Lutheran Mission Matters

Volume XXX, No. 2 (Issue 61) November 2022

LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS

Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology

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LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS TEL: (314) 505-7116
14100 Sunland Dr. E-mail: editor@lsfm.global
Florissant, MO 63034, USA

BOOKS FOR REVIEW SHOULD BE SENT TO THE BOOK EDITOR:
Joel Okamoto TEL: (314) 505-7152
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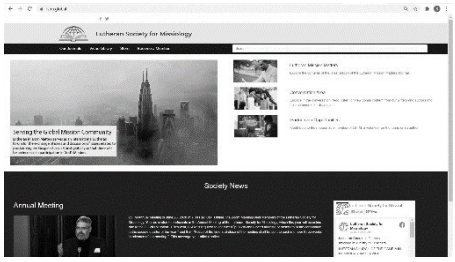

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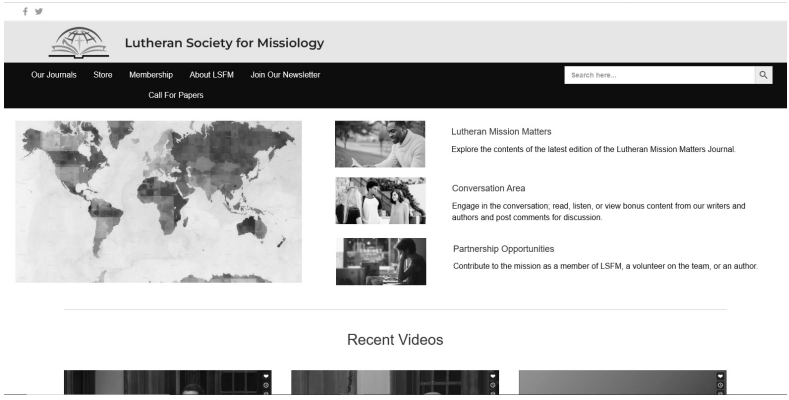

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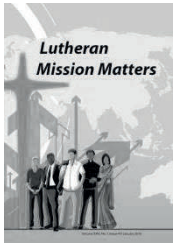

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In Memoriam

Dr. John Loum Enters Eternal Rest

Concordia Seminary News Release

Dr. John Loum, former director of the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and missionary to The Gambia, entered rest in Jesus Oct. 26, 2022. He was 74 years old.

"Dr. Loum's commitment to sharing the Gospel of Jesus among African immigrants in America, and among immigrant communities from all around the world, has yielded remarkable fruit — fruit that will last," said Dr. Thomas J. Egger, Seminary president. "We are grateful to have had John as a colleague and a brother, and we pray that the Lord will comfort John's family and all who knew and loved him, and that God will continue to bless and further the Gospel outreach efforts among us for which John labored so diligently and joyfully."

Loum served as the director of the EIIT beginning in 2006. When first named to the position, he said he was looking forward to "a fruitful and blessed ministry." He served as director until 2020.

The EIIT Program is a specialized program leading to ordination for men engaged in pastoral ministry contexts in ethnic immigrant and urban cultures in North America. EIIT also offers a program for women to become deaconesses. During Loum's tenure as EIIT director, he guided many missionary pastors and deaconesses.

With a wealth of knowledge about Islam and numerous years of experience working with Muslims in Europe, Africa and the United States, he was passionate about sharing the Good News of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus with Muslims. At the Seminary, he organized several continuing education workshops and other educational sessions for seminarians to better understand outreach among Muslims.

In 2017, he began serving as a part-time missionary to The Gambia, his home country, on behalf of a partnership between The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and Concordia Seminary. He was the first LCMS missionary called to The Gambia, a predominantly Muslim country in West Africa. "It was God's idea, because He planted it in my heart," Loum said at the time.

Until 2020, he spent several months of the year teaching Lutheran doctrine to an established group of Christians there. Along with teaching and catechizing the pastor and lay leaders of the church in The Gambia, he also instructed the teachers and students of the Lutheran school in the village of Abuko.

"I'm cut out for this," Loum said in 2017. "I'm a missionary. I was brought to faith by the mission agencies, so I feel everything about me is about missions and sharing the Good News of Christ."

Loum, who grew up in a Muslim family in The Gambia, West Africa, learned about Jesus at the age of 17 from a missionary based in Nigeria. Loum adopted the missionary's name, John, and left The Gambia after he converted to Christianity and was persecuted by his family. Loum received seminary training from Sierra Leone Bible College, West Africa (1970), and Immanuel College, Ibadan, Nigeria (1976). He received a diploma in Islamic studies from Birmingham University, England (1982); a Bachelor of Arts with honors from the University of Oxford, England (1986); a Master of Arts from Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Conn. (1995); and was colloquized by committee and certified in the LCMS (1999). He earned a Ph.D. in missions from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind. (2012).

Before joining the Seminary staff, Loum served as pastor of St. Augustine Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, Ind., and as a missionary-at-large to African immigrants in the LCMS Indiana District.

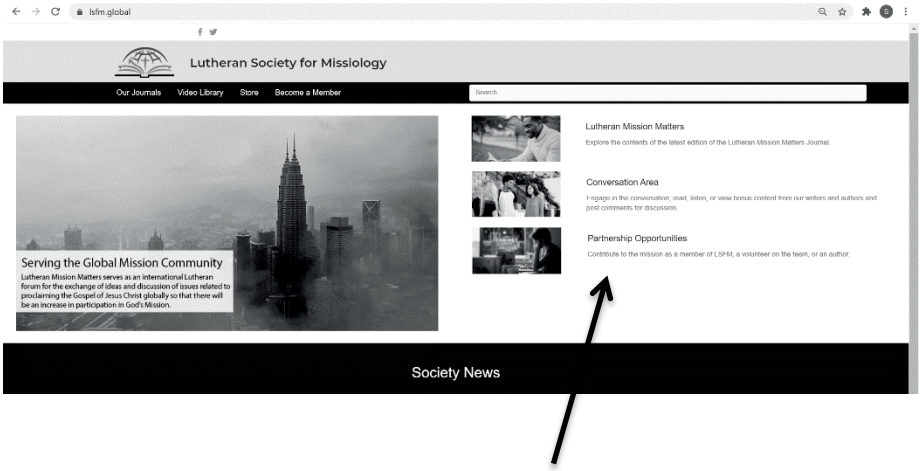
In 2016, Loum received the Wakili Award from Vitendo 4 Africa for community advocacy and "compassionate and exceptional care to the immigrant community in St. Louis." He volunteered with Christian Friends of New Americans, including serving as vice chairman on the organization's board.

During a 2019 video interview with Seminary President Emeritus Dr. Dale A. Meyer, Loum lifted up the recruitment of ethnic people for ministry vocations.

"That's the way of the future," he said. "The ethnics are here to stay and we need to bring them into our Lutheran church because of the purity and inerrancy of the Gospel. That's what our people are looking for."

Loum is survived by his wife, Hannah, coordinator of the Seminary's Re-Sell It Shop, and four sons, John, Hans, Donald and Cyril.

Enter the conversation:
“Why Lutheran Mission Matters.”



Be sure to check out the upcoming issue’s Call for Papers (including the theme) and Submission Guidelines near the end of this edition or online (https://lsfm.global) under Partnership Opportunities.

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

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

Articles

There Is Hope for Second Generation Immigrant Christian Churches: Challenges of Mono-Ethnic and Semi-Independent Immigrant Congregations

Samuel Deressa

Introduction

Historians refer to the twenty-first century as "the age of migration," mainly because there are more migrants in the world today than ever before.[1] In 2020, a UN report shows that, globally, the number of international migrants was 281 million, with nearly two-thirds being labor migrants.[2] This is 3.6% of the world's population. In another UN report published in 2022, over the past two years, despite the impact of Covid-19, the number of migrants has continued to increase.[3]

These migrants have been both Christian and non-Christian. According to Todd Johnson and Gina Bellofatto, almost half of United States immigrants before 2012 were Christians.[4] According to a recent report from Pew Research Center, Christians continue to make up the majority of legal immigrants to the US.[5] Two of the main challenges that the immigrants face are integration into the larger society and inclusion in the Christian community.

Many denominations in the United States, including Lutherans, are engaged in helping immigrant congregations plant mono-ethnic congregations. This is mainly due to the choice of first-generation immigrants to worship in their native languages. Still, while this is the preference of many first-generation immigrants, their children feel differently.[6] Second- and third-generation immigrants speak English and often have

Rev. Samuel Deressa is Assistant Professor of Theology and the Global South and Fiechtner Chair for Christian Outreach at Concordia University, St. Paul. Deressa's published works include Leadership Formation in the African Context: Missional Leadership Revisited, A Church for the World: A Church's Role in Fostering Democracy and Sustainable Development *which he co-edited with Josh de Keijzer;* The Life, Works, and Witness of Tsehay Tolessa and Gudina Tumsa, the Ethiopian Bonhoeffer*, which he co-edited with Sarah Wilson; and is the editor of* Christian Theology in African Context: Essential Writings of Esthetu Abate. *deressa@csp.edu*

only a limited understanding of the language spoken by their parents or grandparents, respectively. This forces immigrant congregations to accommodate these later generations generations through programs offered in English, such as Sunday School, Bible study groups, and youth programs. The key challenge is how to encourage the younger generations of immigrants into the life and ministry of the church. Whether the immigrant communities are African, Asian, or Hispanic/Latinx, these challenges are strikingly similar.

In my conversation with leaders of immigrant communities over the past twelve years, I have observed that there exists fear within immigrant congregations that the younger generations of immigrants are leaving their parents' churches and abandoning their faith. Second-generation immigrants are children born to first-generation immigrants and those who were "born in the country of origin but raised in that of destination" where their parents found their new home.[7] This includes all "immigrant children who have arrived in the United States before they reach adulthood."[8] Much of the research done on immigrant congregations has focused on the first generation.[9]

This article will discuss the challenges of the Ethiopian immigrant congregations in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota, and focus on their struggle to understand how to incorporate second- and third-generation immigrants into their communities. Through exploring the two types of churches planted by African immigrants in America, both mono-ethnic and semi-independent congregations, I propose a move to planting multiethnic congregations. This would create a space where the youth can feel comfortable, are nurtured in Christian faith, and are enabled to participate fully in the life and ministry of the church. As Helen Ebaugh and Janet Chafetz rightly state, "The future of immigrant congregations in the United States depends, in large measure, on whether and in what ways the second and subsequent generations participate."[10]

Ethiopian Mono-Ethnic[11] Congregations

A mono-ethnic church is a congregation primarily comprised of one ethnic group with the total of secondary ethnic group(s) consisting of no more than 20% of the entire congregation.[12] Two reasons lead to the formation of mono-ethnic churches. One of the main reasons is that many people do not wish to cross racial or linguistic barriers to become Christians. This is confirmed by the work of Donald McGavran, who first came up with the homogenous unit principle (HUP). [13] Based on his experience of cross-cultural work in India, McGavran established a correlation between homogeneity and church growth. Thus, according to the HUP, churches grow faster when they are homogeneous. The second reason is that the language barriers in a non-mono-ethnic congregation make it difficult for many immigrants to participate fully in the local congregation's life and ministry. Ethnic churches are organized to meet the needs of particular ethnic groups. They worship in their native language, and their clergy are from the old country.[14]

According to Pastor Demelash Yosef, the reason why Ethiopian immigrants are interested in forming their own separate congregations rather than joining the local church is that the church in the immigrant community functions as a social center that connects them together and brings a sense of cultural and religious identity to each community

member. This is also confirmed by Mark Mullins' research on the life cycle of churches.[15] The church provides immigrants with a context for establishing cultural ties and fellowship. Members speak the same language and share the same values, which for the immigrant community is vital to sharing life together. As Gemma Cruz contends, "for many immigrants, especially from the Global South, the church is not just the principal site of celebration for ethnic identity and community. It is their refuge in times of crisis and their home when they want to shout for joy."[16]

The main challenge among the Ethiopian immigrant congregations is related to youth ministry, especially when serving the first- and second-generation immigrants.[17] Immigrant congregations feel responsible for educating their children in the Christian Gospel and their culture. They assume responsibility for nurturing their children spiritually and culturally. For them, both must happen simultaneously. They try to teach their ethnic languages and culture, hoping that the second and third generation will retain their cultural identity. Yet, they often feel unsuccessful. This is due to the gap between the two generations.[18] As J. Milton Yinger observes, "What will give one generation a sense of a unifying tradition may alienate parts of another generation who have been subjected to different social and cultural influences."[19] Some second-generation immigrants often communicate both in English and their parents' native language but are not fluent in their parent's native language. They attend schools with peers from diverse backgrounds. They are connected to the church because of their parents and friends whom they want to socialize with over the weekends. However, second-generation immigrants are not comfortable in "ethnic" churches, contrary to the assumption of the homogeneous unit principle.[20]

By my observation as a first-generation immigrant, most second- and third-generation immigrants neither understand the language of worship nor are interested in learning the culture. This has created a cultural divide between the first generation, who came to create opportunities for their children, and the second and third generations, who feel misunderstood or unappreciated by the older generation and leaders of the church. The first generation turns out to be radically attached to their traditions, which in most cases results in the failure to create a flexible and engaging environment for the younger generations.[21] As one young girl said during an interview, "the young Ethiopians don't feel welcomed at the

…most second- and third-generation immigrants neither understand the language of worship nor are interested in learning the culture. This has created a cultural divide between the first generation, who came to create opportunities for their children, and the second and third generations, who feel misunderstood or unappreciated by the older generation and leaders of the church.

church because the pastors and leaders of the church can't relate to them because they don't speak the same language."[22]

This has led to what some scholars call the "silent exodus" of the second- and third-generation immigrants from the ethnic churches. It is called the "silent exodus" because because much of it went unnoticed by the first generation. The reason for this exodus is is dissatisfaction with the ethnic emphasis on church culture and the lack of opportunities for them to be part of the larger church and to serve, given the language barriers.[23] The mission of the first-generation immigrant churches is also limited to serving their own community, while the second and third generations are more concerned about being Christian witnesses to their neighbors. In other words, immigrant churches focus on their ministry to the immigrant society, leaving Christian service to their neighbors as an individual responsibility.[24] The difference in mission results in dissatisfaction from the young generations' side and adds to the reasons why they leave the church. Where are the younger generations going? Some leave the church when they move to college or get a job and don't return because they don't feel any connection with their congregation anymore.[25] Studies have also shown that some begin to differentiate themselves from their parents' worship tradition and join mainstream evangelicalism.[26]

How should mono-ethnic congregations respond to these challenges? I propose a move to growing into a multiethnic congregation or planting multiethnic congregations that are led by the youth and are focused on youth ministry. I will also discuss the second type of congregations or ministries that are planted by African immigrants in Minnesota, semi-independent congregations.

Semi-Independent Ministries

Most first-generation immigrants want to worship independently and not integrate with others. They form their separate congregation by sharing a space with a local congregation or buying their own church building. Some immigrants, however, form semi-independent ethnic ministries, ministries that are initiated within a local congregation. This is not a congregation within a congregation, but two or three separate ministries sharing the same space. The immigrants have their own worship service, Bible studies, Sunday School, youth ministry, and so on.

This is different from the mono-ethnic congregation that is planted on its own as a mono-ethnic congregation. Semi-independent congregations are organized based on the assumption that they can be part of the local congregation without losing their cultural identity. Yet, through time, when they don't feel fully integrated into the congregation's culture, they begin to form their own groups within the congregation. The language barrier is what makes it difficult for an ethno-cultural minority (first-generation immigrants) to fully participate in the life and ministry of the host congregation.[27] When the host congregation does not provide worship services in the immigrants' language, it is only natural that they organize as a separate group.

In some congregations with more than one group of immigrants, the host congregation provides space for different ethnic groups and helps them get organized and engage in ministries. Some of these groups grow to become separate ethnic ministries within a

congregation. In such a structure, the immigrant groups have their own worship, Bible study, and so on in their own languages and are actively engaged in a variety of However, this doesn't mean that they form a separate congregation or plan to become They remain part of the local church, but without actively participating in its life and ministry. This means they have their own worship in their own language and common worship with the host congregation.

The advantage for these ethnic groups is that they can share resources with the host congregation. They worship with the host congregation, and their children join for Sunday School with all other children in the congregation. The young adults also participate fully with their peers and have their own Bible studies, all done in English. Some host congregations even pay ethnic pastors from the common treasury. These practices help the children of immigrant communities get integrated with the Anglo congregation, leading the Anglo congregation to grow into a multiethnic congregation.

Unfortunately, this approach hasn't worked for many congregations because, for the first-generation immigrants, there is tension between their ethnic language and culture and that of the host congregation.[28] Immigrants report that when the host congregation is unwilling to incorporate migrant languages and culture into the worship life of the congregation, the migrant community does not feel at home in the dominant Anglo community. In other words, "organizational rigidity"[29] prevents some congregations from adopting changes that accommodate immigrants (such as introducing bilingual services, recruiting bilingual leaders, making materials used during worships services available in multiple languages, and so on). This makes it hard for the immigrants to feel at home.

An additional challenge that immigrant communities note is that they are not invited to participate in the ministry and leadership of the church. In an interview conducted for this article, one interviewee said, "pastors and leaders of the host congregation want them to sit there as attendees even though they as new members want to be there as contributors and leaders."[30] It is in response to such practices that Steven Bevans argues that for the local church to grow and serve its diverse communities, it should "not only respond to migrants' needs and to accompany them on their journey, but also to call and equip them for ministry, both within the church and within the world."[31] He also contends that "as migrants grow in integration into the local church, they should be given opportunities not only for ministries among people of their own culture but for cross-cultural ministries as well."[32] The presence of multiethnic ministry teams and leadership present to a congregation a welcoming image—an image that attracts people of other cultures to join.

Problems arise when Anglo congregations attempt to grow a mono-cultural congregation into a multiethnic congregation, hoping that immigrant communities will assimilate to the congregation's culture through time. Nevertheless, as also clearly noted in the document of Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), "Integration as assimilation is perceived by many among ethnic minorities, including especially African Americans, as a call for the surrender of one's heritage and identity in order not only to 'get in,'

but also to become what others label as fully 'human.'"[33] Many perceive this to mean the "interaction of blacks and whites within a context of white supremacy."[34] In some cases, because of the segregation from the host congregation, the immigrants decide to leave this church and join either the mono-ethnic church described above or move to a multiethnic congregation to feel more at home.[35]

A Multiethnic Church

Both mono-ethnic and semi-independent congregations struggle with how to create a healthy church in which the second- and third-generation immigrants are nurtured and enabled to grow into vibrant leaders as first-generations age and step back from leadership. The semi-independent congregations in particular attempt to work this out with the host (Anglo) congregation, and yet are not successful in doing so. It is for this reason that I suggest growing into a multiethnic church as a better alternative for both mono-ethnic and semi-independent congregations to serve, equip, and prepare the second generation for mission in the kingdom of God.

A multiethnic congregation is a congregation comprised of two or more ethnic groups with the sum of the secondary ethnic group(s) consisting of at least 20% of the entire congregation.[36] It is a congregation where no one culture stands over the other. It is a shared community where varying ethnic groups interact with each other and nurture the culture of shared ministry focusing on the mission of Jesus Christ. It is a place where the cultural values and traditions of each ethnic group are represented in every aspect of the church, including leadership.

There are three main reasons for starting a multiethnic congregation. First, because of the continued demographic change in our cities, we need to consider new ways of engaging in mission that are most applicable in our context. Minnesota, for example, is where many cultures converge. This increase in cultural and ethnic diversity, as Douglas Wingeier notes, "demands that we [as a church should] attend to and respect the gift of various groups now represented in our society, church, and institutions. It also requires us to develop intercultural sensitivity and skill."[37] Secondly, it is the multiethnic congregations that the second- and third-generation immigrants feel most comfortable joining. In one case close to my heart, my thirteen-year-old son, Ebba, said, "I want the church to be as integrated as the schools and the families in our community." Thirdly, the church's mission is mainly to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to *all nations* (*penta ta ethne*) (Matt 28:19). As this text clearly indicates, God's mission, which the church embodies, is to open the ways for "all nations" (*ethnos*) to have access to the Gospel of the Kingdom.

This move to a multiethnic congregation would entail the church becoming a truly integrated society representing different cultures. In a multiethnic congregation, all cultures are recognized. Their goal is to grow together, becoming one in Christ regardless of their differences. Members are allowed to work together to be the one body of Christ that expresses both unity of faith and diversity of culture. Whether migrant or citizen, rich or poor, black or white, people find in this church a place and a space, especially the younger immigrant generations. In a prayer for his disciples, Jesus said, "that they may all be one,

just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21).

Below are three approaches that offer possibilities for faith-filled and fully Christian communities to create a healthy environment for the second and third generations to grow in faith and to take the lead in growing their congregations into multiethnic congregations. The youth should be included in this because these require each member, not just the congregational leaders, to be committed to God's mission in the world, taking personal ownership[38] of this mission and working to create a system in which this can be carried out through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Approach A: Focus on Ministry to the Second Generation

Currently mono-ethnic immigrant communities or congregations are united in Christ, but ethnicity frames the basis of that unity. These communities are effective in reaching out to people of their common ethnic groups, but they see no reason to include or incorporate people of other cultures. The main challenges include doing ministry within their community because of language barriers, lack of vision to engage people beyond their own ethnic groups, and failing to incorporate younger generations into their congregations. These challenges require them to open their doors to "others" and change to a multiethnic congregation, which according to one interviewee "makes their leaders uncomfortable because it challenges the particularity that they enjoy or the ethnic identity that holds them together."[39]

In most immigrant congregations, the focus is on the needs of first-generation immigrants. Therefore, the younger generations feel excluded and unappreciated. The question remains, What can the older generation do to make the next generations feel wanted, celebrated, and even affirmed? The first step to ministry among second-generation immigrants is adopting the culture of listening. As stated above, the problem that the second- and third-generation immigrants mention when it comes to their experience with mono-ethnic congregations is that the older generation is unwilling to listen. So, the older generation needs to identify ways of serving the young ones by listening and discerning their needs. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once stated, "the first service that one owes another in a community is *listening*."[40] This concern, for listening and engaging, has long been an issue even for monocultural congregations with their youth ministry. Will the congregation act in a way that engages younger members?

What can the older generation do to make the next generations feel wanted, celebrated, and even affirmed? The first step to ministry among second-generation immigrants is adopting the culture of listening.

As I have observed among the African and Asian immigrant congregations in Minnesota, some congregations even find it difficult to find English-speaking teachers

from the first-generation immigrants who can communicate well with the Sunday school students. Therefore, almost anyone who speaks English could be appointed as a Sunday School teacher. Recruiting Sunday School teachers and youth ministers from among the second- and third-generation immigrants is also the best way to start a ministry focused on the younger generations. First-generation immigrants should also create an environment in which younger generations are invited to fully participate in ministries, including leadership and decision-making.

Also important is building partnerships with other congregations that are seeking to engage youth in ministry. Eldin Villafañe in his book entitled *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* proposes a ministry pattern that David Sanchez describes as "a corporation composed of several congregations (Anglo and ethnic)."[41] According to Sanchez, congregations can do youth ministry together in a way that "the resources of the congregations are combined to present a strong evangelistic witness in the community."[42] This is done while "the autonomy of each congregation is preserved."[43] It is also helpful to engage the youth from ethnic and Anglo congregations in joint service opportunities. This way, they will begin to learn about each other and take the lead toward becoming part of the same community.[44] These joint youth ministries can then grow into multiethnic distinct congregations led by the youth. This can be done either under the church structure or separately. Such moves have been successful in the case of second-generation Korean immigrants.[45] What is exceptional among the second-generation Korean immigrants is that they plant their own churches that are distinct from mainstream evangelicalism or Korean Christianity—yet a hybrid of both traditions. They have become successful in planting Korean congregations that grow into multiethnic congregations.[46] So far, there have not been any immigrant Lutheran congregations that have done this successfully.

Approach B: Joint Ministries

This approach focuses on the semi-independent congregations described above. These congregations include various ethnic groups that maintain separate distinct ministries within the congregation's structure while worshiping and celebrating life together as one church body in Christ. For these congregations, an essential step to growing into a multiethnic congregation is to start joint ministries with the host congregation focused on children and youth. This could include joining Sunday School, youth Bible studies, confirmation classes, etc. As David Anderson argues, however, "developing a multicultural mindset before [starting] a multicultural ministry is important."[47] According to Anderson, we must be "gracist" to have this mindset, which means that we should be "the one who hears, sees, and pays attention to those on the margin"[48]

One way to develop a multicultural mindset is to be open to incorporating elements of different cultures into our worship and to use different languages for worship and communication. Immigrant members should be willing to learn to worship and serve in English, and the host congregations should be prepared to incorporate other cultures and languages into their ministry. As Michael Hawn notes, the problem with most Anglo congregations is that even though they are open to the multiethnic congregation, "assimilation of immigrants into a single cultural perspective is the goal."[49] This is based

on the assumption that the host culture becomes like a "melting-pot" where other cultures will be "melted" into the main "pot." This, of course, has happened to the traditional European groups that migrated to the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But this time, there are over 120 different ethnic groups communicating in more than one hundred languages and dialects. Therefore, a move to being a multicultural congregation requires openness to accommodating other cultures or adopting a mosaic culture.

On the other hand, the issue with many first-generation immigrants is the language barrier and the problem of adopting English as a worship language. To fully integrate with others and serve in different capacities, these immigrants should be willing to learn and practice English and to adapt to American worship styles. They can do this by intentionally and willingly learning the language and immersing themselves in American church culture. As John McClure rightly argues, language should not be a problem because "languages are nothing more than *things in the world* that human beings shape and reshape to identify and deal *together* with the conditions of life under which they live, as they perceive them, and to identify, live into and bring about certain (hopefully good and true) desires and effects given that situation."[50] Therefore, rather than isolating themselves from the dominant culture in the church to maintain their own identity, they should learn how to embrace and celebrate differences, which in turn will enrich their ministry in the larger society.

This step also requires congregations to start a worship service in which the youth can actively participate. In other words, we need to design a worship program that incorporates elements of different cultures represented in our congregations. This is where the church designs a worship service for all people, young and old, or black and white, using one common or different language that people can understand. This can be an English or bilingual service in which elements of different cultures are reflected. This type of worship program allows the youth to fit in and be part of the service easily. One way Ethiopian congregations, for example, can adopt such worship programs is by designing a joint worship service with the host (English-speaking) congregations. Meaning that, among other activities, the English speakers also use the Ethiopian language.

Furthermore, it is essential to aim to build relationships and involve all members in the life and ministry of the church. As Gerardo Marti rightly observes, "multicultural churches do not achieve integration by diligently accommodating to supposedly distinct racial music styles, constructing assumed universal forms of worship, promoting highly intentional leadership for diversity, or raising racial awareness."[51] Rather, Marti argues, "most people come [to the church] because of family or friends and stay because they are involved."[52]

Approach C: Second Generation Immigrants Taking the Lead

The Korean American experience can be a good model for moving forward with forming a multiethnic church. In her book entitled *A Faith of Our Own*, Sharon Kim shows how second-generation Korean Americans are establishing new churches of

their own.[53] According to Kim, second-generation Korean Americans are planting new hybrid congregations rather than assimilating into mainstream churches or inheriting the the churches of their immigrant parents. They are creating a hybrid second-generation ecclesiastical experience by fusing elements of Korean Protestantism and some expressions expressions of American evangelicalism. Kim argues that this development is unprecedented: "It is only within the Korean American community that you witness a large number of the second generation leaving the immigrant church to develop entirely autonomous religious institutions apart from the immigrant context."[54]

However, studies also show that later generations of Japanese, Chinese, Hispanic, and some African American Christians are also forming multiethnic congregations fused with their own hybrid culture.[55] So Kim may be wrong in describing the second-generation Korean Christians' experience as unique; nevertheless, there are lessons to be learned from their approach. One of the main lessons is allowing the young generation to take the lead in planting new churches that are unique to their experiences and needs.

As some studies show, young Americans are dissatisfied with the kind of leadership that exists—the old leadership style both in the immigrant and non-immigrant congregations. Eddie Gibbs, in his book *LeadershipNext,* contrasts the old leadership style, characterized by "inherited patterns of hierarchy, status, and dispensability" with the emerging leadership (the youth) focused on missional effectiveness. For him, the emerging missional leaders (particularly among the youth) focus on "ministry by the church in the world rather than ministry in the church that is largely confined to the existing members."[56]

An important fact mentioned in Gibbs's book is the "relationship between leadership [in the Anglo congregations] and the loss of the [youth] under-forty-five."[57] According to him, one of the main reasons the youth have continued to disappear from the Anglo church in large numbers is their dissatisfaction with the old leadership style. His research related to the Anglo congregations also speaks to the reason why second- and third-generation immigrants find it difficult to remain in the church. So how can immigrant congregations develop a ministry appropriate to the younger generations? I think the answer should be clear by now—it is by allowing them to take the lead and by thrusting the next generation into God's ongoing creative works.

Conclusion

If Ethiopian American congregations want the second and third generations to keep their Christian faith and remain in the church for life, they need to start multicultural worship programs. The advantage of multiethnic congregations is that they have better opportunities to be a Christian witnesses to their neighbors and influence the larger society. They can engage the larger society by being part of the multiethnic church and still maintain their own ethnic cultural space.

Starting a multicultural congregation requires the openness of congregation leaders and members to change. As church pastors and leaders, we must graciously navigate this change. Congregations are more likely to vote for "no change" and champion the illusive status quo until they realize the enormous short-sightedness of their convictions. Leading change for the sake of mission and developing a program that incorporates the youth among

the immigrant communities may seem nearly impossible. However, this is something worth trying. Remember, if we refuse to change, we will most likely see fewer and second and third generation immigrants attending our churches!

ENDNOTES

[1] Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movement in the Modern World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).
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[4] Todd Johnson and Gina Belloffatto, "Migration, Religious Diasporas, and Religious Diversity: A Global Survey," *Mission Studies* 29, (2012): 8–9, doi: 10.1163/157338312X637993.
[5] "The Religious Affiliation of U.S. Immigrants: Majority Christian, Rising Share of Other Faiths," Pew Research Center, May 17, 2013, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/05/17/the-religious-affiliation-of-us-immigrants/
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[7] "First generation" describes individuals born and raised in a different country. The 1.5 generation are those who were born in a different country but immigrated to the United States between six and seventeen years of age. For further detail, see Cecilia Menjivar, "Living in Two Worlds? Guatemalan-Origin Children in the United States and Emerging Transnationalism," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28, no. 3 (2002): 532; Min Zhou, "Growing Up American: The Challenge Confronting Immigrant Children and Children of Immigrants," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23, (1997): 65.
[8] Zhou, "Growing Up American," 65.
[9] See Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010); Michael O. Emerson with Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Harold Coward, "Religion and Ethnicity: An Overview of the Issues Raised," in *Religion and Ethnicity*, ed. Harold Coward and Leslie Kawamura (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1978); H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Meridian Books Edition, 1981).
[10] Helen Ebaugh and Janet Chafetz, eds., *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continues and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000), 10.
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[12] Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregations as Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.
[13] Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (New York: Distributed by Friendship Press, 1955).
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[16] Gemma Tulud Criz, "Christian Mission and Ministry in the Context of Contemporary Migration," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 20, no. 2 (2016): 249.
[17] Demelash Yosef and Girma Chala, in discussion with the author, August 15, 2022.
[18] Ibid.
[19] J. Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (Toronto: Collier-Macmillian, 1970), 112.
[20] For a biblical critique of this principle, see Damian Emetuche, "Avoiding Racism in Starting New Congregations," in *Racism, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics*, vol. 35 (Waco, TX: Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2010), 75–81.
[21] Barkot Berhanu, in discussion with the author, August 10, 2022.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Tsion Hailu, in discussion with the author, August 10, 2022. Helen Lee in her studies among Korean immigrant congregations describes the three reasons for "silent exodus" as the dissatisfaction of second-generation immigrants with the leadership of their parents, dissatisfaction with the ethnic emphasis on the church culture, and lack of opportunity to participate in the life and ministry of the church. Cf. Helen Lee, "Silent Exodus: Can the East Asian Church in America Reverse the Flight of Its Next Generation?" *Christianity Today*, August 12, 1996, 50–53; Helen Lee, "Silent Exodus No More," *Christianity Today*, October 2014, 38–47; Eunice Hong, "Struggles of Korean Second-Generation Leaders: Leaving the Immigrant Church," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 45, no. 3 (2020): 257–265.
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[25] Barkot Berhanu, in discussion with the author, August 10, 2022.
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[30] Challa Gemechu, in discussion with the author, July 25, 2022.
[31] Stephen Bevans, "Mission Among Migrants, Mission of Migrants," in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, ed. Daniel G. Groody and Giacchino Campese (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 101.
[32] Stephen Bevans, "Mission Among Migrants," 101.
[33] See *Racism and the Church: Overcoming the Idolatry (A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod)* (St. Louis, MO, 1994), 26. For

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[34] Chester L. Hunt and Lewis Walker, *Ethnic Dynamics* (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1974), 354.
[35] It should be noted here that at its 1992 convention, the LCMS adopted Resolution 3-03 "To Combat All Racism," in which it urged its members "to repent of any attitude or practice of racism as individuals and congregations" and resolved that "the Synod repudiate all racism and urge its members to celebrate God's love in Christ and their forgiveness and acceptance as God's children by loving and serving all fellow humans as they have been loved and served, without any exception of persons, and to work toward social justice in their neighborhoods and workplaces and all areas of society." Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Convention Proceedings – 58th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (Pittsburg, PA, 1992), 114, https://archive.org/details/1992LCMSConventionProceedings/page/n111/mode/2up
[36] Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregations as Answer to the Problem of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.
[37] Douglas Wingeier, "Emptying-for-Filling: An Approach to Cross-Cultural Ministry," *Quarterly Review* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1992): 35.
[38] Not "ownership" in the sense that the members control God's mission, but rather that God's mission has become their mission as well. Through their participation in the Trinitarian community, they now also have a stake in this mission.
[39] Berhanu Aaromo, in discussion with the author, July 29, 2022.
[40] Dietrich Bonhoeffer quoted in Douglas Ruffle, "Building Blocks for a Multicultural Congregation," *Quarterly Review* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 81, italics mine. See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Vida en Comunidad* (Buenos Aires: Methopress, 1966), 96.
[41] David Sanchez quoted in Eldin Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (G.R.: Eerdmans, 1995), 55.
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[43] Ibid.
[44] This approach was proposed twenty-five years ago by Manuel Ortiz. See Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models for Developing Multiethnic Church* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1996).
[45] Dae Sung Kim, "New Missions with a New Generation: The Experiences of Korean American Churches and Missions," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 44, no. 2 (April 2020): 174–182.
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[47] David Anderson, *Gracism: The Art of Inclusion* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 40.
[48] Anderson, *Gracism*, 23.
[49] Michael Hawn, *One Bread, One Body: Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship* (The Alban Institute, 2003), 4.
[50] John S. McClure, *Mashup Religion: Pop Music and Theological Invention* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 107, italics mine.
[51] Gerardo Marti, *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21–22.
[52] Marti, *Worship Across Racial Divide,* 82.
[53] Sharon Kim, *A Faith of Our Own: Second-Generation Spirituality in Korean American Churches* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010).
[54] Kim, *Faith of Our Own*, 22. The limitation to Kim's findings is that her research is focused on second-generation Korean American churches in the Los Angeles area. So, we cannot be sure if it

is applicable in other contexts. However, I am proposing the second-generation Korean American experience be taken seriously as we explore different options on how we can grow to be multi-cultural congregations.

