanding honor/shame thinking is invaluable when seeking to share the gospel. For example, the following passage from Hebrews might speak deeply to the heart of someone from an honor/shame culture "...For the joy set before him he endured the cross, **scorning its shame**, and sat down at the **right hand of the throne** of God"<sup>134</sup> (emphasis added).

Many theologians get excited about studying honor/shame worldviews because of the similarity to the culture of biblical times. Missiologist Werner Mischke writes:

The primary social value of the ancient Middle East in the Bible is the pivotal cultural value of honor and shame.... Understanding the ancient dynamics of honor and shame in Scriptures is a catalyst to help you and your church be more faithful to God's Word for more effective ministry in our multi-ethnic, multicultural world."<sup>135</sup>

In other words, the cultural context in which the Bible was originally written is more like the modern cultures of China or Afghanistan than to the cultures of the United States or Germany. For most Americans, reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience.

In contrast to honor/shame cultures, much of Europe and North America value guilt and innocence. In the East, people worry about "losing face" in the community. In the West, an internal sense of guilt is often a consuming motivator for people to seek the forgiveness of God. For example, the popular "Roman Road" gospel presentation has

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<sup>133</sup> Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* (Amerika: Time Press, 2016).

<sup>134</sup> Hebrews 12:2 (NIV).

<sup>135</sup> Mischke Werner, *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World* (Scottsdale, AZ: Mission One, 2015), 38.



been effective in the West for many years. These verses point out that we are guilty, we deserve death, and we can escape the wrath of God by believing in Jesus. The Roman Road presentation appeals to guilt/innocence worldviews. Veteran missionary Kevin Greeson explains that in the West,

...people often feel guilt about something already, and an explanation of how God can remove man's guilt appeals to a felt need in our society. The limitations of this approach are that it requires the hearer to have an understanding of the concept of sin and guilt.<sup>136</sup>

Unfortunately, Western evangelism materials may not be as effective with non-Westerners. On the other hand, a gospel tract has been created especially for sharing the gospel with people from honor/shame cultures using the story of the prodigal son.<sup>137</sup>

Some writers also mention the fear/power worldview. Jayson Georges explains that "fear/power cultures live in constant fear of invisible powers."<sup>138</sup> Certain groups in Africa and Asia, and indigenous peoples in the Americas fall into the fear/power worldview. Missionaries who deemphasize the spiritual power of God in the world have a difficult time evangelizing people from fear-power cultures. This might explain why charismatic churches, which emphasize spiritual power, have experienced explosive growth in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

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<sup>136</sup> Kevin Greeson, *The Camel: How Muslims are Coming to Faith in Christ* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2010), 36-37.

<sup>137</sup> "The Father's Love Booklet," accessed December 20, 2018, <https://thefatherslovebooklet.org/>.

<sup>138</sup> Georges, 26.

## **Developing Strategies to Share the Gospel with Newcomers to America**

Churches who seek to evangelize immigrants, foreign workers, and international students in their communities should not jump blindly into cross-cultural ministry. Below are some effective methods for doing this kind of ministry.

### *The Ministry of Hospitality*

The practice of making visits, sharing meals, and inviting people into homes is one of the most essential ingredients in reaching immigrants with the gospel. Donna Thomas, who has trained missionaries for over forty years, writes:

Inviting people into your home communicates that they are special. It tells them that you want to know them better. If your new friends are from another country, they may never have been in a typical US home. Coming to your home...makes them feel honored.<sup>139</sup>

In our busy, overprogrammed society, Christians may overlook the ministry of hospitality as a biblical virtue. The parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10 reads like it was written for the church in America. This story illustrates someone in desperate need being ignored by busy, religious people. The hero of the story, the one who showed great hospitality, is both an ethnic and religious minority.

Jesus highlighted the importance of hospitality in Matthew 25. Jesus describes the day when God judges people and sends them to either heaven or hell. In Matthew 25:35, Jesus makes a remarkable statement about those who will enter heaven: "...I was a stranger and you invited me in."<sup>140</sup> In this passage, the Bible indicates that inviting

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<sup>139</sup> Donna S. Thomas, *Faces in the Crowd: Reaching Your International Neighbor for Christ* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2008), 138.

<sup>140</sup> Matthew 25:35 (NIV).

strangers into your home is equal to inviting Jesus into your home. In the book *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, Joshua Jipp elaborates:

The Bible does not suggest that people are saved through good works...but their deep connection to salvation does suggest that hospitality is a tangible testimony to our wholehearted embrace of Jesus' person and message. The scriptures indicate that hospitality to strangers is one of the primary ways in which followers of Jesus fulfill the command to 'love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>141</sup>

As seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan, hospitality also involves meeting basic needs. Refugees may need essential items like furniture, clothing, or food. Spouses of foreign workers may need help learning how to shop and cook. College students may get homesick. Children may need help with their schoolwork. In today's world, hospitality may look like driving lessons, filling out government forms, and taking a trip to shop for school supplies.

The connection between hospitality and evangelism may not be obvious, but an author who interviewed 50 immigrants who placed their faith in Christ indicated the importance of meeting felt needs. The interviewer explains that:

Immigrants became aware that they were seeing Christianity being demonstrated for them, helping them understand in a very concrete way what the Christian faith is all about. They saw Christianity before anyone explained it to them. When they heard it explained to them, it was easier to understand because they had already seen an example of it.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Joshua W. Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 7.

<sup>142</sup> Glenn Rogers, *Evangelizing Immigrants: Outreach and Ministry Among Immigrants and their Children* (Bedford, TX: Mission and Ministry Resources, 2006), 89.

### *Bringing Up Jesus*

While some Christians make the mistake of pushing a commitment to Christ prematurely, it is just as wrong not to mention Jesus at all. Many Christians who work with newcomers to America report that people coming from non-Christian backgrounds seem to have no problem with talking about God, Jesus, and religion. Karl Medearis, who is an expert in the area of Muslim-Christian relations, recommends that conversations with immigrants focus on the life and teaching of Jesus. Medearis writes:

Back in the States, sermons and teachings often revolve around doctrine, theology, and how to live a more fulfilling life. We seem to have forgotten the power and the humility and the sheer genius of Jesus, His vibrancy and His compassion.<sup>143</sup>

Of course, there are some newcomers, like those coming from Communist countries, who may want nothing to do with opening the Bible. A fruitful method for sharing about God to those who are hostile to scripture is called *Bible storying*. In this simple method, the stories of the Old and New Testaments are told naturally, without a written script. Missionaries around the globe utilize this technique. Through the stories, people learn about a loving Creator who seeks to redeem people and bring them from shame to a place of honor. Christine Dillon, a missionary in Taiwan writes:

Sometimes storying is the only way people are willing to listen to the gospel. They may have built up defensive walls against the other evangelistic methods, had bad experiences in the past, or their own religious leaders have warned them against listening to the Bible.”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Carl Medearis, *Speaking of Jesus: The Art of Not-Evangelism* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2011), 135.

<sup>144</sup> Dillon Christine, *Telling the Gospel Through Story: Evangelism that Keeps Hearers Wanting More* (readhowyouwant.com Ltd, 2012), 23.

Along these lines, Christians who seek to engage in evangelism with newcomers to America may need to focus more on questions rather than statements. Asking open-ended, friendly questions about family, traditions, holidays, food, or other customs can be very revealing. It also communicates a sincere interest. Personal questions related to God, faith, purpose in life, death, and Jesus can come later.

### *Studying the Bible with Internationals*

Some newcomers are curious about the Bible and will be eager to study it. Be prepared for questions as people encounter God's word for the first time. Christians who study the scriptures together with internationals may want to become familiar with the concept of contextualization. Jackson Wu's book *One Gospel for All Nations* explains the importance of contextualization. Contextualization is the process of sharing God's word in a way that is relevant to the culture of the listener. Contextualization should not be confused with syncretism, in which the teaching of scripture becomes compromised in order to fit with culture. Wu states: "the gospel does not change, rather, contextualization is concerned with discerning its implications of a given culture. In particular, contextualization seeks ways to communicate and apply the biblical text."<sup>145</sup>

The previous discussion of honor/shame, innocence/guilt, and power/fear cultures is valuable when studying the Bible with foreigners. Depending on their background, the topic of contextualization is one in which theologians and missiologists work to honor the integrity of the Biblical text while making the teaching understandable to the listener. While it is unrealistic to expect a volunteer to become an expert in biblical

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<sup>145</sup> Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 4.

contextualization, taking advantage of available resources regarding this area can give guidance in ways to engage in evangelism with immigrants.

### *The Power of Prayer*

Many people come to America from cultures that greatly value spiritual power. For example, immigrants from Thailand, Bhutan, or Malawi may firmly believe in a spiritual world. It might even be that appeasing evil spirits is a central part of their lives. Most American Christians are at ease praying for God's blessings, but some may be uncomfortable with praying for supernatural healing, or deliverance from evil spirits. Immigrants who come from fear/power cultures may need to know that Christ is indeed more powerful than the evil spirits they encounter.

A few years ago, at our church, one of the ministers announced at the end of the Sunday service that he knew of a Muslim refugee family who had been childless for many years. He announced, "I am going over to their apartment now to pray for them. Would anyone like to join me?" Thirty minutes later, about twenty nervous Baptists were crowded in that tiny apartment, praying that Jesus would bless this Muslim couple with a child. Less than ten months later, the wife gave birth to "the baby that Jesus gave us." Even though this couple are not yet followers of Christ, they already have a testimony about the power of praying in Jesus' name.

### **Pitfalls to Avoid when Engaging in Ministry to Internationals**

In the book *Assimilate or Go Home*, D.L. Mayfield writes about her relationship with refugee families. On one occasion, she took a vanload of Somali children to a church Vacation Bible School (VBS) at the large church outside of Portland, Oregon

where her father was the pastor. The theme of the VBS was “Serengeti Trek.” Because of this theme, the church was covered with African decorations. Mayfield writes:

And then, as I was herding the refugee kids towards the water fountains, I overheard a small child talking to a volunteer. ‘Oh!’ he said joyously ‘they brought us kids from the Serengeti!’ Several children turned and pointed at me and my group, and I felt my face began to flush as I realized the church kids thought the refugee kids were props.<sup>146</sup>

Confusing experiences can happen when well-meaning Christians seek to minister to families who are new to America. Inevitably, mistakes will be made when church leaders attempt to utilize traditional evangelism methods with people who do not share a Western worldview.

### *The Danger of Stereotyping*

When engaging in cross-cultural ministry, one or both of the parties may know very little about the culture of the other. When this happens, we often resort to stereotypes and assumptions. For example, a year ago a family from Sri Lanka showed up at our church on a Sunday morning. I assumed that they were Buddhist (or maybe Hindu). I soon realized that this was a Christian refugee family who was persecuted for their faith. Almost immediately, my opinion of them changed from, “How can I share the gospel with them?” to, “I want to hear their story and learn from them.”

Many Americans are not very knowledgeable regarding geography and world cultures. Along with this, some Americans feel a need to share what they think they know, often bordering on being offensive. Some examples include: asking someone from Japan if they know Kung Fu (a Chinese martial art), telling someone from Colombia how

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<sup>146</sup> Danielle L. Mayfield, *Assimilate or Go Home: Notes From a Failed Missionary on Rediscovering Faith* (New York, NY: Harper One, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 13.

much you love tacos (which are from Mexico), or asking an Iraqi refugee, who has an advanced degree in electronics, if he has ever seen an iPhone.

### *Assuming American Methods will be Effective*

In the book, *Crossing Cultures with Jesus*, Katie Rawson shares a story about a church that tried to reach out to foreign workers who were working at nearby resorts. Their method was to blitz the area with flyers advertising an event with “free food” for guest workers. The attendance was dismal. Even though some of these internationals had seen the flyers, they ignored them because they did not have a relationship with anyone involved. Some of these young men and women came from affluent families and were offended by the offer of “free food.” Was this church looking down on them? <sup>147</sup> Some churches make painful discoveries that traditional American outreach methods may not be effective with newcomers to the U.S.

### *The White Savior Complex*

The term “white savior” is commonly used to describe people who travel to poor non-white communities in order to “fix” the problems there...usually with ineffective results. The term is derived from the Rudyard Kipling poem, “The White Man’s Burden.”<sup>148</sup> Well-meaning Christians can cause more harm than good to a family when they drop in, distribute gifts randomly, then leave (after taking an abundance of selfies). In the book, *Loving the Stranger*, Jessica Udall writes “Nothing is more destructive to a

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<sup>147</sup> Katie J. Rawson, *Crossing Cultures with Jesus: Sharing Good News with Sensitivity and Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2015), 139.

<sup>148</sup> “‘The White Man’s Burden’: Kipling’s Hymn to U.S. Imperialism,” History Matters, accessed December 20, 2018, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5478/>.



new cross-cultural friendship than an attitude of cultural superiority.”<sup>149</sup> Christians should be a people who seek to share what they have with compassion and generosity. However, engaging in good deeds or gift-giving with an attitude of, “I feel so good when I help those poor, desperate people” may be an indicator that the ministry is inappropriately focused on emotional needs of the giver. When Christians see people as “projects” and enter into a one-sided relationship where we set the terms, they may be engaging in something which feels good, but could be unhealthy.

#### *An Unrealistic Desire for Quick Results*

Imagine that an American Christian moves to India to take a new job. After living in India for only one month, two men from the local Hindu temple make a visit. The American invites them in and they begin talking about the American’s need to convert to Hinduism. It is unlikely that this Christian would respond positively to their appeal. Nevertheless, Western Christians are often disappointed when a foreigner does not come to Christ after an initial gospel presentation.

Katie Rawson tells of a time early in her ministry with international students in which she had “...a prideful zeal for quick results, not in prayerful listening for the Lord’s direction or a desire to make new friendships.”<sup>150</sup> She goes on to suppose that “our history of crusade-type evangelism in the United States may compound the problem,

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<sup>149</sup> Jessica A. Udall, *Loving the Stranger: Welcoming Immigrants in the Name of Jesus* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: 2015), 80.

<sup>150</sup> Rawson, 10.

sometimes causing us to ask people to become followers of Jesus before they are ready to do so.”<sup>151</sup>

### **Ministry to Internationals who Are Already Believers**

While much is said in the media about the immigration of Muslims, only 4% of all immigrants in America practice Islam. The majority (68%) of immigrants to America report that they are Christians, while 20% say that they have no religion. In the book *The New Pilgrims: How Immigrants Are Renewing America's Faith and Values*, Dr. Joseph Castleberry makes the declaration that “immigrants offer promise for religious revival” in America.<sup>152</sup> While the majority of Latinos who come to America have a Catholic background, many of them are joining evangelical churches. In speaking of the movement of Hispanic immigrants to evangelical churches, Dr. Castleberry proposes that “between 50 and 80 percent of all members have converted since coming to the United States.”<sup>153</sup>

Asians are the most diverse ethnic group in American religion. While the vast majority of Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America are Asian, it is to be noted that 42% of all Asians in America identify as Christians. When examining Asian Christians who identify as evangelical, there are some noteworthy characteristics. For example, 72% of Asian evangelicals say that Christianity is the “one, true faith.” This response is significantly higher than white evangelicals in which only 49% of them affirm this belief.

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<sup>151</sup> Rawson, 127.

<sup>152</sup> Joseph Lee Castleberry, *The New Pilgrims: How Immigrants Are Renewing Americas Faith and Values* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2015), 8.

<sup>153</sup> Castleberry, 29.

As a church develops ministries to internationals, it would be foolish to ignore foreign-born people in the community who are already followers of Jesus. Overseas, some missionaries focus their efforts on training and equipping local pastors, evangelists, Bible women, and other church leaders. While this type of mission work may not seem as heroic as that of evangelists, these missionaries are often investing in a strategy that produces results for generations. Indigenous Christian leaders already know the language and culture of their target group. Oftentimes, their needs are training, resources, and encouragement. This same dynamic can happen in the United States with Christian immigrants. Church leaders can work with immigrant believers in order to train up leaders within their ethnic group.

