

## Inside This Issue

Religion and ethnicity are closely related phenomena in North America. The histories and traditions of various denominations, including Lutherans, have been largely shaped by patterns of immigration and the establishment of various ethnic traditions. Yet despite a rich body of literature on mission and migration, particularly in relation to first-generation immigrants, there has been relatively little attention paid to subsequent generations of immigrants.

The number of immigrants coming to America is increasing. Immigrants tend to begin new churches among people like themselves to retain a connection with their native culture. They value worshiping God and interacting with others in their own languages. Therefore, preserving a certain culture is a primary characteristic of first-generation ethnic churches.

Preserving immigrants' native cultures meets the needs of those immigrants, but succeeding generations are more interested in adopting worship modes represented in American culture. This leads to a critical issue facing immigrant congregations in the United States: the silent exodus of the next generation. The term "silent exodus" was coined by Helen Lee in 1996 to describe the phenomenon of second-generation Asian Americans leaving mono-ethnic immigrant churches.

This issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* discusses the challenge of this silent exodus among immigrant churches and what to do about it. The articles included in this issue address the following questions: How can outreach to second and succeeding generations be successful? How can churches actively engage the next generation to pass on faith? How can multiethnic churches be started and supported? How do our theology and cultural listening skills work together to inform Lutheran mission theology and strategy?

It is important to understand that when the Christian church began in Jerusalem it was an ethnic church. Luke, in his account of the church in the Book of Acts, emphasizes that many Christian Jews struggled with the idea of including people of other ethnic groups (see Acts 15). So the struggle with cultural and racial biases did not start with first-generation immigrants in the US but with the first-generation Christian Jews who had a problem with other Christian Jews taking the Gospel to different people groups. For instance, Peter struggled with the idea of associating with those not of his race. But to obey God, he crossed boundaries and finally said, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ... (he is Lord of all)" (Acts 10:34–36).

Jewish believers' obedience in sharing the Good News sparked a multiracial/multicultural church in Antioch (Acts 11:19–21). It is also important to remember Isaiah's words when he said that God's desire for His Church is that it be a "house of prayer for all peoples" (Isa 56:7, emphasis mine). So as you read this issue of

Copyright 2022 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission. View *Lutheran Mission Matters* 30, no. 1 (2022) at <https://lsfm.global/>. Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>. E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

*Lutheran Mission Matters*, I encourage you to reflect on how the Church today can obey God's message and effectively communicate the Gospel to people of other cultures while also effectively engaging second-generation immigrants in Christian ministry.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Deressa

Assistant Professor of Theology and Global South and Fiechtner Chair for Christian Outreach

Director of the Director of Christian Outreach Program

Concordia University, St. Paul