[55] See Yoshida Ryo, "Japanese Christians and their Christian Communities in North America," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 229–244; Timothy Tseng, "Second-Generation Chinese Evangelical Use of the Bible in Identity Discourse in North America," *Semeia* 90, no. 4 (Spring 2002): 251–267.

[56] Eddie Gibbs, *LeadershipNext: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 31, 44.

[57] Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, 13.

Multiethnic Churches: Challenges and Opportunities[1]

Douglas L. Rutt

Perhaps those who have been around a while will remember this image. It is from an episode of the famous television series *Star Trek*. The title of the episode is "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield." It had such an impression on me that even today I can remember well when I saw it for the first time in 1969. I was fifteen years old. In that episode, the spaceship *Enterprise* comes upon two survivors of a war-torn planet. It turns out that the two men are the only remaining of their race. The two hate each other, so much so that they are constantly disposed to violent fights. They have to be restrained by Captain Kirk and the crew. In one scene, one of the men erupts in to such a fury that he demands Captain Kirk kill the other right then and there.

What is the reason for the hatred between them? The crew, and even Spock, cannot understand what is happening between these two enemies. During almost the entire episode, they try to comprehend the cause. Can you see it? Finally, it is revealed that one of the two men is black on the right side and white on the left, and the other man is white

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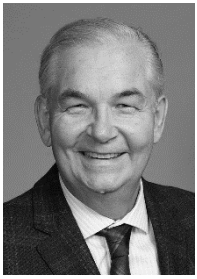

Rev. Dr. Douglas L. Rutt has served in international missions for almost forty years, having moved to Guatemala with his family in 1983. He taught missiology at Concordia Theological Seminary for over fifteen years and several years as a guest professor for Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He was the Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Executive Director of the International Division of Lutheran Hour Ministries, and, since 2018, was Provost at Concordia Seminary where he currently is a Professor of Practical Theology. He holds an MDiv and PhD from Concordia Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Deborah, have five children and fifteen grandchildren. ruttd@csl.edu

on the right side and black on the left. The purpose of the episode is to demonstrate the absurdity of our prejudices against others who happen to be different in some way.

Last week I was talking with one of my grandsons about how he thought his high school baseball team would fare in the coming year. It would be his senior year. He is very interested in sports, especially baseball. During our conversation, he commented on the other teams in his school's league and the rivalries that exist. There was one team in particular that he called out as their biggest adversary in the league. I asked him, "Why do you say they are your most antagonistic opponent?" He exclaimed, "Because we hate them!" I asked, "Why do you hate them?" He responded, "Because they are our rivals, and we hate them, and they hate us!" What I find humorous about this—or maybe a little sad—has to do with the names of the two teams. My grandson's team is the "Fairfield *Christian* Academy Knights," and the name of the other team is the "Grove City *Christian* School Eagles"!

The Challenge of Ethnic Identity

I was assigned the topic "Multiethnic Churches: Challenges and Opportunities" for the LCMS National Hispanic Convention" under the general theme, "We Are One in Jesus Christ." I knew the challenges and obstacles to overcome are great and many, and that we could easily spend the entire time describing, analyzing, and lamenting them. This might leave no time to speak of the many and various opportunities and benefits of being a multiethnic church. However, taking time to analyze the challenges that hinder harmony in the church will help us understand more fully the benefits.

Since the fall into sin, human beings are disposed to find something negative in others, or find some reason to become self-righteous or see themselves as morally superior. In fact, scientists have discovered that self-righteous indignation toward others because one feels superior releases endorphins in the body. They say that this feeling can become addictive, causing a dependency. The person who believes he or she is superior to others can acquire an urge to continue in that thought pattern in order to satisfy his or her need for more endorphins. This happens not only at the personal level, but also at the level of the various groups around which we organize ourselves, be it language, skin color, gender, ethnicity, culture, location, club team, etc.[2]

What is of interest to us today, however, is the matter of how ethnicity and culture affect human relationships and interactions, even between Christians. How does ethnicity influence our life together in the Communion of Saints? As the Apostle Paul affirms, we are one in Christ Jesus— "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In the eyes of God, it is true, but putting this unity in practice in our daily lives, as they say, "is easier said than done."[3] There are countless things that cause divisions among people, even in the church!

Ethnicity as a Cause for Conflict

During the last academic year in chapel at Concordia Seminary, we have been meditating on First and Second Samuel. I had the privilege of preaching two times on Samuel. I had read First and Second Samuel before to be sure, but this time it occurred to me that those two books in large part seem to be a narrative of one raiding party assaulting another tribe or ethnic group, back and forth, again and again. They are continuously in conflict. Each ethnicity considered the others to be mortal enemies—reflecting in many ways the human condition.

The word that is used to describe a source of tension and intercultural conflict in which we human beings incessantly find ourselves is *ethnocentrism*. The first part of this word, *ethno*, comes from the Greek word *ἔθνος,* which is commonly translated as "Gentiles" in the Bible, but also as "nation," "people," or "pagan."[4] Scholars have investigated at length how this term should be translated in Scripture, especially in the context of Matthew 28:19, where Christ commands, "Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*." The fundamental meaning of *ἔθνος*, according to the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (BDAG), is "A body of persons united by kinship, culture, and common traditions, nation, people."[5] Such is the use, for example, in Acts 8:9, where it says that Simon had amazed τὸ ἔθνος τῆς Σαμαρείας, that is, the Samaritan people (or ethnic group). For our purposes, we can say that *ethnicity* refers to a group of people who are united based on shared experiences, shared traditions, shared history, shared religion, shared language, or whatever other symbol around which members of a group identify and to which they maintain loyalty.[6] Sometimes an ethnic group shares a genetic heredity, but not necessarily.

Anthropologists say that to identify with an ethnicity is beneficial for people because it gives them a sense of belonging and security. We understand how to behave and get along with others because we are of the same group. Our ethnic identity provides for our protection and well-being. In this sense, it is important to point out also that there is a strong psychological and emotional component to ethnicity.[7] If someone insults our ethnicity, it can provoke a painful psychological wound and intense emotions, and, as we have seen, even violent reaction. Ethnic groups divide the world between "us" and "them."

Seeing it from a more positive perspective, we can say that ethnicity provides a psychological and spiritual connection with the other members of our group. In a complex and dangerous world, ethnicity provides a "family," which is a powerful metaphor for protection and a sense of belonging. As Eloise Meneses said, "Ethnicity is family writ large. . . . And family is the most powerful form of association that exists between human beings. Hence, ethnic associations carry with them all the strength of both real and metaphorical blood ties. For the world-wide Christian church, this simple fact is both a rich treasure and a dangerous trap."[8]

Ethnic diversity can be a blessing for the global church, helping us to enjoy the richness of the kingdom of God, as we will see later, but it can also be a motive for human beings to become enemies and even cause tragic violence. Meneses sums it up this way: "The blessing of ethnicity, like the blessing of family, is indeed a mixed one!"[9] I would say that belonging and being loyal to an ethnic group in itself is neither good nor bad. It is

simply a fact because each one of us belongs to an ethnic group. We all need to belong to a group. However, unrestrained loyalty can lead to negative actions and consequences.

The Problem of Ethnocentrism

The problem begins with what anthropologists and sociologists call *ethnocentrism*. *Ethnocentrism* is a term that describes the belief that one's group is superior to others that one's way of doing things is better, and that one's values are superior to those of the rest. Ethnocentric people impose a *moral force* to their judgments against others. I can love my ethnicity and even be proud of it. For example, my ancestry on my mother's side is German, but on my father's side my ancestry is Czech. For some reason I have always had more interest and pride in the Czech side. I don't know why, but I am proud of my Czech lineage. I find it more fascinating and perhaps mysterious. There is nothing wrong with that. However, if I begin to believe that the Czech culture is superior to all the rest that is ethnocentrism. As the word indicates, *ethnocentrism* is the conviction that your ethnicity is the center of the universe, is superior, and that all other groups are inferior when it comes to their values, knowledge, traditions, likes, dislikes, etc.

Sherwood Lingenfelter, in his book *Ministering Cross-Culturally,* identifies six points of tension in cultural values. Each culture tends to emphasize one side or the other on a continuum for each of these tension points:

- Tensions over the concept of time (Time vs. Event)
- Tensions over the concept of judgment (Dichotomist vs. Holistic)
- Tensions over how to deal with crises (Crisis vs. Non-crisis)
- Tensions over goals (Task vs. Person)
- Tensions over self-esteem (Status vs. Achievement)
- Tensions over vulnerability (Concealment vs. Exposure)[10]

Lingenfelter's objective is to show how different groups or cultures have distinctive attitudes regarding these six categories of cultural values, and the differences can cause a multitude of misunderstandings and conflicts. One common example is the tension over the concept of time. An African student once told me that our Anglo-Saxon obsession with the clock causes us to squander time away—that our incessant worry about time actually causes our time to move faster. He said to me, "We believe that personal relationships are more important than the clock. You have it the other way around."

Another example is the tension over how to deal with crises. People from an Anglo-Saxon, Northern European culture, in general, want to be prepared for any eventuality that might occur. We believe that we can control everything, and with extensive and meticulous planning it is possible to face and overcome any crisis or emergency. Thus, it is necessary to have a "contingency plan" for every possibility. We have confidence in our ability to control events. Such a culture is classified as an "anxious" culture, which such an obsession will surely produce.

On the other hand, other cultures put more emphasis on actual experience, which normally does not include the event of a crisis. They might say, "Why invest so much time and so many resources planning for something that probably is not going to happen? And

besides, doesn't God govern what happens in this world? Why shouldn't we trust in His protection and help? There are things that are out of our control anyway." This kind of culture would be classified as "non-anxious."

Cultures value different approaches to the possibility of a crisis. Is one approach morally superior to the other? I would say, no. Different approaches have their positive and negative points. Ethnocentrism, however, will put great moral force in favor of the preferred way of its culture, and the differences, which have nothing to do with morality, will be used to criticize, insult, or make the other feel small or insufficient.

There is a principle called the "negative attribution bias." It suggests that if we human beings see or observe a behavior or action that we do not understand, we will attempt to explain it cognitively to fill the void in our knowledge, and, in most cases, we will arrive at an interpretation that judges the action of others in a negative light. For example, there was a member of my congregation who suffered from multiple sclerosis. He could walk, but with irregular and uneven movements. His doctor advised him, therefore, to carry a cane when going for a walk so that those who observed him would not think he was inebriated. The point is that people observing him would be more likely to think something negative rather than to give him the benefit of the doubt.

I bring this up only to show the dynamic of how human beings judge others continually, and we are predisposed to believe that our values, actions, and commitments are superior. Even morally neutral matters such as colors can be a motive for criticism. I have heard people who have ridiculed the brilliant colors that some cultures like to use to paint their homes and churches. Yet, what difference do the colors we like make? It is merely a preference.

The Destructive Power of Ethnocentrism

It is tragic that ethnocentrism can increase in intensity easily until it gets out of control, with sometimes horrible results. A few weeks before writing this paper, I was in Ethiopia to participate in a theological symposium and the commencement of the Mekane Yesus Seminary. The keynote presentation of the symposium was "Christian Mission in an Ethnically Polarized Nation." Ethiopia is a nation where Christians are in the majority. About 70 percent of the population is Christian, with about 22 percent being protestant, mainly from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

However, Ethiopia has experienced and is experiencing ethnic violence and atrocities of frightening proportions. Currently, the affected ethnic groups are the Tigray, the Amhara, and the Oromo, among others. The church knows it must confront this situation. On the day of the symposium, the president of the seminary, Dr. Bruk Asala, testified before the assembly that on that same day members of the Mekane Yesus church body of different ethnic groups were killing each other. "Today," he emphasized. Later that night, I learned upon seeing the news that on that day some 300 men, women and children were massacred in a village in the Oromia province about 200 miles west of Addis Ababa. It is sad to see such hostility and violence, especially in a nation that is predominantly Christian.

We are all aware of the ethnic cleansing that occurred in Rwanda in 1994, when the two groups in conflict were the Tutsi and the Hutu peoples. Again, it is sad it happened in

a nation that is predominantly Christian, yet it found itself amid a horrific atrocity. The cause was ethnic conflict. A Jesuit priest lamented the horror that Rwanda suffered, commenting,

> My faith as a Christian has been affected seriously, in the sense that I cannot realize that such evil could happen in a country where so many people are Christians and where there are so many Catholics (over 65 percent) with such influence in education. What have we been doing as Christians and as priests? How can we preach the love of God, the compassion of God, in this situation? All these questions rise from an experience of the deep mystery of evil, evil that is so consistent and so strong that its power is prevailing.[11]

East African theologian, Aquiline Tarimo, in his article, "Ethnicity, Common Good, and the Church in Contemporary Africa," concludes, "The blood of ethnicity is thicker than the water of baptism."[12]

In his keynote address at Mekane Yesus Seminary, Dr. Wolde-Kidan reflected at length on the interaction between Christian identity and ethnic identity. He asked, "Who are we, ethnics or Christians or both?"[13] The question had to do with the debates within the EECMY concerning which language should be used and the place of ethnic customs in the church. Some argued that the church should not emphasize or observe ethnic differences. To put so much emphasis on the differences only weakens the collective identity as Christians. It would be better that everyone used the same language and followed the same customs and rituals. According to this opinion, the attempts to create a multicultural institution would result in failure because of the reality of the sinful condition of humanity. Wolde-Kidan expressed this opinion (not necessarily his opinion, but his characterization of the opinion held):

> Likewise, though the church is a place for great teachings of love, peace, tolerance, and self-control, it is also an institution of human beings predisposed to exhibit ethnocentrism and/or racism; the church is prone to conflicts just as the rest of society is. At times, the grip of ethnicity becomes irresistible, and many people choose to follow the crowd and commit atrocities.[14]

On the other hand, there are those in EECMY who desire to recognize, celebrate, and make space for ethnic diversity. They believe that their ethnicity is a gift from God—it is part of their identity—and they do not want to disparage something that was not their decision but was given to them by God. Those holding to this position recognize that the new birth has made them part of the family of God and has united them in the fellowship of believers, but that they are still members of their ethnic group. They have a "double identity," one might say, and the two identities should be recognized and celebrated.

During the symposium, the conversation became quite emotional at times, with some of the pastors and leaders expressing their experiences and opinions with shouts and tears, demonstrating how significant a topic this was for the participants. It should be noted, however, that while there were differences of opinion, both sides agreed that in the church

there is no place for ethnocentrism, that is, that one ethnic group would believe itself to be superior to another.

All that we have said so far is to demonstrate that the issue of ethnicity, and its relationship to the life of the church, is something that must be taken seriously. Ethnic tensions and the reaction that ethnic identity can produce is serious. It has been the experience of the human race since the fall into sin. I came away from Ethiopia convinced that not to address it in a healthy way, using all of our theological and human resources, would be dangerous, not only because it damages the witness of the church of Christ, but also because it can be dangerous to our souls, emotions, and even our physical well-being.

The Benefits and Opportunities of a Multiethnic Church

It is not necessary to prove biblically that our God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is a God who loves the whole world and desires that we be united in this love. It is a spiritual reality that all believers are united in Christ: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Of course, these distinctions still exist, but they should not divide us in Christ's church. One can see that the categories mentioned here by Paul speak of matters such as race, nationality, ethnicity, social class, and gender. When speaking about the love and salvation that God provides, however, there is no distinction—that is, these distinctions lose their importance in the eyes of God. Yet, obviously the distinctions continue, and they are taken seriously in Holy Scripture.

One of the most impactful passages found in the Bible is the description of the vision of the Apostle John in Revelation chapter 7, when John sees the celestial multitude worshiping God—a multitude made up of "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (7:9). John leaves no room for doubt: Salvation is for all human beings, no matter how they are distinguished. All are included.

The first Christians, even the apostles, knew intellectually that the saving work of their Lord Jesus Christ was for all. But they needed to learn the practical implications of this truth, which would only be learned through experience. Putting this reality in practice is a challenge because of the previously described reasons.

Biblical Understanding—The Seven "Deacons"

The book of Acts is instructive because it presents us with case studies of how the early church, little by little, learned to overcome its prejudices. Normally, when studying Acts, we think of the expansion of the church in terms of the geographical boundaries that were crossed. However, Acts also tells the story of how the church crossed cultural borders. One interesting case, which I believe is often misinterpreted, is the narrative of the "seven deacons" (Acts 6:1–7).

As the church grew and many people were added to the number of the followers of Christ, the church began to experience "growing pains." Soon, a kind of culture clash erupted between two ethnic groups: The Jews who spoke Greek and the Jews who spoke Aramaic and Hebrew. Acts reports that a complaint arose concerning the treatment of the

widows of the Greek-speaking Jews: "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because (ὅτι) their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution" (Acts 6:1).

When there is rapid growth within any social group, inevitably there will be tensions.[15] When more and more people are added, the needs of the group expand exponentially in proportion to the growth in numbers. When other factors are included, such as linguistic and/or cultural differences, the situation can become even more acute. In the case of the selection of the so-called seven deacons, a deeper analysis of the "complaint" that Luke describes and how it was dealt with indicates that it more likely was a matter of disenfranchisement than anything else.

Part of the problem is how we interpret the little Greek word *ὅτι*, which can be understood in English as either "that" or "because." Almost every English Bible translation that I consulted interpreted the "complaint" of negligence as an absolute fact and thus use the word "because." According to this interpretation, they complained legitimately *because* their widows were not fairly attended to. However, if we were to translate *ὅτι* as "that," the sense changes a bit. If we say that the Hellenistic Jews complained *that* their widows were unfairly attended to, the content of the complaint is stated without judging if the complaint is valid or legitimate. Consider this small change in translation: "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews *that* (*ὅτι*) their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution." Seeing the case from the dynamics of a human relations perspective, which teaches us that the "problem" is not always the problem but is often what psychologists call the "designated problem," opens up a slightly different interpretation. That is, the "complaint" is a marker or indication that there is a matter to resolve, but one needs to dig more deeply into the surrounding dynamics to discover the true problem behind the designated problem.[16]

When one examines the solution that the twelve proposed to deal with the "problem," other possibilities present themselves. For example, the twelve could have said, "It's not true! Look at the distribution records!" Or, they could have declared, "We will take your concern under advisement and be more careful so that it doesn't happen again." However, the twelve said to the Hellenists, "It is not right that we should give up preaching (sic)[17] the word of God to serve tables" (6:2). In other words, they did not enter into a debate over a matter that probably was not the fundamental question at any rate. Rather, they responded, "Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty" (6:3).

Those who were chosen were to be men of "good repute" and they were to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. In other words, they were to demonstrate spiritual maturity. And it is notable that all of the names of those chosen are Greek and thus were Hellenists themselves. Based on the qualifications to serve in this office, and the powerful preaching that immediately follows by some of the seven, such as Stephen and Philip, we can conclude that their calling was not only to serve tables, but to preach the Word. I am convinced that the problem that caused the complaint from the Hellenistic Jews was *not* that their widows were being neglected. That complaint was simply a symptom of another problem, which was disenfranchisement, a feeling of marginalization or lack of inclusion, on the part of the Hellenists. The way in which the twelve dispensed with the conflictive situation was very astute, but what is even more significant and instructive for our purposes is the affirmation of ethnic differences and that the installation of representatives with a Greek background in the ministry of the Word, in turn, resulted in the growth and expansion of the Christian movement. Luke concludes his account of this episode with these words: "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (6:7). The solution to the ethnic tensions by selecting and installing these men from the Hellenist-Jewish ethnic group was related directly to the mission of extending the kingdom of Christ.

That complaint was simply a symptom of another problem, which was disenfranchisement, a feeling of marginalization or lack of inclusion, on the part of the Hellenists.

This case is encouraging because it demonstrates that there are biblical models and patterns for overcoming ethnic tensions; however, one must approach such situations with sagacity, wisdom, and profound, not superficial, attention in order to analyze well and formulate a response that is adequate and God-pleasing.

Biblical Understanding—Peter at Cornelius' House

Obviously, the events of Acts 6 do not resolve all the challenges of how to incorporate more and more people from different ethnic backgrounds. As I mentioned earlier, I believe that the apostles recognized intellectually that the gospel is for all and that the church should incorporate people from all nations, or ethnicities, given this was the commission that Jesus had given them. However, the practical implications had to be confronted, and the disciples would need to think theologically to advance the mission. I am convinced that mission is the mother of theology,[18] because it requires that we think about questions that previously we did not have to answer.

I want to summarize two other episodes from Acts where the believers were challenged and had to analyze situations that they had not experienced before. In addition, they had to overcome their own prejudices and cultural inclinations. In Acts 10:1 to 11:28, we see the well-known story where God challenged Peter to go to the home of the Roman centurion, Cornelius. It may not seem so strange to us, but it was hard for Peter. He had to

overcome powerful prejudices within his very being in order to enter Cornelius' house, who, despite being "a devout man who feared God with all his household" (10:2), was a Gentile. Peter had learned his entire life that he was not to enter the house of a Gentile, much less sit down to eat with one.

God had to intervene in a powerful way to induce Peter to go to the house of Cornelius. The scene of Peter's vision of the sheet that descended three times from the heavens with animals that were classified as impure, and the voice from heaven that told him to take and eat, is dramatic. This happened to teach Peter that it was necessary to get out of his comfort zone to preach the message of salvation also to Gentiles. In the case of Cornelius, Peter had to experience a worldview transformation, when in one decisive moment after spending time in Cornelius' home, he finally declared, "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" (10:34–35). One must understand that Peter arrived at this conclusion by a drastic and jolting change in his worldview.

When Peter returned to what some call the first "synodical headquarters" in Jerusalem to report concerning the conversion of Cornelius and his household, what was the initial reaction? Did they all rejoice over his report? Actually, no. The initial reaction was to criticize Peter for having entered the house of Gentiles and having eaten with them. Thanks be to God, after hearing more of what happened in Cornelius' house, the disciples became convinced and glorified God. I believe that the episode of Peter in the house of Cornelius is one of the most important accounts in the book of Acts, mainly because of the space in Acts that is dedicated to the story, and because of the account of the sheet that descended from heaven, which is repeated three times. Luke must have considered that history to be highly significant to dedicate so much space to it.

Biblical Learning—Antioch

But not everything was thereby resolved either, because immediately they had to confront the entry of other people from different and diverse ethnicities in the city of Antioch. Antioch was a cosmopolitan city with a population composed of a variety of cultures, languages, and religions. By the end of the first century after Christ, Antioch would become the center of the Christian movement.[19] We remember that the followers of Jesus were first called "Christians" in Antioch (Acts 11:26). But the church would have to go through difficulties that threatened the gospel itself at the conversion of so many Gentiles. Some Jews from Jerusalem arrived at Antioch, and upon seeing so many and such a diversity of ethnicities being incorporated into the church, they became alarmed and insisted that the new converts would need to observe Jewish customs as a requirement for membership in the church.

Paul was so deeply concerned by this demand of the Jews from Jerusalem that he immediately traveled with other leaders to Jerusalem to resolve the matter. For Paul, the gospel itself was under attack because the pharisaical, legalistic Jews wanted to impose traditions and customs outside of the gospel as requirements to be a Christian. The disagreement was so divisive and delicate that a council of "all the apostles and elders" was called to deliberate concerning the matter (Acts 15:6). Fortunately, the council

determined in favor of the gospel and did not impose Jewish traditions and legal requirements, except some things that were advised more than anything to avoid offence to the weaker Jewish brothers.

For me, these episodes and the experience of the primitive church are instructive and edifying for us today considering our theme of the challenges and opportunities of a multiethnic church. First, we see that, concerning customs, likes, traditions, prejudices, etc., it is essential to maintain the supremacy of the gospel. In my forty years of cross-cultural ministry, I have learned that it is not always easy to discern between what are likes and human cultural traditions and what goes against the gospel. We should evaluate seriously the elements of a culture that can be contrary to the gospel, but we must do so carefully.

Approaches to Cultural Differences

There are two ways to look at how we might evaluate cultures. One approach is called "cultural relativity." This is the idea, affirmed by many contemporary anthropologists and sociologists, that each culture should be evaluated and judged according to its own internal criteria. I believe this approach is inadequate because we have the Word of God that teaches us the difference between right and wrong, good and bad. It is possible that a given culture has elements that do not concur with what God's Word teaches us.

A more adequate approach is called "cultural validity." This approach recognizes that all cultures have both good and bad elements, but that finally they will be judged by God. The point is that this approach recognizes the validity of a culture.[20] Before judging, we should try to understand, and that is not always an easy matter. As I mentioned earlier, human beings have a proclivity, according to the "negative attribution principle," to judge those things we do not understand in a negative way. I believe that there is much to learn from the early church on this subject.

Another important insight from the examples of the Book of Acts is that the only way to develop cultural sensitivity and understanding is by experience. We can read innumerable books on the topic, and we can review all the Bible passages that teach us that God is a God of all, including all ethnicities; however, the only way to achieve and assimilate into your being a cross-cultural sensitivity and understanding is through the experience of it. Let me illustrate. In a previous life I was a flight instructor. My first career was to teach people how to fly airplanes. A person can study in detail, reading all the books and manuals about how to fly an airplane; however, the only way to be able to fly an airplane in a safe way is to do it. You must get into the airplane and practice with an instructor. It is like riding a bicycle: you must do it to learn it.

We see something similar at play with the early Christians. The way to grow in their capacity to accept the different ethnic groups was to have the experience of living with others, to live together with others, to personally experience the life of others, to enter their homes, to sit down and eat with them. Therefore, if we are going to overcome the challenges of a multiethnic church, we must be intentional in looking for opportunities to live in community with people who are different from us.

Benefits of Multiethnic Experience

The benefits of having and experiencing a multiethnic church are many and great. The goal should be integration, not assimilation. There is a difference. "Assimilation" is to require that all become similar or the same—usually the same as the dominant culture. Integration, on the other hand, means that all are at liberty to maintain their ethnic or cultural identity. It is to live with the differences, recognizing the unity that we have in Christ, but also the variety of cultural expressions. A phrase that has a long history is "unity in diversity." It expresses the idea of harmony but does not seek a unity based only on tolerance for differences. It presupposes that the different cultural expressions enrich our human interactions. Eloise Meneses comments that if we were able to erase ethnic differences,

> the loss of multiple perspectives on Christian experience and on the Bible would be inestimable. The treasure of ethnicity permits us to unlock the full riches of Christian understanding that are only available through the entire Body of Christ. We must discern God's truth together, not apart.[21]

This is something I have learned during my mission and ministry experience around the world, especially in the classes I have taught with students from different backgrounds. When studying a particular Bible passage, for example, it has been wonderful to see the perspectives and profound perceptions of students who see things that, because of my background, I may not have seen. In addition, to learn more of the world and of the diversity of peoples, ethnicities, and cultures that inhabit planet Earth has been an enriching experience.

Recently, Arthur Satterwhite expressed it like this in *Christianity Today*:

> God knows something we don't know (shocker): The differences that we look down upon in others are a reminder of how outrageously intentional, creative, beautiful, openhanded, and openhearted our God is. Sameness is not a virtue in God's economy. On the contrary, sameness actually limits our ability to see and appreciate the full beauty of the diverse mosaic that is God's creation.[22]

Hope for the Church—Hope for the Future

Now how do we implement the experience of true integration in order to benefit from the richness of human and Christian experience? Twenty-five years ago, Dr. Alvin Barry, then president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, asked me to give the keynote presentation to the Council on Mission and Ministry on the theme "Opportunities and Challenges in Ethnic Ministries."[23] In that study I delineated several steps that could be taken to promote ministry toward people of other ethnicities in our Synod. Thinking of this twenty-five years later, I can say that there surely have been efforts in that direction, and we should never disparage the attempts and achievements of anyone. For example, the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology and the Center for Hispanic Studies operated by Concordia Seminary have been a positive contribution, making theological education and

leadership opportunities available to many pastors and deaconesses from various immigrant communities.

Yet, I regret that there has not been more progress. For example, our two seminaries have not advanced much in terms of the diversity in the ethnic makeup of their faculties.

However, God surely can do great things so that we become a church like the one we see in Revelation 7, and perhaps He is already doing it. A bright light can be with younger generations. I have observed many times that younger people appreciate and want to participate in multiethnic groups and activities. It has been their experience in school, the university, and in the workplace, and they have appreciated the richness of those experiences. So, why not also in the church? That is the way it is for my own children and their spouses. Their desire is to participate in an ethnically diverse Christian community.

Another opportunity on the horizon has to do with the children of the multitude of immigrants who are arriving to our nation. During my time as the supervisor of the PhD program in Missiology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, several of my immigrant students, from places such as Ethiopia, Korea, Latvia and Latin America, were quite concerned for what is called the 1.5 and second generation of immigrants and their spiritual well-being. These students struggled with what it means to bring up their children in the United States. One of them, Dr. Tesfai Tesema, has written an excellent book entitled *Hope for the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Can Rekindle Christianity in the West.*[24] His book does not merely describe the challenges for immigrants and refugees in bringing up their children in a culture that is drastically different from their own; rather, the book is an *optimistic* book. Dr. Tesema demonstrates how, in spite of the challenges, being brought up as a bicultural young woman or man is a marvelous gift from God. It raises a new generation of people who will be exceptionally equipped to bring understanding, aid, healing, and the gospel to a world that is torn apart by contention, racism, ethnocentrism, anger, hatred, and confusion. The affirmation of Dr. Tesema's book gives me hope that things can change, because God is great, and He works in mysterious but effective ways.

The most significant and real unity and connection with our brothers and sisters is the unity that Christ has given us by His saving work. It is a true unity—it exists. Our first allegiance is to Christ, who has given us this unity. This reality is more important than the culture or ethnicity to which we belong. We must never allow ethnic differences to separate us from Christ. However, recognizing and respecting differences between people does not need to damage our unity in Christ; rather, it should make it even stronger. I agree with Eloise Meneses, who affirms that, according to her experience, which is considerable, Christ is *more central* in multiethnic churches.

> In segregated churches, other agendas can predominate. Culture takes over, as the church becomes an increasingly useful association for ulterior purposes. But multi-ethnic, or multi-cultural, churches have nothing but Jesus to hold them together. The very struggle associated with crossing cultural boundaries necessitates a strong commonality, causing Christians to remember the center of their faith. And best of all, the diversity of backgrounds and experiences

> contributes to a richer view of who Christ is, as songs, sermons, and Bible studies provide the variety of perspectives that are lacking in mono-cultural churches.[25]

I mentioned that it is necessary to be intentional about looking for ethnic diversity in the church, but, as we have seen, the challenges and complexities are many. We should be intentional and do all that we can to be open to all nations, and we should be intentional in seeking opportunities to live together with others, especially in the church. Moreover, while we commit ourselves and work to put into practice the celestial vision, things will change, finally, by God's action, who works in mysterious ways. I have hope that God, perhaps using new generations, will teach us the beauty and richness of attaining that unity in diversity in our churches. What we need is a change of heart, and God can change hearts.

ENDNOTES

[1] This paper is a translation and adaptation of the keynote lecture at the VII LCMS National Hispanic Convention in Orlando, Florida, August 3, 2022.
[2] Author David Brin has popularized this idea and brought it to my attention. "Addicted to Self-Righteousness?" Accessed July 10, 2022, http://www.davidbrin.com/nonfiction/addiction.html.
[3] Spanish has a beautifully alliterative way of putting it: *Del dicho al hecho hay mucho trecho.* (From the saying to the doing there is a long stretch.)
[4] Luis Bush, "The Meaning of *Ethne* in Matthew 28:19," *Mission Frontiers* (September/October 2013): 31–35.
[5] W. Arndt, Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 276–277.
[6] Young Yun Kim, *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001), 83–84. "*Ethnicity* is an inclusive term that refers to combinations of cultural, racial, linguistic, national, and religious backgrounds, all pertaining to the distinctiveness of a people."
[7] Paul Heerboth highlighted how "ethnicity" was of value to the early Lutheran immigrants who came to America: "Ethnicity (German, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish) was an important factor for Lutherans in general to preserve their cultural and theological traditions. This became evident during the large immigrations to the United States during the 1800s and early 1900s." Paul Heerboth, "Lutheran Mission Work in the North American Context," in *The Lutherans in Mission: Essays in Honor of Won Yong Ji,* ed. Eugene Bunkowske and Alan D. Scott, (St. Louis: Lutheran Society for Missiology Book Series, 2000), 45. Heerboth also quotes John E. Groh and Robert H. Smith: "Lutherans have exhibited a cohesiveness and maintained a calm, inner strength. While secular storms howl, they have managed to preserve from erosion a rich theological and liturgical heritage. Their rich worship patterns seem to have provided immunity against emotional revivals that have periodically swept over the continent and (against) the fads in celebration that sometimes captured others." John E. Groh and Robert H. Smith, *The Lutheran Church in North American Life* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1979), 8.
[8] Eloise Heibert Meneses, "If you Belong to Christ: Ethnicity and the Global Church." Paper presented at the International Association of Missionary Studies 12th Assembly, Budapest, Hungary (2008), 1.
[9] Meneses, 1.
[10] Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).