### **Challenges Faced by Immigrant Churches**

A popular model to minister to immigrant Christians has been to plant an congregation which targets a specific people group. This model has the advantages of operating within the language and culture of the immigrants. However, some issues may arise which can impede the growth and effectiveness of these congregations. Newly planted immigrant churches often form in homes or shared space donated by an existing church. These congregations may grow quickly. Yet, planting a church which targets immigrants and other newcomer to the U.S. can be a challenge.

#### *Many Immigrant Churches Have Sparse Resources*

Many immigrant church members are not yet financially secure in America. Ethnic congregations are often filled with people who are new converts to Christianity. While this is exciting, the concept of tithing may not yet be practiced by these new

believers. While many immigrant churches start as house churches with few financial responsibilities, they often outgrow these locations. Immigrant congregations from groups who have high birth rates sometimes have more children present at meetings than adults. Rapid growth often leads these congregations to ask local churches for meeting space. This can be a positive symbiotic relationship, or it can cause an array of problems.

*Many Host Churches View Immigrant Churches as Subservient*

As previously mentioned, the relationship between immigrant churches and host churches can take a wide variety of forms. Some host churches see the immigrant church as “missions,” investing financially in the church beyond the use of facilities. The host church might even provide mentoring, childcare, or English classes for the mission church.

To be clear, established churches who share their facilities are a true blessing to these struggling immigrant congregations. However, if conflicts arise, the resolution is often one-sided with the needs of the immigrant congregation being subservient to the needs of the host congregation. For example, imagine a growing immigrant church which is invited to meet in a building with an older congregation in decline. After a few years, the immigrant church members outnumber the host church members two to one. Even so, the immigrants still crowd into a small classroom for services, while the original church members worship in a mostly empty sanctuary. When the attitude of the host church is “beggars can’t be choosers,” the congregations may develop unhealthy attitudes about one another.

### *A Common Language Does Not Ensure a Healthy Church*

Many cities in America have areas where there are a significant number of immigrants who speak a common language. Unfortunately, this does not mean that planting a language specific church is always the best plan. For example, over 140 million people in the world speak Swahili. Swahili is often a “trade language” for people from different tribal groups whose cultures are sometimes quite different from one another. Since immigrant churches often retain a lot of cultural traditions, they are usually most effective when they target a specific cultural group, not merely a language group.

### *Many Immigrant Churches Lose Youth and Young Adults*

Many immigrant churches grow quickly when U.S. immigration numbers are up. These churches can become a haven for new immigrants. More than just a place for worship, the churches often become the cultural and relational home for first generation immigrants who do not yet fit into the social dynamics of mainstream America. These churches also become a venue for training children in traditional cultural values. Immigrant children often grow up to identify more with the majority culture than with the culture of their parents.<sup>154</sup> Many of these second and third generation immigrants do not participate in immigrant churches as they grow into adulthood. For example, the *Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals* reports that 75% of American-born

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<sup>154</sup> Jared Looney, Kendi Howells Douglas, and Stephen Burris, *Crossroads of the Nations: Diaspora, Globalization, and Evangelization* (Portland, OR: Urban Loft Publishers, 2015), 201-203.

Chinese children drop out of church by the time they reach adulthood.<sup>155</sup> A recent study of second-generation Korean Americans who were members of first-generation Korean churches revealed that 80% of them hoped to attend a church where English is the primary language.<sup>156</sup> For this reason, many Hispanic, Chinese, and Korean churches in America are beginning to hold services in English in an attempt to avoid losing the younger generation.

*Many Internationals May Not Have an Immigrant Church Nearby*

Immigrants often face separation from family and friends. Just because a group of Christians relocates to the United States, one cannot assume a capable pastor will be present in that community. Immigrants coming from Africa or Asia may be coming from a wide variety of tribal groups with their own unique languages, cultures, and ways of worship. Just because there are a few dozen Christian families in a town who come from the same nation, it cannot be assumed they will be compatible with one another to form a congregation.

In addition to this, many immigrants may find themselves in a community with no Christians from their people group. For example, at the church where I serve, we have two refugee families from Sri Lanka. These are families of persecuted Christians who came to America as refugees from a country where roughly one percent of the population

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<sup>155</sup> William L. Eng, *Completing the Face of the Chinese Church in America: The ABC Handbook Promoting Effective Ministries to American-Born Chinese* (Oakland, CA: Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals [FACE], 2009), 78.

<sup>156</sup> Helen Lee and Ted Olsen, "Silent Exodus," *ChristianityToday*, accessed April 25, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1996/august12/6t9050.html>.

are evangelical Christians.<sup>157</sup> I do not know of a Sri Lankan congregation available for them in the entire state of Texas. The worship options of these two families are extremely limited.

### **The Multicultural Church as a Model for Churches Ministering to Internationals**

A multiethnic church has members who come from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. However, the “multiethnic” label can apply to a church even if every member was born in the United States and speaks English as their first language. Not every multiethnic church will be effective in meeting the spiritual needs of first-generation immigrants. Christian researcher Ed Stetzer writes:

A church can be multiethnic if it has persons of different ethnic backgrounds who attend. But if people of various ethnic groups listen to the same music, eat the same foods, hang out at the same entertainment venues, and go to church together, that’s not multicultural. They have assimilated to a common culture. It may be multiethnic, but it’s still monocultural. Don’t get me wrong; both multiethnic and multicultural ministries are good and worth pursuing. But being multicultural is much harder than simply being multiethnic.<sup>158</sup>

Mark Naylor of Northwest Baptist Seminary explains the difference between a multiethnic church and a multicultural church.

*Multi-ethnic*...refers to members of a variety of ethnic groups interacting within a particular forum (such as a multi-ethnic church). Such forums require a common structure or format with which all members agree to conform in order for this multi-ethnic interaction to function successfully.... *Multi-cultural*, on the other hand, is much more complex, harder to envision and fraught with conflict. The

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<sup>157</sup> "Sri Lanka," Singapore | Operation World, accessed December 14, 2018, <http://www.operationworld.org/country/sril/owtext.html>.

<sup>158</sup> Ed Stetzer, "Hard Truths about Multicultural Churches," Facts & Trends, October 7, 2014, accessed December 14, 2018, <https://factsandtrends.net/2014/10/07/hard-truths-about-multicultural-churches/>.

concept is that members of a variety of ethnic groups interact *while maintaining their distinct cultural practices and priorities*.<sup>159</sup>

Multicultural<sup>160</sup> churches can become a solution to some of the problems faced by immigrant congregations. Established churches can provide a lot of stability and resources to struggling immigrant families. Preschool care and Bible teaching for children and youth are needs which can be met by the established church. Often, the facilities are of a high quality than what is found in most new immigrant churches. Children's choirs, youth camps, and sports leagues may now be available to these families. Internationals can also take advantage of immigrant-focused ministries that a multicultural church might provide, such as English classes, a food pantry, or afterschool tutoring.

The multicultural church model invites internationals to contribute to the church by using their gifts in ministry and in church leadership. Ethnic fellowship groups and Bible studies do not have to leave their culture at the door of the church. That is what makes the multicultural church model different than the multiethnic church model. While a multiethnic church might seek a common-ground culture that combines many ethnic traditions, a multicultural church accepts the notion that many subgroups can exist in a church while retaining a level of unity. The old axiom of "unity without uniformity" is important to multicultural churches.

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<sup>159</sup> Mark Naylor, "Home," Northwest Baptist Seminary, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://www.nbseminary.ca/the-difference-between-multi-ethnic-and-multi-cultural>.

<sup>160</sup> The term "Muticulturalism" is often used to denote a particular political philosophy which is hotly debated. I am not using this term in this way. I am using the term "muticultural" to refer to churches where members of various ethnic and cultural groups can identify as a valued part of the church body without having to give up their cultural identity.



A multicultural church that has a significant number of foreign-born individuals may want to provide for newcomers to America in a similar way that the church provides for age-group ministries. For example, it is not unusual for a church to have a separate weekly event for senior adults, college students, or youth. However, when a youth group meets together on Wednesday nights for a worship and teaching event, it is not viewed as a separate church. In the same way, multicultural churches can provide separate language-based Bible studies, weekly prayer meetings, and other special events for immigrants to meet their spiritual and social needs. All the while, it is regularly communicated that these groups are a valuable part of the church family.

International families are often attracted to the options for children, teens, and young adults provided by a larger multicultural church. This is important since many immigrant children leave immigrant churches when they become adults. Multicultural churches with thriving youth and young adult ministries can provide a much-needed home to second- and third-generation immigrants born in America who do not identify as foreigners.

### **From “Us Versus Them” to “One Family”**

Douglas Brower, a pastor of an English-speaking congregation in Zurich, Switzerland, defines a multicultural church as “one where there is an intentional engagement of cultures, not just a mix of races and nationalities.”<sup>161</sup> In the multicultural church model, churches do more than represent different ethnicities and backgrounds.

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<sup>161</sup> Douglas J. Brower, *How to Become a Multicultural Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 6.

These churches embrace differences. The personality of the church is hard to pin down. It is a beautiful mix of cultures focused on the common goal of following Jesus.

If a monoethnic congregation seeks to transition into a multicultural church, the understanding of “church” may be challenged. For many white evangelicals in the U.S., a church is a building for the purpose of attending services on Sundays. Contrast this to some Christian families around the world who view the church as the epicenter of daily life. They arrive at a church building, home, factory, or farm early on Sundays and leave in the evening. Meals, fellowship, storytelling, music, networking, and playtime for children are all a part of a typical Sunday in many countries. During the week, many global Christians share meals, possessions, and watch one another’s children. Churches who want to reach out to immigrants must realize that some immigrant Christians have a different, often more biblical, view of “church.” African churches may want to meet at the church building all day on both Saturday and Sundays. Some Korean immigrants feel a need to meet at the church for daily 5:00 AM prayer meetings that are common in South Korea. Many Christians around the world spend a significant amount of time in one another’s homes. When they come to America, they do not always find a church filled with people who want to connect several times during the week. While there is no way for one multicultural church to meet the expectations of every family within that church, some of the ideas they bring might be healthier and more biblical than the status quo in American church culture.

One of the key factors in becoming a multicultural church is to have a multicultural leadership team. A culturally and ethnically diverse leadership team can work together to navigate the many needs of a church filled with internationals to create

options and opportunities for authentic community. Pablo Morales, pastor of Ethnos Bible Church in Richardson Texas, writes,

A multiethnic church is more effective when it has a leadership team characterized by spiritual maturity, ethnic diversity, and cultural intelligence, consistently engaged in the disciplined pursuit of synergy and divergent thinking.<sup>162</sup>

Having both paid staff and key lay leaders with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds can give the church leadership and advantage when navigating the difficulties which can arise when engaging diverse cultures in ministry.

A common problem for churches who host a separate immigrant congregation is that the internationals are often seen as “other” by members of the host church. The host church mandates the service times and use of the building. Yet, in a multicultural church, immigrants and long-term church members are on equal footing. Foreign-born church members can serve, teach, and become deacons or elders. Fellowship events are planned to get church members to connect across relational boundaries. The goal is for church members to be a reflection of heaven, a place where there will be “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”<sup>163</sup> One example of a multicultural church is Wilcrest Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. This church has effectively transitioned from an all-white church to a multicultural church and was the subject of the book, *The Color of Church*.<sup>164</sup> On the Wilcrest website, the church proclaims:

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<sup>162</sup> Pablo Morales, "Key Components of a Culturally Relevant Multiethnic Church Model," (DMin dissertation, Portland Seminary, 2018), 162, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/260>.

<sup>163</sup> Revelation 7:9 (NIV).

<sup>164</sup> Rodney M. Woo, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009).

One of the unique aspects of Wilcrest Baptist Church is that it represents more than 50 different nations during worship. Whereas Wilcrest used to be a homogeneous congregation, God did a miraculous work transforming it into a diverse worship service. Our passion is to reflect God's heart for the nations as we make disciples of all peoples and worship and serve together in unity.<sup>165</sup>

I believe that Multicultural churches who seek to be “one family” should protect unity at every level. A pastor of a multicultural church once told me that he had to impose church discipline on church members from one ethnic group who were slandering church members of another ethnic group. While Christians who come to the same church from a common nation may look alike to outsiders, they might be harboring generations of conflict between their people groups. The goal is for everyone in the church, no matter their background, to be able to humble themselves and serve one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **Discipleship through Discomfort**

Dan Hyun, pastor of a multiethnic church in Baltimore, warns that churches should not move toward becoming multicultural without counting the cost. He writes:

Building a multicultural church will require that every person sacrifice. Whether it's the style of teaching, styles of music, or philosophy of friendships, being part of a diverse church will force people to change or even relinquish certain aspects of church that are important to them. This is true even if never consciously recognized. Sometimes we don't know what's meaningful to us until we no longer have it...if a church is a traditionally homogeneous group seeking to diversify, the greater this impact will be felt by those who have been used to the church existing primarily for them.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> "Our Vision," Wilcrest Baptist Church, accessed December 17, 2018, <http://wilcrestbaptist.org/our-vision>.

<sup>166</sup> Dan Hyun, "Why You May NOT Want to Seek Diversity in Your Church," Facts & Trends, August 29, 2018, <https://factsandtrends.net/2017/02/09/may-not-want-seek-diversity-church/>.

Churches who choose to reach out to internationals to the extent they are willing to change worship styles, traditions, and structures, should be prepared for significant discomfort among existing church members. An abundance of leadership books written about creating change in organizations, have a common message: change can be painful.

As Samuel Chand puts it:

It's inevitable, inescapable. By its very nature, leadership produces change, and change — even wonderful growth and progress — always involves at least a measure of confusion, loss, and resistance. To put it the other way: leadership that doesn't produce pain is either in a short season of unusual blessing or it isn't really making a difference.

So, Growth = Change

Change = Loss

Loss = Pain

Thus, Growth = Pain.<sup>167</sup>

Church leaders who wish to make decisions that will change the identity of their fellowship should count the cost. Creating significant change in a church can result in outright opposition. Mark Hearn pastored a mostly affluent, white congregation near Atlanta, Georgia that transitioned into a multicultural church. He warns:

I want to be brutally honest with anyone considering taking the journey of becoming a multicultural church. People will leave! There will be some passive-aggressive types that will simply slip out the side door...and there will be others who will adamantly oppose the process and question the motive of those leading the way.<sup>168</sup>

These pastors make it clear that multiethnic churches have unique difficulties. Longtime church members who have grown comfortable with the status quo may be offended when things begin to change. However, discomfort is sometimes a necessary

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<sup>167</sup> Samuel R. Chand, *Leadership Pain: The Classroom for Growth* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 5.

<sup>168</sup> Mark Hearn, *Technicolor: Inspiring Your Church to Embrace Multicultural Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 150.

part of discipleship. As churches transition to welcome people from other nationalities, the discomfort church members feel can cause them to focus on the kingdom of God instead of their own self-serving expectations. The anxiety related to changes in a congregation can cause members to search the scriptures to seek biblical models of being a church family. Multicultural churches are more than congregations that “look like heaven.”<sup>169</sup> The value of multicultural churches is not in their symbolism, but in their potential to move people from different backgrounds into to a closer walk with Christ.

### **From Missionary Sending Churches to Missional Churches**

One look at the future of the United States reveals a country in transition. Ed Stetzer writes:

We can now view the United States both as a mission force and a mission field. Every wave of immigrants to the United States has decisively enriched the mosaic of American Christianity and in turn shaped our global engagement. The diverse heritage and vibrant contemporary expressions of Asian, African, and Latino Christianity (with their deep spirituality, family-centered ethic, multicultural competency, willingness to suffer for the gospel, and mission in a multi-religious context) has much to contribute to American Christianity in the 21st century.<sup>170</sup>

Christians who have memorized Acts 1:8 should realize that the “ends of the earth” have moved into to their neighborhoods. Instead of putting foreign missionaries on a pedestal, church leaders can partner with missionaries in order to train church members in cross-cultural methods of evangelism and discipleship. In addition to raising funds to support missionaries, churches can fund cross-cultural ministry in their communities.