[11] Cited in Endalkachew Wolde-Kidan, "Christian Mission in an Ethnically Polarized Nation" (paper, Theological Symposium of Mekane Yesus Seminary, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, June 17, 2022), 12. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Wolde-Kidan for his helpful keen insights into the matter of ethnicity and ethnic conflict.
[12] Aquiline Tarimo, "Ethnicity, Common Good, and the Church in Contemporary Africa." *SEDOS Bulletin*, [s. l.], v. 32, n. 8–9, (2000), 227–234.
[13] Wolde-Kidan, 13.
[14] Wolde-Kidan, 12.
[15] Douglas L. Rutt, "Theological Education and Mission," *Lutheran Mission Matters* 28, no. 2 (November 2020): 200–212. The interpretation of the "seven deacons" is an adaptation and summary of the argument I make in the article of *Lutheran Mission Matters* of November 2020. The same is also found in Travis Scholl, (ed.), *Let the Gospel Lead: Essays and Sermons in Honor of Dale A. Meyer* (Saint Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2020), 69–82.
[16] It is interesting that most Spanish translations I consulted take the *ὅτι* as "that" rather than the causal "because." Could it be that Latinos are more likely to understand the subtleties of human relations than Anglos? In Latin America, whenever someone raises delicate topic, the first question people often ask themselves, rather than simply taking things at face value, is ¿*Qué hay detrás*? (What is behind this?).
[17] The word *preaching* does not appear in the Greek text but is added by the *ESV* translators.
[18] German theologian, Martin Kähler is credited with making this assertion in the early twentieth century, as quoted in David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016), 16.
[19] Douglas L. Rutt, "The City of Antioch as Bridge between Jerusalem and the World," *Concordia Journal* 48, no. 1 (Winter 2022): 11–23.
[20] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 240–241.
[21] Eloise Hiebert Meneses, "If you Belong to Christ: Ethnicity and the Global Church" (paper, International Missiological Association 12th Assembly, Budapest Hungary, August 2008), http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/195/545.
[22] Arthur Satterwhite, "Christians Should Lead the Way in Diversity and Equity," *Christianity Today,* digital edition (May 2022). https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/may-web-only/diversity-equity-evangelical-christian-youth-ministry.html (accessed September 27, 2022).
[23] Douglas L. Rutt, "Opportunities and Challenges in Ethnic Ministries" (unpublished manuscript, August 26, 1997).
[24] Tesfai Zeleke Tesema, *Hope for the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Can Rekindle Christianity in the West* (Tenth Power Publishing, 2022).
[25] Meneses, 12.

Second Generation Immigrant Ministry: Challenges, Opportunities, and Actions Required

Gemechu Olana

I want to introduce myself through my experience as an immigrant and immigrant pastor, which will also be reflected in this short article. Before receiving my present role as a double parish pastor in Austin, Minnesota, I served Oromo speaking Ethiopian immigrant communities in Greater Los Angeles and beyond for over twelve years. Besides congregational ministry, I have been involved in diaspora mission in various ways since 1999, the time I came to live in the immigrant community.

At the beginning of 1999, I had the opportunity to travel to Germany as an ecumenical and international practitioner with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus for a year, followed by years of theology studies in Berlin until 2005. It was here that, for the first time, I got an opportunity to minister to the Oromo speaking Ethiopian immigrant communities, alongside my volunteer work and studies. At the time, I was surprised to discover so many people from my home country who spoke my mother language, shared my experiences, and worshiped with the flair and fervor with which I used to worship in my home country. The discovery of my native people in a foreign land was a great comfort. It offered me a familiar social, emotional, and spiritual environment, not only where I overcame some of my homesickness, but also where I proceeded to practice my Christian faith in a way I better understood.

I was in Germany as a student, so you can only guess what finding a familiar community meant for most of those immigrants who were driven out of their home country under dehumanizing circumstances and who suffered harsh conditions until they reached this new but better world. In late 2005, when I immigrated to the United States, I became an immigrant myself and then a full-time immigrant minister. This opportunity has exposed me to many of the challenges that most immigrants face and worries about the future, especially for the second generation, which includes my three beautiful daughters. I will

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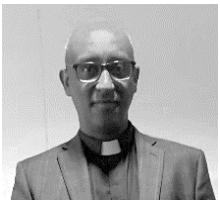

Rev. Dr. Gemechu Olana is a dual parish pastor at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Brownsdale, MN & Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Austin, MN. He has served as a mission planter, chairperson for the United Oromo Evangelical Churches Association, Board Secretary for the Oromo Evangelical Mission Society, a theological instructor at Mekane Yesus Seminary, Ecumenical Volunteer Service in Germany as a reverse-practitioner of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Berliner Mission Work. He did his postgraduate Theological Study at the Humboldt University of Berlin. He enjoys community engagements and painting in his free time. rev.g.olana@gmail.com

try to address those challenges and opportunities from those perspectives, particularly from my observations and experiences.

For most immigrants, including me, who flee harsh political repression and economic poverty, America is a beacon of hope. In contrast to the dehumanizing political and economic situations they may have endured in their native country, they conceive and hope that America will offer them another, better way to live. These immigrants bring this hope closer to reality by saving up all their money and giving up all their possessions to pay for the transatlantic trip to America, the land of their dreams. Regrettably, many suffer horrible hardships to get to America. For example, Ethiopians and Eritreans, the largest populations of African immigrants to the United States, have had to pass through war-torn regions such as Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, and Egypt. However, their despair turns to delight when they reach the United States—though that feeling may not last very long. As soon as they arrive, they become strangers in a strange land. Most of them face many challenges, uncertainty, and confusion until they find some form of normality and familiarity to offer them hope and consolation.

In the case of Ethiopians, but certainly also shared among other immigrant communities, places that offer such hope and familiarity are often the Ethiopian churches and fellowships in various cities in the United States. These immigrant churches and fellowships offer new immigrants a familiar social, emotional, and spiritual environment: people of their home country who speak the same language, with whom they can easily communicate and have an identity. It is here where they encounter hope through Christ and promises for tomorrow.

Since the early 1970s, thousands of Ethiopians have left their country and sought refuge in neighboring countries and the Western world because of the persistent deprivation of fundamental human rights, political instability, and economic crises that have continued to the present day. As a result, when Christian Ethiopians become refugees and settle in different countries and cities of the world, they start prayer groups, home fellowships, and churches, usually following the main national/language identities (Amharic, Oromo, and Tigrinya), like any other ethnic groups. Today, hundreds of Ethiopian congregations and Christian fellowships exist in Africa, the Middle East, Australia, Europe, and North America. The members of these congregations range from the twenties to the thousands, and often the number of children could double that.[1]

Before going further, I want to mention two important observations that should encourage us to be firm about our vision of immigrant ministry, particularly in our Lutheran church body. From my experience, two patterns stand out that often make me grateful and proud to be a Lutheran. Ninety-five percent or more of our Ethiopian Diaspora Lutheran churches and fellowships are hosted, supported, or in some sort of partnership with local Lutheran congregations, including some with non-Lutheran backgrounds, here in the United States and elsewhere.[2] Lutheran churches here in the States and in other parts of the world, like Canada, Australia, and all parts of Europe, have become a safe haven for most Ethiopian Lutheran/Evangelical Diaspora communities, particularly the Oromo speaking fellowships, by welcoming them and reaching out to them with the compassion of Christ. These welcoming ministries empower immigrants and have an enormous impact on their

emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. As a result, some Ethiopian fellowships have already become recognized LCMS congregations and are closely working with local churches. We also have more fellowships pursuing partnerships in different parts of our Synod.[2] In other words, the opportunity to serve the people in our neighborhoods is there and already taking place. But the big challenge is figuring out how to establish a sustainable outreach plan that goes beyond hosting to full partnership—that is, active discipleship that envisions second-generation multiethnic congregations.

Reaching the Second Generation of immigrants

Second-generation ministry requires specific and concrete mission goals and a culture that supports achieving those goals. Especially when we talk about immigrants and their young people, our effort should be based on the big picture of mission planning aligned with God's mission. This means that we need to be proactive in planning, which also includes understanding the challenges immigrant believers face, and those that their second-generation children face. As I pointed out briefly in my introduction, some challenges for immigrants are finding a home in their new world and overcoming economic, cultural, and communication barriers. When it comes to their children, it is even more complicated because they must find out how to navigate between two cultures to build their own identities. In addition to these factors, negative political discourse about immigration and the prejudices it creates against immigrants often further complicate the experience of immigrants and become a significant obstacle to the ministry of the Church. For example, fear and suspicion stemming from ongoing negative political debates over immigration, which often depict immigrants as criminals and threats to the nation and ignore the plight and humanity of immigrants, is a significant problem. In addition, this situation widens the division between established churches and immigrant communities and impedes mission possibilities.

Our approach and vision must align with God's mission

The governing principle of the ministry of second-generation immigrants should be purely God's mission. That means our theology matters more than anything when we talk about immigrant ministry as Christians. How we view immigrants and respond to their needs matters, whether in our churches or our neighborhoods, but is it not my intention to address the theology of immigration in this brief article. It has already been addressed in various studies. But I want to underscore the importance of what should inform our perspective and approach as we embark on this conversation.

Often, the political narrative of immigration in the United States obscures great opportunities for the mission on our doorstep and our primary responsibility as a church regarding immigrant ministry. In our current setting, the conversation about immigration is influenced by various complex political and ideological issues, which often impact our conversation in the Church as well.[3] In particular, the negative social, political, and ideological views that pervade our nation's conversations on immigration often interfere negatively with the Church's mission. Often, the political, economic, and cultural

conversations around immigration are very negative and based on the assumption that immigrants pose a burden to the economy and threaten the cultural identity of the host country. This kind of view is also common among believers, sadly.[4] A 2020 Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) poll found that 75 percent of white evangelical Protestant Republicans, the highest percentage of any Republican group, believe immigrants are invading American society.[6] Additionally, according to a 2018 Pew Research Center survey, the majority of white evangelical Protestants "say the US does not have a responsibility to accept refugees."[5] This indicates that believers cannot be immune from factors such as economics, politics, and other cultural desires, which influence our conversations on immigration. This does not mean, however, that we have no choice on how to respond to the needs of the immigrants among us in the light of the Gospel.

Given our calling and Christian identity and values, our interaction with immigrants should be different.[6] As believers, our vision and conversion to immigrant ministry should be guided by the Holy Scriptures and God's mission among us.[7] In other words, our primary authority, which should inform our views and conversations about immigrant ministry and the purpose of Christ's Church, should be God's Word and God's mission of drawing all people to Himself. God's Word is very clear about immigrants among us: They are not objects of our charity nor strangers we should fear and consider as a burden on us. They are our neighbors who God, in His divine wisdom, has placed among us, who we should embrace with compassion, and with whom we should share the love of Christ.[8] God's will for His Church is to treat immigrants as our neighbors and to love them by attending to their physical and spiritual needs. In particular, we must take outreach to immigrants very seriously if we genuinely care about God's mission and the second generation.

God's Word is very clear about immigrants among us: They are not objects of our charity nor strangers we should fear and consider as a burden on us.

The biblical concept that there is neither a native nor an immigrant also should inform our attitude toward immigrants. The more we absolutize our current reality as our final home, the more we exclude those we regard as foreigners. The Bible is clear that we are all immigrants and strangers in this world. With this assumption, the people of God were often cautioned about how they treated immigrants and aliens among them in the Old Testament. They were required to show aliens among them the same great care and compassion that they received from God, as they were in exile themselves in Egypt (Exod 22:21). They were themselves sojourners in a literal and spiritual sense, and so were Abram, Joseph, and Moses, their forefathers. And this experience of being strangers, whose destiny was beyond the primeval land, should motivate them to love the immigrants among them (Deut 10:18–19). Further, God's commandments about immigrants reveal His character, compassion, and concern for those in need, strangers, and those on the periphery of society.

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter uses the same analogy when he describes the Christian life in this world. He says that Christians are strangers and exiles (1 Pet 2:11 a), people of another Kingdom. Jesus demonstrated this as a stranger and exile in his earthly life, through his experience as a refugee in Egypt and being rejected among his own people. He also displayed compassion for strangers and the marginalized. These truths indicate to us that God's call for the Church is to reflect His own love for strangers in our midst, both in word and deed.

Based on these premises, ministry to the second generation of immigrants is a central responsibility of all our congregations. Through it, we practically express our commitment to God's mission and the commandment to love our neighbors like ourselves.

Second generation immigrant ministry is a God-given opportunity

Ministry to second-generation immigrants is an opportunity that God has provided to the Church in the Western world, where we have experienced the rise of immigrants in our communities. Tesfai Zeleke Tesema, in his recent book, *Hope for the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Can Rekindle Christianity in the West*, has eloquently demonstrated that second-generation immigrants can not only contribute to revitalizing the Church in the West but also help develop multicultural congregations that reflect the neighborhoods in which they are located.[9] Based on his own personal experiences, which the author of this article also shares, Tesfai demonstrates how God, in His divine wisdom and plan, has scattered Christian immigrants from the Global South to the Global North to help re-evangelize the West. From Tesfai's studies, we can conclude that God is not only creating new mission fields in American churches but is also sending missionaries for the revitalization of the Church in decline. The full realization of Tesfai's argument, however, is based on how Western churches deal with ministry to immigrants. If Western churches can see this as a mission opportunity given by God and invest in ministry to the second generation of immigrants, who can become agents of renewal through assimilation into established churches, then there is great hope.

The dispersion of southern people may allude to the dispersion of early believers to fulfill God's purpose.[10] If we look at immigrant congregations in our neighborhoods and churches, it is easy to see that they attract not only non-Christians but also faithful believers with the utmost missionary zeal. That means immigrant communities can be a vehicle for God's mission, through whom we can connect to the diverse communities in our neighborhoods, particularly the second generation. Regarding second-generation ministry, God has given opportunities if immigrant communities and host churches can learn to grasp the moment and transform it into an avenue for growth. We must also not undermine the idea that these immigrant churches can revitalize the mission of our established Church when they are allowed to share their vision of the Church.

Intentional engagement and strategic focus are essential

The materialization of this desire requires strategic missional focus: intentionally scanning our neighborhoods and seeking to partner with immigrant congregations and

ministers. Some may object to a culturally specific ministry and expect immigrants to just join and assimilate within established congregations. In reality, that does not happen, especially among first-generation believers.

The first immigrant congregations are mostly in a cultural preservation mode, like most of our declining established churches. And unless a healthy relationship is established early on with these culturally specific churches by realizing the state of their reality, it is almost impossible to influence their children and retain them as members of the Church. This also requires intentionally cultivating the culture and attitude of God's mission within our established churches, as well as among first-generation immigrant parents. It requires a Kingdom culture that focuses on a disciple-making God who sends and equips people to be active in their diverse communities in word and deed. Particularly among our established Anglo, non-immigrant congregations, it requires an outward-looking attitude that sees cultural diversity not as a problem but as a blessing and an opportunity to connect with diverse groups within a given community.

It demands compassion, love, and patience, sustained by a strong sense of community

Established host congregations must also be proactive in establishing a welcoming and edifying atmosphere for second-generation immigrant children, who are already living through many challenges. Particularly, without compassion, understanding, and a genuine relationship that transcends most of our cultural and racial barriers, it is impossible to have a second-generation immigrant ministry. Here, the role of immigrant congregations and immigrant parents should not be ignored. A mutual partnership and learning based on authentic love and patience, which focuses on the overall vision of God's mission, is key to successfully ministering to second-generation immigrant children.

The fact is that cultural differences and values often create tension and conflict. Not knowing how to handle cultural differences can be a significant obstacle to God's mission. Particularly, in such a setting, hosting congregation's impatience, lack of empathy, and different values and priorities can paralyze any outreach, especially immigrant outreach.

An excellent biblical example of how to deal with people from different cultures is the example of Paul in Acts 17. Paul gives us a model for interacting with people from different cultures with respect. After careful observation, Paul does not rush to disparage their practice but treats it respectfully enough to incorporate it into his preaching about Christ. This respectful approach not only gives Paul the privilege of being heard but also creates understanding through the gaping cultural divide. We may further read and deduce Paul's servanthood posture from many of Paul's writings. He modeled Christ by displaying a sincere concern for others, despite cultural differences (Acts 20–28) and subjected his apostolic privilege and Christian liberty to serve others, be it his people or those of different cultures and values (1 Cor 9:1–23). Paul's attitude helped him to exercise an effective ministry among people of diverse cultures and values. His humility and close identification with others, reflecting the character of Christ, enabled him to overcome complex cultural barriers. In other places, we also see a similar view of Paul (1 Cor 9:1–23). We need this kind of posture when we talk about immigrant communities: a posture of respect and

service that is motivated by the love of Christ. Another example is Philip in Acts 8. What we learn from him is the importance of being open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the art of listening and proper communication. These qualities paved the way for Philip to communicate the Gospel of Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch.

Besides challenges of cultural differences and values, the second most important point we need to address is how we present ourselves and envision the future. Suppose we want to reach the immigrant children of the second generation. In that case, we need to focus on building a new community that comes together, not necessarily based on race, but on a common language and shared experiences that bring people to gather.[11] As they navigate between two cultures, second-generation immigrant children seek a genuine community. Unlike their parents, the question of identity and belonging is on their minds.[12] Therefore, the focus should be on creating an alternative community that takes the experience of immigrant children seriously and focuses on discipleship with the multicultural congregation in mind. In other words, it also means that our approach should always go beyond friendliness and toward establishing authentic relationships with purpose.

Sometimes certain circumstances, especially a lack of experience and differing external narratives, compel both immigrant and nonimmigrant congregations to focus on themselves and stay in a survival mode at the expense of later generations. The right approach is to challenge this kind of attitude by creating a welcoming, forward-looking alternative community of believers, nurtured by the Kingdom's values and visions, and strategically planning the next generation Church.

Here, host congregations can play an essential role in resourcing and sharing experiences by understanding the struggle of both immigrant parents and their children. But the approach should always go beyond providing resources and hospitality. It should involve a concrete ministry partnership, either in the form of leadership development, Christian parental education, meeting the needs of the neighborhoods, or hosting cross-cultural worship experiences from time to time. One example of this kind of work is that of LINC, an organization that tries to help congregations across the United States, especially those in cities, develop creative ways to immerse themselves in cross cultural ministries.[13]

From the outset, the partnership between host congregations and immigrant fellowships must be based on a shared mission vision, which should develop over time. For that to happen, the strategy must be intentional, active participation and a proactive partnership with a big vision of building the Church for future generations. That means it requires openness to a shared vision among hosting and immigrant churches and leaders. Shared vision requires cultivating an environment of respect and appreciation for individuality, cultural difference, and the heritage of others—an environment that aims for mutual growth in Christ and Christian love and service.

All these good aspirations, however, will not develop overnight but require deliberate cultivation of mutual rich and rewarding fellowship. It demands an authentic and lasting Christian communion that transcends our tendency toward tribal thought and strives to bridge differences through love and mutual learning. In other words, these partnerships require participants to see all of God's people as one family in Christ and to focus on

knowing one another, learning from one another, loving one another, forgiving one another, and supporting and caring for one another.

The practical approach is to organize joint services and events from time to time, in which the host and immigrant congregations both take part. It could be for a joint potluck, Vacation Bible School, or even joint neighborhood outreach events, which can bring people together and be mutually enriching. Intentionally encouraging immigrant church leaders and parents to be involved in hosting congregational business meetings, mission planning, or even worship would also be very enriching. Through these practical experiences, members and leaders of both congregations will have a chance to know each other better and mutually grow toward a more enriching communion, which is important for the Church's mission. Often, common misunderstandings and frustrations among host congregations and immigrant communities arise from a lack of mutual understanding, particularly in terms of culture and worship experiences.[14]

First-generation parents must be involved

It would be unwise to tackle the issue of second-generation immigrant ministry without the involvement of the first-generation parents. In most cases, immigrant parents overprotect their children and put a lot of pressure on them to retain their cultural identity. For the parent, the preservation of culture is often the greatest aspiration after education. Alongside English, they want their children to speak their language and worship in their own culturally specific churches. But this parental yearning, which is rooted in the desire for self-preservation, is often a source of conflict and misunderstanding because it fails to acknowledge the struggle second-generation immigrants face in navigating two cultures. Additionally, there are no well-resourced institutions that would help parents achieve this desire in a healthy educational environment. So, out of desperation, parents frequently turn to the Church for help. If this need of parents is not wisely managed by focusing on the well-being and faith of the children, it becomes a ministry obstacle. It diverts attention away from children's ministry, often distorting Sunday School and leading to poor and superficial discipleship.

This desire of parents, in the same manner, is a great hindrance to second-generation ministry among immigrant churches. A few years ago, while serving an Oromo speaking immigrant congregation, I realized that this problem required serious attention.[15] Parents' yearning for their children to embrace their cultural identity is good. But this desire must be balanced with their children's spiritual health and faith in a manner that is culturally relevant and appropriate to them. At that time, my approach was to provide the Sunday School teaching solely in English using the program already available through the help of the host congregation, who provided a Sunday School teacher. I asked the parents to take responsibility for teaching the language separate from the Sunday School class, which they did. But to arrive at this point and support the parents in their struggle to deal with their Americanized children, we set up a quarterly parenting seminar. During these seminars,

we shared experiences and addressed all the issues of the immigrant parents through sound biblical teachings.

Hence, from the outset, when we think about second-generation immigrant ministry, we need to be realistic and intentional in involving the parents. It will be a problem if parents emphasize cultural preservation alone and not the discipleship of their children in a culture and language they understand. Thus, from the start, it is imperative to equip parents and involve them in planning and casting a vision for second-generation ministry. Unless the immigrant parents are helped and equipped, encouraged to be real players in the second-generation ministry of the Church, and made aware that they are a vital force of God's mission through their children, an impactful second generation is hardly possible.

Thus, from the start, it is imperative to equip parents and involve them in planning and casting a vision for second-generation ministry

We must recognize the challenges of immigrant congregations

The Christian immigrant faces some significant challenges that often frustrate the second generation's ministries. The main one is the lack of proper worship space and a sound support system that takes to account the reality of immigrants' experience and mission opportunities. Most of the time, immigrant churches use the facilities of established churches in the form of landlord-renter relationships without a shared long-term mission vision.[16] This attitude hurts the immigrant and host congregation's relationship, limiting it to a business or charitable agreement rather than a missional partnership. Therefore, when a problem occurs in the relationship, it is often handled with the same attitude as a tenant-owner relationship, not with a long-term mission objective that demands mutual missional goals based on love, forgiveness, and understanding. The financial constraints faced by immigrant congregations also are another challenge that not only exacerbates this problem but often creates misconceptions and the damaging dependency syndrome, especially in terms of support for pastoral ministry.

It is essential to recognize these challenges from the get-go and focus on building mutual shared mission outreach and ministry. I believe creating a supportive environment for second-generation immigrants starts here. The foundation we lay and the vision we have is what leads organically into multicultural congregations that embrace second-generation immigrant children as well as their parents. On the other hand, the tenant-owner relationships model, which is not missional, only fosters segregated congregations that are inward-focused and often a source great conflict.

Other significant issues include an adult-focused ministry without sound discipling among immigrant congregations and a lack of proper catechism instruction, which ultimately leads to the loss of the second generation. Immigrant churches and leaders are ill-equipped to do second-generation ministry unless they partner with established English-speaking congregations. Most immigrant pastors and leaders are not fluent in English and

are unfamiliar with the curriculum we have here in our Church body. In fact, first-generation pastors may not be able to fully address the needs of the second-generation children because of the cultural gap. Therefore, the possibility of immigrant children abandoning their Christian lives when they leave their parents' homes, particularly when they attend college, is very high.

There is strong evidence that if children, especially millennials, do not build a healthy relationship with the Church early in life, they are less likely to develop habits or associations that make it easier to stay or return to a church community after leaving home or after college.[17] Like their other American peers, young second-generation immigrant adults are likely to have a non-Christian spouse, which can lead to complete detachment from the church community and faith. Above all, like their other American peers, second-generation immigrants live in a dominant culture that is constantly evolving, particularly in terms of the relationship between morals and religion.

Unless properly equipped, second-generation immigrants will eventually join the majority who feel that church institutions are simply irrelevant or unnecessary. Therefore, supporting second-generation ministry is an excellent opportunity for hosting congregations. It is an opportunity to partner in God's mission and build up the next generation of the Church, and it is already within our reach. In this sense, the second generation can be a bridging generation. They live between two cultures, have unique skills, and are interested in engaging their communities. Through their shared experiences, they can also relate to other second-generation immigrant children, whom they can attract to the Christian faith, which could lead to a truly multicultural church that reflects our present community.

Purposeful plans and actions should contemplate the future church

A practical approach starts by intentionally seeking and partnering with ethnic immigrant ministers and congregations. Most of our established nonimmigrant churches are already located in a sea of diverse communities, so the opportunity to find mission partners is already there in their respective neighborhoods. Therefore, by aligning themselves with what God desires for His Church, our established nonimmigrant churches need to proactively scan their neighborhoods and make an effort to reach out to potential mission leaders and groups in the community. When they do, though, their outreach should not just revolve around compassion ministry but should focus on the practical building of a shared mission vision and partnership in neighborhood engagements. If this process is dealt with a clear mission drive and openness, the possibility of realizing multiethnic congregations favorable to the second-generation immigrant is possible.

Our nonimmigrant churches have a great missionary responsibility when it comes to immigrant ministry as well as the second-generation immigrant ministry. They are significantly better positioned in terms of resources, leadership, and status in the community. That means they must use their resources and standing for the advancement of the Gospel. This is not only a way in which they can promote the Gospel of Christ in their sphere of influence, but it is also an opportunity to practically lead by example and demonstrate the services of others with humility and love in the footsteps of Jesus.

Another practical step is to demonstrate openness and intentional practice of cross-cultural fellowship and worship from time to time with ethnic immigrant fellowships. Coming together to worship the Lord as people from many nations, tribes, and languages is a blessed experience and a foretaste of heaven (Rev 7:9–10). But the blessing can be unleashed if we commit ourselves to it with humility and openness, remembering the Gospel imperatives.[18]

Partnerships between our established churches and immigrant churches would have even more impact if they also included shared responsibility. We already have immigrant church leaders here in the United States who are mature, talented, and competent leaders. Seeking, cultivating, and including such leaders in the local ministry of the churches will undoubtedly bring positive synergy, new ideas, and new ways of carrying out the ministry of the Church. Most importantly, intentional inclusion will create a sense of belonging and opportunities for sustainable second-generation immigrant ministries. I also believe that these simple, practical measures could create a good foundation for ministry to second-generation immigrants, which may eventually lead to the organic development of the multiethnic church. To ignore this opportunity, on the other hand, is a mismanagement of what the Lord has provided, and this is also true for the immigrant church leaders. Neither should the leadership of the immigrant churches simply stand on the sidelines when our Church has trouble connecting with the local community and when the possibility of losing our second-generation immigrant children is high. They must also be open, go out of their comfort zone, engage, and commit to true missionary life for the good of the future Church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to stress that second-generation immigrant ministry requires recognition of challenges and opportunities, and an awareness of the responsibilities entrusted to it by the Lord. All resources, spiritual gifts, and ministry opportunities originate from the triune God (Jas 1:16–18; Eph 4:7–11; 1 Cor 12:1–11), and we are simply God's entrusted servants, given the privilege and responsibility to manage them for Him.

As receivers and custodians of the various measures of grace, we are all responsible for managing well the resources, abilities, and opportunities that God has entrusted us according to His desires and purposes. We all are called to be accountable partners with the triune God and the body of Christ to accomplish the *Missio Dei* (mission of God) under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This stewardship is carried out in two dimensions: in a vertical, trusting relationship with God and in a horizontal, loving relationship with others. Our stewardship flows out of God's act of love for us in Christ, which empowers us to love others with actions of Christ-like love in a practical, tangible missional spirit.

Often, the missing element of a strategic stewardship and partnership culture based on the above premises (especially the wise use of God-endowed resources, skills, and opportunities), as well as underestimating the unique opportunity for partnership across cultures, frustrates ministries, creates confusion and conflict, and blocks the expansion of the Gospel.

Both culture-specific and multiethnic ministries require cultivating strategic stewardship and strategic partnerships across cultures. These collaborations should be regarded as *mutual missional relationships* and opportunities to partner with God to accomplish the *Missio Dei*.

ENDNOTES

[1] For example, in the Twin Cities, where a lot of Ethiopians live, we have more than twenty-two organized Ethiopian churches.

[2] I know this firsthand from my involvement in the Association of Diaspora Oromo Speaking Ethiopian congregations worldwide, having chaired the association for six years (2010–2017). United Oromo Evangelical Churches (UOEC) is an umbrella organization of more than fifty Oromo Evangelical Churches throughout the world (in Africa, Australia, Canada, Germany, Norway, the UK, and the United States). Also worth noting is that Lutheran organizations, including Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), have played an important role in resettling Ethiopian immigrants in many parts of the world, connecting them with local Lutheran congregations to welcome them, and advocating for them through the love of Christ.

[2] In our church, for example, organizations such as the Oromo Evangelical Mission Society (OELMS) and the North America Mekane Yessus Fellowship play a significant role in recruiting mission leaders, planting new immigrant churches, and establishing links between immigrant churches and hosting congregations and ministries of the LCMS in collaboration with our districts.

[3] In our current cultural setting, clearing our thinking is important. "Hauerwas and Willimon's contention is that the Christian church has lost its way and is captive to the culture. The church must regain the vision of being a distinct community, a distinct community made up of ordinary individuals (resident aliens) with a calling to be faithful to its Lord. The focus on living the life of the Savior in the world is clear from the other biblical quotation that begins their book: 'Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus' (Phil 2:5). Christians are to display the life of Jesus, and this requires acquiring a set of virtues, like peaceableness, kindness, hospitality, and patience. Christians and the church need to be a certain kind of people with a particular way of looking at and living within society. For the church to be the church requires training in these virtues, the nurturing of Christian tradition through Word and sacrament, and the continual practice of the virtues." M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press), 132–133.

[4] Close to half of evangelical believers in the United States tend to view immigrants from these perspectives. Evangelical Immigration Table and World Relief, *Evangelical Views on Immigration*, February 2015, https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Evangelical-Views-on-Immigration-Report.pdf

[6] Public Religion Research Institute, *Fractured Nation: Widening Partisan Polarization and Key Issues in 2022 Presidential Elections*, October 2019, https://www.prri.org/research/fractured-nation-widening-partisan-polarization-and-key-issues-in-2020-presidential-elections/.

[5] Hannah Hartig, "Republicans Turn More Negative Toward Refugees as Number Admitted to U.S. Plummets," Pew Research Center, May 24, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/24/republicans-turn-more-negative-toward-refugees-as-number-admitted-to-u-s-plummets/ .

[6] As Christians, our attitude and action should be shaped and guided by the biblical view of the immigrants among us, the grace of God that has shattered all barriers that divide humanity, the desire to build everything into one body, and the knowledge that our true and final home is in heaven with God (see Lev 19:33–34, Matt 25:35, Phil 3:20, Gal 3:28).

[7] Carroll R., *Christians at the Border*, 117.

[8] "Immigrants are, quite simply, neighbors. As neighbors, immigrants fall under the law of God, which calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves." *Immigrants Among Us: A Lutheran Framework for Addressing Immigration Issues*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (St. Louis, MO: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2012), 11.

[9] Tesfai Zeleke Tesema. *Hope for the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Can Rekindle Christianity in the West* (New York: Tenth Power Publishing, 2022).

[10] "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

[11] Church is built not on ethnic identity, but on language and shared experiences. Yes, a language can carry the identity of an ethnic group or a specific race, as often religion and ethnicity are deeply connected. But language is also a medium of communication, transcending sociocultural identities like race and ethnic identity. For example, not every English-speaking person is Anglo. And multiethnic congregations are possible due to this nature of language, being a means accessible to all who use it as a means of communication and understanding. At a time when we are starting to think about the Church in terms of a specific ethnic identity, rather than a common language and shared experiences, exclusion based on racial or ethnic identity is inevitable. It was based on this assumption that in the Ethiopian Mekane Yesus Evangelical Church congregations are named on the basis of their preferred language or land location, not ethnic identity. For instance, we say "Oromo speaking church," not "Oromo church." Unfortunately, here in the diaspora, some Oromo speaking churches call themselves "Oromo churches." Oromo is an ethnic identity, and "Afaan Oromoo" is a language. I understand that naming a church based on a specific ethnic identity is both theological and biblically wrong. The medium of communion should specify the church, not the exclusive ethnic identity.

[12] Tesfai provided details in the interview with twenty-five Ethiopian youths. Tesema, *Hope for the Second Generation,* 153.

[13] For more information and helpful resources, check LINC website at https://linc.org/.

[14] The author has a personal experience where the clash of cultures, and unspoken expectations have caused a lot of distress among host congregations and immigrant churches, to the extent of greatly frustrating immigrant mission outreach. For example, one of the battlegrounds is churches kitchen. Fellowship and eating after Church services are the most important cultural experience for most immigrant churches, hence use church kitchens and church fellowship halls excessively. But often they fail to see the unwritten or unspoken expectations of hosting Anglo congregations, especially in terms of time, cleanliness, and multiclause organization of kitchen tools. The worship experience is also likewise. This problem can only be resolved through mutual cultural awareness and understanding, as well as through sound conflict resolution that is not based on mere prejudice but on genuine empathy. We should also think that if a host congregation cannot learn to manage the difference with immigrant parents, how it may relate to their children.

[15] To give a complete picture, this happened when I was a pastor of an Oromo speaking Lutheran Church in Los Angeles, where some parents requested that Sunday school be taught in Oromo. The request of these parents was legitimate in terms of a desire to preserve cultural heritage, but the reality was that most of their children did not speak Afaan Oromo. They were Mission Matters 30,

children born and raised in the United States; they all spoke English. A few of them could speak some Afaan Oromo words, but not enough to understand Sunday School lessons taught in the language. This experience is shared among most Ethiopian and other immigrant churches, from my observation. At the time, my approach was not to change the medium of the Sunday lesson, as it was the relevant and just thing to do. As well, I did not discourage parents from worrying about their children speaking their heritage language. As an immigrant parent, I could relate to their struggle. Thus, I asked parents to help with needed resources and to identify who could teach Afaan Oromo after Sunday School. After intensive work, we were even able to develop our own Oromo League teaching materials with the help of parents who have a language curriculum development background, as well as a time for the language lessons. This program even helped the church get more children in church on Sundays because it was also aligned with parents' needs.

[16] From 2016 to 2018, when I was president of the Association of Oromo Speaking Evangelical Churches, this was my observation. The role of the association was to plant Oromo immigrant churches all over the world wherever there are Oromo immigrants and help the Oromo speaking fellowships connect with local hosting Lutheran congregations. During this time, I noticed that hosting congregations often provide space without long-term missional thought. Most often, this is with good intentions to help. But in the absence of a clear and deliberate mission plan, the result is usually small, parallel congregations with limited impact. Likewise, the immigrant churches often use the facilities of the hosting congregations like a guest, without long-term missional vision or commitment. This kind of approach limits both congregations' mission possibilities.

[17] See *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2018); According to another Barna Group study, "roughly seven out of ten Americans adults (71%) had a period of time during their childhood when they regularly attended a Christian church. Apparently, old habits die hard: a majority of those who attended church as a youngster still attend regularly today (61%), while a large majority of those who were not church goers as children are still absent from churches today (78%)." "Adults Who Attended Church as Children Show Lifelong Effects," Barna, accessed November 5, 2001, https://www.barna.com/research/adults-who-attended-church-as-children-show-lifelong-effects/

[18] One of the harmful practices I frequently observe with some of our established host congregations is to keep immigrant churches/fellowships away from using the sanctuary, limiting them to fellowship halls and church basements. Like other worldly institutions, this practice of keeping immigrants at the periphery does not assist the Church's mission of advancing the Gospel. This kind of practice fosters a guest and owner mentality, not a ministry partnership on which a shared vision of the future can be built and practiced. Eventually, when these immigrant fellowships grow or have come to some awareness and sense of independence, they will leave to look for alternative conducive worship environments. This means that the lack of Kingdom mentality and mission hospitality will eventually lead to missed mission opportunities.

Shining the Light of Christ from Generation to Generation at True Light Lutheran Church in Chinatown, New York City

Joshua Hollmann

True Light Lutheran Church stands at the corner of Worth and Mulberry Street in the heart of the oldest section of New York City's Chinatown.[1] Nearby is Confucius Plaza, City Hall, and the Brooklyn Bridge. True Light's façade at the crossroads of lower Manhattan features a towering cross illuminated at night to point to Jesus Christ, the true light that gives light to everyone.[2]

The ongoing story of True Light Lutheran Church proclaims the *missio Dei* in the context of New York City and incorporates Chinese and American cultures, languages, and members as one in Christ. As the fortieth-anniversary booklet of True Light Lutheran Church in 1976 affirms, True Light "was the first Lutheran mission church in the United States to preach the Word of God among the people of Chinese origin."[3] True Light is the mother church of Chinese ministry in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. John 3:16 is inscribed in Chinese above the altar of True Light Lutheran Church along with the traditional Chinese character for love, which ties everything together in perfect harmony.[4] Established as a Chinese Lutheran mission congregation in 1936, today there are weekly Sunday worship services in English and Chinese. Countless lives have been changed through the ministry and mission of God at True Light Lutheran Church and the congregation continues to shine the light of Christ in New York City and beyond.

True Light Lutheran Church presents a unique case study for intergenerational and intercultural mission and ministry in North America. The church has served multiple generations of Chinese immigrants and American-born Chinese and now includes non-Chinese members.

This article attempts to answer why True Light Lutheran Church has connected across cultures, languages, and generations. We will take an overview of the history of True Light, as well as observing cross-cultural pressures and opportunities within the Chinese community in New York. Along the way, we will see the shining lights of Christ in past and present members of True Light Lutheran Church[5] that reflect the importance of the

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Rev. Dr. Joshua Hollmann (PhD, McGill University) is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia University, St. Paul, and Interim Pastor at True Light Lutheran Church in Chinatown, New York City. Previously, he studied Chinese at Hangzhou University, China, served as theological faculty at Concordia College New York, and pastored multicultural churches in Queens and Montreal. Joshua.hollmann@mail.mcgill.ca

following missiological elements: culturally attuned and contextual evangelism, the traditional Chinese concept of harmony as centered in Christ, and experience of the welcoming love of Jesus, the Light of the world, in the heart of New York City's Chinatown. From the start, True Light has been a Chinese Lutheran Church with a global reach in the center of New York, an international city.

The history of True Light begins with the shining light of Miss Mary E. Banta, illumining the intercultural mission of the Gospel and contextual evangelism.[6] Born in Upper Sandusky, Ohio, in 1875, her father was a preacher in Canada. In 1880 she moved with her family to New York City. In training as a missionary, Miss Banta taught English to Chinese men at a Baptist church in Brooklyn. Over time the students began to seek and find the love of God in Christ the Savior, inspired by Miss Banta's faith and witness. This awakened in her a lifelong commitment to teaching the Gospel of Jesus to the Chinese people. In 1901, Miss Banta was sent to serve as missionary in Liberia, where she contracted black water fever. Due to her illness, she returned to New York; and after recovering, became connected with the Methodist Church's Chinese mission work on the east side (Chinatown) in New York.

Starting in 1905, Miss Banta began diligent work among the Chinese in New York and taught English and the Bible. Through her patience, love, and cultural understanding, she earned the confidence of many Chinese families. Her influence was far-reaching in Chinatown as a teacher, social worker, and friend. After listening to the messages of Dr. Walther A. Maier, speaker of the Lutheran Hour, Miss Banta requested to join the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and was confirmed on March 29, 1936. That same year saw the formation of True Light Lutheran Church which originally met in a loft, dubbed Gospel Hall, on Canal Street in Chinatown.

In 1938, due to an overflow in new members, the church began meeting at a larger loft on Canal Street. Soon, to accommodate the influx of new Chinese members, and with the full support of the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the congregation moved to its current location, a five-story dilapidated former factory in the leather industry at the corner of Worth and Mulberry Street. With financial donations from the Atlantic District and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the support of members, the building was restored and transformed into True Light Lutheran Church and School. Miss Banta continued to assist Rev. Louis T. Buchheimer, pastor of True Light until 1959.

In May 1959, Miss Banta was honored at a Chinese banquet for her fifty-five years of work among the Chinese people of New York City. She died in 1971 and is still fondly remembered and revered for living and telling the love of Christ in Chinatown. Before her death, she said, "I don't want an elaborate tombstone when I die because this building is my monument. This is what I've always dreamed of for True Light."[7] Miss Banta's missionary endeavors exhibit culturally attuned evangelism, which remains apparent in the array of Chinese architectural accouterments adorning True Light Lutheran Church. The appointed location of True Light in the epicenter of the original Chinatown and at the historically significant and economically depressed "Five Points Neighborhood" in lower Manhattan also affirm the importance of place for the proclamation of the Gospel. As is

apparent in Miss Banta's own life story, True Light Lutheran Church has consistently maintained a harmony of Chinese and American English languages and cultures.

True Light Lutheran Church observes the Chinese characteristic of harmony—harmony here of Chinese and American cultures centered in Christ. This has mainly occurred in the interplay of members and seekers born in China and American-born Chinese.[8] In formal and informal discussions and interactions with shining lights of Christ at True Light Lutheran Church —long-time and newer members of the congregations—the following points on Christian harmony have proven consistent. First, members tend to remain at the congregation as they are ultimately there to worship God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, receive the gifts of God for the people of God, and find delight in the strong relationships flowing from altar, font, and pulpit and formed by the Word and Spirit at work in the congregation. Second, True Light's strengths are expressed in the loyalty of many members, and their mutual caring for each other across generations. Many current members had parents who were involved in the church and have attended the congregation for years and even decades.

Third, True Light has traditionally included a dynamic blend of members born in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and Chinese members born in America and enculturated in New York City. While this has sometimes led to friction between Chinese face-saving culture and in-your-face New York City culture, overall, it has rejuvenated intercultural bonds within the congregation. Fourth, many members appreciate opportunities afforded to contribute and help at the congregation no matter their age or language.

Finally, there is the New York City effect. New York City beckons residents from around the world and is a vibrant, diverse, and tolerant metropolis. True Light Lutheran Church continues to benefit from its prime location in New York's original Chinatown and downtown Manhattan as the congregation regularly welcomes first-time attendees, with the consistent practice of the art of Christian hospitality. As paraphrased from one long-time, active member of the congregation—True Light, is an English and Chinese and welcoming church, a balance and harmony of old and new, avoiding of extremes and rough edges, a spiritual home in Christ for understanding.

In addition to intercultural harmony, True Light Lutheran Church actively utilizes the importance of its prime location in Manhattan's Chinatown. This has been expressed to me as the True Light feeling of belonging. While situated in Manhattan's Chinatown, members now live near and far. As one member put it, Chinatown has an enduringly positive reputation among Chinese-Americans and newcomers from China. Given the recent rise in anti-Asian violence, Manhattan's Chinatown is seen as a safe place for Asian Americans and Asian immigrants.

True Light Lutheran Church hosts a popular Chinese (Mandarin) language after-school program on weekdays for children in Chinatown which has led to new members of the congregation. In addition to the after-school program, the church sponsors a well-attended summer Chinese language camp that draws children from different neighborhoods and boroughs of New York City. True Light Lutheran Church in Manhattan's Chinatown has a sense of home which extends beyond the borough of Manhattan and attracts newcomers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

True Light maintains a neighborhood vibe and many members consider Chinatown a cultural center. For example, even though New York City now has a number of Chinatowns, members of True Light comment that the best roast pork barbeque buns are still found in Manhattan's Chinatown. Chinatown and True Light Lutheran Church go together. True Light Lutheran Church now has a majority of American-born Chinese members. Demographically, the congregation is predominately Asian and becoming more diverse as reflected in the changing context of Manhattan's Chinatown.

Here are some of the current ways that True Light Lutheran Church practices the traditional Chinese approach of harmony, stays culturally attuned in worship, and extends intercultural and inter-language hospitality in New York City from generation to generation. True Light Lutheran Church has Sunday services in English (10:00 am) and Chinese (12:30 pm). The governing board of True Light Lutheran Church is a balance of six members from the English language service and six members from the Chinese language service. Furthermore, the governing board seeks consensus and harmony in its deliberations and decisions. Many of the members of the governing board are second- and third-generation Chinese-Americans and daughters and sons of members of True Light.

True Light Lutheran Church hosts troops of Boy and Girl Scouts of America that meet weekly (and who have met for decades and generations at True Light). The church building houses an air-conditioned gym which is used daily by different groups: Chinese language after-school and summer programs, Boy and Girl Scouts, and senior citizen associations of table tennis players (the gym also includes ping-pong tables), among others. Chinese and Chinese-American senior citizens gather for community events during the course of the year in the church's classrooms, sanctuary, and basement.

The signs and posters throughout the church building are in Chinese and English. Both the Chinese and English language Sunday services project the liturgy, readings, and pertinent information in Chinese and English. Newcomers to both services are greeted by church members in either Chinese or English or even sometimes Spanish. Sunday services often include LCMS members visiting New York City from across the United States. The baptismal font of True Light Lutheran Church is in the shape of a pagoda crowned by the cross. Sermons in the English and Chinese services often include Chinese terms and concepts as applied to the Christian Gospel. The congregation routinely places tables with Bibles, Small Catechisms, and Lutheran materials in Chinese and English outside the entrance of the church on the busy corner of Worth and Mulberry Streets.

True Light continues to be a desired destination for memorial services. During the summer of 2022, the sanctuary was filled to capacity for a memorial service in Chinese and English for a longtime member of the congregation who had moved to Florida. The memorial service concluded with a Chinese banquet at a nearby restaurant and catering hall in Chinatown. Special services at True Light Lutheran Church incorporate English and Chinese, and include English and Chinese choirs.

True Light Lutheran Church advertises in local news outlets (online and in print) in Chinese and English in Chinatown, downtown Manhattan, and Flushing, Queens. True Light Lutheran Church maintains an ongoing mission and ministry satellite worshiping community in Mandarin in Chinatown, Flushing, Queens that meets on Sunday mornings.

Extending from Chinatowns in Manhattan to Queens, True Light Lutheran Church's Christian hospitality and Gospel reach embraces the first, second, and third generations of Chinese and Chinese-Americans, new and old members from China, New York City, and beyond, and guests and friends in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin.

Considering the future, True Light Lutheran Church aims to welcome new members and seekers in the love of Jesus, the Light of the world. When asked why the name True Light matters, members expressed that the church is called True Light for following the true light of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life.[9] When asked what the church might look like twenty years from now, church members affirmed that by God's grace it still will be a place where the light of Christ shines and gives light to everyone. True Light Lutheran Church seeks to build upon its feeling of belonging in Chinatown by continuing to minister intergenerationally and interculturally in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, and connecting with Chinese Lutheran ministries and missions in Asia and across North America.

True Light Lutheran Church offers lessons for intercultural and intergenerational Christian ministries and missions. Why has True Light Lutheran Church connected across cultures and generations? With the guidance and sustenance of God's abiding and illuminating grace, True Light Lutheran Church synthesizes the missiological elements of culturally attuned, contextual evangelism, with the traditional Chinese concept of harmony as centered in Christ, adapting to the realities of Chinatown, and experiencing the welcoming love of Jesus, the Light of the world.

Chinese understandings of seeking harmony and the history of True Light Lutheran Church reminds us of the importance of working together and the role of districts and the larger synod in facilitating the development of existing and potential missions and ministries. As we realize resource depletion, the collective origins of True Light Lutheran Church commend us to consider similar situations and solutions from the past for boldness in faith for the present.

A harmony shown in Miss Banta's collective and intercultural work in English and Chinese reveals a *yin and yang* Christian approach to different cultures and languages in and through Christ.[10] Instead of seeing one culture and language as distinct from another, a *yin and yang* Christ-centered approach realizes Chinese and American cultures in harmony as mutually beneficial and reflective of the other. The *yin and yang* approach to Christian ministry and mission may be applied to other intercultural contexts. Furthermore, immigrant and newcomer ministries and missions like True Light Lutheran Church remind all generations of Christians that they are strangers and sojourners who await the city of God, who, in faith, hope, and love even now extend hospitality in the name of Jesus in their cities, towns, and communities.[11] The traditional Chinese characters for True Light can also be translated as Spirit Light. Since 1936, True Light has been borne by the Word and Spirit of God. As Scripture teaches and the example of True Light Lutheran Church attests, it is only through the Word and Spirit wherein Christians discover unity in harmony.[12] New Yorkers like to think that they live in the center of the world and this sentiment resonates for True Light as the future looks bright for collaborations with Lutheran Chinese ministries and missions around the globe. True Light, the mother church of Chinese

ministry and mission in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, continues to shine the light of Christ from generation to generation.

ENDNOTES

[1] Information about True Light Lutheran Church, including a history of the ministry and mission in Chinatown, is found on the church's website: test.truelightlutheran.org.
[2] John 1:9. Miss Mary E. Banta also emphasized Zechariah 14:7 ("When evening comes there will be light.") as a theme verse for True Light Lutheran Church.
[3] *True Light Lutheran Church 40th Anniversary* (self-published booklet). The quote is from the Rev. Philip N. Yang, pastor of True Light from 1965–1995. Rev. Philip Yang was born in China, attended Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary and Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, and is widely respected today for his active community engagement in Chinatown and for his faithfulness in serving as pastor of True Light. He worshiped at True Light this past Easter Sunday (2022).
[4] Colossians 3:14.
[5] Daniel 12:3; Matthew 5:14; Philippians 2:15.
[6] Information on Mary E. Banta in this article is from *The Biography of our Mary E. Banta* (self-published booklet) from True Light Lutheran Church made in 1954 and reprinted and updated in 2016, and from *True Light Lutheran Church 40th Anniversary* booklet.
[7] Quoted in *The Biography of our Mary E. Banta*.
[8] One active member of True Light described this diversity as ABC (American born Chinese), HBC (Hong Kong born Chinese), CBC (China born Chinese), TBC (Taiwan born Chinese), and all one in Christ, the True Light.
[9] John 14:6.
[10] While the *yin and yang* is often associated with Daoism, the concept is used here in direct relation to the Christian understanding of *logos*. *Logos* is an ancient Greek philosophical term that was baptized, reinterpreted, and reimagined in Christ (John 1:1–18). In many Chinese editions of the Bible, *logos* is translated as *dao*, an ancient Chinese philosophical term now properly understood in and through Christ, the Word of God. Thus, the Word of God, the pre-incarnate *logos* and the incarnate Jesus Christ, is the *dao* (*logos*), and the source and realization of Christian concordance and unity in the diversity of the Body of Christ in many and various cultures and languages. Cf., the hermeneutical-missiological method of Saint Augustine of Hippo who advised plundering the wisdom of the Egyptians (i.e., ancient pagan cultures) in order to bring all things under subjection to Christ so that God may be all in all (Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*; Exodus 3:22; 1 Corinthians 15:27–28).
[11] Hebrews 11:13–16; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Hebrews 13:2.
[12] Ephesians 2.

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A Multiethnic Church for the Sake of Our Children, Our Grandchildren, and the World

William Utech

Introduction

"Do you love your traditions more than your children?" This was the surprising, startling, unsettling question with which David Kinnaman, CEO of Barna Group and author of the bestselling books *Faith For Exiles*, *Good Faith*, *You Lost Me*, and *unChristian*, concluded his presentation at a joint pastors' conference for the Minnesota North and Minnesota South Districts back in 2014. He left the crowd of clergy pretty much speechless because, I imagine, they had never been asked this question before, nor had they ever been asked to ponder its validity. Or, maybe they were instantly scandalized by the inference that there might be a legitimate distinction between what they rightly believed, taught, and confessed on the one hand and the way they lived out and corporately practiced that faith on the other. The conference planning committee never invited David Kinnaman to come back to present at another gathering of our pastors.

I have heard it said, and from some personal experience have to believe, that one of the primary reasons we don't have more young people in our Lutheran congregations is because our congregations don't look like the high schools that these young people attended and graduated from.[1] What do I mean by that? Well, Martin Luther King Jr. frequently called the Sunday morning worship hour "the most segregated hour" in America. Over the years, religious demographers have echoed King's sentiment, arguing that in our country, more often than not, the people in our churches don't look like those in our communities. We're a pretty homogenous group. That is, we're birds of a feather who have flocked together in our local congregations.

Meanwhile, our public schools reflect all the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity that's going on out there, and our kids have come to not only like diversity but to expect it. So, it is argued, that a primary reason we don't have more young people in our Lutheran congregations is because our congregations, in many instances, have stopped looking like

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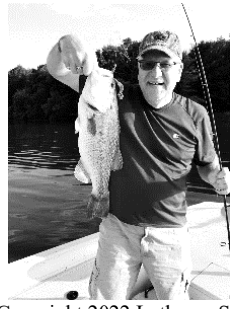

For over 35 years William Utech has served church and world as pastor, seminary professor, and district mission executive by preaching, teaching, presenting, and writing in ways that encourage pastors, leaders, and congregations to think, plan, and act in missional ways, so that they are able to break free from old and unhelpful status quos, and move, more and more, toward health, vitality, and starting new ministries that reach new people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. utechw@gofast.am

our young people's communities. Our children see, experience, get to know, and get comfortable with ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity, and then they look at us, and we all kind of look the same, and they know that something about that is not right—that something about that is broken.

When the people in church no longer reflect their local communities in terms of culture, race, and ethnicity, it indicates to people that the church is not for everyone—that it's only for people who look and live a certain way. But we all know, of course, that nothing could be further from the truth. We know that Jesus died for *all* people so that all people might believe in Him and all might be saved. We know that the Great Commission Christ has given to us is to "make disciple of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).

Our Church Today

Eight years after David Kinnaman's presentation mentioned above, it appears that his words were at least semi-prophetic in that the numbers of young people who are intentionally engaged in the mission and ministry of our LCMS congregations remains embarrassingly low.

In 2013, the largest segment of the district's 245 congregations (89 of them, or 36 percent) had an average weekly attendance between 100 and 249 people. Meanwhile, 112 congregations (46 percent of MNS congregations) had an average weekly attendance of 99 people or fewer. This is significant because it is generally accepted and understood that it takes, on average, approximately 100 or more people in church every week for a congregation to be able to afford the salary and benefits of one full-time, traditionally trained pastor. In other words, back in 2013, nearly half of the congregations (46 percent) in the MNS District were beginning to experience a crisis of leadership.

Fast forward eight years and the trends have only worsened. In 2021, for example, the largest segment of MNS congregations (93 congregations) was the group that averaged fewer than 50 people in worship per week. Add that group to the next largest segment that averaged between 50 and 99 people per week (75 congregations), and we see that by 2021, 71 percent of MNS congregations were no longer able, by themselves, to afford the services of one full-time, traditionally trained pastor.

These realities have weighed heavily on the hearts and minds of God's people throughout the district. Indeed, several years ago, when MNS District staff spent quality time listening to congregational leaders (both clergy and lay) from each of the twenty-four circuits that comprise the district, three major congregational concerns were enumerated time and time again: (1) aging membership, (2) declining worship attendance, and (3) the financial stresses that come with the first two concerns. These realities/concerns caused the laypeople running and supporting their congregations to express to us that they felt too old and too tired to keep their churches open. And indeed, since that time, the district has seen a pronounced increase in church closings.

I am confident the Minnesota South District is not the only LCMS district to have these concerns/problems/anxieties. Long-time Lutherans throughout our Church body are wondering what's going to happen to their congregations and their church buildings in the

not-so-distant future. Additionally, in terms of their own time, energy, and financial resources, they know that their local churches are "on the bubble," meaning they are on the precipice of failure. Thus, most established LCMS congregations (especially those located in metro areas and places where good entry-level jobs are prevalent) need to start paying attention to the new immigrant churches that are popping up in their communities.

Instead of God sending us to the nations, He is bringing the nations to us. In the Twin Cities metro area alone, whole communities are changing. For example, as these words are written, the Twin Cities metro area is currently experiencing the following new realities:

- They have the largest Somali, Hmong, Oromo Ethiopian, Liberian, Karen Burmese, and Anuak populations in the US, as well as the second largest Tibetan concentration. In fact, the only place in the world where there are more Somalis is in Somalia.
- The Brooklyn Center School District is 80 percent non-white.
- The Richfield School District is 72 percent non-white.
- The Fridley School District is 61 percent non-white.
- The Robinsdale School District is 59 percent non-white.
- The Burnsville School District is 57 percent non-white.
- The North St. Paul/Maplewood/Oakdale School District is 57 percent non-white.
- The Osseo School District is 55 percent non-white.
- The Roseville School District is 54 percent non-white.
- The Bloomington School District is 49 percent non-white.
- The Phillips Neighborhood in South Minneapolis is the most diverse neighborhood in the US with over 100 languages spoken there.
- There are more Hmong gangs than Hmong churches.
- Before Covid-19, Eat Street (Nicollet Avenue) in South Minneapolis had over seventy-five ethnic restaurants in a six-block area.
- Eight Muslim mosques, six Hindu temples, three Buddhist temples, one Sikh temple, and one Jain temple are now all located in former church buildings throughout the Twin Cities.[2]

And as all these new cultural and ethnic realities take place, the Lord is moving the new immigrant Christians that come into our communities to start new ministries and plant new churches that are primarily reaching only their particular ethnic and cultural groups. Unlike most established Anglo churches, however, the immigrant churches do not suffer from a lack of energy, mission zeal, eager volunteers, or youthful exuberance. On the contrary, our immigrant brothers and sisters are "raring to go!" In short, their congregations have what many of our established Anglo congregations lack—children, youth, vibrance, liveliness, large numbers of committed and engaged laypeople, an outward/evangelistic focus, excitement for the present, and hope for the future. What the new immigrant churches lack, however, is familiarity with US culture; brick and mortar places and spaces that can be used for worship, mission, and ministry; financial stability; leadership cultivation and training; appropriate English curriculum for Sunday School and youth classes; and methods for organizing and running their congregations within an American

milieu. Under such circumstances, it only makes sense that Anglo and immigrant congregations should share their strengths and shore up each other's weaknesses.

This is already happening in a few LCMS congregations in the Twin Cities. One of our declining Anglo congregations merged with a Hmong Lutheran congregation pastored by two Hmong graduates of Concordia Seminary's Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT). Today, Pastor Johnny Vang and Pastor Yia Lor are bi-vocational pastors who lead The Gathering Place in suburban St. Paul. Pastor Lor preaches every week in Hmong for the first-generation immigrant Hmong members, and Pastor Vang preaches every week in English for the second and third-generation Hmong, and for all the Anglo members of the church. Because both pastors are bi-vocational, the fledgling congregation can afford to have two pastors.

Likewise, when Pastor Matthew Cephus immigrated to America from Liberia, it wasn't long before he had planted Royal Family, a multiethnic congregation made up of immigrants from Liberia and Cameroon, as well as some Black Americans. Pastor Cephus, desiring to have a connection with and accountability to the larger Church, reached out to the MNS District, and, in time, became an EIIT student himself. Partnering with the district and one of the district's larger suburban Anglo congregations, it was decided that what the Twin Cities really needed was a multiethnic Lutheran church within the City of Minneapolis to give clear witness, at a time of great social and racial unrest, that the Gospel for Jesus Christ is for anyone and everyone, regardless of race or nationality, and to show that people from anywhere and everywhere can be brothers and sisters in Christ in one multiethnic congregation.

The problem, of course, was finding a site in Minneapolis where such a multiethnic congregation could be planted. Thank God that one of the district's Minneapolis Anglo congregations was still open! Gloria Dei, in Northeast Minneapolis, had a long and illustrious history, but over the past two or three decades, had encountered all of the problems and challenges facing established urban churches. So, despite some fear and trepidation, the Gloria Dei congregation bravely voted to open up their building to the Royal Family congregation and is even cooperating with Pastor Cephus and his people to evangelize the surrounding community. This is the kind of teamwork and partnering that the congregations in our Church body need to engage in now more than ever.

The homogeneous unit principle (HUP) tells us that "birds of a feather flock together," and it is very often on the basis of this sociological principle that local congregations come into being. The HUP was at work when German Lutherans came to the upper Midwest and settled there. German speakers naturally gravitated toward other German speakers who spoke, sang, worshiped, and communicated the Gospel in their first language, also called their "heart language." This is also happening among the new immigrants moving into the upper Midwest. They naturally gravitate toward "safe" spaces where they can communicate and commune with familiar forms and familiar people, and where they can hear the Good News about the person and work of Jesus in their heart language.

And this is what *needs* to happen for first-generation immigrants. They need to be able to think and talk and sing and hear and worship and receive all of God's Word-gifts in their heart language. Therefore, our existing Anglo congregational leaders do great work when

and where, if at all possible, they make space and time available for first-generation immigrant congregational gatherings. The HUP is working for the good of the Church in such instances.

But by the time the second generation comes around, the language, style, and traditions of the first generation begin to lose their sheen. Members of the second generation desire to be part of the broader culture and society. They speak English more often and better than their parents. They typically attend public school and become fluent in American culture. They are surrounded every day by kids from a plethora of racial, ethnic, social, and religious backgrounds. This is their normal! They don't necessarily want to learn "the mother tongue." They don't necessarily want to be steeped in the traditions of "their people" because those they consider *their* people aren't, necessarily, of the same tribe and tongue as their parents' people. I'll never forget the look of utter consternation that I received from a group of first-generation Sudanese church leaders when I asked them, "When I say the word *home*, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? And if I were to say the word *home* to your children, what do you think would be the *first thing* that came to *their* minds?"

So, the HUP is a sociological phenomenon that first-generation immigrant Christians use to their advantage to gather into congregations that fulfill their need to hear and experience the Gospel. And this is all well and good! It is my position, however, that we have *all* held onto the HUP as a way of planting, growing, and being the Church for far too long. True, many church planters in the 70s, 80s, and 90s were able (and were even encouraged) to use the HUP to their advantage in order to speedily gather a new group of believers and plant a new church that could quickly become a self-sustaining congregation. But times have changed, and our country is fast becoming a nation of minorities, to the point that if a local church does not mirror the ethnic diversity of its surrounding neighborhood and community, then it is viewed by the people in that community as odd, at best, or as irrelevant or counter-productive, at worst.

A year or so ago, those of us who were on the executive staff of the Minnesota South District were all challenged to come up with a Big Hairy Audacious Goal (BHAG) for our district. Here's what I devised and submitted:

Revelation 7:9–12 gives us an astounding vision of the future: men and women from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue will one day gather before the throne and worship God with one voice for all eternity. If this is the future of the Church, can there be any doubt that God is pleased to see us pursuing such a vision here on earth? We often ask ourselves, "If the kingdom of heaven is not segregated, why on earth is the Church?"[3]

It is the multi-ethnic church at Antioch, and not the homogeneous church at Jerusalem, that should serve as our primary model for local church development in the twenty-first century. Yes, it is the church at Antioch, and not the church in Jerusalem, that is the most influential church of the entire New Testament.[4]

Stretch goal (BHAG) for the next triennium:

The churches and leaders of the Minnesota South District are intentionally working toward making their congregations as racially and ethnically diverse as the public high schools that are located closest to their church buildings.

How is this done?

- Invite, encourage, and welcome non-Anglo congregations and/or Christians to share our buildings, and intentionally engage in fellowship, service, and Bible study activities together with them.
- Encourage, empower, and expect Anglo ministry leaders to spend quality time around and build healthy relationships with non-Anglo ministry leaders.
- Provide cross-cultural competency education, training, and hands-on experiences for congregations and their leaders.
- Provide ample tuition aid for those non-Anglo leaders desiring and qualified to enroll in Concordia Seminary's Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT), Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS), or Cross-Cultural Ministry Center (CMC) programs.
- Accommodate for including non-Anglo leaders in all district and circuit meetings, conferences, worship, and fellowship gatherings.
- Intentionally include non-Anglo leaders in district and congregational leadership.
- Work intentionally toward identifying, raising up, and equipping second-generation non-Anglo millennial leaders who can build and lead multiethnic ministries that reach the growing population of "nones," or the religiously unaffiliated, in our many diverse communities.
- Merge as many Anglo and non-Anglo congregations as possible, as soon as possible.

Nothing ever came of my recommendation, but I still stand by it. Not only because it is a way forward in forming new and more multiethnic congregations at a time when the world needs to see the power of the Gospel at work (i.e., gathering people from all races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and histories as one family in Christ), but also because this is the only kind of church that will grab and hold the attention and imagination of second-generation immigrants as well as the Anglo children and grandchildren who are already missing from our congregations. They have heard us say to them, at many times and in various ways, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to make all things new. And yet they have also seen our congregations get smaller and weaker and older and less-relevant to the mission fields around them. The HUP at work among us has wrought this, and for the sake of the mission field all around us, it needs to be intentionally impugned, discredited, and discarded. As our local churches transform into multiethnic churches, they become places for the world to see humanity at its best. They become communities of love, reconciliation, unity, and hope. They become places of Gospel transformation for our children, our children's children, and for the world.

A Lesson from the Early Church

So how do we get from where we are in terms of racial, ethnic, and cultural makeup to where we ought to be? How do we create Christian congregations that look like the communities in which they reside? Well, perhaps looking at how the first-century Church did that exact thing will help us. As we can read in Acts 11:19, some of our early Christian brothers and sisters "were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen," which incited the multiplication of churches. In other words, the fact that God allowed early Christians to experience hard times actually served to move them into the mission field. Reading the early chapters of Acts, we get the impression that those early believers were quite happy living in and around Jerusalem where most of the people they dealt with were just like them—but that wasn't accomplishing God's mission. So, God used persecution to thrust them into the midst of new people who lived in new places.

The disciples "traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:19–21, NIV). This way, persecution resulted in missionary work. Those nameless men from Cyprus and Cyrene did not go back to Cyprus or Cyrene after they were scattered from Jerusalem. Rather, they went to Antioch and did what Christians do: they talked about the person and work of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit used their Gospel presentations to save a great number of people. We don't know their names. We don't know how long they had been Christians before they traveled to Antioch. The most we can know about them is that, as early Christians, they were baptized, and "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). That's pretty much all we know about their level of training. And that qualified them! It qualified them to share the Gospel with people who were just like them, and it qualified them to share the Gospel with the Greeks—that is, with people who were *way different* from them. And in saying that, I've just described pretty much everyone reading this article or sitting in our sanctuaries on Sunday mornings! We *all* have been baptized been adopted into God's family as sons and daughters of the King. We *all* have been purchased and won from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil—*not* with gold or silver, but with the holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we've received, and that's all we've ever needed to be His witnesses and missionaries wherever we find ourselves. Ordinary Christians make extraordinary missionaries.

Furthermore, as a church receives the Gospel of Christ and is immersed in the Word of Christ, it cannot help but share the love of Christ. In Acts 11, nameless missionaries from Cyprus and Cyrene speak the Gospel to Greeks living in Antioch and a great number of them believe and turn to the Lord, and a new and truly multiethnic church is born. Next, word of this new multiethnic church reaches the ears of the still monoethnic church in Jerusalem, and they send Barnabas to Antioch to check it out. Barnabas sees clear evidence of the grace of God at work among these new Christians and in their multiethnic church,

and he wants to help them, so he travels to Tarsus to fetch Saul (also known as St. Paul), and for the next year the two of them devote themselves to teaching the Word of the Lord to the multiethnic church in Antioch. All that immersion in the Word of God turns that congregation into a unified and loving church that cannot help but reflect the love of God for all people. Jews are loving Gentiles and Gentiles are loving Jews, so much so that the church in Antioch becomes a sending church.

They are engaged in mission through sending money (Acts 11:27), sending missionaries, and probably most important of all, these brothers and sisters in the church in Antioch are sending a message. You see, they have come to learn that as the leadership of a church goes, so goes the church. If the church is serious about reaching its community, then it will eventually look like its community, and if it really wants to look like its community, then it will work to make sure the leadership of the church looks like the community. So that is what we find in Antioch. The Bible tells us that there are prophets and teachers there. Two of them are from Africa, one is from Asia, and one is from the Middle East.

This shows everyone living in the city of Antioch that the Gospel is for *everyone*! Though they look and sound very different from each other, the leaders of the church are nevertheless *one* in the Gospel. Though they look and sound very different from each other, the people of the church at Antioch are nevertheless *one* in the Gospel: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

That kind of unity, respect, cooperation, and love is such a rare, special, and attractive thing that the rest of the city simply cannot refute the power of the Gospel to change hearts and lives. The church in Antioch sends a powerful and visible message of love and reconciliation to their community, and for that, they are the first Christians *ever* to be called "Christians," that is, a people—a diverse people—who love *everybody* like nobody else on earth. As they receive the Gospel of Christ and are immersed in the Word, they cannot help but share the love of Christ.

So, we give ourselves over to this. We give up our illusions of control. We give up our efforts to run our churches our way. We give up our standard operating procedures, our preferred way of doing things, our buildings and programs and past successes. We give up the things we like, prefer, and are comfortable with in order to become what God has already declared us to be: His church in mission to the nations.

ENDNOTES

[1] See similar arguments in C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People: The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America* (Atlanta: J. Knox Press, 1979); Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Christian Mission and Ministry in the Context of Contemporary Migration," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 20, no. 2 (2016): 249, https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2015-0030.
[2] John A. Mayer, *CityView Report 17th Edition* (Minneapolis, MN: City Vision, 2020).
[3] Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 31.
[4] DeYmaz and Li, 42.

The Interrelation between Mission and Migration and Its Implication for Today's Church

Dinku Bato

The biblical and theological analysis of migration and mission generally exhibits strong interconnection, which means that God oftentimes uses immigrants to disseminate the message of His kingdom. Faith and tradition accompany immigrants not only as a reservoir that they habitually resort to in an effort to adjust to changing sociopolitical and economic situations, but also to influence communities they live with and encounter on a regular basis.

This essay will first discuss a few biblical narratives illustrating how God uses migration as an integral part of His mission. Next, a theological understanding of mission that makes sense of the importance of migration as a vital part of God mission will be discussed. The final section highlights the contemporary implications that present the Church in the West with challenges, but also opportunities.