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<sup>169</sup> "Looking Like Heaven," PENews, November 28, 2018, <https://news.ag.org/news/looking-like-heaven>.

<sup>170</sup> "Diaspora Missions: East Meets West (and North Meets South ...," Christianity Today, accessed December 9, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2016/october/diaspora-missions-east-meets-west-and-north-meets-south-ref.html>.

Instead of churches being impressed that a missionary can speak a foreign language, churches will begin to teach language classes to members seeking to engage internationals in their heart language. Instead of racing the other churches to be the first to plant a congregation in a new, affluent neighborhood, churches will focus on planting churches in sections of town filled with families from non-Christian backgrounds. Churches will become “missional” when members see themselves as missionaries to neighbors who do not know Jesus. Below are four real examples of how individual Christians and churches refocused their view of missions.

### *Randy and Mary Make a Move*

When Randy and his wife Mary (names changed for reasons of privacy) retired, they decided to sell their home and relocate to North Dallas to be a part of their grandchildren’s lives. One day they agreed to go on a tour of the area with a realtor. They had in mind a location near their family members. This was a safe neighborhood with affordable housing prices. The relator told them, “you don’t want to buy a house in that neighborhood, most of the people who live there are from India.” As those words sank in, Randy and Mary thought about all of the church mission trips they had taken over the years. They had traveled to Asia in order to share the gospel. Why would they not want to live in a neighborhood full of Hindu families? Against the advice of the realtor, Randy and Mary bought the house.

As Randy and Mary settled into their new home, they grew to love their Hindu neighbors. These families were warm and friendly to their new Christian neighbors. Last November, their doorbell rang one evening. At the door was an Indian family. These neighbors were dressed in ornate outfits from their homeland, celebrating the Hindu

holiday known as Diwali. The neighbors had come to offer traditional pastries to all of their neighbors, including Randy and Mary. A few weeks later, Randy and Mary reciprocated. One night, they baked cookies, obtained Jesus film DVDs in multiple South Asian dialects, dressed up in fancy Christmas clothes, and went door to door in their neighborhood. They told their Indian neighbors that they wanted to share the Christmas holiday with by giving them Christmas cookies with the DVD. Some neighbors were suspicious of a movie called, “Jesus,” but were excited to see it was in their home language.

Randy and Mary continue to look for opportunities to be witnesses in the neighborhood where God has led them. Randy told me that he believes that “God brought my neighbors here to America to hear the gospel, I need to be faithful and share it with them.”<sup>171</sup>

### *Rose’s Story*

Rose (name changed for security reasons) was born to a Muslim family overseas. She immigrated with them to the United States when she was a young teen. When Rose became an adult, she had many questions about the Muslim faith. Rose did not speak Arabic, so the words that she recited at the mosque held little meaning to her. She had a well-paying job and worked hard, but she was lonely.

One day, Rose’s neighbor, Amy (name changed for security reasons) invited her to come over for a meal with friends. She accepted the invitation. When Rose arrived, she slowly realized this was more than a dinner; it was a weekly home group from Pantego

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<sup>171</sup> Personal Interview, Randy and Mary (pseudonyms), December 16, 2018.



Bible Church in Arlington, Texas. This group met each Sunday night to discuss that morning's sermon. Rose began attending the group weekly and was surprised at how warmly she, a Muslim woman, was treated by this group of Christians. A year after her first visit to the "dinner" at Amy's home, Rose asked Amy for a Bible. Rose started reading the Psalms and was amazed at how beautifully the scriptures portrayed God's love. Weeks later, Amy invited Rose to attend a Christian women's event. Rose reluctantly agreed to attend. This event was Rose's first experience visiting a worship service at a church. She was moved deeply by the music at the event. Rose soon decided to follow Jesus. For Rose, it was not an organized ministry that led her to Christ. It was the experience of being invited to the home of a neighbor.<sup>172</sup>

#### *A Church Changing with their Neighborhood*

Over the years, leaders of Murphy Church, located in east of Plano, Texas, looked around them and saw their neighborhood changing. Historically, this was a mostly white church, but many Indian, Vietnamese, and Latino families began to purchase homes in the community. While many churches might follow the "white flight" to another part of town, Murphy Church was led to develop ministries to reach their new neighbors. Today, Murphy Church has between 400 and 500 in attendance in their Sunday worship services, which are attended by people from a variety of ethnicities.

Murphy holds an additional worship service for South Asians with over 100 in attendance. The service is in English, but it is led by an Indian pastor who shapes the elements of the service to meet the needs of South Asians in their community. The church

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<sup>172</sup> Personal Interview with Rose (pseudonym), March 9, 2018.

also hosts a Spanish-language service after the main service. Some Latino parents bring their children and youth to Murphy's Sunday School program while they attend the English worship service. Afterward, the entire family attends the Spanish service together. Murphy Church also sponsors a Vietnamese house church that sometimes meets at a local Vietnamese community center.

### *Ning's Story*

I met Ning (name changed for security reasons) at Southcliff Church at our English as a Second Language (ESL) ministry. Ning was a schoolteacher from Beijing who was spending a few months in Texas to study teaching methods. One of our ESL teachers, Beth (name changed for privacy) felt God leading her to spend time with Ning. Beth began inviting Ning over to her home for coffee, and eventually they began to study the Bible together. After several weeks, Ning told Beth that God was speaking to her and she wanted to place her faith in Jesus. Because of Beth's willingness to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, Ning gave her life to Jesus. I was able to baptize Ning before she returned to China as a Christ-follower.

## **The Next Great Missions Movement**

I believe the next great mission movement will happen when churches transition from being supporters of overseas missionaries into being directly engaged in mission work in their own communities. Reaching the nations who reside in our cities takes more than the creation of a few programs. For churches, taking risks is an essential element in the process of moving from being "mission-minded" to becoming "missional." Missional churches see themselves as home bases for cross-cultural missionary work in their

communities. For these churches, their identity does not come from having the best worship band, the most beautiful church building, or the most popular celebrity preacher. Missional churches get excited about seeing people from non-Christian backgrounds place their faith in Christ. They celebrate their role as being on the front lines of the kingdom of God, sharing the gospel with members of unreached people groups living in their communities. Missional churches are committed to the long process of encouraging members to form relationships with newcomers to America. Instead of looking for quick results, church members are coached on how to be “salt and light”<sup>173</sup> where God leads them. Missional churches are committed supporters of overseas missionaries; however, these churches see missionaries as coworkers in Christ instead of spiritual superheroes placed on a pedestal.

Six years after young William Carey was silenced and humiliated at a ministers’ meeting, he stood before another group of pastors in Nottingham, England. This time, he was prepared to boldly proclaim what was on his heart. Carey called for churches to move out of a place of complacency in order to reach the nations for Christ. The sermon was entitled, “Attempt Great Things, Expect Great Things.”<sup>174</sup> Carey’s words are an appropriate challenge to today’s evangelical leaders who wish to create a new missions movement. Leading a congregation to take the love and message of Christ to their foreign-born neighbors is no simple task. Even so, we know that God is with those who

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<sup>173</sup> Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV).

<sup>174</sup> “An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens,” accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/expect/expect.htm>.

attempt audacious things for His kingdom. Missional churches can indeed expect great things from God.

## SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The artifact attached to this dissertation is the proposal for a book entitled: *Reaching the World (across the street)*. There have been many academic books written about missiology, diaspora peoples, multiethnic churches, as well as books that target specific groups (like university students or refugees). Large churches with several full-time staff can afford a “Missions Pastor” to sift through resources to develop and implement strategic ministries to internationals in their communities. However, most churches in America have a weekly attendance of less than 100.<sup>175</sup> Some overworked pastors may notice international families moving into their city but have little surplus time available to read an academic book about diaspora missiology. *Reaching the World (across the street)* targets both busy church leaders and ordinary church members who seek practical ways to share the love and message of Jesus with internationals without having to sift through a lot of theoretical content.

Some of the books about diaspora mission work in the U.S. claim to be “practical,” but contain very few specific ideas and ministry options. *Reaching the World (across the street)* will provide some introductory material about the urgency of reaching out to internationals in the United States. This is meant to enlighten and inspire the reader. However, the heart of the book will focus on descriptions of practical ministries to be developed by individual Christians or entire congregations.

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<sup>175</sup> Russell Lievers, "Majority of American Churches Fall Below 100 in Worship Attendance," Facts & Trends, June 22, 2017, <https://factsandtrends.net/2016/02/24/majority-of-american-churches-fall-below-100-in-worship-attendance/>.

It would be an understatement to say that immigration is a hot topic in today's political climate. There are many books available about a Christian's role when approaching controversial political issues. Most of them lean toward either a left-wing audience or a right-wing audience. *Reaching the World (across the street)* takes the approach that individual Christian's political ideology should not change the church's role in caring for and evangelizing internationals. In other words, my goal is to write this book in a way that both conservative and progressive Christians will find its content both biblical and reasonable.

*Reaching the World (across the street)* will be written in a "common voice" to make it readable to a wide audience of readers. It will include a variety of special sections, including inspiring testimonies of foreign-born people giving their lives to Jesus while in the U.S. as a result of cross-cultural ministry. The preceding dissertation makes the bold assertion that cross-cultural ministry should not be delegated to a few elite experts. *Reaching the World (across the street)* is meant to be a tool to help evangelical Christians across America get involved in ministry to internationals.

## SECTION 5:

### BOOK PROPOSAL

**Title:** *Reaching the World (across the street)*

**Author:** Stu Cocanougher, 4100 SW Loop 820, Fort Worth, TX 76109, stu@southcliff.com, (817) 924-2241, stu@southcliff.com

**Overview:** The United States has more immigrants than any other country in the world, yet evangelical churches in America have a history of delegating cross-cultural ministry to missionaries overseas. This book is a practical handbook to assist local churches in developing ministries to foreign-born people living in our midst.

**Purpose:** There are several books written about diaspora missiology, the theology of migrant ministry, and multiethnic churches. Most of these books spend the majority of their pages focused on theory. The purpose of *Reaching the World (across the street)* is to be a practical handbook to not only cover the “why” of cross-cultural ministry but also to address some of the “how.” In addition to this, *Reaching the World (across the street)* will contain a collection of testimonies of internationals who were led to Christ by ordinary church members.

**Promotion and Marketing:** Endorsements may be sought from evangelical leaders who have a relationship with the author, including Mark DeYmaz (President, Mosaix Network), Richard Ross (author and speaker), Mark Matlock (author, speaker, American Bible Society board member), Randel Everett (President of 21<sup>st</sup> Wilberforce Initiative), and David Garrison (author, missionary, and executive director of Global Gates). This book could be promoted at conferences focused on

missions, church planting, and multiethnic ministry. Social media marketing could be used to reach church leaders in cities with a high concentration of internationals.

**Competition:** Among the books on this topic, the most popular include, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration and Mission* by J.D. Payne (2012), and *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* (2016) by Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Dr Issam Smeir. Both of these books successfully make the case that Christians should reach out to immigrants and refugees. However, they offer few practical solutions regarding how to accomplish this. *Reaching the World (across the street)* will complement these books by moving from the “why” to the “how.”

**Book Format:** The format of this book is intended to be a softcover, easy to access handbook. *Reaching the World (across the street)* should have a feel similar to the popular “Dummies” books available on a variety of subjects. Colored ink, photography, illustrations, and special sections will help make this book an easy read with interesting, practical content.

### **Chapter Outlines:**

#### **INTRODUCTION: The World Across the Street**

This section will open the readers’ eyes to the current state of immigration in America. The purpose and intended audience are clearly stated. The goal is to pique the interest of readers who are interested in developing ministries to internationals.



**CHAPTER ONE: Erasing the Line Between Local Church Ministry and Foreign Missions**

This chapter will make the connection between foreign missions and cross-cultural ministry in the United States. Facts and figures will be utilized to communicate the scope of the need for more ministries focused on internationals.

**CHAPTER TWO: Barriers to Cross-Cultural Ministry**

This chapter will discuss the hurdles to overcome before developing ministries to internationals.

**CHAPTER THREE: Preparing for Ministry to Internationals**

This chapter is specifically written to church leaders who seek practical ways to prepare a congregation for future ministry to internationals.

**CHAPTER FOUR: Developing Ministries to Engage Internationals**

This is the heart of the book. This chapter lists practical ideas of ministries churches and individual Christians can implement to connect with internationals.

**CHAPTER FIVE: Cross-Cultural Ministry Concepts**

This chapter identifies basic concepts ministry leaders will want to understand before engaging in ministry to internationals.

**CHAPTER SIX: Sharing the Good News with Internationals**

This chapter is dedicated to cross-cultural evangelism strategies and concepts.

**CHAPTER SEVEN: Cooperating with Ethnic Believers**

This chapter explores concepts related to supporting immigrant Christians. Various models of immigrant churches are mentioned.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: Becoming a Church Family that Looks Like Heaven**

This final chapter discusses the option of being a multi-cultural, “One Family” church.

## **CONCLUSION: A Second Modern Missionary Movement**

The book concludes by arguing that mission work targeted to diaspora people is a much-needed revision in the evangelical concept of foreign missions.

**Intended Readers:** The primary audience is both church leaders and individual Christians who seek to engage in global mission work in their neighborhoods. A secondary audience would be seminary students who are studying diaspora missiology.

**Manuscript:** In the completed form, this book could contain around 30,000 words. It could be finished by Spring of 2019.

**Author Bio:** Stu Cocanougher has been involved in ministry for over 30 years in evangelical churches in Texas, Washington DC, the Philippines, and England. He has a Master of Divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (1992), and anticipates being awarded a Doctor of Ministry degree from Portland Seminary in 2019. The author is involved with missions partnerships in San Francisco, Baltimore, Hong Kong, Serbia, Zambia, Taiwan, and other locations around the world. Stu lives in Fort Worth, Texas with his wife, Jana, and has two adult children.

## POSTSCRIPT

I feel strongly that the evangelical church is missing a divine opportunity to reach internationals in the United States. I chose the Track Two option for my dissertation because I wanted to create a resource to help change the status quo. Over the past two and a half years, I have researched local church ministry to internationals via the program at Portland Seminary. I have read many books and articles lending me insight into effective ministry to newcomers to America. However, I realize many busy pastors and church leaders do not read many dissertations over the course of a year. For this reason, I chose to adapt my research and experiences into a book, *Reaching the World (across the street)*. My goal is to present the material in a way that gives readers an overview of the urgency of the situation, along with practical ideas of how to get started.

While writing a traditional (Track One) dissertation would have allowed me to develop some of my thinking with more detail, I wanted to write a book that would be more accessible to those outside of academic life. While some of this information could have been placed on a website, a book is still one of the best ways to inspire and inform. I can easily see a pastor handing this book to a key lay leader interested in starting a new ministry to internationals. Being a photographer, I also considered a photo exhibit; however, the nature of cross-cultural conversions involves a lot of security and privacy concerns. A photo exhibit would probably compromise the identity of immigrants who have a fear of persecution because of their decision to follow Christ.

I started this program with personal experience related to my church's ministries with refugees. Over the past two years, I have realized that many evangelical churches in America have the potential to evangelize and disciple internationals. Unfortunately,

many church leaders are overextended with their day-to-day ministry activities.

Nevertheless, I feel that international ministry might be a solution to some of the lack of growth in majority white or majority African-American churches. If I were to continue my research, I would want to conduct more interviews with internationals who have come to Christ in the United States. This research could either be utilized in a stand-alone book, or perhaps a YouTube channel with video testimonies. The purpose would be to share inspirational stories of how ordinary Christians have had a global impact by sharing their faith with internationals.

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# REACHING THE WORLD

*across the street*

How You Can Participate in Global Missions Without Leaving Your Community



**Stu Cocanougher**

## NOTES:

- All scripture is quoted from the New International Version of the Bible.
- All photography, unless noted, is royalty free and taken from [www.pixabay.com](http://www.pixabay.com)
- I currently serve as the Share Strategy Pastor at Southcliff Church, in Fort Worth, Texas.  
Any reference to “our church” or “my church” refers to Southcliff. For more information about Southcliff, visit [www.southcliff.com](http://www.southcliff.com).

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## INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD ACROSS THE STREET

Southcliff Church, where I serve, has been in existence for over 50 years. For most of its history, the majority of the church members were from the same ethnic background, and most of them have been born in America. In the past decade, the makeup of our city has become more diverse. More specifically, Fort Worth has experienced a lot of growth from foreign-born families. Some factors that have contributed to this dynamic include:

- An increase in international students at local universities.
- More skilled foreign workers who have found jobs in local businesses, factories, and hospitals.
- We are a border state and have many immigrants (legal and unauthorized) from Latin America.
- A large number of refugees have been resettled in Fort Worth.

Our church is fortunate to be situated across the street from an apartment complex where a lot of refugees and other newcomers to America choose to live. You can actually stand in our church parking lot and see Arabic children playing on the other side of the road.

Other churches may face similar dynamics. For some, it is the proximity to a university that brings internationals to their doorsteps. For others, it is seasonal workers in agriculture or tourism. Some urban areas have seen the demographics of their neighborhood change almost overnight. Congregations who have spent years teaching and praying about foreign missions might find their community inhabited by new families who are Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh. If your church is located in a community where there are newcomers to America, **this book was written for you**. It is my desire to inspire pastors, lay leaders, and ordinary Christians to develop strategies to engage internationals in fruitful ministry.

There are hundreds of books written about evangelism, discipleship, worship, and congregational life. Yet, most of them assume a Western culture and worldview. They are written to American Christians who wish to minister to people like them...people who grew up in the United States. There are also a lot of books written about missiology – reaching people for Jesus in foreign lands. These cross-cultural ministry methods are usually thought of as information for foreign missionaries serving overseas...not for local churches and “ordinary” Christians living in America.

A current trend in evangelicalism in America has been the “multi-racial” church movement, now known as the “multiethnic” church movement. Much which has been written in this area has dealt with racial reconciliation and the integration of black, white, Hispanic, and Asian Americans into a local church with a blend of subcultures. I have read many of these books. However, many of these books are academic writings which are high on theory and ministry philosophy.

I am a full-time missions pastor at a large, multi-staff church. Even so, I realize that 94% of protestant churches in America have an average attendance of less than 100.<sup>1</sup> The reality is that many church leaders are overworked and under-resourced. If a bunch of families from Congo, Afghanistan, or India moved into their neighborhood, I would assume that many church leaders would feel a burden to reach out to them but might not know where to start. In the same way, God often moves in the lives of individual Christians to share the love and message of Jesus outside of the realm of official church ministries.

My goal is to help churches, small groups, and individual Christians to be able to reach foreign-born people who are now living in America. They may be immigrants, students, seasonal workers, tourists, refugees, asylum seekers, spouses of citizens, work visa holders, unauthorized immigrants, green card recipients, and those who are seeking

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<sup>1</sup> Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their Characteristics and Cultural Context, [http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast\\_facts.html](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html).

green cards. There is a wide assortment of words that are used to identify these people. Some labels, like “foreigners” or “aliens,” have negative connotations. Other words, like “refugees,” are very specific. The two terms that I prefer to use are “international,” (used as a noun) and “newcomer to America.” These terms are open to anyone who comes to America, whether they be immigrant, temporary worker, student, or tourist.

It is difficult for anything to be written about immigration in America without the insertion of politics into the conversation. On that note, I would like to be clear. Christians who come from a more conservative background might differ with Christians who come from a more progressive background on many areas regarding immigration policy, refugee resettlement, work visas, etc. There are numerous books written from a wide variety of perspectives on the “shoulds” and “should nots” regarding immigration. This is not the subject matter of this book. The Bible is clear that, no matter what choices a government makes, the mission of the church is unchanging. Christians are to show loving hospitality to immigrants and strangers (Leviticus 24:22, Zechariah 7:8-10, Matthew 25:31-46, Hebrews 13:1-2). We are also commanded to share with everyone the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. It is my goal for this book to be utilized by Christians whose commitment to Jesus overshadows their political perspectives.

The ultimate goal of this book is to encourage evangelical Christians to engage in ministry with newcomers to America--to see lost men, women, and children come to Christ, and to see brothers and sisters find a church home.

## **CHAPTER ONE: ERASING THE LINE BETWEEN LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRY AND FOREIGN MISSIONS**

### **ABU**

Abu was an English professor at a college in Bagdad, Iraq. He and his wife, Fatima, had two young children. One day, Abu was approached by the authorities to come to work as a translator for the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. Since the enrollment at his University was down, working for the Americans seemed like a good option.

Abu enjoyed his work for the Embassy, but it came with a price. Some of the people in his neighborhood called him a “traitor.” Occasionally, he received death threats slid under the door to his home. Fatima was worried for the safety of Yousef and Aisha, their son and daughter. Abu shared his fears with his American coworkers, and he was offered a proposition. If Abu were to continue working for the United States, his supervisor would begin processing the paperwork for Abu and his family to immigrate to the U.S. under a special visa program. After a year-long process of interviews and security checks, Abu and his family boarded a plane headed for the United States. Abu and Fatima were settled by a refugee resettlement agency in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Abu found a job stocking shelves at a grocery store. While he was glad to be working, Abu was frustrated. Being a former college professor, Abu felt strange working alongside young men and women the age of his former students. Yet, he was glad that his family was safe. Abu was overwhelmed with all of the stress. Fatima was becoming depressed because she missed her family in Iraq. When they came to America, they assumed that they would make lots of new American friends. In actuality, they felt isolated and alone.

## LI JING

Li Jing is a Sophomore at a prominent university in Nashville, Tennessee where she studies business. Her father owns a sporting goods factory in Shanghai. Li Jing is a student and hopes to take over the family business someday. Even though Li Jing is proficient in English, most of her friends at school are also Chinese.

Li Jing's roommate, Carol, is from Memphis. They are polite to one another but do not have much of a relationship since Li Jing is usually in the library or hanging out with Chinese friends. Every morning, Li Jing notices Carol studying the same book as soon as she wakes. Curious, Li Jing asks Carol what class has her studying so hard. Carol laughs and tells Li Jing that her reading has nothing to do with school. Carol explains that she is a Christian and that she reads the Bible every morning. This is confusing to Li Jing. Growing up in China, Li Jing had always been told that Christianity was a superstition held by uneducated peasants. Yet, Carol was a biology major who made excellent grades. Li Jing wondered how Carol could believe in an outdated religion that no credible scientist would ever embrace.

## AJAY

Ajay works in the research and development department of a large tech company in San Jose, California. He was raised in Bangalore, India, but was granted a visa to work in the U.S. once he graduated with a master's degree in computer engineering. Ajay is a newlywed, having married Pari in India last summer. Ajay and Pari have been adjusting to life in America as a young married couple. Ajay worries about Pari. She is a college graduate, but she does not have a work visa. She is at home all day, while he is at work, and always complains about being bored. To pass the time, Pari sometimes has coffee with June, the elderly widow who lives next door. Ajay is afraid that his wife resents him for making her give up her career.

Months later, Ajay noticed an abrupt change in Pari's demeanor. Pari, who had been distant from Ajay over the past several weeks, now seemed happier. When Ajay asks, Pari tells him that she has been studying the Bible with June and that they have been

praying to Jesus together. She tells him that praying to Jesus has given her a feeling of peace. This confused Ajay. Being raised in a strict Hindu family, Ajay did not want his wife to become a Christian, yet he could not deny that he liked the changes that he was seeing in Pari.

## **WELCOME TO AMERICA**

The above three stories are based on authentic situations which are happening in America today. There are more foreign-born people living, working, and studying in the United States than ever before. Many of them come from places in this world where only a small percentage of the population are Christians. They live in our neighborhoods, their children go to the same schools as our children, they may even work alongside us at our jobs. Yet, we see them as “other.” They are foreigners. They have their own customs and their own religion. We know that they need Jesus, but we don’t know where to begin.

## **THE REBUKE THAT BIRTHED A MOVEMENT**

"Sit down, young man; when God pleases to convert the heathen, He'll do it without consulting you or me."<sup>2</sup>

The year was 1785. William Carey was a young pastor attending a local minister's meeting in England. When the pastors were asked for suggestions as to the topic of that day's discussion, Carey proposed that they discuss the responsibility of Christians to reach the nations with the gospel. While the topic of foreign missions would be taken as a positive topic of discussion with evangelicals today, the religious and social environment that Carey faced was very different. In the late 1700s, Carey's denomination had embraced a theological belief where they believed that evangelism was unimportant. At the same time, England was reeling from two painful overseas defeats...the loss of a bloody war with France, and the forfeiture of their thirteen

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel, J. T. K., and Roger E. Hedlund. Carey's obligation and India's renaissance. Serampore, West Bengal: Council of Serampore College, 1993, 11.

colonies in North America. The last thing that these English pastors wanted to talk about was sending their church members on ships to faraway lands.

John Ryland Sr., a prominent minister at the meeting, issued the command to “sit down.” Ryland intended to put young Carey in his place. Instead, these words of rebuke were a catalyst that lit a fire within William Carey. Carey’s response was to write one of the most significant treatises ever written to challenge the church to engage in foreign missions: ***An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens.***<sup>3</sup> This booklet, and Carey’s subsequent life’s work as a pioneer missionary in India, influenced future missionaries for decades.



William Carey: The Shoemaker Who Became the Founder of Modern Missions  
John Brown Myers; London 1887. Public Domain via Wikipedia

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<sup>3</sup> William Carey, *Enquiry to the obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (S.I.: Outlook Verlag, 2018).13.

## OUR LEGACY OF TAKING CHRIST TO THE NATIONS

Carey's "Enquiry" was based on Matthew 28:18-20, popularly known as "The Great Commission." In this passage, the resurrected Jesus gives a command to His followers to "go and make disciples of all nations." This is reinforced by similar accounts of Jesus' instructions in Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20, and Acts 1. These are not the only references to evangelizing the nations in the Bible. In Genesis 12:3, God tells Abram "...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." In Psalm 46:10, God is proclaimed to be "exalted among the nations." In Acts 2:5-11, the gospel is being proclaimed at Pentecost to God-fearing Jews "from every nation under heaven." In Acts 10, God reveals to Peter that the gospel was also meant for the Gentiles. In Romans 10:13-15, Paul challenges the church to send preachers by asking, "How can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?" Finally, God's promise to Abraham is revealed in Revelation 7:9 as Heaven is described with "...a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb..." These passages are a reminder that global evangelism is a core part of the identity of a Christ follower.

Bringing the gospel to the nations is nothing new. The book of Acts tells of Paul's missionary journeys. The Apostle Paul and his cohorts, including Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, and others, took the gospel across the Mediterranean to areas including modern-day Syria, Turkey, Italy, Greece, and possibly Spain. Christian tradition tells us that the Apostle Phillip brought the gospel to Carthage in Africa (Tunisia) and Thomas took the gospel to India where he baptized many but was eventually martyred. Furthermore, Thomas's followers are believed to have been the first to take the gospel to China. In India today, there is a Christian denomination of "Thomas Christians" who claim to be the descendants of these first-century converts.<sup>4</sup> From the first century until modern

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<sup>4</sup> Lynn Johnson, Paul Zacharia, "The Surprisingly Early History of Christianity in India," Smithsonian.com, February 19, 2016, accessed January 08, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/how-christianity-came-to-india-kerala-180958117/>.



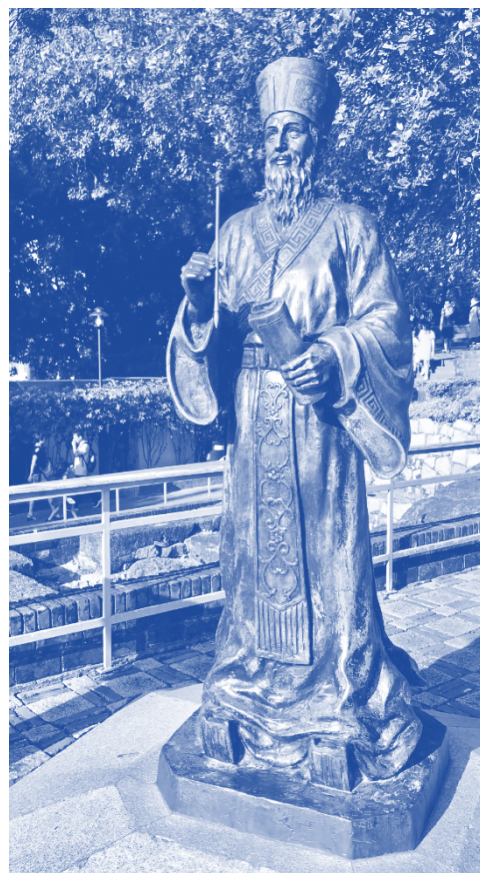
times, the church has been engaged in global missions. The task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth is a part of the core DNA of the evangelical church.

SPECIAL SECTION:

### **A Brief History of Christian Missions**

As we look at church history, some men and women stand out in their heroic efforts to take the gospel to the nations.

- In 1541, Francis Xavier, one of the co-founders of the Jesuit order, left Portugal to plant churches in India. Xavier later engaged in mission work in Malacca (modern-day Indonesia) and Japan.<sup>5</sup>
- Forty years later, another Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, arrived in Macau and took the gospel to China. Ricci became fluent in the Chinese language and created a lexicon which he used to translate scripture into Chinese. Ricci was an accomplished scientist and adopted the dress of a Chinese scholar. He was the first Westerner ever to be given access to the Forbidden City by the emperor.<sup>6</sup>
- In 1722, the Moravians, a group descended from the martyred reformer, Jan Hus, arrived at the estate of German royal, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Soon, revival broke out among the Moravians. In 1731, Zinzendorf traveled to Copenhagen to attend the coronation



Statue of Matteo Ricci, Macau.

Photo by Stu Cocanougher, 2018

<sup>5</sup> Chris Lowney, *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company That Changed the World* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2005), 131-137.

<sup>6</sup> Lowney. 74-81

of the King of Denmark. At the event, Zinzendorf met Anthony Ulrich, a converted slave from the West Indies. The count was greatly moved by this freedman's plea to send someone to share the gospel with his people. Upon return to Germany, where Zinzendorf encouraged two young Moravians, Leonard Dober, and David Nitchmann, to travel to St. Thomas in order to live among the slaves and preach the gospel. Zinzendorf himself was engaged in mission work in America. Zinzendorf and the Moravians had a significant impact on John and Charles Wesley, founders of the Methodist Church.<sup>7</sup>

- In 1792, the previously mentioned William Carey co-founded the Baptist Missionary Society. A year later William, his wife Dorothy, and their children arrived in Calcutta, India. Carey spent 40 years in India where he translated the Bible into several languages and formed a mission that saw over 700 converts.<sup>8</sup>
- In 1812, Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann left America to become missionaries in Burma. In encountering William Carey's followers in Calcutta, Judson was decided to become a Baptist. Judson went on to see great success in Burma and translated the entire Bible into the Burmese language.<sup>9</sup> Today, Burmese Christians still use his translation.
- In 1841, David Livingstone, a Scottish Missionary, arrived in Capetown, South Africa. While Livingstone's legacy is connected more to his exploration and his passion to see an end to the African slave trade, Livingstone was an inspiration to generations of missionaries who caught a vision to reach people in the interior of the African continent.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Janet Benge and Geoff Benge, Count Zinzendorf: Firstfruit (Seattle, WA: YWAM Pub., 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Timothy George, Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey (United States: Christian History Institute in Association with Samford University, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Janet Benge and Geoff Benge, Adoniram Judson: Bound for Burma (Seattle, WA: YWAM Pub., 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Janet Benge and Geoff Benge, David Livingstone: Africa's Trailblazer (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Pub., 2009).