Biblical Examples of Migration in Service to God's Mission

From its first occurrence in Scripture in connection with the displacement of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, migration informs major biblical narratives before it is consummated in the uprooting of St. John, who is believed to have written the last book of the Bible in the place of his exile—the island of Patmos (see Gen 3:23, Rev 1:9). The Bible is full of such stories where immigrants and sojourners are invited to participate in God's mission as agents to bless nations, people groups, and individuals (kings, leaders, prophets, etc.). The list is long and includes Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, the people of Israel, Ezekiel, Jeramiah, Daniel, Jesus, and the Apostles, to mention but a few.

From a different angle, God's command at the onset of creation to fill the earth seems to have at least two missional tones embedded in migration. The first notion involves the movement of people from one place to another, which includes the propagation of their

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Rev. Dinku Bato is an ordained minister in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, where he served as national director of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) University Student Ministry (USM) from 1998 to 2009. He is also a rostered minister in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as of June, 2017. Currently he works for the Lutheran Heritage Foundation (LHF) as regional director for Africa. Pastor Bato holds a Ph.D. in Leadership and Mission from Luther Seminary (May 2015). He lives in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota with his wife Mergitu Sarka and their three children. dinkubato@gmail.com

beliefs, cultures, and artifacts. Secondly, it entails the replenishing of God's earth as people move, live, and share ideas and experiences to enrich each other (see Gen 1:28, Acts 17:26). Geographic movement, one can say, is part of God's original plan for humanity to fulfill the "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28) mandate that follows the primordial human migration from paradise to the rest of the world.

The Bible portrays migration not only as a vehicle of mission, but also as an agent that transforms and revitalizes mission in terms of maintaining identity (distinctiveness), hope, new possibilities, and opportunities. This depiction is buttressed by instances that trace migration as having been a natural and purposive phenomenon in the history of humanity since its origin. For instance, we can see the book of Genesis as a book of migration: the displacement of Adam and Eve from the Garden, Cain's flight to foreign cities, Noah and his family's disaster-induced displacement, and the exodus of Abraham followed by that of his son Isaac and then his grandson Jacob, to mention but a few.

The Bible introduces Abraham first as an immigrant called to leave his homeland and clan to begin a pilgrimage (as a stranger, foreigner, and immigrant) to a new land on a mission to be a blessing to "all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:3). To be a stranger and an alien was a fundamental aspect of Abraham's self-understanding. Abraham's son Isaac also understood this as an integral part of God's vision for himself, a self-portrait that Isaac saw as fundamental to his being an instrument of God's mission to the nations (see also Gen 26:1–6). Thus, Abraham became the father of nations and a blessing to all people of the world—a precursor to what God would do through Jesus Christ. The call of Abraham and Sarah continues to serve as a paradigm and inspiration for God's people in all times who are called to be a blessing to nations.

In another instance, namely, at the time of exodus, God revealed his power so that the Egyptians and the nations in their vicinity would "know" Him and have His name "be proclaimed in the earth" (Exod 9:16). The "many other people" who joined the exodus show that many Egyptians knew the God of Israel when He ousted their gods. In making covenant with Israel and setting them apart as His people, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, God wanted them to represent Him to the nations (see Exod 9:16, 12:38, 19:4–6).

Much later, the Babylonian captivity proves to be another migration story that offers a future for Israel's faith, enriching it with a new direction and impetus for the eventual re-establishment of the Jewish community in Palestine and the Kingdom of God in the world. Regarding this, Mark Lau Branson writes,

> Not only were the exiles to settle in Babylon for a few generations, their relationship with their new context was beyond their imagination, "seek the shalom of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its shalom you will find your shalom" (Jeremiah 29:7). This does not fit the expectation of an immediate rescue. The enemy and this city of exile were being interpreted in ways that were profoundly disorienting.[1]

The story of the young girl taken captive from Israel to Syria is another interesting biblical example of what God can do with immigrants. The girl in the story had effectively served as a missionary (though she might have not been intentional about it) as she shared

with her captors what she knew about God's prophet in the context of the challenge her captors faced: leprosy. Yet God used the tragedy of her captivity to bring about something wonderful in a very simple way. Her life and witness set a marvelous example of a faithful witness under trying circumstances. Her faith and testimony of the God she knew, working in the life and ministry of the prophet Elisha of her home country, finally brought the knowledge and worship of God into the country of her exile—even more, into the Syrian palace, and, later, probably the nation at large (see 2 Kings 5:1–18).

What is more, the New Testament gives a substantial account of the role of immigrants and migration in mission. Jehu Hanciles gives a detailed account of Jesus's life based on the Gospel narratives to show that His "life and ministry embodied the interconnection of mission, the boundary-crossing movement, and the alienation of exile and migration," arguing further that "the incarnation itself should be considered as a veritable act of migration or relocation."[2]

Furthermore, the book of Acts provides a comprehensive understanding of how God used migration as it is applied in the life and ministry of the apostles, who were forced to leave Jerusalem for outlying towns, regions, and Gentile territories. Hence, the call to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and the ends of the earth came to pass as the first and subsequent disciples of Christ moved from place to place, but mostly through forced displacement in the form of persecution (see Acts 1:8, 8:1,4,5). Drawing on the immigrant experiences of Jesus, the apostles, and Paul as form and catalyst of mission, Hanciles therefore concludes that "not only do we encounter every major form of migration in the biblical account, but also the biblical story and message would be meaningless without migration and mobility."[3]

The missional hermeneutical reading of the Bible proffers different perspectives of immigrants: partners, co-laborers, and co-participants in God's mission to the nations.[4] Based on biblical narratives, Charles Van Engen argues that, throughout history, we observe that the process of immigration, intentionally or not, has been a means for carrying out the mission of God, where He invites people to be not only the object, but also the active subject of mission and renewal of congregations and denominations.[5] Stories related to the movement of God's people—be it forced or voluntary—generally tie to the direct or indirect promulgation of the story of God's salvation, forming a strong correlation between migration and mission. Based on this consideration, let's now see how the Trinitarian vision further reinforces our understanding of the interrelatedness of migration and mission.

Migration and Mission in Light of the Trinitarian Vision

The Trinitarian vision, the communion of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, sheds some light on understanding migration as an aspect of human interconnectedness, interdependence, and reciprocity. In the Scriptures, God is depicted as the "migrant God" who is always on the move, above all, through the Incarnation (sending of the Son) and through Pentecost (sending of the Holy Spirit). Likewise, the *perechoretic* nature—mutual reciprocity within the life of the Trinity—informs immigrants' relationship with the host community where differences would not be allowed to generate exclusion or division.[6]

The understanding of a Trinitarian mission as the mission of the Father through the Son and the Spirit includes the Church and gives rise to the conception of mission as movement that emanates from God's movement to the world through Jesus Christ:

> Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission (Aagaard 1973:13). There is church because there is mission, not vice versa (Aagaard 1974:423). To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.[7]

As one can readily observe from the above discussion, mission entails *sentness*, where the sending usually points to a movement from one place to another. It is therefore appropriate to see mission in relation to migration, where "the movement of Christian people to other places is integrated in the concept of mission."[8]

In Trinitarian studies, reference is often made to God as essentially relational. This is expressed in both Eastern and Western lines in Trinitarian faith, even though in different ways. In Jean Zizioulas' words, "since 'hypostasis' is identical with Personhood and not with substance, it is not in its 'self-existence' but in *communion* that this being is *itself* and thus *is at all*. Thus, communion does not threaten personal particularity; it is constitutive of it."[9] In the face of the widespread assimilation of the weak and minority groups (in this case immigrants) by the powerful and dominant groups within the present globalized world (be it in the forms of Anglo-conformity, melting pot, etc.), Christian mission calls for a just and conscientious relational witness to the Gospel.[10]

Miroslav Volf suggests that the life of the Trinity is characterized by self-giving love.[11] Volf further describes that self-giving means first abandoning self-absorption and moving toward the other in order to "nourish" and "tenderly care," and in order to make "without blemish" and clothe in "splendor." Second, self-giving means the opening of the self for the other, letting the other find space in the self—so much so that love for the other, who remains the other and is not transformed into an inessential extension of the self, can be experienced as the love of the self.[12]

He further warns,

> In a world of enmity self-giving is the risky and hard work of love where there are no guarantees that self-giving will overcome enmity and that the evildoers will not try to invade the space that the self has made and crush those willing to give themselves for the good of other. We will have to resist such evil-doers without betraying the commitment to self-giving.[13]

Corresponding to the relational characteristics of the Trinitarian life, Martin Luther also reminds us that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and the neighbor—in Christ through faith and in his neighbor through love.[14]

Zizioulas also argues that communion with the other—be it God or one's neighbor—requires the experience of the cross, the sacrifice of our own will and the subsequent act of subjecting it to the will of the other, repeating in ourselves what our Lord did in

Gethsemane in relation to the will of his Father. Without this we cannot reflect properly in history the communion and otherness that we see in the triune God. The self-emptying move (*kenosis*) of the Son of God—to meet the other—is the only way befitting our communion with the other.[15]

The incarnation and the cross are dynamic ways through which the all-powerful God shows that He can make space for "self-exteriorization to the maximum."[16] This "self-exteriorization" of the Trinity can also be considered as a scatter-to-gather movement which reaches out to gather the other at the margin to the center. This understanding offers a solid foundation for the Church's life and ministry of welcoming the stranger and making room for the other.

Contemporary Implications: Challenges and Opportunities

The forgoing biblical demonstration of the interconnectedness of mission and migration enlightens our imagination of what God wants to do through the immigrants of our time as agents of God's mission in North America. Based on that understanding, I will discuss four implications of migration for God's mission in the world: (1) the ecstatic nature of human nature and culture (2) equality and reciprocity, (3) new challenges and opportunities for North America, and (4) immigrants as participants in God's mission.

The Ecstatic Feature of Human Nature and Culture[17]

People always move with their cultural knowledge, which primarily includes their religion and tradition. This movement naturally involves the transmission of tradition, artifacts, faith, and spirituality as confirmed by similar experience of several biblical characters and groups and individuals in the Christian faith and other faith traditions. The ecstatic character of human nature and culture buttressed by the phenomenon of migration, initiates and sustains a certain kind and level of change over time.

As discussed above, the notion of *perichoresis*—a Trinitarian movement/dance around the divine persons that continuously open/reach out to the *other*—also inspires the contact and coinherence between various cultural groups. This depiction of circular dancing, however, is also complemented by yet another movement that simultaneously emigrates outward to make space and incorporates *others* for God: "is not a stationary point but a person who loves by moving outward toward others."[18] These movements somewhat resemble the simultaneous centrifugal motion and the concomitant centripetal movement as per LaCugna's observation that "the centrifugal movement of divine love does not terminate 'within' God but explodes outward."[19] Similarly, Zizioulas observes,

> God, in Christ, moves out of himself in love, and this makes all true ecstatic. This, according to St Maximus, makes God, who is by nature unmovable, to be moved . . . toward creation, moving at the same time toward himself those who are capable of receiving his divine movement and responding to it (notably the creatures that possess freedom).[20]

This insight about the Trinity paves a way toward a richer understanding of the nature of the Church. David Bosch, drawing on Winston Crum (1973), Hans-Werner Gensicen (1971), and T.F. Stransky (1982), among others, perceives the Church as an ellipse with two foci. . . . In and around the first it acknowledges and enjoys the source of its life; this is where worship and prayer are emphasized. From and through the second focus the church engages and challenges the world. This is a forth-going and self-spending focus, where service, mission and evangelism are stressed. . . . Neither focus should ever be at the expense of the other; rather, they stand in each other's service.[21]

Underlining the importance of the dual movement in the Church, Bosch further asserts that "the church *gathers* to praise God, to enjoy fellowship and receive spiritual sustenance, and *disperses* to serve God wherever its members are. It is called to hold in 'redemptive tension"[22] A church, apart from this "redemptive tension" would, in the words of Lesslie Newbigin, "risk becoming a self-centered existence serving only the needs and desires of its members."[23] The postmodern conception of culture also argues that cultural identity becomes a hybrid, relational entity, something that lives between as much as within cultures.[24] Thus, the permeability and malleability of cultures allows creativity that quickens the adaptive process and cultural enrichment toward holistic flourishing of the communities involved.

This idea has been clearly revealed in human history at different times. Andrew Walls, for instance, pointing out major historical periods that played a role in the revitalization and continuity of Christianity, notes that migration was a major factor in each of the transitions.[25]

What is more, in the context of African immigrant churches, indigenous forms of Christian faith exhibit the way people adopt a global view while remaining faithful to local forms. Based on Lamin Sanneh's concept of translatability, Hanciles further avers that "the translatability of the Christian faith and gospel locks diversity and unity in perennial tension: each living Christian community is a model of the whole and the whole is a reflection of the individual parts."[26]

Equality and Reciprocity

As discussed above, the Trinitarian life involves the equality of each person of the Trinity where there is no above or below, no rank (first, second, or third in importance), no rivalry or competition where one uses the other for their own interest and self-aggrandizement. Rather, Trinity as a communion of equals each free for the others is characterized by self-giving love and reciprocity, where Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in fellowship of mutual openness.[27] Following this line of thought, Lamin Sanneh argues,

> The characteristic pattern of Christianity's engagement with the languages and cultures of the world has God at the center of the universe of cultures, implying equality among cultures and the necessarily relative status of cultures vis-à-vis the truth of God. No culture is so advanced and so superior that it can claim exclusive access or advantage to the truth of God, and none so marginal and remote that it can be excluded.[28]

Some churches in the West that appear to be largely engaged in serving their own national, ethnic, and cultural interests would do well to turn to the global immigrant church in their midst for a fuller understanding of the Scriptures and the Christian faith.[29] This caveat also serves the global Church anywhere in welcoming the stranger in the growingly cosmopolitan world expedited by the twin forces of migration and globalization.

As also depicted splendidly in their culture of *ubuntu* (belongingness, relatedness), African Christians, among others, must usher the way for interdependence, togetherness, symbiosis, and mutuality with the community in their new environment. "Only *together* is [their] salvation and survival. . . . The 'me generation' has to be superseded by, Bosch argues, the 'us generation'. . . . since human existence is by definition intersubjective existence" fitting to the Church as a body of Christ and as a *communitas* of common space of participation.[30] The presence of immigrant churches—with all their challenges—could well be a force of renewal for missionary vision and vigor in North American churches. As Tinyiko S. Maluleke rightly notes, several missiologists have recently observed that Christian mission is not something that the first world does to the two-thirds world, or men do to women, and certainly not a one-way current from the north to the south, but something from everywhere to everywhere.[31] He further argues that the real proof for this assertion comes to pass when all participate equally and mutually in God's mission, crisscrossing the quantitative and qualitative boundaries of race, gender, class, geography, politics, economy, and culture.[32]

New Challenges and Opportunities for North America

In resonance with Craig Van Gelder's observation that "changes made in immigration policy by the US during the 1960s and 1970s allowed for a significant inflow of persons from Africa, Central and Latin America, and the Pacific rim,"[33] Jacob Olupona notes,

> Immigration is changing the religious configuration of the United States. The 1965 Immigration Reform Act contributed to an unprecedented wave of African immigrants in the twentieth century…. [T]hese immigrants have inevitably contributed to the new religious reality in the United States.[34]

This wave of immigrants to North America has surprised American churches with new challenges. In a way, it has stirred up social disturbance caused both by cultural differences and by the social needs of the newcomers. But it also has sparked a kind of Christian life marked by enthusiasm and vitality that can have a rejuvenating effect on the host church and community.[35] Furthermore, it begs for new patterns of relationships with regard to "the changing pattern of immigration in recent decades [that] has introduced the reality of diverse cultural communities into the midst of once familiar and usually somewhat homogeneous neighborhoods."[36] This phenomenon of immigration challenges the church to demonstrate that Christ can fashion new attitudes in people of different cultures so that they may learn to accept one another as Christ has accepted them. In today's society of tense pluralism, such transformation is the way to becoming the people of God and participating in His mission.

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At the same time, migration seems to be a new opportunity since mission calls for a missional imagination wherein the migrants are not only objects of mission but also active subjects and agents of God's mission among the groups they encounter in the process of displacement, flight, and resettlement. Migration, as a huge impetus for peoples' movement across boundaries, brings people of different faith traditions and cultures into contact with one another. This dynamism, in the long run, impacts all communities involved—either directly or indirectly. In the same vein, the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) has stated emphatically that "where the Gospel has been heard and obeyed, cultures have become further ennobled and enriched."[37] In consonance with the above argument, the Vatican document *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (EMCC) also states,

> In contemporary society, to which migration contributes by making it more and more multiethnic, intercultural, and multireligious, Christians are called to face a substantially new and fundamental chapter in the missionary task: that of being missionary in countries of long Christian tradition.[38]

This seems to hold particular significance for the United States as a "prime target for immigration with a million new immigrants a year," which, according to Andrew Walls, will lead to a rise in the US population that could reach four hundred million by 2050—entirely as a result of immigration.[39] This influx is a double blessing to the host nation: first, because these immigrants largely come from majority Christian and/or fastest growing churches of the south with rich evangelistic outreach experiences, and, second, because they are predominantly a relatively younger population with the evangelistic and demographic potential for self-propagation.

Immigrants as Participants in God's Mission

The invitation to participate in the Triune life (in Christ through the Spirit) enables us to share with all people the love of God through acts of hospitality. Equally, in this network of humanity, we can establish and receive harmony and ecstasy from and with others who participate in the web of human relations which we depend on for our holistic wellbeing. In the same vein, Stanley Grenz argues,

> Creating this relational fullness is the work of the Spirit, who places humans 'in Christ' and thereby effects human participation in the dynamic of the divine life. Moreover, being 'in Christ' entails participating in the narrative of Jesus, with its focus on the cross and the resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:1–14).[40]

Our participation in the Triune life opens up a new opportunity to partner with God. This participation, according to Daniel L. Migliore, takes the shape of faith, love, and hope as "ways of living into the image of God realized for us and promised to us in Christ."[41]

Migrants as pilgrims seek "to transgress all artificial boarders that impede the quest for communion with God and with other people."[42] As discussed above, migrants frequently do not only move with their faith and traditions but also disseminate them among people they encounter in passage and/or at destination. The growing number of Christian immigrants, leaving homelands on grounds of the dynamic interplay of push and pull factors can participate as agents in the transmission of valor and vivacity experienced in Christianity of the global South toward the transformation of the West.

The non-Western world, with its rich and fully untapped potential (which includes dynamic forms of the Christian message, demographic wealth, mobility, and culture of the peaceful coexistence of religions), can play a crucial role in revitalizing churches in the West overwhelmed by ideals of Christendom and secularization. The quest for spirituality and the ubiquity of religious symbols and artifacts in the social and political landscapes, however, seem to epitomize a welcome for the return of religion as the main actor in "civic globalization" and/or healthy "glocalization."[43] Immigrant churches could serve as companions to their counterparts in the West toward renewal and transformation of both. Regarding the mutuality between the West and Africa, Steven Biko, for instance, writes that the Western societies

> seem to be very concerned with perfecting their technological know-how while losing out on their spiritual dimension. We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationship. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa—giving the world a more human face.[44]

Accordingly, addressing the multifaceted and gigantic global challenges requires more than scientific breakthroughs; it will require new ways of human relations, networking, and

participation embedded in the ethos of *communitas* and the Trinitarian life of reciprocity, mutuality, and self-giving.

Conclusion

The biblical and theological understanding of mission and migration depicts the symbiotic relationship between the two phenomena in God's work in the world. Or, put differently, migration furthers the multidirectional dissemination of the Good News *glocally* (globally & locally) crisscrossing social, cultural, and physical boundaries. What is more, the dynamic movement within and from the Trinitarian God inspires and guides the interconnectedness and mission of God's people toward a growing manifestation of His kingdom on earth.

ENDNOTES

[1] Mark Lau Branson, "Interpretive Leadership During Social Dislocation: Jermiah and Social Imaginary," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 8, no. 1 (2009): 43.
[2] Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 139.
[3] Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 140.
[4] Darrell L. Guder et al., ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 209.
[5] Charles Van Engen, "Biblical Perspectives on the Role of Immigrants in God's Mission," Evangelical Review of Theology 34, no. 1 (2010).
[6] See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 228. *Perichoresis*, according to Cathrine M. Lacugna, "is the life of communion and indwelling, God in us, we in God, all of us in each other. . . . The mutual interdependence that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel of John: 'I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:20–21).
[7] David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series No. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 390. Emphasis in the original. See also John 1:14 in Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 2002) rendering the Incarnation into the movement of God into the neighborhood.
[8] Fabio Baggio and Agnes M. Brazal, *Faith on the Move: Toward a Theology of Migration in Asia* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 155.
[9] Jean Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human in Capacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood," Scottish Journal of Theology 28/5 (October 1975), 409 in Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 52.
[10] Anglo-conformity assumes that all new immigrants in the United States should conform to the dominant Anglo culture while the melting pot model assumes that different ethnic groups in the United States should conform to a common model, but one in which each group contributes something to the new culture being created. For more, see Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martinez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 88–89.

[11] See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), Ch. 3.
[12] Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity and Gender Identity" in Douglas Atchison Campbell and Alan J. Torrance, *Gospel and Gender : A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, Studies in Theology and Sexuality 7 (London ; New York: T&T Clark International, 2003), 176–177.
[13] Volf, "The Trinity," 176–177.
[14] See *Freedom of a Christian* (1520), in LW 31:371.
[15] Jean Zizioulas and Paul McPartlan, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 5–6.
[16] See Hans Urs von Balthasar and Aidan Nichols, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 28–29.
[17] The word "ecstatic" here mainly refers to the self-spending and forth-going movement of people and cultural osmosis with service to other people and cultures. See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 135. Here he argues that "in all their forms of manifestation the works of God's Spirit have an ecstatic character."
[18] LaCugna, *God for Us*, 351.
[19] Ibid., 354. See also Lorance, "Reflections of a Church Planter among Diaspora Groups in Metro-Chigago: Pursuing Cruciformity in Diaspora Missions."Here he discusses the idea of centerpetality and centerfugality in connection to diaspora mission where the former is understood negatively as "immovability, inflexibility, and unhealthy 'long termism" in favor of "embraced centrifugality" which is characterized by the antithesis of the former. Cognizant of Lorance's warning against self-centered and inward-looking tendencies in several diaspora church and communities, the researcher here, however, wants to perceive centerpetality as a positive movement that emerges from the Trinitarian life of *perichoretic* love, reciprocity, and hospitality.
[20] Zizioulas and McPartlan, *Communion and Otherness*, 26.
[21] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 385.
[22] Ibid., 386. (Emphasis in the original)
[23] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 11.
[24] See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 57–58.
[25] Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 16–25.
[26] Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 155.
[27] Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Wetminster John Knoc), 93.
[28] Lamin O. Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*, Oxford Studies in World Christianity (NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25.
[29] Guder, *Missional Church*, 268. See also E. Randolph Richards and J. Brandon O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes*, (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2012).
[30] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 362. For a detailed discussion on *communitas* see Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures, 1966 (London,: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969), 97. *Communitas* is a Latin term that Victor Turner borrowed to refer to "a bond of oneness beyond ordinary community, an actual communion together that does not destroy individuality but brings alive the full gifts of each participant. It is a leveling process wherein 'he who is high must experience what it is like to be low' yet accomplished in a setting that is accepting, life-giving, and unifying." See also Paul H. De Neui, "Christian Communitas in the Missio Dei: Living Faithfully in the Tension between Cultural Osmosis and Alienation," *Ex auditu* 23 (2007).

[31] Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "A Black Missiologist: Contradiction in Terms?," *In Mission Is Crossing Frontiers: Essays in Honour of the Late Bongani A. Mazibuko* ed. Roswith I. H. Gerloff and Bongani Mazibuko. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003), 113.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 50.
[34] Jacob Obafemi Kehinde Olupona and Regina Gemignani, *African Immigrant Religions in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 89.
[35] Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, Baffour K. Takyi, and John A. Arthur, *The New African Diaspora in North America: Trends, Community Building, and Adaption* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 131.
[36] Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 97.
[37] WEF, "Consultation on the Church in Response to Human Need," (Wheaton, Ill: 1983), 20., in Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 346.
[38] See Baggio and Brazal, *Faith on the Move*, 155.
[39] Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 2002), 81.
[40] Stanley J. Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei," In *Trinitarian Soundings in Systematic Theology*, ed. Paul Louis Metzger. (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 98.
[41] Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology 2nd ed*. (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 162.
[42] William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011), 82. Here it is stated that the word "pilgrim" is derived from the Latin *peregrines* the meaning of which includes "foreigner, wanderer, exile, alien, traveler, newcomer, and stranger."
[43] See Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, Passim. See also Patrick R Keifert, "The Return of the Congregation: Missional Warrants," *Word & World* XX, no. 4 (2000).
[44] Steve Biko and Aelred Stubbs, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 46–7.

Bridge People and LCMS Congregations: Bicultural Immigrants, Missions, and the Scriptures

Matthew Buse

Abstract

Migration allows people the opportunity to operate in different cultures with various levels of fluency. People fluent in two or more cultures can increase the reach of mission work through congregations involved with immigrant groups. Tensions arise, however, as these people may feel torn between cultures. By understanding some of the terms around immigration and culture, we can understand the role of people to bridge various cultures in service to congregations by reaching out with the Gospel. Their bridging is not simply between groups but also brings people together under the authority of the Scriptures, which owe their origin to divine inspiration.

Bridging Different Cultures

Once, when speaking with a congregation leader about issues immigrant families face while raising children, he remarked that the congregation's community center had produced a video. He pointed out two children in the video, both born to immigrant parents. The children introduced themselves: "I'm from the Congo," said one. "I'm from Australia," said the other. As we watched, the congregation leader remarked, "They're the same age." Each statement was true for each child. Bicultural fluency for immigrant generations looms large in the minds of diaspora communities. Retaining old and absorbing new cultures are adaptations that immigrant families and communities cannot avoid. Just how much to retain and how much to absorb are perennial questions, complicated by the different levels of

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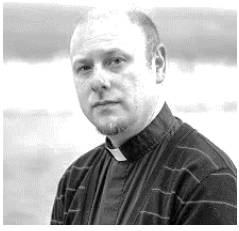

Rev. Dr. Buse currently serves as the Executive Director of the Immigrant Mission Field Network, which he founded in 2021. He is a 2020 graduate of the PhD. in Missiology program at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Prior to that, he served as Pastor in the Lutheran Church of Australia in parishes in Melbourne and rural South Australia. He earned a Master of Theology degree at Australian Lutheran College, Adelaide in 2008. He is a 2007 graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary. Rev. Buse and his wife, Rachel, have been married for 19 years. They have two daughters, Mira and Alathea. The family lives in Fort Wayne, IN and are members of Ascension Lutheran Church. matthew.buse@ctsfw.edu

adaptation among parents, children, and grandchildren in these communities. As individuals operate in multiple cultural settings, they act as bridges between the different cultures—as Bridge People. They address themselves to people of many different cultural contexts by virtue of their capability in multiple cultures.

As the illustration indicates, some tensions go along with being a bridge between cultures: the danger of feeling torn between those two cultures.[1] One's culture is, after all, a source of immense importance; people cherish their cultures. Thus, speaking about the meeting of cultures in the Church requires our care and awareness. However, there are implications for mission work in immigrant communities we would do well to consider. To do that requires discussing the processes of cultural engagement across immigrant generations. Doing so allows us to consider the category of Bridge People as a missions category. Second, we turn to the foundation and function of the Scriptures and the opportunities that accompany the tensions in the life of congregations and their outreach. Then, we turn to the role Bridge People have in demonstrating and encouraging unity in Lutheran multiethnic congregations.

Though our goal here is to discuss engaging immigrant mission fields with the Gospel of Christ, there are a host of terms often used to discuss immigration and its accompanying cultural adaptations which are important to note. For our purposes, it is enough to consider the terms *assimilation*, *integration*, and *acculturation*. They are applied to the different experiences of immigrant generations: the first generation (born abroad), 1.5 generation (born abroad but partly raised and educated in the host culture), second generation (born in the host country), and third generation (the grandchildren of the first generation). Sociologists commonly use the term *assimilation* to describe immigrant groups becoming like the majority native-born population. Richard Alba and Victor Nee, in their book *Rethinking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, take up the question of old and new views on assimilation. They propose that assimilation theories old and new hold in common the minimizing of "ethnic change," whether it is pressure on immigrants to abandon their cultures and embrace the American mainstream or a mutual cultural adaptation of immigrant groups and the mainstream culture where both decide what aspects to retain and adopt.[2] *Integration* is a related term, often referring to the processes involved when immigrants participate in the host country's institutions.[3] *Acculturation* is the acquiring of a new culture and can apply to infants acquiring the culture of their parents as much as to adults acquiring a new culture because of immigration.[4]

All of these terms are contested to one degree or another. The nuance concerning assimilation is the speed at which different generations acquire a new culture. An obvious example is the higher rate of new language acquisition that children possess compared to adults. Anthropologist Margaret A. Gibson introduced the term *segmented assimilation* to encompass three different outcomes for different immigrant groups: (1) a steady economic and cultural assimilation, (2) a more selective process, and (3) a process that stagnates groups economically.[5] Also complicating the term is the rate of assimilation between groups or between diaspora communities in different locations, depending on their circumstances. Factors such as the amount of contact between immigrant groups and the

rest of the community, as well as the size and migration replenishment rates of groups, are examples here that affect the speed of acculturation.[6] In the realm of missiology, Wan and Casey take a term like *assimilation* and reframe it as the opportunity for different cultural groups to become a bit more like each other, redefining the process as a reciprocal social interaction.[7] When that happens, the opportunities for the spread of the Gospel in multiple cultural directions increase significantly. When different immigrant and non-immigrant groups grow together, even slightly, their reach expands accordingly.

The Diaspora Experience and the Mission Field

Based on the experience of immigrants in the United States, one can argue that it is not simply the new cultural surroundings where diaspora communities find themselves that determine how cultural adaptation takes place. Current immigration processes allow for increased transnationalism. Increased transnationalism need not imply a flat refusal to adapt to a host culture but rather a different rate of acculturation. As we have seen, scholars posit that assimilation is not always a straight line, and connections between the home country and the host country affect this process also. Fernández-Kelly proposes viewing transnationalism in its cultural aspects along horizontal and vertical axes. The horizontal vector deals with connections between immigrants' homeland and their new country, a process that maintains ties between the two places but also includes how diaspora communities provide mutual assistance to operate more easily in their new cultural setting. The vertical vector deals with how the second and third generations can interact with the birth countries of their parents. Even when viewed as opportunities for business networks, these interactions function as ties both to their parents' generation and to the wider culture of their land of origin.[8] As she writes, "by affirming bonds to the homeland, younger generations honor their progenitors and redefine their own position in places of birth *and* residence."[9]

In terms of Christian missions application, while the spread of the Gospel from one location to another and from generation to generation is nothing new, how remarkable and extensive these channels of interaction are demands attention. The Gospel moves along these channels. At this point, we also note with Jehu Hanciles that the usual conception of globalism can limit how we view its missiological implications because "the realities shaping non-white immigration into Western societies render existing theories of assimilation unsustainable, even misleading."[10] He develops this point that, when it comes to globalization, there exists a one-directional mindset of the West as the only culture that influences anyone, but "such views overlook the capacity of non-Western societies to adapt or resist Western flows and project alternative movements with potential global impact."[11] Immigrants from the Global South contribute to the engagement of all mission fields in the United States, immigrant and non-immigrant. These issues are not as simple as either completely resisting the host culture or completely assimilating to it. That fact alone requires research on the contributions globalization can make to mission work among immigrant communities.

I think it is helpful to discuss the term *Bridge People* in bicultural and multicultural missions settings. As a missions term, the idea came together for me while reading Paul

Hiebert's *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* and his use of the terms *Bicultural Brokers* and *Bridging Relationships*.[12] As an immigration term, *Bridge People* implies no more than an immigrant of the first to third generation who builds bridges between two groups: those of the inherited and newly acquired cultures. As a missions term, it means bicultural Christians who connect multiethnic congregation members of both cultures to each other and to the Scriptures. The key is the capacity for Bridge People to connect different cultural groups not only to each other through their unique levels of cultural fluency but to tie different groups together to the Scriptures. Which word will be the authoritative word for a congregation? (see Figure 1). Having the Scriptures as the authority is important since the Holy Spirit uses God's Word to tie us to Christ. When Bridge People encourage others to study the Word together and live under the authority of the Scriptures as the common authority in the Church, their faithful example can ease many potential tensions in multiethnic congregational outreach, as we will explore in the final section. Such example is for the sake of faith in Christ.

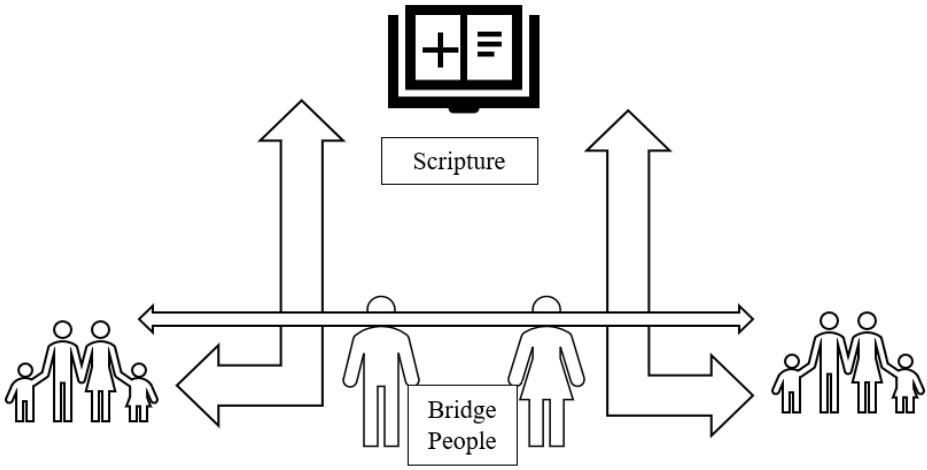

Figure 1. Bridge People connect congregants of different cultural groups to each other and to Scripture.