- In 1854, Hudson Taylor arrived in China and made waves with the local missionaries by adopting the traditional Chinese dress, something that Ricci had done centuries before. He formed the China Inland Mission along with his wife, Maria, whom he met on the mission field. During the Boxer Rebellion, 58 of Taylor's CIM missionaries were murdered, along with 21 of their children. Yet, the organization pressed on and is known today as the Overseas Missionary Fellowship.<sup>11</sup>
- Charlotte "Lottie" Moon arrived in China in 1873. She labored for 39 years, mostly in China's Shantung province. She was an avid letter writer, and her letters were collected by Southern Baptist women in the United States, who utilized them to raise money for foreign missions. Today, the "Lottie Moon Christmas Offering" is one of the largest missions offerings in the world.<sup>12</sup>
- The "Student Volunteer Movement" of the late 1800s, had its origins in Princeton College, evangelist Dwight L. Moody, and the YMCA. The movement inspired thousands of young adults to serve on the foreign mission field. It was a significant force in global missions up until the 1920s.<sup>13</sup>
- In the mid to late 20th Century, many nondenominational missional organizations formed and engaged in significant mission work overseas. Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru), Youth with a Mission, World Vision, Compassion International, World Relief, and others have made a significant impact globally.

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<sup>11</sup> Janet Bengé and Geoff Bengé, *Hudson Taylor: Deep in the Heart of China* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Pub., 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *10 Who Changed the World* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2012), 47-68.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Parker, "Mobilizing a Generation for Missions," *Christian History | Learn the History of Christianity & the Church*, March 02, 2016, accessed January 11, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2009/august/mobilizing-generation-for-missions.html>.

## THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL, BUT THE WORKERS STAYED IN AMERICA

For over 200 years, evangelicals in the U.S. have operated under a system in which the job of the local church was to win Americans to Christ, and the job of missionaries was to win foreigners to Christ. Denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God USA, and others, separated their mission efforts into two mission boards. One entity is responsible for missions in the U.S., while the other is responsible for global missions. The terms “foreign missionary” and “home missionary” emerged to designate those who were doing evangelism, church planting, basic needs ministry, etc. in either domestic or international contexts. Denominations created separate missions offerings, one for international missions and one for mission work in the United States. This separation of mission work is based on the premise that most people in the United States speak English, have similar Western values, and have at least a “Christmas and Easter” understanding of who Jesus is. On the other hand, it is assumed that most international missionaries are uniquely gifted men and women who travel to exotic locations in order to share the gospel with followers of other religions.

Over time, the idea of two separate forms of missions has solidified. The foreign missionaries are the heroic pioneers. They are the ones who learn a new language, endure hardship, and make dramatic sacrifices. In contrast, those who do mission work in the U.S. are not considered “real missionaries.” They are often labeled *church planters, social workers, evangelists, and strategists*.

In reality, global missionaries are scarce. By taking numbers from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), an evangelical denomination who lifts up missions as one of their top priorities. The SBC 2017 Annual Church Report states that there are 15,005,638 Southern Baptists. Additionally, this report also states that there are 3,551 overseas missionaries. This means that there is one overseas missionary for every 4,226 members.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Southern Baptist Convention," Southern Baptist Convention The Southern Baptist Convention: A Closer Look, accessed December 29, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/FastFacts.asp>.

To put this in perspective, imagine if 8,452 followers of Jesus gathered on the Mount of Olives with Christ before his ascension. As the crowd listened, Jesus spoke and commanded them all to “go and make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:19). Now imagine if, out of the 8,452 disciples gathered, only one solitary couple steps forth to say, “We will go.” This is a symbol of the current state of the American church. We have made cross-cultural missions something for a select few while most of us are not directly engaged in cross-cultural ministry.



Royalty Free Image by Pixabay – Word Bubbles by Stu Cocanougher, 2018

## SPECIAL SECTION:

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### The World Across the Street: “Poppy”

*This is the first of several true stories which illustrate what can happen when Christians take the Great Commission seriously and seek to reach out to internationals living in their communities. These all come from personal interviews. The names listed in these testimonies have been changed for reasons of security and privacy.*

Poppy’s parents fled war in Cambodia and came to the United States as refugees in the early 1980s. Although Poppy was born in the U.S., she was raised as a “third culture” kid, a U.S. citizen whose parents were foreign-born refugees. Poppy was bilingual, being totally fluent in both her family’s native language and English. Growing up, she practices ancestor worship at the altar in her home and occasionally went with her family to a local Buddhist temple.



As she grew older, Poppy thought all “white people” were Christians. Most of her friends from school were other immigrants. As a high school student, even though she lived in the “Bible Belt,” she was never once invited to a church or Christian youth activity. By the time Poppy graduated high school, she had stopped practicing Buddhism and embraced atheism.

Poppy attended a large, state school where, for the first time, she made friends who were Christians. These friends invited her to a campus Bible study, which she attended out of both curiosity and a longing for friendship. She soon joined a campus ministry team, even though she was still an atheist. This team would go from dorm to dorm offering to take out students’ trash “in Jesus’ name.” The campus ministry leaders were patient and loving to Poppy who joined them in these projects, even though she thought Jesus was a fairy tale. In her mind, she wanted to prove to these Christians that she could be a good servant of others without believing in their religion. Yet, Poppy secretly wondered why her Christian friends truly seemed happy most of the time.

Poppy began attending a weekly worship service at the campus ministry building. She loved the music but was confused by some of the teaching and testimonies. Often times, someone would talk about sin, repentance, and a need for God’s forgiveness. This language was confusing for Poppy, being raised in a Buddhist in a family. She knew that no one was perfect, but the idea of “sins separating us from God,” was difficult for her to grasp.

During Poppy’s sophomore year, she decided that she wanted to figure out why her Christian friends seemed to have joy and peace, something that she deeply wanted in her life. She decided to start praying, “God, help me to understand who you are and what you want me to do.”

One day, Poppy walked over to the campus ministry house. She did not see any of her friends, so she decided to go into the closet which had been set up as a prayer room. In the prayer room, she knelt to pray, then saw a bucket filled with little slips of paper.



Poppy read the sign next to the container which said: "Write Down the Name of a Lost Person to Pray For." Poppy was curious, reached in, and unfolded a slip of paper. When she did, she was startled to see her name. She then reached in and read each of the names listed on the papers. Several times, the name that she uncovered was her own. Poppy thought, "Why does everyone think I am lost?" Not fully understanding, Poppy thought maybe they were out looking for her. Later, a Christian friend explained to her that "lost" meant that she had not yet decided to be a part of God's forever family. Poppy was humbled. She wondered, "are all of my Christian friends praying for me?"

A few weeks later, Poppy attended the campus ministry fall retreat. During one of the worship sessions, the gospel finally made sense. Poppy made the decision to cease her quest to be self-sufficient and gave her life to Jesus. Poppy soon became one of the most evangelistic college students at her university. She began telling most everyone in her family about what God had done in her life.

When I interviewed Poppy, I asked her what advice that she would give Christians when sharing their faith with someone raised in an Asian-Buddhist family. Poppy told me, "Go very slow. Sometimes, well-meaning Christians wanted me to pray a 'prayer of salvation' with them when I did not have a clue who Jesus was. For me, I had to see Christianity lived out before I wanted to hear about the teachings of Christ."



## REVISITING THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:19 is considered to be Christ's *mission statement* to the church as it relates to evangelism. It reads:

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Yet, a closer look at the Greek, “πάντα τὰ ἔθνη” or “panta ta ethne” might be more accurately translated “all of the people groups” or “all ethnic groups.” In our modern mindset, we think of “nations” as geographic places on a map with firm boundaries, constitutions, flags, and national identity. Yet, in the first century, much of the world was made up of ethnolinguistic groups, familial tribes, and small kingdoms that were much different than our contemporary understanding of “nations.”

Why does this matter? Missionaries understand that taking the gospel to several cities in a large nation, such as India, does not mean that the Great Commission has been accomplished there. India has 1,755 distinct ethnic groups. Many of them have their own unique languages. Leading people to Christ into one town in India does not mean that every unique ethnic group in the entire nation has access to the gospel.

Taking this further, there are roughly 17,014 unique people groups in the world today.<sup>15</sup> If Jesus gave us the task of taking the gospel to *all people groups* rather than all nations, then our focus is not on geography, but on ethnicities.

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<sup>15</sup> Joshua Project, "Joshua Project," Joshua Project, accessed December 29, 2018, <https://joshuaproject.net/>.

## A CHANGING AMERICA

The small Tennessee town where I grew up had very little ethnic diversity. I do not remember meeting anyone who spoke a foreign language until I was in college. There were no international restaurants in my hometown, not even a Taco Bell. Things have changed radically since then. On a recent visit to my hometown in Tennessee, I saw a Chinese reflexology salon, an Indian restaurant, and a convenience store with Arabic writing on the sign. The 1970 U.S. Census records only 4.7% of residents in the U.S. as immigrants.<sup>16</sup> By 2016, this percentage had increased to 13.5%.<sup>17</sup> Currently, there are 43.7 million immigrants living in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

### Foreign-born population in the United States, 1850-2016

*Foreign-born population, in millions*

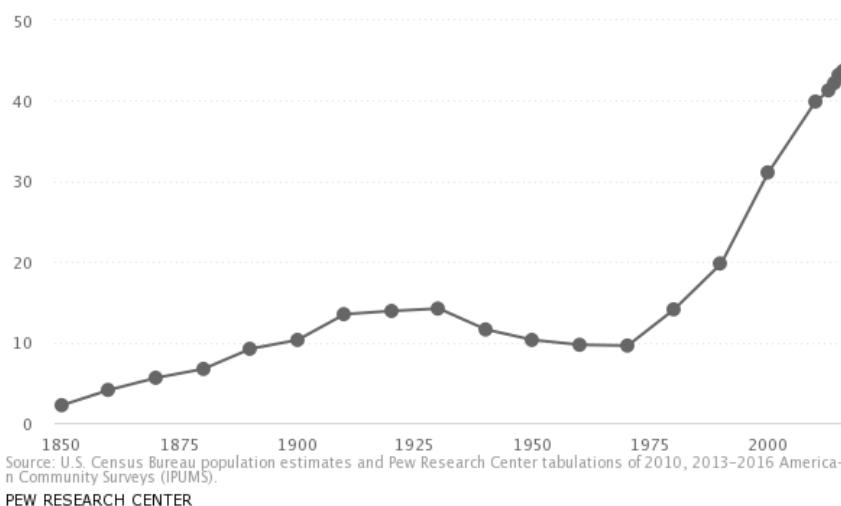


Figure 1. Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 1850 to 2016<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "Chapter 5: U.S. Foreign-Born Population Trends," Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project. September 27, 2015, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/chapter-5-u-s-foreign-born-population-trends/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," Migrationpolicy.org, April 06, 2017, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>.

<sup>18</sup> Abigail Geiger, "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants," Pew Research Center, September 14, 2018, accessed November 21, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/14/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

<sup>19</sup> Jynnah Radford and Abby Budiman, "Immigrants in America: Key Charts and Facts," Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, October 17, 2018, accessed November 21, 2018, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2018/09/14/facts-on-u-s-immigrants/#fb-key-charts-arri>.

To put this in perspective, these numbers are roughly equal to the population of Canada with the population of Hong Kong added to it. When American-born children living in immigrant homes are factored in, this number rises to over 60 million. Altogether, one-fifth of our nation's population is an immigrant or the child of an immigrant.<sup>20</sup>



*The number of immigrants living in the U.S. is roughly equal to the total number of people living in Canada and Hong Kong.*

What is even more remarkable is that many of these families are coming from the same countries where evangelical mission work is either illegal or restricted. For example, in 2016, the top three countries of origin for new immigrants coming into the U.S. was India (126,000), Mexico (124,000), and China (121,000).<sup>21</sup> Both China and India have a history of deporting Christians for engaging in mission work. Surprisingly, more Asians than Hispanics have immigrated into the United States since 2010.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the Pew Research Center predicts that by 2055, Asians will replace Hispanics as the largest minority group in the U.S.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Bedard and Damian Dovarganes, "US Immigration Population Hits Record 60 Million, 1-of-5 in Nation," Washington Examiner, October 16, 2017, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/us-immigration-population-hits-record-60-million-1-of-5-in-nation>.

<sup>21</sup> Abigail Geiger, "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants," Pew Research Center, September 14, 2018, accessed November 21, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/14/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

<sup>22</sup>ibid

<sup>23</sup>"Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 Million to U.S.," Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, June 18, 2018, accessed November 21, 2018, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/modern-immigration-wave-brings-59-million-to-u-s-driving-population-growth-and-change-through-2065/>.

Historically, the United States has led the world in refugee resettlement. Because of this, more and more Americans have neighbors who were born in faraway countries, including Afghanistan, Nepal, Iran, Bangladesh, Burma, Cuba, Sudan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Iraq, and Vietnam. Missiologist J.D. Payne points out that, “The United States has an estimated 360 unreached people groups, making it the country with the third largest number of unreached peoples.”<sup>24</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people have moved from places where evangelism is restricted to the nation with more evangelical churches than any other country. In addition to this, many of America’s universities are now hosting a large percentage of international students. In the 2016-2017 academic year, there was a record 1.08 million international students in the United States.<sup>25</sup>

Today, the U.S. has more Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Confucian, and Muslim families than ever before. Many of these immigrants are from countries where evangelism is severely restricted—countries that are “closed” to traditional missions. For decades, faithful members of our churches have been praying for people from every nation to hear the gospel. *Could it be that God is answering these prayers by bringing the nations to our doorsteps?*



Chris Clayman is a former missionary from North Africa who had to leave the foreign mission field due to serious health issues. After relocating his family to New York in order to assist with a ministry there, he was astounded that the same Muslim people

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<sup>24</sup> "Reaching Unreached Peoples in North America," Missiologically Thinking, September 04, 2015, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.jdpayne.org/2015/09/reaching-unreached-peoples-in-north-america/>

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

group that he had been working with in Africa was living in New York. He and his wife soon picked up where they left off, this time as missionaries to Malian families in New York City.<sup>26</sup>

In 2014 Clayman quoted the son of pioneer missionary, Adoniram Judson, and gave his perspective on this subject...

*It was one hundred years ago that New York pastor Edward Judson said, "Our heavenly Father deemed it wise to put in the hearts of the heathen to come from all parts of the world to our shores, paying their own expenses." Thousands of immigrants flock into our cities every year in search of the American dream. May we not be so wrapped up in the American dream ourselves that we falter an unprecedented opportunity to walk across the street, move to the other side of town, or travel across country to welcome strangers—into our lives and into His kingdom.*<sup>27</sup>

I am not suggesting that churches and parachurch ministries cease sending missionaries overseas. The 10/40 window (countries lying between 10° and 40 ° North latitude) is home to 4.89 billion individuals residing in approximately 17,014 distinct people groups. Of these people groups, 41.4 % are considered "unreached".<sup>28</sup> The reality is that there are millions of people on our planet who will be born, live their lives, and die without ever meeting a follower of Jesus. For the Kingdom of God to grow in these countries, innovative missionaries are needed to move to these countries. Yet, at current levels, these faithful men and women are not numerous enough to be the only Christians engaged in cross-cultural evangelism.

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<sup>26</sup> Chris Clayman, *Superplan: A Journey into God's Story* (Monument, CO: Wigtake Resource, LLC, 2018), 76.

<sup>27</sup> Clayman, Chris. "Great Commission Research Journal." *Reaching the Nations through our Cities*. 6, no. 1 (2014): 6-21.

<sup>28</sup> Joshua Project, "Joshua Project," Joshua Project, accessed December 29, 2018, <https://joshuaproject.net/>.

## WHEN THE “ENDS OF THE EARTH” MOVE TO “JERUSALEM”

Do we really believe that Jesus meant for the Great Commission to look like a professional football game, where a select few players are engaged in the game while a massive crowd cheers them on? There are millions of American Christians who are “fans” of foreign missionaries. They give financially to missions, they pray for missionaries, they may even go on a mission trip. Might God be calling some of them to get involved in cross-cultural ministry in their communities?

Jesus told his followers in Acts 1:8:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*



Over the years, many theologians have made the application that “Jerusalem” represents our hometown, “Judea” is like our region, “Samaria” represents our nation, and “the ends of the earth” refers to global missions. In this interpretation of the Great Commission, Jesus is commanding His church to take the gospel to everyone in the

world. For over 300 years, evangelical missionaries have done just that. They have left their hometowns (Jerusalem) and have traveled to faraway places (ends of the earth) in order to reach people with the gospel and to plant thriving churches. I believe that it is time for the church to start asking these questions:

- What if members of an under-evangelized people group immigrate to America?
- What if Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs come to study at a nearby university?
- What if foreigners who have never heard the gospel come to our towns as seasonal workers?
- What if our new neighbors are immigrants who have never had a friend who was a practicing Christian?
- What if some of my child's elementary school friends are nominally Catholic families who have never heard what it means to be "born again?"
- What if people from the "ends of the earth" move to our "Jerusalem"?

I believe that God might be doing something new in the area of global missions. I envision a day when Christians across America do more than support foreign missions, but actually engage in foreign missions in their own communities.

In a 2016 *Lifeway Research* survey of Senior pastors, 86% of them agreed that "Christians have a responsibility to care sacrificially for refugees and foreigners." Yet, almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them admitted that their church had not even discussed the topic of ministry to foreigners in their community.<sup>29</sup> I believe that it is past time for the church in America to wake up to her role in global missions—not only as senders of missionaries but as a missional force in the world.

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<sup>29</sup> Bob Smietana, "Churches Are Twice as Likely to Fear Refugees as to Help Them," Christian History | Learn the History of Christianity & the Church, May 31, 2017, accessed December 29, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2016/february/churches-fear-refugees-lifeway-survey-world-relief-vision.html>.

SPECIAL SECTION:

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**A Brief History of Immigration in the United States**

The U.S. is famously known as a nation of immigrants. Native Americans are presumed to have migrated across a land bridge from Asia. Explorers, persecuted religious groups, European indentured servants, African slaves, and even deported criminals are all part of the origins of America. From 1880 to 1930, over twenty-three million immigrants came to the United States.<sup>30</sup> As Europe became more industrialized, farmers and unskilled laborers migrated to America in search of work. By 1910, almost one-fourth of the population of American cities was foreign-born.<sup>31</sup>

In the mid 1880s, thousands migrated from Guangdong, China and settled in California, many were fleeing civil war and famine. Some Chinese immigrants became victims of violence in California as locals resented them for taking agriculture jobs. Many Chinese Americans found safety in "Chinatowns." Then, in 1882, the U.S. Congress passed the *Chinese Exclusion Act*, virtually halting immigration from China.<sup>32</sup> This was the first law enacted for the express purpose of preventing a specific ethnic group from immigrating to the United States.

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<sup>30</sup> Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Immigrant America*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> "Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)," Our Documents - Interstate Commerce Act (1887), accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=47>.



Immigration between Mexico and the United States goes back centuries. In 1848, Mexico's northern provinces were ceded to the U.S. at the end of the Mexican-American War. All at once, around 75,000 Mexicans became immigrants to the United States without leaving their homes.<sup>33</sup> However, most immigration ceased after the 1929 stock market crash, and the government deported over 500,000 Mexican-origin U.S. citizens during the Great Depression.<sup>34</sup> With the onset of World War Two, and later the Korean War, migrant workers were once again a necessity. With so many men deployed overseas, immigrants were once again needed to keep the U.S. economy afloat. The 1942 Bracero Program saw an estimated two million Mexicans, mostly men, enter the U.S. to provide labor.<sup>35</sup> After World War Two, provisions were made for immigrants from Europe and the Soviet Union. Moreover, after the revolution in Cuba, hundreds of thousands of refugees escaped to the United States.

By the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement revealed the dramatic disparity between whites and non-whites during a time of postwar prosperity. Attached to new civil rights legislation were laws that reformed immigration. The Immigration Act of 1965 repealed national-origin quotas which had strongly favored white Europeans.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, since 1965, more than half of all immigrants came from Latin America and one-fourth

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<sup>33</sup> "Many Truths," PBS, accessed December 13, 2018, [http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/aftermath/many\\_truths.html](http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/aftermath/many_truths.html).

<sup>34</sup> "In the 1930s, We Illegally Deported 600,000 U.S. Citizens Because They Had Mexican Heritage," Timeline, September 08, 2017, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://timeline.com/in-the-1930s-we-illegally-deported-600-000-u-s-citizens-because-they-had-mexican-heritage-f0c5d589a5c3>.

<sup>35</sup> "Bittersweet Harvest: Introduction/Introducción," National Museum of American History, September 25, 2013, accessed December 13, 2018, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/bracero/introduction>.

<sup>36</sup> *Immigrant America*. 23.

emigrated from Asia.<sup>37</sup> The Pew Foundation estimates that by 2065, there will be 159 million Americans who will be first or second generation immigrants (36% of the total U.S. population).<sup>38</sup> At the 2016 Multiethnic Church Conference, Dr. Soong-Chang Rah stated that if immigration immediately stopped, the U.S. would still become majority non-white in this century because of the higher birth rate of minority groups.<sup>39</sup> This is reinforced by the Pew Research Center, which predicts that by 2065, non-Hispanic white Americans will make up less than 50% of the U.S. population.<sup>40</sup>



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<sup>37</sup> "Latin American, Asian Immigrants Make Up Most of Post-1965 Immigration," Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, September 23, 2015, accessed December 13, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, "Main Session Address," Presentation at the Multi-Ethnic Church Conference, Dallas, Texas, November 2, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> D'Vera Cohn, "Future Immigration Will Change the Face of America by 2065," Pew Research Center, October 05, 2015, accessed January 09, 2019, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/05/future-immigration-will-change-the-face-of-america-by-2065/>.

## CHAPTER TWO: BARRIERS TO CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRY

During William Carey's day, there were theological beliefs which led to his experience of being told to "sit down." Many of Carey's peers rejected foreign missions as an attempt to trust in our own endeavors instead of the divine will of God. Today, there are still many barriers that Christians might face if they attempt to create ministries to people who are new to America. This section will discuss some of those barriers.

### ETHNOCENTRISM

Webster's Dictionary defines "ethnocentrism" as "the attitude that one's own group, ethnicity, or nationality is superior to other."<sup>41</sup>

Ethnocentrism is a common form of bias which most of us exhibit to varying degrees, ranging from preference to prejudice. For example, I might have a love for food which I ate as a child while having an aversion to a type of ethnic food that I have never even tasted. Alternately, those who live in urban areas may be prejudiced against rural people as uneducated "hicks," while those in the country might label city people as weak "snowflakes."

It can be said that Americans grow up in a bubble of sorts that contributes toward ethnocentrism. Part of that is due to our geography. For example, people who grow up in France are surrounded by six different countries. For the French, depending on the direction they drive, one could cross a border and encounter people speaking German, Spanish, Catalan, Italian, or Flemish. Many of our churches are filled with people who have never left the U.S.A. and do not speak a language other than English. We are not accustomed to diversity. Many of us have never had dinner at the home of someone who was not born in America.

As someone who leads church mission trips, I see ethnocentrism surface a lot when people process their experience after international travel, especially when they have just

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<sup>41</sup> "Ethnocentrism," Merriam-Webster, accessed December 30, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethnocentrism>.

returned from a developing nation. After hearing multiple testimonies of “this trip showed me how blessed we are here in America,” I have finally taken steps to proactively help team members see past their ethnocentrism as I encourage them to look for the positive. For example, I share with trip participants that a country may struggle with poverty, injustice, or political instability, yet many nations have a much lower divorce rate than the U.S., and their culture may respect their elderly much more than ours does.

In most American communities that I have been in, churches are less diverse than the shopping mall down the street. Ethnocentrism plays out when church members think to themselves, “Why would I invite her to my church? I am sure that she would rather go to a church with *her people*.” This mentality is solidified among many church leaders by something that many young ministers are taught in seminary... the *homogeneous unit principle*. This idea was first developed by Dr. Donald McGavran, a former missionary to India. McGavran argued that people “...like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers.”<sup>42</sup> McGavran’s ideas were widely spread by church growth specialist, C. Peter Wagner, who taught that churches grew the fastest when they were made up of people from the same cultural, ethnic, and economic background.

In recent years, some church leaders are questioning the homogeneous unit principle. The conversation has moved from “Does it work?” to “Is it biblical?” or even “Is it ethical?” For example, sociologist Michael Emerson found that homogenous churches actually strengthened racial division.<sup>43</sup> It is widely pointed out that the book of Acts (chapters 2, 6, 11, and 16) describes the early church as ethnically diverse. Furthermore, the united body of Christ in Heaven, as described in Revelation 7:9, contained people “from every nation and tribe.” A quick read of Acts and Revelation will illustrate that the church was birthed in diversity and will eventually exist forever in

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<sup>42</sup> Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter. Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 163.

<sup>43</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 161.

diversity. Could it be that many churches have been formed by values which reinforce ethnocentrism? Homogeneous churches may provide an easier path to numerical growth while missing an opportunity to demonstrate to the world that God's kingdom transcends ethnicity.

## **A LEGACY OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC SEGREGATION**

On April 17, 1960, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. summed up the state of American churches on the television show, *Meet the Press*. He said...

*I think that it is one of the tragedies of our nation...that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is ...the most segregated hour in Christian America. I definitely think that the Christian church should be integrated. And any church that stands against integration, that has a segregated body, is standing against the spirit, and the teachings of Jesus Christ.*<sup>44</sup>

It has been more than half a century since Dr. King spoke those words. Yet, in 2010, a survey revealed that only 4 percent of America's churches were classified as "multi-racial."<sup>45</sup> Historically, churches in America were formed by a group of people with a common heritage. For example, a Mennonite church would crop up in a community of Swiss immigrants, while a Catholic church would be formed in an area of town where Polish people lived. In addition to this, racial segregation produced a dynamic in which a white Baptist church would be built on Main Street while a black Baptist church was formed on the outskirts of town.

In the era of racial segregation, black churches became a vital part of the social life of African Americans. For example, Mt. Gilead Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, was

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<sup>44</sup> "April 7 1960 Interview on Meet the Press," Martin Luther King Jr Papers Project, accessed December 20, 2018, [http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document\\_images/Vol05Scans/17Apr1960\\_InterviewonMeetthePress.pdf](http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/Vol05Scans/17Apr1960_InterviewonMeetthePress.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> Information About The Faith Communities Today Project | Faith Communities Today, accessed December 30, 2018, <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faithcommunitiestoday.org/files/2010FrequenciesV1.pdf>.

formed in 1875 by former slaves. In the Jim Crow years, the church constructed an indoor pool because there was not a place in the city where black children were allowed to swim. During the civil rights movement, African American churches provided a much-needed shelter from the storms of society.



It would be naïve to ignore the fact that many churches were formed when America was a more racially segregated society than it is today. For example, our church currently has many married adults whose spouses come from different ethnic backgrounds. In the year that I was born, interracial marriage was a felony in the state of Texas.<sup>46</sup> Creating ministries targeting newcomers to America usually means that a church must be willing to embrace people who come from African, Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern, and European backgrounds. If you are seeking to lead your church to reach out to newcomers to America, you must come to terms with the reality that some in your congregation may have either a passive or active aversion to racial diversity.

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<sup>46</sup> "Miscegenation Laws," Sharetn.gov, accessed December 30, 2018, [https://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/pdfs/Miscegenation laws.pdf](https://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/pdfs/Miscegenation%20laws.pdf).

## VIEWING FOREIGNERS AS ENEMIES

On September 11, 2001, nineteen Middle Eastern men affiliated with the militant Islamist group al-Qaeda, hijacked four commercial airliners and used the planes to attack New York City and Washington D.C. For many Americans, these events changed the way that they viewed Arabic people, especially those who practiced Islam. A few years ago, the apartment complex that is located near our church became the home of many families from Iraq. Many of these families started attending the free English classes our church offers. Because of our quality, loving children's ministry, some of the Iraqi moms started to bring their kids on Sunday mornings. It was not unusual to see a row of Iraqi Muslim women sitting on a front row of our church during Sunday worship. Some of our older church members were unnerved by the sight of women wearing hijabs (Muslim head coverings) in our church services.

Around the same time, our church held a seminar on "Understanding and Reaching Out to Muslims" taught by an expert in that area of ministry. One of our elderly deacons came to that training. This godly man later confided in me, "to be honest, there is a part of me that hates those people. Yet, as a Christian, I realize that I need to learn to love them."

Most violent crimes in American do not make the national news cycle. For example, in 2016, there were 1,224,185 acts of violent crime in the U.S. This included 17,250 murders, including nonnegligent manslaughter.<sup>47</sup> This means that in America, there are an average of 47 murders every day. However, if one of these violent crimes involve a foreign-born person, especially a Muslim person, our emotional hot buttons are pressed. We wonder... "Is this a 'normal' crime or an act of terrorism?"

In addition to the mainstream media, "clickbait" websites, masquerading as legitimate news outlets, play on our fears in order to get us to "click" on their web pages, revealing an abundance of advertising which generates revenue. It is not uncommon for members

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<sup>47</sup> "Committed Crimes in the U.S. in 2017, by Type of Crime | Statistic," Statista, accessed December 31, 2018, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/202714/number-of-committed-crimes-in-the-us-by-type-of-crime/>.

of our churches, even well-meaning ministers, to be spreading inflammatory “news reports” about immigrants on social media that are either skewed or totally false. The end result might be that the negative feelings toward one person might become attached to every member of that ethnic group. I once heard of a World War Two veteran, who had been a prisoner of war in Japan, go through months of anguish after a young Japanese family joined his church. Decades after the war, this man had an overwhelming emotional response to Japanese people, whom he saw as his “enemy.” His negative feelings toward his captors had been transferred to an entire ethnic group.

If your church develops strategies to reach out to newcomers to America, God may bring people to your doorstep who have a wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Is your church ready to embrace families who come from a Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Sikh background? Are the people in your congregation willing to welcome families who come from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East?

## **STEREOTYPING**

When engaging in cross-cultural ministry, one or both of the parties may know very little about the culture of the other. When this happens, we often resort to generalizations and assumptions. Many Americans are not very knowledgeable regarding geography and world cultures. Some Americans feel a need to share what they think they know, often bordering on being offensive. Some examples include: asking someone from Japan if they know Kung Fu (a Chinese martial art), telling someone from Colombia how much you love tacos (which are from Mexico), or asking an Iraqi refugee (who has an advanced degree in electronics) if he has ever seen an iPhone.

The way to avoid stereotyping is to ask appropriate, respectful questions, such as “How long have you lived in our city?” or “Tell me about your family,” or “What do you miss the most about your home country?” Of course, these questions are usually better asked after some relationship has been made. It can be considered rude or suspicious to ask a total stranger about their heritage. You can sometimes avoid stereotyping by listening more and talking less.



## AN ATTITUDE OF NATIONAL SUPERIORITY

Patriotism is a positive value which gives honor to a country's values, heritage, and founders. As Christians, we can celebrate America's accomplishments while refusing to gloss over our faults. However, it is possible that pride in our heritage can evolve into feelings of cultural superiority. Historian Christopher Catherwood warns that national pride can become a "substitute religion."<sup>48</sup>

If you take a walk through the concourse of our church on any Sunday morning, you are likely to hear conversations in Spanish, Korean, Burmese, French, Chinese, Swahili, and a variety of other languages. I see this diversity as a beautiful thing. However, there are some who see foreign-born people as a threat to American culture and values. As Christians, we need to realize that we have an identity which transcends our earthly allegiances. While we need to be good citizens of our nation (Matthew 22:21), we must also realize that our primary citizenship is in a heavenly kingdom. This kingdom is ruled by a loving God "...who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

If you examine the scriptures, you will see a great drama unfold when you focus on the concept of "nations." The same God who created the different nations at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11), sent His Son to redeem all nations (John 3:16-17). His Son then sent his disciples "into all of the world" (Mark 16:15), in order to draw all nations to the Father (Revelation 7:9). We are all a part of the same family, a "holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). God's word declares that all earthly nations will pass away, but the Kingdom of God is forever (Matthew 24:35).