Bridging People: A Biblical Perspective

Now we turn to Bridge People examples from the New Testament and how this concept makes use of the article of the inspiration of Scripture. Consider Barnabas, a Jewish Christian from the Gentile island of Cyprus (Acts 4:36). Sent by the apostles to inspect the Gentile mission field in Antioch, he (true to his name) encourages Jewish and Gentile Christians, tying them together. However, not only does he tie them together, but he also travels to Tarsus to recruit another preacher and teacher to tie together Jews and Gentiles under the Scriptures: Paul (Acts 11:25–26). Timothy is another very well-known example, having a Jewish mother and a Greek father (Acts 16:1). Paul has Timothy circumcised, since his mixed parentage was well-known, that he would more easily work

in the Jewish mission field (Acts 16:3). But Paul also sends him to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17), Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:2), and Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3), churches that engaged both the Jewish and Gentile mission fields. However, the clearest example of tying together Jews and Gentiles under the Scriptures surprisingly comes from James in Acts 15. There, he settles the question of Gentile incorporation alongside Jewish Christians and apart from circumcision or any other works of the Law into the Church by quoting Amos 9. He ties them together under the authority of the Scripture by quoting an Old Testament prophet and giving the apostolic prohibitions that clearly mark uncircumcised Gentile believers as belonging to the one communion of the Church together with Jewish Christians (Acts 15).[13]

The reason Bridge People can tie together different cultural groups underneath the authority of the Scriptures is because Scripture is the inspired Word of God. Here, the emphasis is on what the article of inspiration has to say about the source and origin of the Scriptures. The Scriptures do not belong to any one culture but are of divine origin. Terms like *assimilation* deal with the acquisition of culture, but the Scriptures are not a product of culture. Culture is the cumulation of judgments made by people.[14] However, the Scriptures address all cultures from outside because of the article of inspiration. The question then is how this can be, since the books of Scripture come through the pens of human writers. These writers cannot be separated from their cultures. The old Lutheran theologians uphold the role of the authors while maintaining the authority that the Scriptures have over all cultures. The Holy Spirit both inspires the Scriptures and uses them as the means to create and sustain faith in hearers from all cultures. Theologians, therefore, make the distinction between the efficient cause and instrumental cause of Scripture. God is the efficient cause (*causa efficiens scripturae principalis*).[15] The human writers of Scripture are the instruments that God used to deliver the Scriptures, the instrumental cause (*causae instrumentales*).[16] As Gerhard writes, "They neither spoke nor wrote by human or their own will; rather, they were moved, driven, led, impelled by the Holy Spirit and controlled by him. They did not write as men but as 'holy men of God,' that is, they wrote as God's servants and as the unique instruments of the Holy Spirit."[17] Heinrich Schmidt quotes Calov on the ability of the Holy Spirit to inspire the Word of God in many languages: "'The Holy Spirit, supreme author of the Holy Scriptures, was not bound to the style of any one, but, as a perfectly free teacher of languages, could use, through any person soever, the character, style, and mode of speech that He chose.'"[18] As the instrumental cause of Scripture, Gerhard draws attention to the apostles' universal office. The implication is that the Scriptures neither originate from any people nor belong to any one people or any one time. He writes, "The apostles are commanded to teach all nations [Matt 28:20]; they also are ordered to put their instruction in writing, for they could not teach all nations to come in the future without writing."[19]

In line with Gerhard's quote, we cannot assert any opposition between the words of Scripture and the message of Scripture. This protects the teaching that the Scriptures are accessible to all cultures since it allows for faithful translation into all languages. Therefore, people who act as bridges between languages can also act as bridges between cultures. What matters in the end is what ties together the people on each side of the bridge, as it were. While there are common points among all cultures because of a common humanity

as part of God's creation, these First Article connections cannot alone bear the weight of the many cultural differences. But when Bridge People connect people to the divine authority of the Scriptures as one that objectively applies to all cultures, the results are many. As the Scriptures transcend cultural barriers between people, the results are faith in God, who inspired the Scriptures, and the opportunity to grow together under the Scriptures with those of the same communion in the Divine Service. As one of my dissertation respondents put it, "Here is my Swahili Bible. You find the Romans, I'll find Romans, and you read the English or in my Swahili, we get along very fine." Growing together under the Scriptures can happen as easily as when Bridge People add to the conversation at Bible study by bringing together insights from multiple cultures that show delight in the Scriptures, which are gifted to all cultures equally (and addressed to all cultures equally). In leading different cultures to study the Scriptures together, Bridge People function to help each group teach the content of the Scriptures to each other by teaching the text of the Scriptures with all the insights that different cultures afford in their interpretations. Doing so does not require favoring any particular culture since the Scriptures exist in translation so that all studying it may be studying the same Scriptures in different languages.

The above is but one example where Bridge People can ease any potential tensions between different cultural groups in the life of a congregation. This contribution to congregational life includes the work of outreach to different immigrant mission fields as well as to the native-born. Bridge People can make a unique contribution because of their ability to operate more easily in two different cultures and to bring the teaching of the Scriptures to those interactions. In a multiethnic congregation, the role of these connectors is especially significant to facilitate communication within the communion of the congregation.

Within the communion of the congregation, Bridge People can help as one culture judges another. We can consider culture as a shared set of judgments on myriad individual events passed on from one generation to the next. Therefore, within the congregation, Bridge People can make a unique contribution in judging different cultural patterns from an almost liminal perspective. As noted in the introduction, differing cultural patterns can create much push and pull from people who mainly operate within one cultural context. And yet, it bears repeating that social cohesion can be the only goal of multiethnic communities apart from scriptural authority. But, under the Scriptures, the goal is growing together in faith as an exchange in teaching the Scriptures and communal formation by the Scriptures.

Because Bridge People can occupy such a tense role in the congregation, the whole congregation can support them. If the immigrant community complains that Bridge People act too much like the native-born community, and if the native-born community complains that they act too much like the immigrant community, Bridge People can feel abandoned by both cultures. If Bridge People can serve in a useful role in a congregation, congregations can act to cultivate those roles. The main encouragement here comes through parents, through households. When a child of an immigrant family sees mother and father actively involved in the life of the congregation, they can emulate that service as they mature. But the context of that service is their own bicultural fluency, which will be

different from their parents. At the same time, cultivating that service aims first at the role of the parents. If congregations encourage bicultural children in isolation from their parents, those children may not appreciate the value of participating together with their parents in the same Divine Service. When encouragement comes through parents and households rather than by partitioning the second generation from the first generation, parents and children draw closer to each other in the Christian faith, and the congregation benefits from the unique role of each. The first generation congregants benefit by the honor they receive from the congregation appreciating the faithful service of the second generation, since their parents have fostered these opportunities. In this way, households can help avoid the tensions that come from the second generation's different speed of acculturation because of their shared participation in the congregation's worship. And the congregation benefits from increased engagement with other first generation immigrants, other second generation immigrants, and people of all ethnicities who notice the faithful harmony of such a congregation.

Because Bridge People understand the issues surrounding first and second generation immigrants, they are well equipped to understand that evangelizing to first, second, and even third generation congregants ties families together based on their shared communion in the congregation. In the same way, they can encourage the whole multiethnic congregation away from considering themselves as atomistic individuals and toward viewing themselves as a communion that holds a common confession and has the responsibility to love and support one another. This can lead to evangelizing households of non-immigrant families as well.[20] When this happens, it takes seriously the stigma within many immigrant communities of breaking with the family culture. At the same time, it allows the native-born non-immigrant community to adapt by taking on godly and pious attributes of the immigrant communities. As Bridge People keenly feel the process of cultural adaptation and acculturation, they bring encouragement in growing closer together while growing under the Scriptures.

Cultural bridging for the sake of the Gospel can be as local as establishing new households of faith through bicultural marriage and as extensive as bridging countries with the Gospel. In discussing assimilation and transnationalism, Fernández-Kelly traces the latter term through the literature to include its use as a term for maintaining connections between countries across generations.[21] Mission work travels in multiple directions across such connections, so Bridge People benefit more than the local work of their congregations, even as they receive benefits in mission work from their international bonds. Moreover, as scholars have stated, those connections are not separate from assimilation for the second generation but are part of their assimilation process.[22] Christian identities are formed and reinforced across such ties, strengthening Bridge People in congregations for more robust mission field engagement.

There are many more opportunities for Bridge People working in LCMS congregations than space allows, and it is vital to remember that the second generation are not the only people able to operate in different cultural contexts with ease. The point here is that every Christian immigrant potentially carries extensive and robust networks.[23] Additionally, every non-Christian immigrant and non-immigrant needs the preaching of

the Gospel, and different immigrant generations serve as instruments in that work to differing degrees but with the same Gospel.

The unity that Bridge People can encourage in a multiethnic congregation setting itself serves the mission work of the congregation. This unity is one of confession and love. How can "unity" mean physical and cultural resemblance when Scripture clearly states, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28), and "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col 3:11)? The Shepherd of Hermes makes this same point: "Having, therefore, received the seal [referring to Baptism], they had one understanding and one mind; and their faith became one, and their love one."[24]

Conclusion

Cultural tensions can exist in work done among and by immigrant mission fields. We need not deny that the tensions exist to notice the positive contributions to the mission activities of a congregation. Either dismissing or elevating ethnicity over all other considerations can derail those contributions. If the point were simply getting along, that would still not be a contribution to engaging mission fields with the Gospel.[25] If congregations subordinate ethnicity totally, they run the risk of ignoring the "concrete realities" of the estates we inhabit.[26] On the other hand, elevating ethnicity for its own sake runs the risk of missing the unity of the Church. Elevating ethnicity can also quickly become an opportunity to "Merely 'celebrate diversity' and then retreat into separate camps."[27] Counterintuitively, when getting along becomes the focus, relations break down. But when unity in confession becomes the focus, getting along follows behind the effort to live under the Scriptures. After all, the inspired Scriptures have no culture as their source but every culture as their addressees.[28] Or, as Jesus says, "Seek ye first …" (Matt 6:33, KJV).

The term *Bridge People* situates itself in the language of immigration theory. Nevertheless, it becomes useful for LCMS congregations' engagement of immigrant mission fields in its missiological function. The Bridge People in our congregations deserve our support for the tensions that their unique levels of cultural fluency bring. In this, they follow the pattern of the mission work of the Church described in the book of Acts. They deserve our support for their capacity as instruments to bring different cultures deeper into the Scriptures as the authority that lays claim to people of all cultures equally.

ENDNOTES

[1] Steven Ybarrola, "Diasporas and Multiculturalism: Social Ideologies, Liminality, and Cultural Identity," in *Human Tidal Wave: Global Migration, Megacities, Multiculturalism, Pluralism, Diaspora Missiology*, ed. Sadiri Joy Tira (Manila, Philippines: LifeChange, 2013), 146.
[2] Richard D. Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 9–11.
[3] The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) is a global research tool that measures immigrant integration based on eight categories: access to nationality, anti-discrimination, education, family

reunion, health, labor market mobility, permanent residence, and political participation. https://mipex.eu/.

[4] See how David R. Dunaetz deals with the term for its ability to work in two directions and its church planting applications in David R. Dunaetz, "Three Models of Acculturation: Applications for Developing a Church Planting Strategy among Diaspora Populations," in *Diaspora Missiology: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World*, ed. Michael Pocock and Enoch Wan, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 23 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 129–45.

[5] Margaret A. Gibson, "Immigrant Adaptation and Patterns of Acculturation," *Human Development* 44 (2001): 20.

[6] Ybarrola, "Diasporas and Multiculturalism," 144–45.

[7] Enoch Wan and Anthony Casey, *Church Planting among Immigrants in US Urban Centers: The "Where", "Why", and "How" of Diaspora Missiology in Action* (Portland: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2014), 46. Dunaetz defines integration in a similar way as mutual cultural acquisition between groups in "Three Models of Acculturation," 140.

[8] Patricia Fernández-Kelly, "Assimilation through Transnationalism: A Theoretical Synthesis," in *The State and the Grassroots: Immigrant Transnational Organizations in Four Continents*, ed. Alejandro Portes and Patricia Fernández-Kelly, 1st edition. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 291–93.

[9] Fernández-Kelly, "Assimilation through Transnationalism," 293; italics added.

[10] Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 376.

[11] Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 376.

[12] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 229–35; Matthew Aaron Buse, "The Multiethnic Congregation and Lutheran Missions: Toward an Old Orthodox Lutheran Diaspora Misssiology" (PhD diss., Concordia Theological Seminary, 2020), 219–23.

[13] The apostolic prohibitions are "to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:20). See the discussion of Acts 15 in Richard Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles (Acts 15:13–21)," in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154–84; Ben III Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998).

[14] When referencing culture, I am using the definition given in my dissertation: "A set of shared moral judgements passed from generation to generation formed and continuously shaped by a body of individual decisions and judgements on behaviors and activities." Buse, "Multiethnic Congregation and Lutheran Missions." The influences for this definition are Roger Scruton, *Culture Counts: Faith and Feeling in a World Besieged* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007) and T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture: The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949).

[15] Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and on Scripture*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes, Theological Commonplaces (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 49–50; Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1955), 28.

[16] Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 54.

[17] Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and on Scripture*, 54.

[18] Calov quoted in Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, Around the Word Classic Reprints (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1876), 65.

[19] Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and on Scripture*, 62.
[20] A "straight line" model of assimilation assumes that immigrant communities give way to individualistic diffusion. As Hanciles writes, "Since full assimilation was understood in terms of *individual* mobility (at the expense of ethnic loyalty), the dissipation of the immigrants' collective identity was expected." Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 236; italics in the original. But if diaspora groups maintain family networks across generations, one reasonably assumes that would apply to efforts in proclaiming the Gospel as well.
[21] Fernández-Kelly, "Assimilation through Transnationalism," 298.
[22] Fernández-Kelly, 308.
[23] As Hanciles puts it, "In simple terms, from both a biblical and a historical perspective, *every Christian migrant is a potential missionary*." Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 378; italics in the original.
[24] Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., "The Pastor of Hermas," in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, trans. F. Crombie, vol. 2, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), ninth similitude, chap. xvii, p. 50.
[25] Though it should be mentioned that the social cohesion role for Bridge People also benefits the congregation; when no one gets along, mission work is hampered, after all. As one pastor remarked concerning a church council meeting, when the native English speakers started discussing a certain idea that the immigrant members knew would not work for various reasons, out of a sense of propriety it took the second-generation member of the council to voice what they were thinking, to which all then agreed.
[26] Eloise Hiebert Meneses, "Transnational Identities and the Church: Examining Contemporary Ethnicity and Place," *Mission Studies* 29 (2012): 73. Meneses writes, "People cannot be loved in the abstract. They can only be loved in the concrete realities of who they are as members of families, cultures, and ethnicities. Thus, while the church must subordinate ethnicity to its own oneness in Christ, it must not destroy ethnicity in favor of what would surely be a totalitarian single culture."
[27] Meneses, "Transnational Identities," 73.
[28] Meneses, 74–5.

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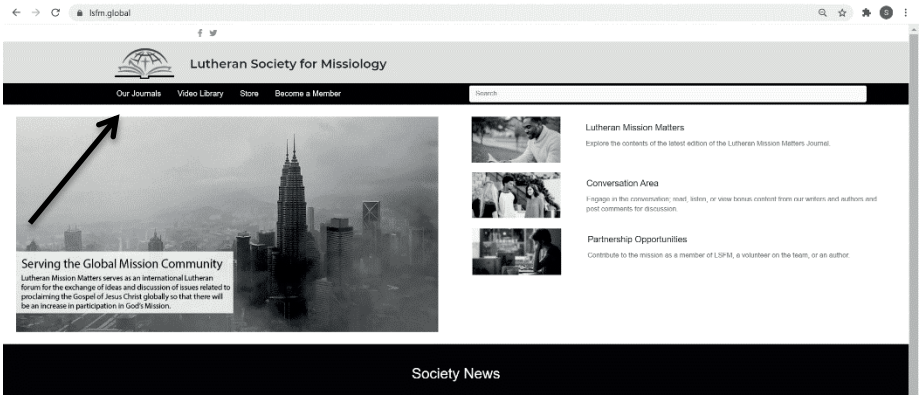

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Reverse Mission and Homeland Imagination: Trends and Issues in Burmese Migrant Christianity

David Moe

Introduction

In his seminal work *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins observes that the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted from the Global North (Europe and North America) to the Global South (Latin America, Africa, and Asia).[1] While this is true, the US, a unique nation of immigration, remains the center for education and global migration. Therefore, students, scholars, and refugees from the Global South come to America as pilgrims with their distinctive forms of political repression, ethnic marginalities, and religio-ethnic identities.

Some scholars of world Christianity and mission have paid close attention to the theological issues of the relationship between mission and migration. Scholars, such as Justo Gonzalez,[2] Peter Phan,[3] Jehu Hanciles,[4] and M. Daniel Carrolls among others[5] have played significant roles in writing about what I call the trilogy of world Christianity, global migration, and intercultural mission/theology. Their aim is to invite readers to rethink the identity of Christianity as a religion of migration. The relationship between mission and migration is not a new issue; it is as old as the stories of Israel in the Old Testament and of the apostles in the New Testament. Israel and apostles are called to move from one place to another.[6] Especially in the NT, people's migration to another place is crucial for their identity and mission movement. Acts 1:8 sums it up: Jesus said to His disciples, ". . . you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This reveals the apostles' cross-cultural move of mission. Gonzalez rightly notes that "Diaspora Judaism is of crucial importance for the history of Christianity, for it was one of the main avenues through which the new faith expanded throughout the Roman Empire. Diaspora Judaism unwittingly provided the church with one of the most useful tools of its missionary expansions, the Greek translation of the Old Testament."[7]

David Thang Moe (PhD) is a Postdoctoral Associate in Southeast Asian Studies at Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA. He is the author of one book, over 70 scholarly articles, and co-editing a forthcoming book Public Theology for Global Witness*. The main goal of his scholarship is to engage three different communities—academy, grassroots churches, and public society. He is an invited speaker on Myanmar at both grassroots events and several universities across the world. davidmoe83@gmail.com*

It is fair to say that people in the first century share some similarities with the moves of Burmese Christian immigrants in the twenty-first century. Although the motivations for their moves might not be exactly the same, the concepts of their moves share some similarities. They left their homelands by force or by choice and adopted foreign lands as their new homes. It is in this analogous sense that I will be exploring contemporary trends and issues in the Burmese migrant Christians who move to the United States. Particular attention will be given to the Chin, Kachin, and Karen ethnic groups who represent the highest percentage of Christian population both at home and abroad. Here, some terminologies need clarity. Despite some controversy, I take the liberty to use the term "Burmese" for the Chin, Kachin, Karen, and others regardless of ethnic and religious groups and for the national language. On the other hand, the term "Bamar" will be used for the ethnic majority groups who represent Buddhism.[8]

The story of Burmese migrant Christianity is not widely heard in the academic discourse about Asian American theology and missiology. It is fair to comment that Asian American theology is mainly represented by some academic theologians of Chinese, Korean, and Indian origins. What we learn about Asian American theology is the story told and written by most scholars from Chinese, Korean, and Indian ethnic backgrounds. While we appreciate their pioneering works on Asian American theology since the 1980s, it is important to introduce the hidden story of other Asian American Christians, such as Burmese migrant Christians. Burmese migrant Christians are on the margins of the margins in the context of Asian American theological discourses.[9] The main purpose of this paper is not to react against Asian American theology, but to add the story of Burmese migrant Christianity to the making of Asian American theology.

First, I will begin by exploring how scholars reconsider a theoretical concept of Christian mission as reverse mission in the contemporary context of global migration. I will examine whether or not the academic concept of reverse mission is popular among grassroots migrant Christians. I will also discern if reverse mission is rhetoric or reality. Second, I will describe some trends, challenges, and issues in Burmese migrant Christianity. My goal is not necessarily to provide a sociological study of Burmese migrant statistics. I will suggest how one should respond to trends, challenges, and issues. Third, I will describe the gap between academic and grassroots voices and suggest why and how one should bridge the gap. I will also describe the need for dialogue between scholars from the Global South and the Global North for imagining intercultural theology. I will conclude the paper by showing how Burmese migrant Christians should imagine their homeland from the perspective of holding a double identity.

Reverse Mission and Religious Movement: Is Reverse Mission Popular among Grassroots Communities?

Is the concept of "reverse mission" popular among grassroots Christians? It is observed that the concept of reverse mission is popular among academic communities. In particular, scholars of world Christianity treat the concept of reverse mission as a contextual agenda for new theological discourses. However, the concept of reverse mission is not popular among many grassroots Christians. I recently preached at the Myanmar

Christian Community in Baltimore on the topic of reverse mission based on God's call of Abraham to move to the promised land for the mission (Gen 12). Instead of using the US as analogous to the promised land, though many grassroots migrant Christians see in that way for imagining American Christian nationalism, I chose to see God's call of Abraham to move to the foreign land as analogous to Burmese Christians' move to the foreign land. After my preaching, some church members came to me and said, "We have never thought about reverse mission. We thought Myanmar is the only mission field, and we financially support a few missionaries in Myanmar."

What exactly is reverse mission? Scholars agree that reverse mission is a missiological concept of sending Christians from the then mission-receiving continents (Global South) to the then mission-sending continents (Global North) as missionaries and migrants.[10] Reverse mission is about non-Western Christians who have been reached or even colonized by Western missionaries in the past, bringing the Gospel back to Christians in the West. Historically, it focuses on the late twentieth-century reversal of Christian mission movement from the Global South to the Global North. The Global South is not the mere Western missionary receiver, but the missionary sender.[11] For instance, Myanmar received Catholic mission in the sixteenth century and then Protestant mission in the nineteenth century. But things have changed in the past few decades. Now Myanmar is no longer the mere mission-receiving nation, but also a missionary-sending nation. Such reverse concept is seen in the lives of Christian migration to the West.

Since the late twentieth century, a good number of ethnic minority Christians have migrated to Western countries, especially North America, as refugees. Most of them have migrated to the US through the United Nations High Commission of Refugees in Malaysia, while some Christians, especially Karen and Chin, have come to the US through the UNHCR in Thailand and India. They have left their homeland, but they have not left their religion behind. Rather, they have brought their faith or religion with them to the foreign land. For some, religion is in their bones. Especially for Chin, Kachin, and Karen, their ethnicity and religion [Christianity] are not separable. The vast majority of these ethnic groups are Baptist, though smaller numbers of them are Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and so on. What they have in common is that their ethnic migration can best be understood as reverse mission and religious movement.[12]

This leads us to the next point. Is reverse mission just rhetoric, or is it reality? Some Christians criticize the term "reverse mission" more as rhetoric than reality. For them, there are two reasons. First, reverse mission tends to be rhetoric because there is no mission success in converting Western people. Historically, the success of Western mission in a colonial period has been measured by the quantities of new converts. In some contexts, Western missionaries had to report to their sending mission agents about the numbers of new converts so that they received financial support. Second, but related to the first, it tends to be more rhetoric because migrant Christians do not often reach out to Westerners; rather they reach out to

First, reverse mission tends to be rhetoric because there is no mission success in converting Western people.

their own people within their religious and social communities.[13] The second reason seems more appealing. Burmese Christian migrants are more comfortable with reaching out to their own people. Living in a foreign country, migrant Christians imagine their social community by reaching out to each other.[14] Some grassroots Burmese Christians do not think of their move to the US as reverse mission. Given the fact American missionary Adoniram Judson is the greatest missionary to Myanmar, they still see mission as a move to Myanmar from the US. They do mission work in Myanmar by financially supporting missionaries among Buddhists.[15]

One may not deny the fact that reverse mission seems to be rhetoric in some ways. Yet one should also accept the fact that it is a reality. The reality is that mission is no longer understood and practiced as the West's one-way move of reaching out to the non-West as the mere receiver of Western missionaries. In recent decades, both academic and grassroots Christians have migrated to the Global North. While some grassroots Christians are manual workers, academics are teaching at some institutions as professors. In their respective workplaces, they interact with people of the same and different religions and ethnicities as neighbors. To say that mission is reversed, we mean by the movement from the non-West to the West through forced and voluntary migration. Reverse mission is not mainly defined by how one religiously converts Westerners, but it is defined by the paradigm shift of move to the West from the non-West.

Homeland Imagination: Generation Gap and Identity Crisis

I have met several Burmese migrants and asked their main challenges. The first challenge is language barriers on the basis of the generation gap within their own community. There is a lingual gap between the older generations and younger generations. While people of younger generations tend to speak English, people of older generations tend to speak Burmese or their native dialect. Some members of the younger generation understand their native languages or their ancestral languages, but they use English as a medium of communication with their parents. Of course, the comprehension level younger generations have of their native language differs from person to person. Those born in Myanmar but raised in the US typically have a deeper comprehension of their native languages. But those born and raised in the US often have a limited comprehension of their native languages.

The second challenge is the potential for identity crisis. Those who were born and grew up in the US do not have any strong sense of ethnic and cultural belonging to Myanmar as homeland. For them, the US is the only imagined homeland. They imagine themselves as Americans rather than as Burmese. In terms of homeland imagination, there is a gap between younger generations and older generations. While older generations have a strong sense of belonging to Myanmar as imagined homeland, younger generations have a stronger sense of belonging to the US. Some older people often said they miss their homes in Myanmar. Although they are in the US, their hearts are always in Myanmar where their ancestors are. Despite their houses in the US, they see themselves as foreigners.[16]

Moreover, there is sometimes an identity crisis among siblings in the same family. One of the grassroots families from my village said that there is an identity crisis among

three siblings. Two younger siblings who were born and grew up in the US do not see their older Myanmar-born-and-raised brother as their own sibling. Despite having the same parents, they see him as an adopted son. They asked him, "Who are your parents?"[17] The two younger siblings do not see their older brother as a sibling partly because of their different lifestyles and their American accents. In my observation, most of the Burmese migrant parents encourage, even force, their children to learn their native languages. Some children are willing to learn their ancestral languages, but others are reluctant. What should be done? I suggest that one should choose the "middle way," which makes a space for the mutual needs of parents and children. Forcing children to learn native languages is not the only one way for maintaining their ethnic identity. Moreover, just as young generations need to learn their native languages, so the parents should also learn the English language, as much as they can. While learning one's native language is indispensable for maintaining the old homeland's culture, learning English is necessary for adapting to the new homeland.[18]

Multiculturalism as a Source for Intercultural Theology

The world is ethno-religiously pluralistic, culturally diverse, and economically globalized. North America is a good example. In her book *A New Religious America*, Harvard scholar Diana Eck observes that America has become "the world's most religiously diverse nation" (her book's subtitle). [19] At one level, it is hard to argue against Eck's thesis. As a country of immigration, America is probably the world's most multicultural nation in terms of ethno-religious and linguo-cultural diversity. Some people might even say that America is the greatest nation because of its diverse cultures. In other words, diversity is what makes America great. People from the Global North and the Global South live in the same towns and public spheres as the citizens, go to the same and different churches as the pilgrims, and teach and learn at the same institutions as scholars and students. As Alvin Padilla helpfully puts it,

> Learning to live well in the diverse culture of North America is no longer an option, but a necessity. The U.S. Census estimates that in 2050 proposition of the whites in the population will be only 53%. Our children will live and serve in a society in which their classmates, neighbors, and fellow disciples of Christ will be equally divided between whites and people of color. As new people move into our neighborhoods, the communities undoubtedly will change. The change could be haphazard and filled with misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and even violence, or the change could permit all to reinvent and reinvigorate themselves for the better.[20]

This poses a theological question of how multiculturalism and interculturalism are different from and related to each other.[21] In my opinion, multiculturalism and interculturalism are not identical, but inseparable. They need each other. While multiculturalism tends to recognize the description of diverse cultures as God's greatest gifts to the world, interculturalism tends to emphasize the prescriptive nature of respectful

interactions with one another.[22] In his book, *Christianity with an Asian Face*, Peter Phan rightly suggests that one should see the current trends and issues of migration as multicultural sources for doing intercultural theology in the US.[23] People from the Global South, especially from Asia, have brought their multicultural and religious insights of other religious teachings for forming a more diverse America. People from Africa have brought their cultural insights of indigenous religious worldviews and cultures. In the past, Western people had to travel to Asia to learn about Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Taoism. But now they can learn about those non-Western religious teachings from migrant neighbors. This calls for both Global South and Global North theologians to interact with one another and to develop intercultural theology in the multicultural context of world Christianity and global migration.[24]

In looking at multiculturalism as source for intercultural theology, Mark Cartledge and David Cheetham argue that the word "inter," does not just refer to the exchanges of insights *between* two groups only. It refers to an engagement with different expressions of theology both *between* and *betwixt* different groups.[25] If they are right, we can think of intercultural theology as a two-way interaction between people from different cultures.[26] The creation narrative recognizes God as the creator of diverse cultures, and the Pentecost narrative (Acts 2:1–21) reveals God's affirmation of diversity as His gift to the present world.[27] According to the Pentecost narrative, God embraces ethnic and cultural diversity by speaking to people in their native tongues rather than speaking to them in a heavenly language.

With the recognition of mutual contributions, I will now show why and how academic theologians and lay Christians should dialogically interact with one another in the context of migration.

The Need for Dialogue between Academic and Grassroots Christians

Academic theologians tend to focus on two liberations in the context of global Christianity—liberation of theology and theology of liberation. While the liberation of theology[28] tends to focus on erudite liberation of majority world theology from Western theology, the theology of liberation tends to focus on political liberation of the oppressed. In the next section I will elaborate on the former form of liberation. Here, I would first like to show the gap between academic Christians and lay Christians and suggest how they should bridge that gap for practicing more relevant theology in the context of migration.

Academic liberation theologians tend focus on socio-political liberation. They believe that socio-political liberation depends on the success of interreligious dialogue. They call on the Church to engage with people of other religions for the common goal of social justice and freedom in public society. In other words, their focus is on the function of the Church. When it comes to the identity of the Church, we tend to focus on its function in the academic world. Academic discussions on ecclesiology tend to focus exclusively on the idea of how the Church should be functionally related to the issues of political liberation and interreligious dialogue. While this is crucially important, academic discussions on ecclesiology do not sufficiently engage with the grassroots issues of the ontology of the Church. Much of the academic discussions on ecclesiology, according to Singaporean

Pentecostal theologian Simon Chan, tend to be confined to what academic theologians are saying about the Church.[29] Academic theologians propose the prescriptive role of the Church's function in mission without sufficiently engaging with grassroots Christians' multiple witnesses of their faith inside and outside the Church.

Academic theologians' approach to ecclesiology tends to be a top-down methodology rather than from the bottom up.[30] Academic liberationists often talk about advocacy for the political liberation of the grassroots margins, but do they practically advocate for them? Some may advocate for them, but many do not advocate for them at the grassroots level. They rarely advocate with the grassroots communities as co-doers of liberation theology by recognizing their lived experiences and social engagements. They do not sufficiently bring their grassroots voices and practices of worship, prayer, and preaching into theological reflections. Instead, they reflect their academic voices by engaging with their fellow academicians and apply them into the life of the Church. Such a top-down approach is not sufficiently relevant to the life of the Church. But if one starts practicing theology from the lived experiences and expressions of grassroots churches by recognizing their implicit and explicit contributions to the mission of God and by qualifying their voices and practices, theology will be more relevant for the Church and public society.

I am not suggesting that one should romanticize grassroots Christians' expressions of their faith, views of politics, and their emphasis on prosperity gospel. Many grassroots Burmese Christians are theologically fundamentalist and politically conservative. The majority of them are big fans of former President Trump. They highly admire Trump because they believe that he built the US as a Christian nation, and that he made the US economically great. They are less interested in academic discourses about theology and politics. It is true that many academic theologians are also less interested in grassroots Christians voices. It is my suggestion that we need to bridge the gap between these two different voices by interacting with one another as the instruments of God's love, justice, and peace. My conviction is that we should practice Christian theology from the bottom up by humbly and critically engaging with the grassroots Christian community.

Our concern here is how one should integrate the ontology and function of the Church for a holistic mission of the triune God. "Grassroots Christians' contribution to ecclesiology arises as much from how being the church is practiced as how it is understood."[31] While academic theologians tend to focus on the function of the Church in political liberation and interreligious dialogue, grassroots Christians focus on the ontology of the Church in terms of doxological relationship with God and intra-religious dialogue with Christians within their own community.

Grassroots Christians' understanding of the identity of the Church is rooted in the spiritual act of worship. For grassroots Christians, the primary identity of the Church is defined by its spiritual act of worship. Without worship, the Church is meaningless.[32] It is observed that grassroots migrant Christians define themselves as the chosen people of God. To call the Church "the people of God" is to recognize its continuity with the chosen people of Israel. Many grassroots migrant Christians imagine themselves as the new Israel. As Chan points out, that covenantal relationship between God and the worshiping people is summed up in the promise of God throughout Scripture: "I will be your God and you shall

be my people" (see Rom 9:1–5, 11:1–2).[33] Grassroots Christians often cite 1 Peter 2:9–10 to justify their identity as the chosen people of God.[34]

While grassroots Christians' imagination of their identity as the chosen people of God is strong, their imagination of their identity as the Body of Christ is weaker. In light of the latter, I suggest we put a strong emphasis on the identity of the Church as the Body of Christ. In looking at the Church as the Body of Christ, our goal is to build an intercultural nature into the Church. Doing so demands recognizing diverse gifts for the mission of God. Being baptized into one Christ and one faith (Eph 4:5), we become one Body of Christ. But becoming one Body does not mean complete uniformity or becoming the same in all ways. As Apostle Paul reminds us, we are one Body of Christ with different gifts and ministries (1 Cor 12:5–31). Our diverse cultures and gifts are not to be seen as the sources for discriminating against each other, but to be seen as the strengths for glorifying God in different tongues. Paul encourages us to witness the Gospel of salvation and love in multiple forms. John also talks about the importance of glorifying Christ with different tongues, gifts, and languages (Rev 5:9, 7:9).

In my observation, migrant Christians from Myanmar have a strong sense of witnessing about God with different gifts. However, they are not strong enough in their vision for building the interethnic and intercultural nature of the multicultural church. They have a stronger tendency toward building churches with their own similar ethnic groups. For instance, Kachin Christians tend to focus on building the Kachin Christian community without embracing Chin, Karen, and Lisu, and so on. The same is true of the Karen, Chin, and Lisu ethnic groups. Interestingly, when these groups first arrived in the US from the same nation of Myanmar, they began by building the Myanmar Christian Community (MCC), which embraces more diverse ethnic groups.[35] A few years later, however, some church leaders split from the MCC and founded new congregations with different ethnic and tribe names. This is a common trend and issue for many Myanmar churches throughout the US. While this paradigm of church formation is not wrong, my suggestion is to develop a stronger vision for building a multicultural church with a strong intercultural and interethnic nature by embracing different ethnic and cultural groups.

The Need for Dialogue between Global North and Global South Academics

Global South students have been on the receiving side of theological study for many years, while Global North Christians have been on the giving side. Now things have changed. Some scholars, especially those who are aware of the rise of Christianity in Global South, have created hospitable classrooms for the mutual exchange of theological and cultural insights. These scholars aim to decentralize Western theology by listening to the voices of students and scholars from the Global South. The ultimate goal is to achieve the liberation of theology from Western dominant theology and thinking. They want to move beyond Christendom and imagine a new kind of majority world theology.[36] Western theologians are no longer the controlling referees for imagining majority world theology in the context of global Christianity. Only the Holy Spirit is a referee, and theologians from both the Global North and Global South are collaborative players in practicing world

theology. As collaborative players, they should interact dialogically with one another and exchange their different insights.