Feelings of national superiority may be a barrier to effective outreach to those who were not born in the United States. Church leaders need to wisely navigate this path as they guide their congregations in this area. Christians can love their country without putting it on such a high pedestal that it overshadows our identity as loyal subjects of the King of Kings.

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<sup>48</sup> Christopher Catherwood, *Whose Side Is God On?: Nationalism and Christianity* (New York: Church Pub., 2003), 5.

## SPECIAL SECTION:

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### The World Across the Street: “Amin”

Amin was born in a strict Muslim country in the Middle East. He was raised a Muslim but stopping practicing Islam when he left for law school. At the University, Amin became friends with older students and professors who were advocating for increased human rights in their country. For example, Amin questioned why it should be lawful in his country for a 9-year-old girl to get married.



Amin was such an exceptional student that when he graduated, he was offered a teaching position at the University. One of the subjects that Amin taught was human rights. As time passed, Amin became conflicted about what he was teaching. The more Amin learned about human rights in the West, the more that he felt that his country’s definition of “human rights” was lacking.

Eventually, Amin and some of the other like-minded professors began teaching their students about how their country’s injustices against women would not be tolerated in much of the world. This caught the eye of government officials. One by one, Amin saw his friends being arrested for saying things that the government did not like. Amin knew that he was next. His mother told him to leave the country before he was arrested. Amin quickly left his homeland, giving the excuse that he was invited to study in another country. Eventually, he came to the U.S. as a political refugee via the United Nations.

Having good English skills, Amin quickly found a job and settled into life in the United States. However, Amin was shocked by his American coworkers. From his perspective,

these men and women grew up having more freedom than people in his home country could ever imagine. Sadly, they used this freedom to get caught up in addictions and unhealthy relationships. Amin began to feel depressed. He left his family and his home to come to America, a land of freedom, only to become disillusioned by it all. Amin began to feel that life was meaningless.

Around this time, Amin was asked by a local Christian ministry to help them as a translator with immigrants who spoke his language. By this point, Amin had no use for religion in his life, but he agreed to help out as a translator. Amin was amazed at the way that these new Christian friends talked about God. The God that Amin grew up worshipping was a God of fear and punishment. These Christians talked about a God who gave them joy and love. Intrigued, he began to ask these new friends about their ideas about God. They instructed him to study the Bible for answers.

As a lawyer, Amin began comparing the rules of Islam with the rules of the Christian Bible. He found that the Bible taught that all people (men, women, religious, non-religious) should be treated with dignity as a creation of God. Amin became excited because this is exactly what he had come to believe while at the University. Amin eventually began attending church services with his Christian friends. He felt that their joy was contagious. Since Amin was single, one married couple at his church began inviting Amin over to their home for dinner. Amin felt that his loneliness and depression were fading away as he spent more and more time with his Christian friends, who were becoming like a family to Amin. One Sunday, as Amin was attending a morning worship service at the church, he felt God's Spirit moving in his heart. Amin told the pastor that day, "I want to follow Jesus and be Baptized."

When I asked Amin what he wanted Christians to know about Muslims, he said, "Realize that your Muslim friends are watching and evaluating everything you do. They listen to how you talk to your family. They watch how you spend your money. They want to know if your faith affects your lifestyle."

## THE WHITE SAVIOR COMPLEX

The term, “white savior,” is commonly used to describe people who travel to poor communities in order to “fix” the problems there...usually with ineffective results. It is a derivative of the Victorian notion, expressed in the Rudyard Kipling poem, *White Man’s Burden*, that Great Britain and the United States were ordained by God to bring the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America into the modern era.<sup>49</sup> The attitude of superiority here is obvious.

This dynamic can apply to international mission trips when a church group (whether they be white, black, or brown) causes more harm than help by visiting an under-resourced village, distributing gifts randomly, then leaving (after taking an abundance of selfies). This attitude can also be present in local ministry to internationals. In the book, *Loving the Stranger*, Jessica Udall writes “Nothing is more destructive to a new cross-cultural friendship than an attitude of cultural superiority.<sup>50</sup>” Christians should be a people who share what they have with compassion and generosity. Yet, engaging in gift-giving with an attitude of “I feel so good when I help those poor people” may indicate that the action is performed to meet the emotional needs of the giver. When we see people as “projects” and enter into a one-sided relationship where we set the terms, we may be engaging in something that appears to be good but could actually be unhealthy.

The bigger picture here is the “us and them” mentality which sees foreign-born people as “exotic” or “interesting” while refusing to accept them as equals. This subtler version of the White Savior Complex seemingly admires newcomers to America while retaining an attitude of superiority. In the book *Assimilate or Go Home*, D.L. Mayfield writes about a time she took a vanload of Somali children to a church Vacation Bible School (VBS) at the large church outside of Portland, Oregon where her father was the pastor. The

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<sup>49</sup> “‘The White Man’s Burden’: Kipling’s Hymn to U.S. Imperialism,” History Matters - The U.S. Survey Course on the Web, accessed December 20, 2018, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5478/>.

<sup>50</sup> Jessica A. Udall, *Loving the Stranger: Welcoming Immigrants in the Name of Jesus* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: 2015), 80.

theme of the VBS was “Serengeti Trek.” Because of this theme, the church was covered with African decorations. Mayfield writes:

And then, as I was herding the refugee kids towards the water fountains, I overheard a small child talking to a volunteer. ‘Oh!’ he said joyously ‘they brought us kids from the Serengeti!’ Several children turned and pointed at me and my group, and I felt my face began to flush as I realized the church kids thought the refugee kids were props.<sup>51</sup>

As a missions pastor, I regularly encounter someone who shows up at our church with a minivan full of used clothing, furniture, toys, etc. They want to drop it all off at the church for someone else to distribute to local refugees. At times, I have suggested that they take the time to go themselves to get to know the family personally. The response is usually somewhere between “I am too busy,” and “that is not my ministry.” While these gifts are often appreciated by these refugee families, they are a poor substitute for a building a relationship.



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<sup>51</sup> Danielle L. Mayfield, *Assimilate or Go Home: Notes From a Failed Missionary on Rediscovering Faith* (New York, NY: Harper One, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 13.

## CHURCHES AND CHANGE

Your church may not face any of the above barriers to reaching out to newcomers to America, but there is one issue that plagues many churches...an aversion to change. Churches are rumored to have split over changes such as the decision to use contemporary music, an argument of whether or not to change the color of the carpet, or whether or not the pastor would be allowed to preach without a tie. For some churches, making changes in order to become more welcoming to internationals might be more difficult than you would think.

For example, at our church, we offer an audio translation of the worship services in the native languages of some of our members, but not all of them. On some Sundays, we have bilingual people in our services who are translating the sermon to a friend or relative who is not yet proficient in English. Complaints have come to me about “those people who are talking during church.”

In many churches in America, consistency and tradition are unwritten values. Naturally, any type of change which upsets the status quo is problematic. For some church members, the sound of foreign languages ringing in the hallways, or the sight of ethnic dress on Sunday morning, or dealing with a wider variety of parenting styles in the nursery may cause church members to express that their church no longer “feels” like it used to. For some churches, “change” can create stress. As one pastor put it, “Most churches who gather diverse people groups, experience it as a beautiful witness to God’s unity in diversity. However, it usually takes much more effort, intention, and time to develop that unified family.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Andy Manning et al., "Why You May NOT Want to Seek Diversity in Your Church," Facts & Trends, August 29, 2018, accessed December 31, 2018, <https://factsandtrends.net/2017/02/09/may-not-want-seek-diversity-church/>.

## **A LACK OF “BUY-IN” BY CHURCH STAFF AND LEADERSHIP**

Imagine this scenario. A senior pastor of a mostly-white church notices that 50% of the children in a nearby elementary school are Latin American. Discovering that many of them come from first-generation immigrant families, the pastor proposes to the staff and lay leaders, “I want us all to look into ways to adapt our programs and ministries in order to reach these families.”

Imagine if these are some of the reactions:

**YOUTH PASTOR:** “I know that many of these families have minimal funds. What will this mean to our annual ski trip that costs \$1,200 per student?”

**PRESCHOOL LEADER:** “Our nursery is currently understaffed. I have not been to a worship service in months because I am always covering for those who don’t show up. Are you seriously suggesting that we begin reaching out to families who are known to have a lot of young children?”

**CHURCH SECRETARY:** “I don’t speak Spanish. What am I supposed to do if one of the families calls the church?” “Am I going to have to begin printing church publications in Spanish?”

**CHAIRMAN OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE:** “Developing new ministries is expensive and we are not currently meeting our budget. Instead of looking at these families, maybe we should focus our efforts on that new affluent gated community that is going up a few miles away.”

**DEACON:** “Why would those families want to come to our church? Why don’t we just hire a Hispanic pastor to start his own church? Those people can use our building on Sunday afternoons.”

If the goal of reaching out to newcomers to America is a pet project of only one church leader, it may not be successful. In order for a church to develop effective, lasting ministries to internationals, the majority of staff members and key lay leaders should be supportive. Casting vision among leadership and preparing the church for international ministry should proceed the development of church programs.



## **ASSUMING AMERICAN METHODS WILL BE EFFECTIVE**

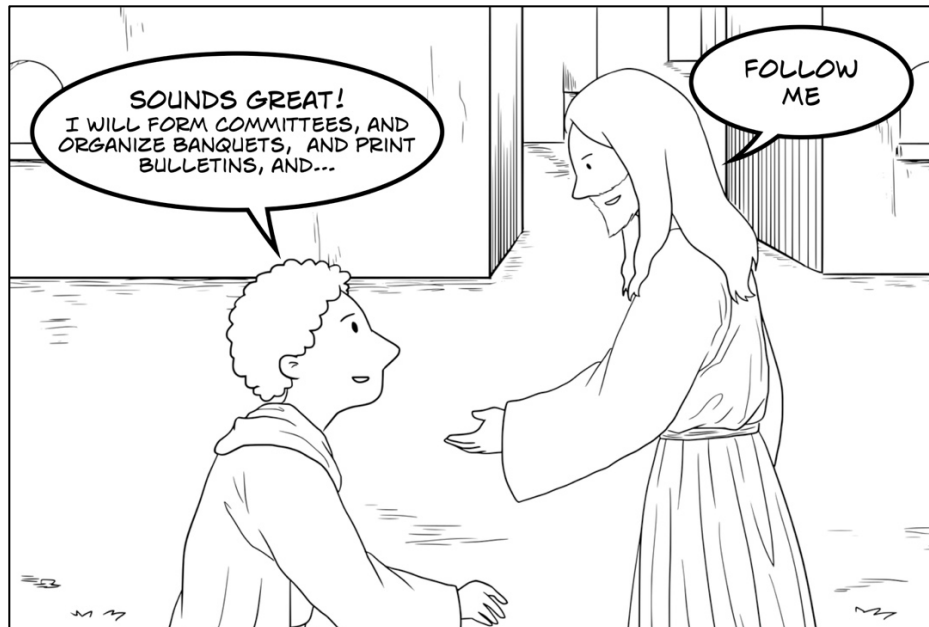
In the book, *Crossing Cultures with Jesus*, Katie Rawson shares a story about a church that tried to reach out to foreign workers who were working at nearby resorts. Their method was to blitz the area with flyers advertising an event with “free food” for guest workers. The attendance was dismal. Even though some of these internationals had seen the flyers, they ignored them because they did not have a relationship with anyone involved. In fact, some of them were offended by the offer of “free food.” Many international students and young foreign workers come from affluent families. Was this church looking down on them? <sup>53</sup> Now to be fair, this strategy might work well for a ministry to U.S. college students, but just because many Americans came to Christ via certain methods does not mean that these will be effective with newcomers to America.

In the same way, high-pressure gospel presentations to internationals you have just met are usually not effective. For someone who does not grow up with a Judeo-Christian worldview, these methods can be confusing. I have been told by former Muslims that, when they came to America, they were told “Christians do not really care about you. All they want is to convert you, then they move on.”

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<sup>53</sup> Katie J. Rawson, *Crossing Cultures with Jesus: Sharing Good News with Sensitivity and Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2015), 139.





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### **AN UNREALISTIC DESIRE FOR QUICK RESULTS**

Imagine that you move to Thailand to take a new job. After you have lived in your new apartment for only one month, your Saturday nap is interrupted by a knock at the door. Two men from the local Buddhist temple have come to visit you. You invite them in, and they begin telling you why you need to convert to Buddhism. How likely are you to consider their appeal? You probably will laugh the whole thing off when you retell the story to your family. As Western Christians, we often are disappointed when a foreigner does not come to Christ the first time we share the gospel. The reality is that people with non-Christian worldviews usually take months, even years to understand the gospel message.

This was explained to me once by a missionary to Hindus. He told me that the Hindus who are seeking Christ often go through phases....

- Jesus is not a god.
- Jesus is one of many gods.
- Jesus is my favorite god.
- Jesus is the only God for me, I renounce all others.

As you can see, this is not the usual way that someone comes to Christ in the West. Sharing the gospel with someone who does not even have a “Genesis 1:1” theological framework can take time.

In America, evangelists brag about being “bold” and “sealing the deal” when it comes to gospel presentations. This is precisely where international missionaries can help the American church. While some foreign missionaries have told me about people giving their lives to Christ right after hearing the gospel for the first time, these stories are rare. Many missionaries who live overseas see people take years before following Christ. American Christians who seek to reach out to internationals should seek out the wisdom of veteran missionaries.

## SPECIAL SECTION:

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### The World Across the Street: “Than”

Than was born in Vietnam. He and his mother fled to the United States as refugees after his father was imprisoned for assisting the U.S. armed forces in the Vietnam War. As a young immigrant child, the world was very lonely and confusing. He still remembers the shock of going to an American school as a second grader, not knowing any English.

Than and his mother lived with their uncle, who had immigrated to America years before. His mother performed seamstress work out of her home, which helped to pay the bills. They had little resources, but they got by with the assistance of an American church that hosted a Vietnamese ministry. Even though Than’s family were Buddhists, they were exceptionally grateful for the food, clothing, and other assistance that their church provided.



Soon, Than and his mother begin to attend the Vietnamese service at the church. They loved the fellowship of other Vietnamese people and enjoyed the worship service, which was in their heart language. Than and his Vietnamese friends enjoyed attending the Sunday School classes with the American children at the church. As he grew older, Than began making friends with the other children and started to feel more at home in America.

Each summer, the church's Preteen ministry invited the Vietnamese children to attend their summer camp. It was a week of games, fun, and age-appropriate worship times. Than remembers the camp speaker telling the children, "Jesus loves you, and He will never leave you." Than thought to himself, "I want to have a relationship with Jesus." Than responded at the camp altar call and prayed with his camp counselor. In the following years, Than grew to become a committed Christian teen, and eventually married a Vietnamese Christian woman. Today, Than is the pastor of a newly planted Vietnamese church.

When asked about evangelism with Asians, Than replied that Asian culture is very relational. He put it this way, "Many Asian people are like coconuts. They are hard on the outside but very soft on the inside. Even though they may appear cold and distant, once you get to know them, they are warm and enjoy deep friendships. I think that Americans are more like peaches--soft on outside, hard on the inside. They usually make friends easily, but they don't seem to have that many really deep relationships."

Than went on to say that, "Buddhism is a culture of transaction. When you perform good deeds, you expect something in return. When Christians serve Buddhists and expect nothing in return, it makes a big impression on them."