The idea of liberation of theology was developed by Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire through his seminal book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.[37] According to Freire, the pedagogy of the oppressed uses a hermeneutics of suspicion that reacts against "education from above," which represents the interest of the centrist. In some theological institutions, Global North theologians are not interested in theology represented by marginal scholars and students from the Global South. They simply transfer their dominant knowledge to students without learning their insights. What is more problematic is that students from the Global South go home with Western knowledge, which is not always contextually relevant to their situations. For instance, German scholar Rudolf Bultmann's Western concept of mythologization of the New Testament story of Jesus's public ministry of exorcism and healing[38] is not relevant to Africa and Asia where ordinary people experience the fear of evil spirits. In Asia and Africa, ordinary people seek healing, exorcism, and deliverance from demonic spirits. While academic liberation theologians tend to focus on liberation from political oppression, grassroots people tend to focus on liberation from the psychological oppression and freedom from the fear of evil spirits.[39]

What the Western and non-Western theologians have in common is their understanding of political liberation theology. They emphasize the prophetic type of political liberation theology that resists socio-political oppression for the liberation of the oppressed and those on the margins. However, they almost ignore the grassroots people's vision of liberation from demonic spirits. Perhaps the most distinctive contribution from non-Western Christianity, especially Asian and African Christianity, is the understanding of Jesus not only as a prophetic liberator, but also as a priestly healer and as a redeemer from sin and shame. Most of grassroots Christians from Africa and Asia tend to focus on the soteriological motifs of Hebrews (sacrificial Christology) and Colossians (cosmic salvation), while some Western Christians tend to prefer the soteriological motifs of Romans and Galatians (individualistic salvation).[40] It is imperative for Christian theologians and practitioners from the Global North and Global South to exchange their different insights and to enrich each other for a holistic understanding of salvation and global mission.

As Freire suggests, a transformative nature of education has to start from below. It has to take into account the contextual situations of the oppressed. Letting the oppressed people speak their own voices is the way to liberate education from Western-dominant theology. Erudite liberation of education is not simply to be brought down to the non-Western students as mere learners, but to be initiated by them.[41] I am not suggesting student-centered theology. Rather, in order for intercultural theology to take place, I am suggesting subject-centered theology. Northern teachers and Southern students have to interact with each other as the active subjects in a dialogical classroom. But since Southern students have been on the receiving end for many years, it is more important for the Northern theologians to let the Southern students speak by "revealing their hidden gifts and affirming their insights they offer."[42]

Christian mission is no longer a one-way move to people of other faiths in the context of world Christianity. Likewise, theological education is no longer a one-way transmission of knowledge to the other. Theological education in the context of global migration should be a two-way move of dialogical interaction between Global North theologians and Global South theologians. Theologians from the Global South bring some world and indigenous religious insights for developing an intercultural theology in North America. Thus, it is necessary for theologians from the Global North and Global South to create a hospitable academic space and dialogical interaction for practicing theology in the context of global migration and world Christianity. The result of dialogical and hospitable conversation of brothers and sisters is for mutual conversion (intellectual conversion). Theology should be reconsidered as conversation and conversion.[43]

Homeland Imagination: Globalizing and Localizing Faith

I want to conclude where I began. Scholars have long considered Christianity as a religion of migration since its inception. As a religion of migration, Christianity is not confined to a particular geography and culture. It expands spaces by crossing cultures and geographies. This shows that Christianity is what Andrew Walls appropriately calls a "pilgrimage religion"—a religion wandering around the world without ceasing to indigenize at each homing culture.[44] Walls famously introduces two principles—"pilgrim and indigenizing principles"—to describe Christianity as a religion of global migration without ceasing to indigenize its home. Walls stresses that the two principles are distinguishable, yet not in opposition.[45] Walls' academic description of pilgrimage and indigenizing faith is perfectly suited for the grassroots Burmese Christians' lived experiences and expressions of their faith. They do not think academically about their faith, but they practice the reality of pilgrim and indigenizing faith.

The vast majority of diasporic Burmese Christians feel that they have a double identity. They are diasporic pilgrim Christians who practice their global faith in the West. On the other hand, they are indigenous ethnic Christians who indigenize their faith at home in Myanmar. Because of this double identity, they do not want to separate their migrant faith from their indigenous faith. This does not mean that they have two faiths. There is always one faith. As Apostle Paul reminds us, there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5). This means they practice their one faith in multiple forms and in two contexts—Myanmar (where they began their faith) and the West (where they nurture their faith). They practice their one faith by donating some funds to their home churches in Myanmar and some to diasporic churches in the West.

In their social and ecclesial imagination of homeland, diasporic Burmese Christians believe that they belong to two nations—Myanmar and the US. As noted, people of older generations have a stronger sense of belonging to Myanmar, while people of younger generations have a stronger sense of belonging to the US. In this context, theologians should encourage and equip both older and younger generations to balance their homeland imagination and to hold their double identity as the pilgrims in the global mission of God. In the past, Jerusalem, or Rome, or Wittenberg, or Geneva was once the epicenter for Christianity. Today, they are no longer the real centers of Christianity. Western Christianity

has been decentered by the growth and vitality of non-Western Christianity. There is no center of non-Western Christianity either. Although the vast majority of Christians are now in the Global South, there is no real center of Christianity. Christianity is always moving by way of migration. As a religion of cross-cultural movement, Christianity is not fully at home in this world.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored the concept of reverse mission by using the hidden story of Burmese migrant Christians as a case study. I also have examined how the concept of reverse mission could be both rhetoric and reality. Further, I have shown how the US should be seen as a context for global migration and world theological education. In light of this context, I have observed the gap between academic Christians and grassroots Christians in their diasporic Christian communities and suggested the need for dialogue between academic Christians and grassroots migrant Christian communities. Their intra-religious dialogue is important for addressing and overcoming theoretical and practical challenges they face as a community. Likewise, I have demonstrated some ways why and how academic theologians from the Global North and those from the Global South should dialogically interact with one another for developing intercultural theology beyond Western-centric theology. I have ended the paper by framing a dialectical idea of homeland imagination and by showing how Burmese migrant Christians should hold a double identity for the practice of diasporic and indigenizing faith. Putting one leg in the US as a new homeland while keeping the other leg in Myanmar as an old homeland is the most appropriate response to the current trends, contextual issues, and critical concerns migrant Christians face in their lives as global followers of Christ.

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Clergy, Congregations, and Today's Young Adults: Exploring the Church Through the Experiences of Generation Z Lutherans

Heath Lewis

For decades, pastors, church leaders, congregations, and scholars have been concerned when a generation emerges into young adulthood—and for good reason. Ministry leaders encounter several unique challenges while serving the young adults entrusted to their care. For many young adults, leaving home for the first time and having the opportunity to choose their own house of worship removes an external compulsion to remain part of their family's faith tradition.[1] Many young adults also report seeing the Church as outdated and irrelevant in today's world, prompting them to question its value and role in their lives.[2] These and other factors have led to a historically challenging relationship between the Christian Church and young adult generational cohorts,[4] including high levels of young adult attrition from the Church.

These challenges are more pronounced when it comes to the latest generation to enter adulthood, Generation Z, which includes those born between 1997 and 2010.[3] According to Barna, only 42 percent of Generation Z identifies as Christian,[4] compared with 84 percent of the silent generation (born 1928–1946), 76 percent of baby boomers (1947–1965), 67 percent of Generation X (1966–1980), and 49 percent of millennials (1981–1996).[5] If trends continue—and there is no convincing reason to think otherwise—two-thirds of young adult Christians will drop out of the Church for at least one year between the ages of 18 and 22, with 69 percent not returning.[6] Additionally, "the percentage of Gen Z that identifies as atheist is *double* that of US adults."[7] As the number of practicing Christians continues to decline, Generation Z has not been raised with faith as a central focus, leading them to be called a "post-Christian" generation.[8]

These numbers demonstrate that ministering to Generation Z Christians poses significant challenges as they enter adulthood, as does reaching the substantial numbers

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Dr. Heath Lewis, DCE, currently serves as Assistant Professor of Christian Education & Leadership at Concordia University, St. Paul. His areas of academic focus include Christian education, organizational leadership, and Christianity and contemporary culture/media. Dr. Lewis may be reached at hlewis@csp.edu.

of their peers who are not Christian. This article will examine these challenges and offer suggestions for Christian ministry and mission to Generation Z.

The approach taken in this article focuses on young adults' relationships with their pastors. When considering why young adults leave the Church, their individual relationships with their congregations and pastors is often cited. According to Lifeway Research, 73 percent of young adult study participants left the Church because of an issue related to their congregation or pastor.[9] In a study conducted by the Missouri Synod's Youth Ministry Office (YMO), 48 percent of young adults who left the Church identified their pastor as a negative influence, with 9 percent reporting they felt their doubts and questions had been pushed aside.[10] The YMO concludes,

> In many cases, the negative influences of pastors were the result of a series of encounters where the young people repeatedly felt ignored or dismissed. In other cases, there may have just been a single event that stayed with a young person. The young person did not even have to be directly involved for a negative experience to lead to broken relationships, struggle, and disconnect from the church. Pastors need to be aware that there are no meaningless interactions with youth, especially in times of heightened stress or struggle.[11]

It is clear that pastoral relationships with young adults are critical to their experience with the Christian Church. Sociologist Frank Newport, citing Gallup business research, asserts, "'…people leave managers, not companies,' and the same conclusion may be applied to organized religion. People may be leaving ministers, not churches."[12] As the Church seeks to serve emerging adult generations and help them remain connected, understanding their relationships with clergy is critical.

A significant lack of research exists that specifically explores this topic for Generation Z. My doctoral research aimed to address this gap, considering Gen Z young adults in congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS).[13] The overarching question guiding this research was, What is the lived experience for Generation Z young adults, specifically as it relates to their interactions with clergy in the Christian Church?

The answer to this research question was pursued by considering three sub-questions:

1. How do Gen Z young adults understand the role of Christian clergy?
2. How does Gen Z experience pastoral leadership in the Christian Church?
3. How does the understanding of and experience with clergy (specifically pastoral leadership) shape Gen Z's overall experience with the Christian Church?

While the study's primary research question focused on the role of the pastor in shaping a young person's relationship with the Church, this study's participants also spoke about their experiences with numerous aspects of church life. Because each generation has unique experiences and influences that shape their lives and worldviews (including their

views of the Church),[14] each generation offers distinct mission opportunities. No generational cohort is identical to those preceding it. Consequently, understanding and learning from the lived experience of *each* generation is vital for carrying out the Church's mission and engaging them in ministry. With these factors in mind, this study bears weight for *all* members of the Christian Church seeking to build up and support the entire body of Christ, including today's emerging adults.

Who is Generation Z?

While drawing generational boundaries is an inexact science, defining a marker between cohorts is needed for research purposes. This study defines Generation Z (or "Gen Z" or "Z'ers") as Americans born between 1997 and 2010.[15] Gen Z comprises over one-quarter of today's American population,[16] making it the largest generational cohort in the United States.[17] As with all generations, Gen Z has been shaped by a series of cultural experiences that formed a collective worldview, affecting how they see themselves and the world around them—including institutions like the Christian Church. Understanding their generational identity is key to best reaching and serving Gen Z. Five key issues that have shaped Generation Z's collective identity, which must be recognized and understood by missional leaders, are as follows: diversity and identity, technology, safety and security, fear and anxiety, and spirituality and religious affiliation.

Diversity and Identity

Generation Z is the largest generational cohort in America, and it has also experienced the greatest diversity of any generation.[18] This is true in terms of race and ethnicity, and also in their diverse perspectives on issues of gender and sexual identity.[19] Selingo asserts, "Gen Z is the most diverse generation in modern American history, and its members are attentive to inclusion across race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity."[20] This exposure to diversity has formed within Z'ers a value for social relationships, acceptance, inclusivity, and individual expression. Gen Z desires diversity in institutions with which they affiliate, and, for many, inclusivity trumps a specific belief system or doctrine.[21]

Technology

Technological advances have uniquely shaped the daily existence of Generation Z. This is most evident in the fact that they live as the world's first digital natives: although previous generations have experienced some degree of digital connection, Z is the first cohort raised with virtually ubiquitous access to information via the internet.[22] As of 2018, ninety-one percent of Z'ers carried a smartphone, with 90 percent reporting they would be reluctant to sever their internet connection as it is prized more than most in-person engagements.[23] Although face-to-face connection is valued by Gen Z, the overall expectation is that organizational communication will incorporate modern technology in some manner. While a number of positives exist because of recent technology, there are downsides to this generation's constant access to information. For example, Z'ers have become proficient at consuming massive quantities of information quickly[24] and swiftly

switching between tasks.[25] Rue noted, however, that because the generation has been inundated with information, they often struggle to assess its validity to know what is real.[26]

Safety and Security

Challenges to personal and societal safety and security have shaped how Gen Z engages the world. Raised in an era of war, terrorism, mass and school shootings, and threats to national security,[27] Z'ers have never known a peaceful world. Consequently, many see the world as unsafe.[28] Their generational emergence also coincided with the 2008 financial crisis,[29] showing them the effects of economic struggle as they watched their millennial predecessors compete in a difficult job market and accumulate record student debt loads.[30] Issues of safety and security have led Generation Z to a more realistic, pragmatic worldview,[31] with many saying they are "distrustful of the future."[32] Consequently, many name happiness and financial success as the primary goals for their lives and continue searching for safety and security wherever they may be found.

Fear and Anxiety

High levels of anxiety are felt by many in Generation Z, as "inner battles with anxiety and fear often exceed levels of hope or optimism."[33] Three out of ten American Z'ers struggle with anxiety, with 39 percent of college students demonstrating signs of depression or anxiety and 11 percent exhibiting suicidal ideation.[34] There are numerous causes for this generational anxiety, including the physical safety and financial security issues described above. Additionally, technology—one of the generation's greatest assets—is also one of its greatest sources of stress. Kim and Koh found a positive correlation between smartphone addiction and anxiety, with teens self-reporting struggles with "nomophobia,[35] which Barna Group describes as "a feeling of anxiety anytime they are separated from their mobile phone."[36] The fear and anxiety felt by Generation Z is one of its most noteworthy attributes, and the Christian Church must take notice: "Depressed, anxiety-ridden screenagers hiding out in their bedrooms need an escape hatch that opens into the body of Christ."[37]

Spirituality and Religious Affiliation

In recent decades, American indifference to organized religion has increased dramatically in what White calls the "Great Decline" of religion's relevance in society,[38] leading to a "reduced cultural authority" for Christianity.[39] Of Americans under the age of thirty, 36 percent are religiously unaffiliated,[40] even though only 9 percent were raised outside of any organized religion.[41] Generation Z is considered the first "post-Christian" generation in American history, with 34 percent saying spirituality is a low priority and only 16 percent expressing a desire to grow in this area.[42] As noted previously, this generation's beliefs about the Church are reflected in its high rates of attrition from Christian churches.

Conceptual Framework, Methodology, and Data Collection

My research explored the phenomenon of Gen Z's experience with the leadership of Christian clergy in terms of the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory.[43] LMX views leadership as a series of one-on-one, dyadic relationships between leaders and followers (or "members"). According to this theory, these exchanges help to create the culture within an institution as the health of each dyad affects group-level processes throughout the entire population. Healthy relationships increase member trust, commitment, and organizational citizenship, while unhealthy relationships have the opposite effect. With these factors in mind, this study's research questions focused on the individual perceptions and experiences (or "exchanges") members of Gen Z had with Christian clergy and their effect on the young person's engagement with the Church.

To best understand this phenomenon, the voices of Gen Z'ers were critical for this study. Consequently, a qualitative approach was utilized in developing this research. This study incorporated a phenomenological methodological approach, which seeks to construct the meaning of personal experience.[44] Phenomenology is regarded as "well-suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences,"[45] making it an optimal choice for research on a person's religious beliefs and experiences.

Data for this study was collected through interactions with young adult church members of Generation Z.[46] The chief data collection method was semi-structured interviews with Z'ers who have recently participated in an LCMS congregation using a modified version of Seidman's three-interview format.[47] The first round of interviews explored each participant's personal history with the Church and their understanding of the pastoral role/office. The second round of interviews examined each participant's experience with Christian clergy. Finally, the third round of interviews offered each participant the opportunity to reflect on how these experiences have affected their lives, specifically their faith and involvement with the Christian Church. Each interview was approximately sixty to seventy-five minutes. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and logistical restrictions, the majority of interviews were conducted via Zoom, with two participants engaging asynchronously via email exchanges. In total, this method yielded nearly thirty hours of interviews, in addition to the email interviews. Data were coded using Creswell and Poth's six-step method.[48] Four primary types of coding were utilized: in vivo, emotion, value, and causation. Data was collected to the point of saturation and sufficiency, rather than through the establishment of a pre-determined number of participants.

This study was conducted and presented with approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Drake University (Des Moines, IA) to ensure adherence to ethical standards. Informed consent, member checking, peer examination, and audit trails were among the practices utilized to ensure the study's validity. All participants, congregations, and clergy names were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality, and congregations were identified using generalized geographic regions rather than specific locations.

Participants

In phenomenological research, participants are critical—so critical they have been referred to as "co-researchers."[49] Ensuring participant's experiences align with the study's

purpose is of the utmost importance. Consequently, a purposeful sampling method was selected for this study.[50] Participants were required to meet the following criteria prior to selection for the study: (1) eighteen to twenty-three years old at the time of the study, (2) currently living in the United States, and (3) a member of an LCMS congregation at some point within the last three years.

Participant selection incorporated maximum variation sampling, along with a combination of snowball and opportunistic sampling. Additionally, sample size in a phenomenological study may vary widely. For this study, Seidman's criteria of sufficiency and saturation were utilized.[51] Table 1 offers a list of participant demographics, and Table 2 shares information about the study participants' congregations.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Gender	Setting/Region	Status	Congregation	Years Attended
Graysen	23	Female	Metro/Midwest	Working	City Church	2
Aidan	22	Male	Rural/Midwest	Working	St. Paul's	15
Natasha	21	Female	Suburban/South	College	Hosanna	21
Saylor	22	Female	Suburban/Midwest	Working	First	22
Rebecca	22	Female	Suburban/Midwest	Working	Christ	10
Matthew	19	Male	Metro/Rocky Mtn.	College	Zion	8
Bryn	21	Female	Suburban/South	College	Hope	21
Trevin	18	Male	Suburban/South	College	Hosanna	18
Paige	19	Female	Suburban/Midwest	College	Trinity	8
Sam	18	Male	Metro/West	High School	Redemption	6

Table 2
Congregation Information

Congregation	Setting/Region	Year Founded	Member-ship	Pastor(s) Discussed	Pastor Since
City Church	Metro/Midwest	2007	2000	Pr. Dan	2015
St. Paul's	Rural/Midwest	1959	1300	Pr. Dave	1992
Hosanna	Suburban/South	1986	1200	Pr. Jeff	1991
First	Suburban/Midwest	1847	85	Pr. Greg	1991
Christ	Suburban/Midwest	1980	200	Pr. Adam	2010
Zion	Metro/Rocky Mtn.	1965	1400	Pr. Jack	2005
Hope	Suburban/South	1948	400	Pr. Matt	2005
Hosanna	Suburban/South	1986	1200	Pr. Jeff	1991
Trinity	Suburban/Midwest	1876	2000	Prs. Sheldon & Leo	2012 & 2017
Redemption	Metro/West	1882	4600	Pr. Ian	1993

Findings

Using leader-member exchange theory to examine the relationships between ten LCMS young adults and their pastors, four key themes emerged to help answer the study's primary research question, What is the lived experience for Generation Z young adults, specifically as it relates to their interactions with clergy in the Christian church? Themes include the duality of the pastor's role, treatment as outsiders, pastoral positivity, and it's not (all) about the pastor.

Theme 1: The Duality of the Pastor's Role

Participants understood the pastoral office as a blending of two roles: spiritual authority and shepherd. Most study participants found their pastors functioning primarily in the role of spiritual authority: ensuring right theology and doctrine while practicing Word and Sacrament ministry. They experienced the pastor as one who ensures that members and congregations stay on a correct theological path and who creates a unified theological viewpoint in the church. Accordingly, their language for describing pastors tended to describe their spiritual authority, focusing on theology, doctrine, and programs of faith formation. They used terms and phrases like "preacher," "teacher," "lead worship," "lead confirmation," and "direct faith formation." While there was nearly unanimous agreement regarding how participants had experienced the work of the pastor, this view of spiritual authority was seen more as a reality of the relationship rather than as the desired interpersonal dynamic between participants and their pastors.

For participants, the second pastoral role—the pastor as shepherd—was experienced less frequently but was more highly prized. When asked about the attributes a person should possess if they are to successfully serve as a pastor, participants most frequently described *relational* attributes. Responses centered on words of interpersonal and emotional intelligence such as "relatable," "connecting," "welcoming," "inclusive," "understanding," "friendly," "personable," "thoughtful," and "selfless." Participants expressed a desire for clergy who were able to connect with and understand them, along with serving as a leader for their people. Each participant expressed a view that the pastor should be the principal leader in a congregational setting, offering clarity, vision, strategic guidance, and organizational direction.

Many participants struggled with this duality, commonly experiencing the role and work of their pastor as that of spiritual authority while desiring more encounters with their pastor as shepherd. For Generation Z, humble service from a shepherd is critical to the work of Christ's mission; today's young people are more willing to follow to a leader exhibiting the attributes of a servant leader than one positioning themselves solely as an authority figure. The two visions of the pastorate offer insight into the young adult's understanding of and experience with clergy, and they affect the way Gen Z understands its place in today's Church, as demonstrated in Theme 2.

Theme 2: Treatment as Outsiders

Most participants exhibited signs of feeling treated as *outsiders* in young adulthood, both by pastors and their congregations. Eight out of the eleven relationships described by participants would typically be considered "outsider" treatment according to leader-member exchange theory. In describing their current interactions with their pastors, these participants noted that following the conclusion of confirmation instruction, their primary interactions revolved around the Sunday morning worship service, with their only regular interaction being a handshake and brief small talk with the pastor at the end of the service. Participants also recounted stories of feeling unheard by their pastors based on the general tone of their conversations about personal decisions and beliefs. These young adults reported feeling unheard, lectured to, and voiceless in their interactions with the pastor. The way young people view their interactions with pastors not only affects their one-on-one relationships; it changes the way Z'ers view their place in the LCMS: as the relationship with the pastor goes, so goes the young person's feeling of belonging (or lack thereof) in the Church.

Overwhelmingly, participants expressed frustration from the feeling that there is not a place for young adults in today's LCMS. A general lack of programming for young adults, coupled with the overall absence of young adults themselves, raised concern for study participants. While all of these young adults have remained active in their churches, they continue watching as many in their generation walk away, leaving them longing for Christian community within their age group. One participant even shared the belief that their generation is often ignored by members of the clergy and older congregational members. Yet, despite feeling "on the outside" with these groups, as another participant stated, these young adults were all still part of the LCMS. While the first two themes help explain the experiences of young adults; the themes that follow help describe the meaning they have made from those experiences.

Theme 3: Pastoral Positivity

Despite feelings of disconnection with pastors and congregations, the Z'ers in this study still expressed positive feelings overall toward their pastors. Of the eleven pastor-member relationships discussed in the interviews, ten were characterized as positive by participants, with each participant affirming that their unique relationship with their pastor is important to them. While the specifics of each relationship differed, three key ideas emerged from listening to those who expressed the greatest fondness for their pastors.

First, the engagements pastors facilitated with young adults *outside* of the worship service were reported as the most positive and of greatest significance to the Z'ers. Simple comments made in passing helped the young adult feel seen; using shared interests to spark conversation made participants feel understood; showing up at major life events (graduations, confirmation parties, etc.) helped the Z'ers feel cared for. Several participants also reflected on how service opportunities with the pastor or getting to know him and his family outside of the congregation (through babysitting, for example) deepened the bond these Z'ers felt with the pastor—not just as a spiritual authority, but as a person. A few participants added that a pastor's use of technology offers the potential to enhance their

relationship with young people. Given Gen Z's propensity for technology use, this is an avenue by which the pastors who utilized technology were able to "practice presence" with the young adult, even when they were physically unable to participate in the congregation.

Another means by which pastors were able to develop rapport with participants was through taking the initiative to build relationships with young adults. By learning what was important to their members, reaching out to the young person during particularly trying circumstances, remembering and celebrating big life events, etc., the young people felt affirmed and loved. Overwhelmingly, participants in this study noted that they are not likely to initiate building a relationship with the pastor, even though they believe doing so is important, because of the power differential with the pastor as an authority figure. Part of what these young people expect from a pastor is to prioritize relational development and "take the first step" in connecting with church members.

A third sub-theme involved pastoral longevity. Eight out of eleven study participants have known their pastor for at least eight years. Many of these participants continued referencing the pastor's consistent presence in their lives—in some cases, since birth. This longevity was frequently cited by participants as leading to a more positive relationship between pastors and young adults due to the volume of interaction these years offered. The consistency of pastoral presence allowed many participants to maintain their positive view of their pastor, even in times of diminished communication.

Theme 4: It's Not (All) About the Pastor

When asked what effect the pastor had on their continued participation in their congregations, only three explicitly stated their pastor played a role their decision to remain active in that setting. It is important to consider that participants noted positive feelings for at least one of their pastors, as shown in my discussion of Theme 3. This positivity is critical: although their pastors were not named as primary factors in their decision to *stay*, each study participant held their pastor in high enough regard that they did not *leave* their church because of his presence. Several other influences, however, did surface throughout the interviews that helped keep the young adults engaged: family, secondary (commissioned/auxiliary) workers, and events outside of worship.

The majority of study participants were raised attending a Christian church, and family remained a principal consideration when deciding to remain active or follow many in their generational cohort in leaving the church. Seven out of the ten study participants listed family as a primary factor for their engagement with the Christian Church today. For some, fear of disappointing their parents played a part. Most, however, valued the time to worship with family and the bonds church participation helped them build with parents, siblings, and extended family members.

While only three participants specifically mentioned pastoral influence as a factor in their continued activity within their church, six of the participants discussed relationships with a secondary (commissioned/auxiliary) worker as key. Vicars, directors of Christian education (DCE), DCE interns, deaconess interns, and lay youth workers were specifically referenced as positive influences. The idea surfaced that, for many young people, direct

contact with the pastor diminishes following the completion of a confirmation program, but students are often "handed off" to these workers for the high school and college years. Consequently, their level of influence on the student's congregational activity was heightened during this critical time of life.

Finally, participation in events outside of the worship service were listed as key for these Generation Z'ers. A host of activities were noted that helped participants connect with others in their generational cohort, more broadly within their congregations, and the Church as a whole. Youth trips (LCMS Youth Gathering, summer camp, service trips), educational opportunities (Bible studies, confirmation), and other "special" events that varied by region or congregation were key factors for these participants. It is important to note, the events in which participants engaged were not pivotal because of their attractional value; they were catalytic to participant relationships. Through these events, young people connected with others in their age range, committed and caring adults, and other parts of the Church at large. Consequently, these opportunities hold tremendous potential for helping Z'ers reframe how they see their Christian vocations and place in the Church, as was the case for this group of young adults.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Based on existing research on Generation Z, along with the data collected in this study and its emergent themes, the following recommendations are suggested for current pastors, those preparing students for pastoral service, and members of the Church at large. These recommendations also offer the opportunity for missional leaders to consider their missional thinking and action with the Generation Z members of their congregations and communities.

For Current Pastors

1. *Initiate continued relational development, specifically seeking opportunities outside of the worship service.* A relationship with a pastor can be difficult for a young person to pursue, particularly when they see the pastor as an authority figure. By connecting with young adults in settings outside of the worship service, pastors can help redefine their role from simply being one of authority to serving as a shepherd to Generation Z. Investing time outside of the office (e.g., visiting coffee shops, participating in community events, etc.), for example, allows the pastor to be visible beyond the walls of the church building and allows for engagement on a "neutral" site—or even on the "home field" of the Z'er. This is important for your members, and critical for those outside the Church who may never step foot in a church building. In serving Gen Z, a focus on relationships over programs will often yield the most positive results.

2. *Utilize technology and digital communication in ministering to Generation Z.* Technology use is not a preference for Generation Z; it is an expectation. Hill et al. found that digital communication increased positive communication across

organizations and helped build higher quality exchanges, including in groups that were not always physically present.[52] Young adulthood has always been a particularly transient time of life for many people, and they are not always able to be physically present. Pastors can utilize technology to connect with young adults beyond the walls of their church buildings. This can include Z'ers in general, not only members of their congregations. Technology affords opportunities to find and engage with Gen Zs who have left the Church or who are unchurched.

3. *Listen to the youth.* Study participants often felt unheard and voiceless in the Church. To better understand what is happening in the lives of young people and how they may best be served, it is critical to listen to them. Find ways to hear the hopes, desires, fears, concerns, goals, and dreams of your Gen Z members. It is, as Greenleaf notes, the response of the true servant leader to listen first.[53]

4. *Pastors don't have to do everything.* Pastoral ministry is a gift and blessing, but it sometimes carries a heavy weight. As Theme 4 illustrates, however, this weight need not be carried solely by pastors—particularly in serving Gen Z young adults. While it is critical for the pastor to serve all their members, forming a team that can help "share the weight" of this work will bless both pastor and members. The reality that Christ's mission is given to the whole Christian Church must be continually upheld and promoted; missional leaders should seek ways to engage the priesthood of all believers in service to this mission rather than attempting to handle the ministry on their own. Invest in helping parents fulfill their God-given vocation as they raise their children. Empower congregational members to serve the young adults in their midst, outside of the typical congregational systems and structures. Work with congregational leaders and parents to help ensure every Z'er has a "team" of adults praying for and supporting them, particularly during their transition to young adulthood.

For Those Preparing Students for Pastoral Service

1. *Ensure future pastors are being taught about leadership, not just theology.* LCMS pastors are highly trained theologians, which is vital as they oversee all function of Word and Sacrament in their congregational settings. However, within the Christian congregation, the pastor is often viewed by their members as the primary leader of the organization. Consequently, those training future clergy for their public ministry ought to ensure students are trained in areas of clarity, vision, strategic guidance, and organizational direction in congregations. At the same time, students themselves must recognize and appreciate this dynamic as they prepare for ministerial service. This will help clergy better understand how members see them and navigate (even balance!) the duality expressed by participants in Theme 1.

2. *Understand and support the role of the family in faith formation.* As family remains a primary influence in a young person's engagement with a Christian congregation, training pastors to understand this dynamic and respond accordingly to equip parents for their work as spiritual caregivers is critical. By continuing to train future pastors to acknowledge and honor the role of parents in faith formation, the Church will increase the potential of effectively teaching, serving, and retaining Gen Z young adults.

3. *Help future pastors develop a posture of learning about generational differences.* Every generation is unique, yet we often minister to all adult cohorts in the same manner. Help those training for pastoral ministry understand generational differences and how they affect the ministry of today's Church—particularly relating to dynamics of church membership and attrition. Aid future pastors in their ability to view those broader generational dynamics in light of their local context so they may develop a plan to best serve both the churched *and* unchurched young adults in their midst.

For Congregations At Large

1. *Prioritize secondary (commissioned/auxiliary) workers and spiritual formation events in the allocation of resources.* Some of the themes that surfaced in this study require support beyond the pastor. It is up to *all* members of a Christian congregation to demonstrate their support for Generation Z. Theme 4 highlights several factors that positively influenced retention of young adults in the LCMS. Certainly, not every congregation will be able to call a new worker or develop a host of new programming opportunities, but every little bit helps. Increasing resources that support Generation Z shows this generation that they matter to the congregation, which is critical to the mission of the Church.

2. *Recognize and address the transience of young adulthood.* As previously discussed, young adulthood is a transient time during which many young adults walk away from the Christian Church. It can be quite easy during this time for congregations to "lose track" of their young adults as they move to college, join the military, move out on their own, or engage in any number of other life transitions. Develop and implement plans to continue the relationship your congregation has with young adults, even when they are not physically present.

Limitations and Future Research

The primary limitation of this study is that all participants remain connected to LCMS congregations. Their stories matter and can help shape how congregations may best serve the young people in their midst. However, it does not help us understand the history of Gen Z members who have *left* the Christian Church. Replicating this study with Gen Z young adults who are inactive or completely separated from Christianity is vital for a holistic understanding of Gen Z's engagement with clergy and the Christian Church.

A secondary limitation involves the overall scope of this study. As every denomination has a unique culture, it was logical to bind the study within one denomination (the LCMS). However, the scope of Christianity is broad, and learning what is happening across denominations may help as church leaders work to best serve Gen Z. Conducting a similar study with young adults from across Christian denominations would offer new insights for the Church at large.

Conclusion

Exploring Generation Z's understanding of and experience with Christian clergy leadership led to the emergence of four key themes. Despite the challenges faced by young adults in the Church today, these Z'ers remain active in their congregations, each caring for their church and desiring that it more effectively serve their generation. Their commitment is a beacon of hope and inspiration for the future of the Church, and their experiences help point the way to a better shared future. In telling their stories, they use their voices to help the Church better work toward its mission, specifically as it relates to the unique mission field offered by Generation Z as they help us understand what matters most to their generation and what they need from the Christian Church. Their experiences will help more people be served well by their pastors, and ultimately, by the Gospel of Christ.

This article presents a summary of this study and its results; the full study report may be found in Dr. Lewis's dissertation, *Tend My Sheep: A Phenomenology Exploring Generation Z's Understanding of and Experience with Christian Clergy Leadership.*

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The Social Economics of LCMS Stewardship Practice: Aligning God's Supply with Ministry and Missional Goals

Martin Lee and Anne Lee

Abstract

Primary ministry activities have traditionally been performed by autonomous Lutheran congregations, serving local communities in Word and sacrament ministry and also as the focus for social engagement and outreach activities in towns, suburbs, and cities across the country. Local congregations also worship God through reverence and obedience in properly caring for what God has entrusted to them. Increasingly, congregations are instead becoming the site of competition over finite resources. The authors' experience is that the problem lies not in God's supply but in the Church's overall stewarding of it. But the stewardship responsibility does not fall on the pastor or individual laypersons alone. Since local congregations participate in the country's economy, capitalism's progression to financialization has had an impact on them and may be a driver of congregational decline,

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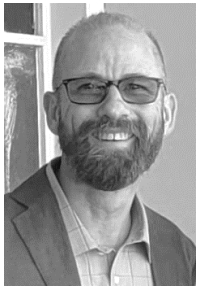

Rev. Dr. Martin Lee has served the LCMS Council of Presidents as a Transitional Specialist since 2010 and in pastoral ministry for 25 years. He is American born, raised in seven foster homes and reborn through Baptism. His natural birth was to an African-descended father who was, in turn, born to a coalminer who worked on a company town in Lemont Furnace, PA, and died young from black lung disease. His grandfather was born to a slave child (William Lee) of an unnamed bedwarmer (transaction recorded) for the Lee's of Virginia family on a plantation near Roanoke, VA. Martin's parents were one of the few biracial couples married in the 1960's. Martin has extensive experience in practical theology, congregational stewardship, and church finance, having served eleven congregations in five districts and having been trained in portfolio management and non-profits at UBS PaineWebber. Martin has served on several missions: Malawi, Beijing, Manilla, and with LAMP. churchorganizers@gmail.com.