## CHAPTER THREE: PREPARING FOR MINISTRY TO INTERNATIONALS

William Carey did more than merely reject his critics. He wrote a compelling treatise which both educated people about the need for missionary work and communicated the biblical necessity of sending missionaries. Carey's courage started a movement within the Evangelical church as men, women, and families were sent all over the globe. Whether you are a pastor, staff member, lay leader, or "ordinary" church member; ministry to internationals will be more effective if you are a part of a fellowship that does ministry together.

Could God be calling you to be a catalyst in your church? In addition to sending church members around the world, could members of your church family be mobilized to engage in cross-cultural ministry in your own community?

The following are ideas that help to prepare a church to engage in mission work among internationals in your area.

### CAST A VISION OF WHAT GOD IS DOING AROUND THE WORLD

Consider casting a vision of what God can do when people take risks for the sake of the gospel. For example, this book contains several summaries of testimonies of foreign-born people who came to Christ through relationships with American Christians. Why include them? These true stories are meant to inspire you. Some people in your church have never met a Christian who was raised in another religion. Consider inviting a Muslim-background or Buddhist-background believer to share his/her testimony in your small group or Sunday worship service. It is common for churches to host international missionaries to share at churches as guest speakers. In addition to these, consider inviting someone who is a people-group missionary in the United States to speak at your church.

Some churches have an annual "foreign missions study" or another emphasis on global missions. Church leaders can utilize this event to make a connection to reaching out to

newcomers in their community. For example, if there are a lot of Vietnamese people in your community, consider shifting the focus of your annual mission study to Vietnam. At the conclusion of the study, host a field trip to a Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in your city. Let your congregation know that some of the same people groups whom your missionaries are targeting are present in your community.

Does your church have a library or bookstore? If so, stock it with engaging books that reinforce God's heart for the nations. Here are some suggestions:

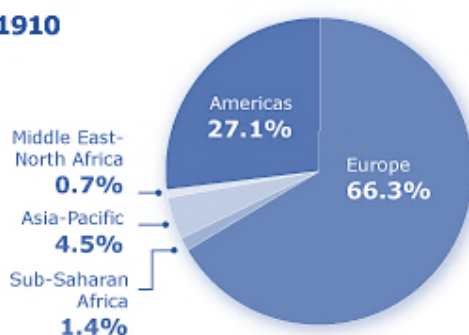
- *Radical* by David Platt
- *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* by Nabeel Qureshi
- *The Heavenly Man* by Brother Yun
- *An Insider's Guide to Praying for the World* by Brian Stiller
- *Seeking Refuge* by Bauman, Soerens, and Smeir
- *God's Double Agent* by Bob Fu
- *Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?* by Tom Doyle
- *Finish the Mission: Bringing the Gospel to the Unreached and the Unengaged* edited by Piper and Mathis
- *A Heart for Freedom* by Chai Ling
- *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* by Carl Medearis
- *Ten Who Changed the World* by Daniel Akin
- *I Dared to Call Him Father* by Bilquis Sheikh
- *Walking from East to West: God in the Shadows* by Ravi Zacharias
- *Superplan* by Chris Clayman
- Various Missionary Biographies by Janet & Geoff Benge (YWAM)

One reason that I am recommending that people in your church read books by Muslims, Hindus, and others who have found Jesus is because there may be people in your church who have bought the lie that it is nearly impossible for someone who was raised in one of these religions to become a Christian. Nothing could be farther from the truth. For example, all across the world, Muslims are coming to Christ in record numbers. The dramatic growth of the church in China over the past 30 years has been monumental. In a 2013 study of the top 20 countries where Christianity was growing the fastest, 7 of the countries were located in Asia, 7 were found on the Arabian Peninsula, 5 from Sub-Saharan Africa, and one was located in the Caribbean.<sup>54</sup>

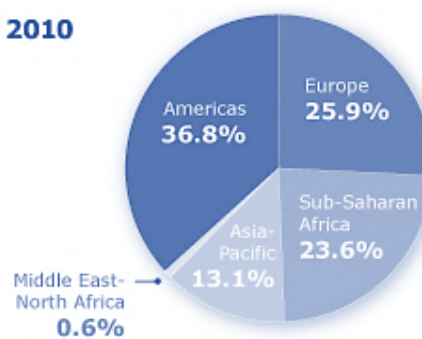
What does this mean? While many of the churches in North American and Europe are seeing very little growth, God is doing some dramatic things among Asians, Arabs, and Africans. It may be that your Chinese or Jordanian neighbor may actually be more receptive to the gospel than your neighbors who grew up in America. Laying the groundwork for developing new ministries to internationals begins by casting a vision that your church can join what God is already doing in the world.

### Regional Distribution of Christians

**1910**



**2010**



Figures for 1910 are from a Pew Forum analysis of data from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • *Global Christianity*, December 2011

*From 1910 to 2010, Christianity in Africa and Asia has experienced dramatic growth.*<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> "The Top 20 Countries Where Christianity Is Growing the Fastest," NATIONS MAGAZINE, April 21, 2014, accessed January 01, 2019, <http://nationsmagazine.org/top-20-countries-christianity-growing-fastest/>.

## THE POWER OF REPRESENTATION

In 2017, Marvel Studios released the movie, *Black Panther*, which was a mega-hit by any standards. This was the first big budget superhero movie to feature an African American in the lead with a mostly non-white supporting cast. Many African Americans went to see the film again and again.<sup>56</sup>

In the same way, some Americans from Asian descent were so moved by the 2018 romantic comedy, *Crazy Rich Asians*, that they wept in the theaters because it was the first major movie featuring an all Asian-American cast since 1993.<sup>57</sup>

Why were a superhero movie and romantic comedy so moving for these people? One factor may be the power of representation. When African Americans and Asians saw people who looked like them as the heroes on the screen, an emotional connection was made. There is a lesson that the church can learn from these two films.

If your church is serious about reaching out to newcomers to America, more is needed than an “all people are welcome here” sign in front of the church. When Arabs, Asians, or Hispanics walk into a church, and they do not see anyone who looks like them, their guard may be up. If your church is predominantly made up of one ethnicity (i.e., white, black, Filipino, Hispanic) and you want to reach out to newcomers to America who come from different ethnic backgrounds, you might encourage those who are already in your church who come from different backgrounds to serve in more visible ways (door greeters, leading prayers, singing in the choir, etc.).

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<sup>55</sup> Joseph Liu, "The Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, September 27, 2018, accessed January 01, 2019, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>

<sup>56</sup> Bloomberg.com, accessed January 01, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-22/-black-panther-reveals-black-audiences-box-office-superpower>.

<sup>57</sup> Jane Mo, "Opinion: Why 'Crazy Rich Asians' Made Me Cry," USA Today, August 15, 2018, accessed January 01, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2018/08/14/crazy-rich-asians-why-movie-made-me-cry/991351002/>.



Of course, this is a tricky subject because it sounds a lot like tokenism. The English Oxford Dictionary defines “tokenism” as...

The practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce.<sup>58</sup>

For example, imagine an African American church that is located in a neighborhood that is becoming more Latino. The pastor wants to reach more people from the community, but the church only has a few current members who are Hispanic. If that pastor makes an effort to recruit Hispanic members to become ushers, is that tokenism? Probably not. If the pastor is genuinely wanting to reach out to more Hispanics, that is not tokenism. If the pastor grudgingly recruited a Latino usher because he was being pressured by the deacons to look more diverse, that might be tokenism.

One of the most important decisions that a church can make to become more welcoming to other ethnic groups is to hire a diverse ministry staff. Even if these staff members are not immigrants, when a mostly black church hires a Latino youth minister, or when a predominantly white church hires an Asian worship pastor, the face of the church changes almost immediately. Alternately, a church wanting to reach newcomers to America might recruit staff members who were raised overseas or who speak a foreign language fluently. Even though they may look like everyone else, they have cultural and linguistic skills which enable them to connect with people who are new to America.

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<sup>58</sup> "Tokenism | Definition of Tokenism in US English by Oxford Dictionaries," Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed January 01, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/tokenism>.

## INTENTIONAL MISSION TRIPS

Social media is filled with an abundance of blogs about why mission trips are a waste of time and money. Some even say that teams from the U.S. can do more harm than good overseas. I do not doubt that some short-term mission efforts fit these descriptions. Yet, God can use a well-planned mission trip to be both a blessing to overseas partners and a life-changing event in the heart of the trip participant.

I will never forget the moment I stepped off of the airplane in Manila as a 20-year-old, ready to spend 10 weeks in a country that I knew almost nothing about. This experience changed the course of my life. For the first time, I understood that God was so much bigger than my hometown in Tennessee. I will never forget the teenage boy who came to our home Bible study every week, even though his father beat him severely for doing so. Another experience that is burned into my memory is when we visited a giant trash heap where squatter families made a living out of sifting through the garbage in search of something they might sell for a few pesos. In Manila, God taught me lessons that I could have never learned in a seminar. I also gained an appreciation for the sacrificial hospitality, strong family values, hard work ethic, and contagious joy of the Filipino people. To this day, I enjoy meeting Filipinos and telling them how much I love their home country.

Carefully planned mission trips should be connected to relationships that you are building overseas. I frequently tell others that our church does not do “missions tourism.” In other words, we do not go to a certain country or city because people in our church have always wanted to visit that place. In fact, I strongly recommend that when you connect with a quality partner overseas, you build a relationship and go back to work with that partner again and again. If you are fortunate, what started as an “experience” becomes a “relationship.” Instead of focusing on ourselves and the places we want to see, we focus on supporting and encouraging our missionaries and national partners in their work. Soon, you will develop healthy relationships and may even

discover that some of the families in your church are going back on their own to assist your overseas partners with a project.

SPECIAL SECTION:

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### **CAREY RESPONDS TO HIS CRITICS**

When addressing the topic of international missions to church members, pastors and missions leaders often hear the retort “Why go overseas? There are plenty of lost people in our city.” This argument is nothing new. In fact, William Carey addressed this question back in 1792.

It has been objected that there are multitudes in our own nation...and that therefore we have work enough at home, without going into other countries. That there are thousands in our own land as far from God as possible, I readily grant, and that this ought to excite us to ten-fold diligence in our work, and in attempts to spread divine knowledge amongst them is a certain fact; but that it ought to supersede all attempts to spread the gospel in foreign parts seems to want proof. Our own countrymen have the means of grace, and may attend on the word preached if they chuse (sic) it. They have the means of knowing the truth, and faithful ministers are placed in almost every part of the land, whose spheres of action might be much extended if their congregations were but more hearty and active in the cause: but with them the case is widely different, who have no Bible, no written language, (which many of them have not) no ministers, no good civil government, nor any of those advantages which we have. Pity therefore, humanity, and much more Christianity, call loudly for every possible exertion to introduce the gospel amongst them.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> William Carey, Enquiry to the obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens (S.I.: Outlook Verlag, 2018).13.

## FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL THINGS

Ask yourself this question: “If a large group of Buddhist families moves into my community, does Satan want me to minister to them?” I would presume that your answer would be, “Of course not!”

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 reminds us:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

In the above passage, we see the tools that the enemy uses to try to stall the movement of God in this world include false thoughts, pretension, and ungodly arguments. In other words, there is a connection between spiritual warfare and ideas which foster prejudice, feelings of superiority, and apathy.



Our task is not to win arguments, but to lead them to a new way of thinking. The best defense against the lies of the enemy is spiritual maturity. If a church wants to reach internationals with the gospel, these questions about the spiritual health of the church might need to be discussed.

- 1) Are we currently an evangelistic church? Do our church members actively share the gospel with others? Are people being baptized?
- 2) Would we say that our church is welcoming to newcomers? Do we accept people who look different than us?
- 3) Are our church members studying the scriptures? Do our pastors and church leaders share God's word, even when it is counter-cultural?
- 4) Do we have discipleship, fellowship, and service opportunities for those who are not yet believers or new to the faith?
- 5) Do we have foreign-born people in our church already? Are they seen as a valuable part of our church family?
- 6) Do we hear church members in the hallway speak negatively about people who are new to America? Do they post inflammatory stories about immigrants online?
- 7) Does our church focus on being led by the Holy Spirit? When the Holy Spirit leads our people to act, do they obey?
- 8) Are the members of our church willing to take risks? Do they make decisions based on comfort or conviction?

As church leaders, we must not only seek to implement God's plans, but we also need to recognize God's timing. Some churches may be poised and ready to engage in cross-cultural ministry. Others may need a stronger spiritual foundation to be built before reaching out. Some churches need to take the time to develop a core group of leaders for a new ministry before becoming fully engaged.

It may seem to be oversimplifying matters to be told to "pray about" developing ministries to newcomers to America. Yet, doing God's will, with God's people, in God's timing has to be something that is fostered by God Himself. Effective church ministry of any kind is reliant on fervent prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit.

## SPECIAL SECTION:

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### The World Across the Street: “Zaiynab”

“Zaiynab” grew up in the Middle East in a strict Sunni Muslim family. When she was a child, her family was sponsored by an uncle, who was a U.S. citizen, to relocate to the United States. Her father believed that there would be more opportunities in America for him to be successful in business. Growing up in America, Zaiynab felt like she was living in between two worlds. At home, she was living the life of a conservative Muslim. At school, she tried to blend in with everyone else.

Upon graduating high school, Zaiynab was forbidden by her father to attend college, so she took a job and moved into an apartment as soon as she was able. Living alone, she yearned for friendship. One day Zaiynab noticed a neighbor, who was around her age, walking her dog. “Amanda,” Zaiynab’s neighbor invited Zaiynab to join them on their walk.

As the weeks went on, Zaiynab joined Amanda in walking her dog several times a week. As they talked about their lives, Zaiynab and Amanda would often discuss their family and upbringing. When the topic of religion came up Amanda, a Christian, had lots of questions about Islam. Similarly, Zaiynab was curious about the similarities and differences between her



religion and Amanda's. Zaiynab soon decided to do her own research on Christianity, mainly through the internet. As she visited various Christian websites, Zaiynab was amazed at how different Jesus was from Mohammed.

One day, Amanda invited Zaiynab to the Sunday morning service at her church. Curious, she decided to go. While Zaiynab enjoyed the music and the message, what really made an impression on her was that several of the young adults invited Zaiynab to go with them to lunch after the service. These new friends accepted Zaiynab. She was impressed with how naturally they spoke about how Jesus was making a difference in their lives. As Zaiynab grew closer to this group of young adults, she asked them a lot of questions about their faith. Zaiynab began studying the Bible and praying for God to reveal Himself to her. After several months of research, combined with a lot of conversations with her Christian friends, Zaiynab made the decision to give her life to Jesus.

Zaiynab's family was horrified by this decision. In their mind, she was abandoning both God and her family. Yet, Zaiynab continued to grow in her faith. Zaiynab realized that Christ had sacrificed so much for her, and she had to be willing to make sacrifices as well.

When I asked Zaiynab what Christians needed to know about sharing Christ with Muslims, she said,

"To share Christ with a Muslim, you don't need to know a lot about Islam. However, you do need to know a lot about your Christian faith. When Muslims ask you questions about what you believe, you need to have a biblical answer ready for them."

*Reaching the World (across the street) continues...*

CHAPTER FOUR: Developing Ministries to Engage Internationals.

This is the heart of the book. This chapter lists a variety of practical suggestions of how individuals, ministry teams, and churches can engage internationals in ministry.

CHAPTER FIVE: Cross-Cultural Ministry Concepts

This chapter identifies basic concepts ministry leaders will want to understand before engaging in ministry to internationals.

CHAPTER SIX: Sharing the Good News with Internationals

This chapter is dedicated to cross-cultural evangelism strategies and concepts.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Cooperating with Immigrant Christians

This chapter explores concepts related to supporting immigrant Christians. Various models of international congregations are mentioned.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Becoming a Church Family that Looks Like Heaven

This final chapter discusses the option of being a multi-cultural, “One Family” church.

CONCLUSION: A Second Modern Missionary Movement

The book concludes by arguing that mission work targeted to diaspora people is a much-needed revision in the evangelical concept of foreign missions.



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