*Anne Lee was born and raised on the mission field in Papua, New Guinea. Anne has been published in periodicals including Adelaide University's student pro-life newsletter, "*LifeNews*," Fort Wayne's "*The Journal Gazette*," Western Michigan University—Cooley Law School's "*Thomas M. Cooley Journal of Practical and Clinical Law*," and edited the Interim Ministry Conference quarterly newsletter, "*Transition Times*." annerlee@protonmail.com.*

along with church and school closures. More study is necessary to determine how much financialization is impacting local congregations and local missions. First steps toward a possible solution are framing the issues for constructive theological dialogue and better alignment of finite resources toward "real" (primary) ministry and missional efforts in local communities.

Introduction

The field research for this article was conducted in my current ministry context, as an Intentional Interim Ministry (IIM) pastor to a congregation in an "Ocean Cities" area of Southern California. Despite having adequate resources, existing in a large evangelism pool, and having gifted and active members, congregational membership is declining, and church members and leaders wonder if the church will be around in the next fifty years. The problem this article hopes to address is the stewardship challenge nearly every congregation faces: competition over finite resources. In the past twenty-five years I have had the joy to pastor eleven churches in five districts of the Lutheran Church─Missouri Synod (LCMS). In each congregation (big and small), resources *appeared* to be in short supply. Too few people, too few volunteers, too few offerings. My task was to assist these congregations in identifying (and harvesting) the many gifts they have received in Christ and in clarifying how these gifts (gleanings) are precisely what they needed to accomplish the tasks they have been given in the Master's fields. The Church is reminded in Psalm 34:10 that in Christ they lack no good thing.

This article proposes then, that the problem lies not in God's supply but in the Church's overall stewarding of it. In my twenty-five years of parish ministry, recurring stewardship challenges have emerged: too many ministries are working **out of alignment** with their congregation's goals, and too many ministries are not integrated with other ministries in the congregation, but act in isolation. For example, four of my eight IIM posts had large schools. Often the churches and schools found themselves competing for space, volunteers, and finances, working towards their own purposes and frequently at cross-purposes. The same can be said of LCMS member congregations and their relationship with the Synod.[1] As if these two challenges were not enough, to compound the internal *alignment* and *isolation* issues (e.g., silos), I have observed the economic problem of **financialization** becoming more pronounced in the Church. Briefly stated, financialization is when financial products and services become overweight in size, importance, and impact relative to the

overall (primary) mission of the organization. (Financialization will be fully defined in Part III of this article.)

Since we are a Church body ever striving to walk together and work together it is only reasonable (self-aware) to acknowledge that competition over finite resources does occur. The question is what can be done about it? Understandably, some will want to deny the problem exists and others will seek to burden-shift, or scapegoat, identifying one party that needs to be fixed (typically the pastor or lay members). There is a better way. Fortunately, as a Synod we are in it together. For better or for worse.

Following Paul's exhortation for building up the Church, the authors understand the topic of money can be sensitive and so have taken great care in this article to speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:12–15). This article encourages pastors and lay leaders, along with district and synodical leaders, to explore what generative learning in the LCMS's stewardship practice needs to occur in an age of financialization. What adaptive challenges must be overcome? And should we consider updating the Church's understanding of stewardship given these new realities? This article begins by describing some examples of stewardship deficits caused by misalignment and poor integration of ministry resources. It continues by describing the concept of financialization and gives a couple examples. This article concludes by proposing that the necessary response to the effects of financialization is for stewardship leaders at all levels to *align* goals and financial resources toward the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This article and the resulting recommendations do not focus on the local congregations or their pastors as the ones needing to be fixed. Additionally, this article does not offer technical solutions like building projects, mergers, real estate transactions, endowment plans, fundraising campaigns, or legacy funds. Instead, it seeks to address congregational stewardship deficits as a social problem of the LCMS—the idea that we are all in it together. The article describes the stewardship problem as a social one to emphasize the need for the local congregation and the Synod to recognize their financial interconnectedness and work together with the singular goal of aligning, preserving, and sustaining resources over time for faithful and fruitful ministry until the Lord's return. The authors believe this alignment of ministry resources is the necessary stewardship framework needed to update stewardship models addressing the new challenges facing the Church.

Congregations Align Resources with Ministry and Missional Goals

My current IIM ministry assignment in the Ocean Cities of Southern California is in one of the wealthiest zip codes in the nation. Members of the congregation are correspondingly wealthy, and their offerings are generous. Even so, this church has been experiencing financial difficulties for over fifty years, when two Lutheran congregations merged with the goal of reducing costs, consolidating resources, sharing church worker expenses, and ultimately hoping to be more effective in sharing the Gospel Good News of life and salvation in Jesus Christ. But the two congregations that merged never found alignment in culture, ministry, and purpose. In fact, they have grown further apart in doctrine, along with misalignment of ministry goals and competition over resources.

The Ocean Cities Lutheran Church ("OCLC") is typical of local LCMS congregations in that it struggles with declining membership, declining offerings in relation to increasing ministry expenses (least of which are church worker costs) and an uncertain future. Ocean Cities Lutheran Church requested an intentional interim pastor to assist in a process of congregational self-study and direction-finding between settled pastors. OCLC provides an ideal setting to study the stewardship effects of ministries out of alignment with congregational goals, ministries working at cross-purposes, and the effects of financialization.

One concern for OCLC is how to afford bringing a new pastor and family into their church community given the entry-level cost of a two or three-bedroom house is between two and three million dollars. Like OCLC, the other ten congregations I have served were being pressured to do as much with their ministry programs as in the past (or possibly more due to real wages flattening from rising costs and interest rates), with fewer people and fewer financial resources. For example, I served one large church in the Michigan District with a preschool at capacity with 200 students, 67 employees, and a full waiting list going out for the next two years. But the cost of the defined benefit plan was becoming prohibitive. The congregational treasurer, who was the CFO of a major Fortune 500 company, working with her finance committee, elected to opt out of the defined benefit plan to set up a church sponsored retirement plan that would be portable for the young employees of the preschool who experienced a high attrition rate. This stewardship decision enabled the congregation's investment to become more affordable, as well as enduring for these young teachers who were highly mobile. The young teachers had overwhelmingly not been becoming vested in the defined benefit plan and were consequently missing out on the hoped-for benefits. The congregation was able to significantly reduce their cost and, with the savings, contribute directly to each teacher's portable individual retirement account.

Another large congregation I served in the Southeastern District had an elementary school of nearly 400 students and over 80 employees, including a senior and an associate pastor. While the professional church workers were most gracious and humble in their areas of ministry, they were somewhat demoralized due to the fact that the employees were not at or near the suggested district salary guidelines for setting appropriate compensation for church workers. The school principal explained that in many cases the seasoned teachers who had been serving for ten years or more were earning around 65–80 percent of recommended guidelines. Younger teachers with fewer years of experience were on average being paid much closer to the district guidelines due to the competitive marketplace for recruiting new teachers. Enlisting the help of a member of the congregation who was also a compensation consultant, the congregation was able to implement a repair strategy to bring all school and church employees up to at least 85 percent of district guidelines immediately, and incrementally up to 90 percent or more over the next three years.

While the professional church workers were most gracious and humble in their areas of ministry, they were somewhat demoralized due to the fact that the employees were not at or near the suggested district salary guidelines for setting appropriate compensation for church workers. The school principal explained that in many cases the seasoned teachers who had been serving for ten years or more were earning around 65–80 percent of recommended guidelines.

These congregations did not repair their stewardship challenges without significant effort by all the ministry leaders in both the congregation and school. These congregations' stewardship problems were repaired by properly integrating each ministry's goals, budgets, procedures, and personnel, and by aligning all ministry departments and personnel toward the congregations' overall goals. In the Southeastern District congregation, even the two pastors' offices, which had been located on the opposite end of the campus, were moved over into the school hallway to be more accessible to the teachers, staff, parents, and students. Aligning resources toward mutually beneficial ministry and missional goals is preferrable to viewing one person's or one ministry's financial problems in isolation.

Financialization as a Social Problem

As a Synod, We Are in It Together

Viewing each autonomous congregation's stewardship problems in isolation is similarly inadvisable.[2] The strength of local congregations depends on more than strictly local factors and isolated ministry efforts. The local congregation is only as healthy as the Synod. It may also stand to reason that the Synod is only as healthy as its member congregations. Nearly all funding for ministry activities (for both Synodical and local purposes) is given by lay members of local congregations. Financially, the Synod and

authorized agencies look like they are on track to be around until the Lord returns, but in terms of souls (the visible ones that attend local congregations) there is an incremental decline. Paul writes, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:26). Hence, the strength of local congregations is a social problem in which all lay members, pastors, and leaders of the LCMS should invest.

Civil national and global economies are becoming increasingly financialized and, since the Synod and LCMS congregations participate in the economy, these trends have had an impact on them. It is the water we all swim in. Investopedia defines financialization as "the increase in size and importance of a country's financial sector relative to its overall economy. Financialization has occurred as countries have shifted away from industrial capitalism."[3] Financialization is said to favor short-term gains over long-term goals.[4] Economist Michael Roberts criticizes financialization, arguing that it has led to "unproductive" capitalism: "financialization is now mainly used as a term to categorize a completely new stage in capitalism, in which profits mainly come not from exploitation in production, but from financial expropriation (resembling usury) in circulation."[5] Other research shows that big firms dominate the new financialized economy, because of "their ability to cater to and play in financial markets."[6]

The lesson to be learned by the Church from unproductive capitalism is its equivalency in the Church of unproductive ministry efforts, campaigns, or programs. While membership and resources in local congregations are shrinking, Synodical and agency assets are on the rise.[7] While denominational institutions and agencies provide infrastructure and resources, train church workers, and commission missionaries, "real" church happens in local communities where people gather in worship around Word and Sacrament ministry and proclaim the transformational message of Christ for the good of this world and into the next.

It is the intent of the authors to eventually chart the growth rate of Synodical balance sheet trends (including agency assets under management) side-by-side with LCMS congregations' communicant membership, outstanding loan balances, and church worker salary trends over the past fifty years.

Financialization Misaligns Resources with Gospel Purpose

At first glance, it appears the trend is toward fewer, bigger churches and schools (or multisite),[8] with large donor gifts accumulating in the even larger Synodical institutions. The Synod looks a lot like a large company, having paid off all its debt on June 19, 2019. According to David Strand, "This is the first time in living memory that all Synod indebtedness to external entities stands at zero."[9] What a beautiful goal for every church! Strand cites BOD Chairman Rev. Dr. Michael L. Kumm who says, "This is a milestone achievement because paying off the historic debt will free up millions of dollars in mission and ministry funds for years to come."[10]

In contrast, trends in local churches and schools have been mirroring trends in local small businesses. Of the eleven churches I served in five districts over the past twenty-five years, only one (Kansas District) had no financial worries. Local congregations rattle around in underutilized buildings with heavy mortgage, maintenance, and utility

obligations. John and Sylvia Ronsvalle conducted stewardship interviews and surveys with church members and denominational leaders of fifteen denominations over a seven year period (1988–1995). They published their findings in their book, *Behind the Stained Glass Windows: Money Dynamics in the Church*. The Ronsvalles explain,

> Constructing new church buildings is actively promoted by denominations and fund-raising consultants as a creative way to build enthusiasm and revitalize congregations. One fundraising consultant pointed out that the theory used to be that a congregation ought to have a building project every few years. He advised that the idea is now for a church to always be in some stage of a building project to keep people involved in the life of the church.[11]

The argument for constructing new church buildings has been an attempt at repeating trends from the old style of industrial capitalism that profited mainly "from exploitation in production"[12] but is no longer the prevailing style of capitalism in the wider economy. In some cases these options make sense, but in other cases they do not. Over time, this old style of capitalism has served to drain resources and increase the indebtedness of local church and school ministries. One congregation I served was recently encouraged to build a million dollar office space and gym they don't need. Sometimes building projects cause conflicts and congregational splits. Understanding (now) that there are too many church buildings for members in some communities, one proposed solution is that old churches may need to die and be replaced with new churches and new members. We can plant more churches for new members, primarily in areas of high immigration.[13] Another currently popular solution is consolidation.[14] While no two congregations should enter into merger discussions thinking of it as a simple consolidation of resources, too often that is what happens. This appears to have been the case at OCLC, a cautionary tale to avoid.

The Ronsvalles note that denominations believe congregations aren't giving enough money; at least not for "denominational support, seminary support, international missions, and so forth."[15] The Ronsvalles' research discovered that denominational leaders are counteracting shrinking denominational support from congregations by going directly to generous high-capacity donors.[16] "Several denominations have begun to consider whether large donors who are underchallenged at the congregational level might not want to become more directly involved in making contributions to the denominational level."[17] Such high-capacity donors could, instead, be better challenged to support their local congregations, where they were baptized and confirmed, married, or had a family member buried.

Local congregations not blessed with shrewd and knowledgeable stewardship professionals are operating at deficits and either going further into debt or spending funds on activities unrelated to advancing the Gospel (e.g., new offices and gyms). Church workers are over-worked, many are subsidizing budget shortfalls,[18] and some are

experiencing burnout.[19] Over-worked (possibly burned-out) church workers should not be asked to do more, like start new careers (bi-vocational ministry) or be more entrepreneurial. But many congregations lack the resourcing (and preparedness) to mount a response to the need. Local congregations have not kept pace with changes in the economy, draining their resources and hindering their ability to properly care for their ministers[20] or ministries in their communities. Money is used differently today than it was used historically, necessitating new mental maps.[21] The generous lay members that make up our congregations today are facing a new, and foreign, economic landscape with changing laws related to non-profits, income tax, gifting, deferred compensation plans,[22] and personal retirement plans.[23] The changing economics of modern finance has increased the complexity of stewarding congregational finances and the ministries they are expected to fund. Because of these stewardship problems, local congregations are suffering and divisions are becoming wider, creating a significant wealth disparity in the Church.

The answer to the problem is not in addressing complexity, but in "the reorientation of finance through development of theology centering on real economic activity [e.g., primary "real" gospel ministry and missions]—not simply calls for the elimination of injustice but constructive theological dialogue on what the financial economy is for,"[24] suggests Charles A. McDaniel Jr. Instead of looking for novel ways to do things, pastors and congregations should be freed up for the ministry of the Gospel.

Some Framing for Constructive Dialogue

Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4:15)

This article is not intended to solve all the stewardship challenges facing the Church. It hopefully encourages some local congregations and church workers to see that their experiences may be validated through existing dialogue about financialization as a social problem. Church members and leaders should be given permission to speak the truth about any potential impact of financialization in the LCMS and any real financial troubles they may bear. To be good neighbors, we must be able to reason together. Clearly congregations are shrinking, and many church workers are experiencing financial hardships, while the Synod and authorized agencies are accumulating assets and improving balance sheets.

Generative learning requires stewardship leaders on all levels to begin asking questions about what kinds of stewardship practice changes may need to occur in an age of financialization. McDaniel poses these useful questions: "How are we to determine those financial activities that siphon resources from more socially beneficial uses? At what point does financial innovation cease to benefit the general economy and turn purely self-interested?"[25] Questions like these should be asked of the Synod in relation to local congregations.

At first glance, when considering Synodical and authorized agencies' balance sheets and assets under management, the appearance is that Synodical and authorized agency activities are being promoted more successfully over local congregations and local missions. In what ways can stewardship leaders at all levels best align financial resources toward the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ at home and abroad?

Dignify the Profane: Remove Congregational Guilt Over Money

Economic forces have long been an impetus for theological insight. Take, for example, Martin Luther's displeasure with the Catholic church extorting indulgences out of common folk for building St. Peter's Cathedral (1517). Similarly, first president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (1847–1850 and 1864–1878), C.F.W. Walther, began to carefully contemplate the question, "what is church?" after three out of five of their ships sank with much of the immigrants' wealth,[26] and when Martin Stephan misappropriated and misspent funds.[27] Luther, in his famous Galatians commentary, reflecting on Paul's appeal to the Corinthians to provide for the preaching of the Gospel, writes, "When it is preached, not only is no one willing to give anything for the support of its ministers and the maintenance of schools; but everyone begins to rob and steal and to take all sorts of advantage of everyone else. In short, men seem suddenly to have degenerated into wild beasts."[28] He also notes that when Satan cannot suppress the preaching of the Gospel by force, he tries to accomplish his purpose by striking the ministers of the Gospel with poverty. He curtails their income to such an extent that they are forced out of the ministry because they cannot live by the Gospel.[29] The same could be said about Satan's efforts to impoverish local congregations so they cannot properly invest in primary ministry efforts and local missions.

Some denominational leaders insist the success or failure of congregational stewardship rests squarely on the shoulders of the pastor. At the other end of the spectrum, some denominational leaders exhort pastors and congregations to avoid any worry about financial matters and proceed "on faith," warning about the evils of hoarding. Some congregations are stuck using a thirty-five-year-old stewardship philosophy described by Edgar Walz in *How to Manage Your Church: A Manual For Pastors and Lay Leaders.*[30] In the section of the book titled, "Money Is a Tool to Be Used," he writes, "But sizable successive accumulation of unused funds should be a challenge for seeking new and greater tasks for ministry. The generous gifts of God's believers must be gratefully received and used. While saving toward payment of large expensive projects is a part of good management, accumulation of large amounts and even hoarding cannot have a place in a church with a mission."[31] On the other hand, the Synod and authorized agencies establish significant endowments in perpetuity, implement investment policy statements, and create development departments along with hiring sophisticated gift planning professionals to increase assets under management, which spin off a rising income in perpetuity.

On the other hand, the Synod and authorized agencies establish significant endowments in perpetuity, implement investment policy statements, and create development departments along with hiring sophisticated gift planning professionals to increase assets under management, which spin off a rising income in perpetuity.

Borrowing from the book of Ruth as a stewardship illustration, Boaz provides an excellent example in taking care of the impoverished widow and his future bride. When considering the widowed Ruth's need, Boaz instructs his workers not to lay a hand on her and not to rebuke her (Ruth 2:9,16). Boaz is concerned for Ruth's physical safety and also that she be treated kindly: "do not rebuke her" (Ruth 2:16). Here Boaz models a brotherly love towards Ruth as a fellow child of God serving in the Kingdom, no matter how weak or apparently insignificant she is in appearance. Boaz may also serve as a model for how we should treat the Church, as the Bride of Christ.

The Harvesters Can Leave Gleanings Behind

The book of Ruth also offers an example in how Boaz allowed for Ruth's provision. Boaz says, "Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her" (Ruth 2:16). A modern-day application from this account might be as follows: today's congregations are like Ruth, the Synod and her authorized agencies are like Boaz, the harvest is like God's provision, and today's fundraising and gift planning professionals are like the harvesters. [32] Congregations, and (perhaps) church workers are a part of the Bride of Christ, faithfully gleaning for food in the Master's fields. The Synod and agencies are like Boaz because they are the gatekeepers to the harvest and in charge of the storehouses. The fundraising and gift planning professionals are like the harvesters because they gather up the harvest—today in the form of financial products. A humble suggestion, perhaps worthy of conversation, is that the Synod and authorized agencies might direct their professional "harvesters" to work together with congregational leaders to design stewardship models that gather a harvest out of local congregations but leave behind a percentage of what they gather to be used for their own ministry and missional efforts in their local communities (gleanings to meet all her needs).

While Synodical efforts are important and necessary, competition over finite resources nearly always results in a loss to the local congregation where the funds originate. The Synod and her authorized agencies may want to consider how they can do more to leave more measurable and meaningful gleanings behind and avoid "over farming" in already depleted fields. Several agency programs have already given a nod to the idea of sharing in the spoils. "Fan into Flame"[33] promised to leave 15 percent of what was raised to participating congregations, and when overfunding occurred in the Concordia Retirement Plans, Supplemental Retirement Accounts (SRA's) were created to share the gleanings with church workers. Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF), a partner ministry of the LCMS, has introduced a development effort called "Mission Advancement Partnership" (MAP). For a fee, LCEF is offering to assist local congregations ("ministries") in creating their very own "development department and process."[34] LCEF will assist in writing the job description for a development director position in the local congregation ("ministry"), and help in the search, training, mentoring, and coaching of this professional.

The Synod and authorized agencies are making herculean efforts to support local congregations, but ultimately the effectiveness must also be evaluated by measurable and

meaningful results. For instance, Is overall congregational indebtedness being reduced? Are church balance sheets, endowment assets, and incomes rising? And, finally, are church worker salaries being improved so they can live by the Gospel? Are these ministry goals reasonable? Should stewardship leaders at Synodical and congregational levels work together to align ministry and missional goals? The authors believe working toward complementary Synodical and congregational missional, ministry, and stewardship goals should be considered good neighborly practice in every fundraising campaign.

Conclusion

My task as an Intentional Interim Ministry (IIM) pastor to congregations in five districts of the LCMS has often been to assist congregations in harvesting the many gifts they have received in Christ and aligning these gifts with what they need to accomplish their mission in the Master's fields. My present ministry assignment to OCLC provides an example of what I have found to be typical of LCMS congregations. OCLC struggles with declining membership, declining offerings, and an uncertain future, despite having adequate resources, gifted and active members, and existing in a large evangelism pool.

God, in His divine providence, has given us all we need to support this body and life.35 But God, the Master Steward, cleverly, with redemption for all in mind, uses finite material and human resources (e.g., Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath, 1 Kgs 17:7–16) to force us into conversation (transactions) with Him and each other. The Synod, authorized agencies, and her member congregations should not shy away from conversations about money, as our Lord did not hold onto His equality with God but chose to deal with us in the profane and material world (Phil 2:6–7).

In the marketplace of humanity, forced transactions under the law must occur, giving opportunities to put our faith into practice—to love the Lord and love our neighbor. This article proposes that the problem of congregational decline lies in misalignment of God's abundant supply away from primary ministry activities and toward increasingly financialized, less productive activities relative to worship and missions in a locale. Instead of competing over finite resources, all LCMS members and leaders could walk together better "in Synod" by working together toward the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ both locally, institutionally, and abroad. Fostering vital and sustainable LCMS congregations may be possible through better (measurable) alignment of God's supply with meaningful local ministry and missional goals.

ENDNOTES

[1] The Synod and "Agencies authorized to be formed to further the Synod's Objectives (Constitution Art. III). Agencies include each board, commission, council, seminary, university, college, district,

Concordia Plan Services, and each synodwide corporate entity" "Upon This Rock: Repent, Confess, Rejoice" (Handbook, 66th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church─Missouri Synod, Milwaukee, WI, July 9–14, 2016).
[2] Examples: bi-vocational ministry, mergers, closures, therapy for burnout.
[3] "Financialization," Investopedia, updated October 31, 2021, https://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/financialization.asp.
[4] "Financialization," Investopedia.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid; The latest Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated this trend toward big firms, as many small businesses in the country have closed their doors.
[7] David Strand, "Synod's External Debt is No More: 'A Milestone Achievement'." *Reporter*, June 19, 2019, https://blogs.lcms.org/2019/synods-external-debt-is-no-more-a-milestone-achievement/.
[8] "Multisite merger momentum shows no sign of slowing." Tomberlin and Bird, *Better Together*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 40. "For joining churches, the greatest reason to merge is survival" Tomberlin and Bird, 194.
[9] Strand, "Synod's External Debt."
[10] Ibid.
[11] "Financialization," Investopedia.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Michael W. Newman, *Gospel DNA: Five Markers of a Flourishing Church* (San Antonio: Ursa Publishing, 2016), 226.
[14] See Tomberlin and Bird, *Better Together.*
[15] John Ronsavalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *Behind the Stained Glass Windows: Money Dynamics in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 305.
[16] Ronsvalle and Ronsvalle, *Behind the Stained Glass Windows*, 88.
[17] Ibid.
[18] For example, see Michigan District, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Salary Survey 2016 Sole Pastor*, January 31, 2017, https://michigandistrict.org/resources/salary-survey-2016-sole-pastor/. Nearly half of the fifty-two respondents in the Sole Pastor category (no parsonage) appear to be below suggested salary guidelines. The report is useful only in general, as it does not account for the respondents' zip code, years of service, and educational level.
[19] Nearly all districts have resources for church worker burnout. See for example, Richard Izzard, "Combating Burnout in Ministry," *Wellness Blog*, *New Jersey District, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, October 13, 2020, https://www.njdistrict.org/wellness-blog/combating-burnout-in-ministry.
[20] Jeni Miller, "Mercy for Church Workers," *Reporter*, December 2018, 11.
[21] Personal compensation has become sophisticated, including the form of deferred compensation, stock options, or business ownership interests, education loan forgiveness, etc. As deferred compensation, employment perks, and small business ownership become more popular, members intentionally shrink their reportable income (tax liability) while inadvertently having a negative impact on tithes and offerings in local congregations.
[22] Perks and fringe benefits that are either deferred or not in actual dollars. For example, a company car, subsidized meals, trips, etc. These fringe benefits reduce the actual take-home income along with the member's tithes and offerings.
[23] Costs have shifted to the employee, meaning an employee's income after tax (due to benefit deductions and rising taxes) is shrinking. Employees are now being asked to "absorb" the cost of the elimination of pension plans, rising cost of health care, and funding retirement.

[24] Charles A. McDaniel Jr., "Theology of the 'Real Economy': Christian Economic Ethics in an Age of Financialization," *Journal of Religious and Business Ethics* 2, no. 2 (September 2011): 5.
[25] McDaniel, "Theology of the 'Real Economy'," 3.
[26] Rebekah Curtis, "Lutherans in Peril on the Sea," *Lutheran Forum* 43, no. 2, (Summer 2009), https://www.lutheranforum.com/blog/2017/8/3/lutherans-in-peril-on-the-sea.
[27] According to D.H. Steffens, scandal over philandering and finance almost reflected a comparable situation in Rome during Luther's time. Due to the financial turmoil, the faith of these emigrants was challenged. "Doctor Jacobs describes the spiritual conflicts confronting these people, and especially their pastors, as follows: "'Was not the emigration a sin? Were they warranted, without a clearer indication of Providence, in abandoning the places where they had been put by God's call in Germany?'" Quoted in D.H. Steffens, *Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), 140.
[28] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Galatians* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1963), 123.
[29] Luther, *Luther's Works*, 123.
[30] Edgar Walz, *How to Manage Your Church: A Manual For Pastors and Lay Leaders* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1987).
[31] Waltz, *How to Manage*, 95.
[32] The authors acknowledge that no analogy is perfect. For example, in the present case, "Boaz" (the Synod) does not have access to the "largesse" until it is taken from "Ruth" (the lay member) which ultimately comes from and belongs to God.
[33] Rev. Jerry Kieschnick, "'Fan into Flame,'" *The Lutheran Witness,* August 1, 2008, https://witness.lcms.org/2008/fan-into-flame-8-2008/.
[34] "Ministry Solutions: Development," Lutheran Church Extension Fund, https://lcef.org/support/rso/development/.
[35] Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanations* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 108.

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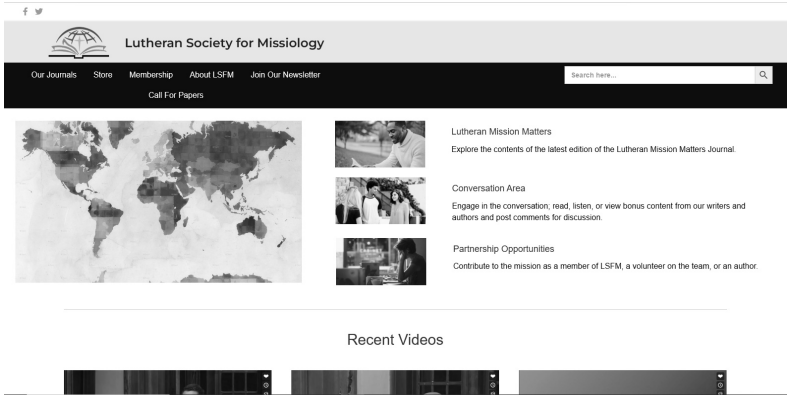

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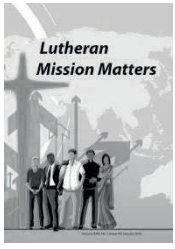

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Mission Observer

Missions are Local: Looking through the Reality-Defining Spectacles of Culture for Effective Cross-Cultural Gospel Communication

Hannah Scheyder

Abstract

Language is foundational to human cultured experience. If worldviews of varying cultures are seen as spectacles, central to comprehending the human experience, effective missional efforts depends on năng của một người to interact with another culture's linguistic framework by bằng đeo glasses that delineate their particular thế giới. If missions are to be effective vehicles of Gospel truths in foreign cultures, ilimin harshe yare should be acquired over a dogon lokaci. If missions must instead be short-term, one should first kula da yanayin yare da al'adun jama'an in front of them, nhìn vào bối cảnh trước mắt của họ, in which there is no cây cầu xuyên văn hóa rộng lớn to cross. This means that all believers have tangible access to help wajen yada bisharan Krista, as lifelong language learners in Lagos, or daily witnesses cho ân điển của Chúa at one's local Starbucks.*

Introduction

"What was one meaningful relationship you made with a local while on the trip?"

I paused to scan the places, the faces, the expanse of memory that accounted for the prior semester's study abroad experience, having seen fourteen countries over the course of five months. I flitted through images of the majestic Greek Parthenon, packed Mongolian marketplaces, and vast Costa Rican coastlines. I remembered the scents of streetside Vietnamese bún chả broth and the deafening sounds of summer cicadas in Tianjin. My stomach turned slightly when I failed to uncover a misplaced memory of a foreign-relationship-turned-lifelong-pen-pal. With two weeks or less spent in each nation, I guess it shouldn't have been a surprise to leave without a plethora of intimate

Hannah Scheyder grew up in Connecticut as the youngest of five in a Lutheran pastor's family, and received a degree in International Studies with an emphasis in Missiology from Concordia University Irvine, California. Minoring in Global Cultural Studies and Anthropology, her familiarity with short-term mission work grew while traveling to 17 countries through several semesters spent abroad. She is moving to Rome, Italy this fall to live alongside and disciple American undergraduate students studying abroad.

friends to call my own—given I'd likely never see the locals I interacted with again. But if my trip was meant to be mission work, where was the Gospel sharing? Where was the relational foundation that allowed for conversion to follow from a sense of trust built?

I had left California in August of 2019 with a 75L blue Jansport backpack overpacked with unsuitable clothes, survival essentials that would go untouched, and the mistaken conception that I would change the world. *Sure, yes, God has been at work in these communities already, but* I *was embarking on a selfless semester-long mission trip—surely I would bring others to faith through the brilliant sharing of my own …*

But with whom would I share the Gospel? With the Maltese gelato maker I thanked once? With the Bengali woman screaming in pain in Mother Teresa's Home for the Dying? With the Israeli woodshop owner whose nativity scenes were too expensive for me to purchase? In what language? My Hungarian vernacular consisted solely of an incomprehensible "hello" and "thank you," and the Swahili I had learned on Duolingo the summer prior became moot when village Ugandans spoke only their local Lugandan. Even if I had had a lingua franca[1] with which to communicate, how on earth would I be able to communicate the Christian experience in a meaningful manner? The world I viewed as an outsider on the streets of Kolkata was entirely different from the world experienced by the emaciated man who lay forgotten on the sidewalk. As the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein notably suggests, "If a lion could speak, we could not understand him,"[2] espousing that a lion's experience of reality was itself too disparate for us to comprehend. Even if I had a host of Nepali words of comfort to impart on the cohort of rescued sex-trafficked girls we met, the worlds which we inhabit are so different—my gentle American upbringing does not lend itself to commiseration. If I could not effectively communicate about the orange chicken I wanted for dinner in Beijing (a look of confusion crossing the waitress's face as I pointed animatedly to an image of pork), then I could not communicate profound Gospel truths in a matter of thirteen days.

To travel is to recognize that the world we see is dependent on our cultured perspective. To stay is to learn to see the world through the eyes of another, and to communicate effectively between those worlds. We cannot evangelize without proper cross-cultural communication, and we cannot properly communicate cross-culturally without inhabiting the world of the "other." Short-term mission trips do not provide enough time to learn to inhabit this new world. If one cannot travel to stay, they might take up one of Jesus' lesser-known commissions—given to a man recently freed from a legion of demons and eager to travel the region alongside the Messiah Himself: "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19).

The Spectacles of Culture

In recent years, linguists and anthropologists have endeavored to illuminate the inseparability of language and our human, cultured experience. Entry into this scholarly community affords significant discourse on our culturally constructed view of reality—that those who live in different geographical settings, religious or ideological contexts,

or who are immersed in disparate cultural frameworks, all experience life and reality itself in fundamentally different ways. Key to this discussion, however, is just how integral language is in the creation of those various culturally constructed worldviews. Rather than language being a result of culture, or culture a byproduct of language, the two are dialectically intertwined, each fundamental to the creation of the other, resulting in a Mongolian nomad's perception of objective reality as profoundly different from that of the Ecuadorian fruit stand owner, or that of the teenage barista in Tampa Bay.

Different linguistic frames are subsequently responsible for delineating various worlds whose boundaries are based on the cultural categories that limit and enable the worldview of its members. If language is actually that which precedes perception, then central to any missionary enterprise that endeavors to share the Gospel in a meaningful and culturally relative way is the learning of the language native to the missional region, and the cultural conceptualizations that lie therein. Without this understanding for foreign evangelism, the term "missions" would be better applied to local sharing of the Gospel with others who inhabit the same cultural, conceptual, and linguistic frame. Local missions mitigate fundamental miscommunications of Gospel truths. Without having the time necessary to learn the worldview of the missional region, short-term missionaries abroad are unable to invest in effective long-term cross-communication and should see the merit and opportunity sharing the Gospel locally using the same, shared language of their friends and neighbors.

British theologian and missiologist Lesslie Newbigin, who spent nearly thirty years in India as a missionary, comments on the incontrovertible link between language and culture:

> Fundamental to any culture is language which embodies the way in which a people grasps and copes with experience, sharing it with one another within the group. So long as one lives one's life within one culture, one is hardly aware of the way in which language provides the framework in which experience is placed, the spectacles through which one 'sees.' It is when one lives in a completely different culture and learns a new language that one discovers that there are other ways of grasping experience and coping with it. One discovers that things are seen differently through different spectacles.[3]

It is these cultural spectacles, or glasses, that illuminate what is true about the cosmos for any given people group across the globe. These glasses frame a culture's expected behavior, their underlying values, and their predetermined emotional responses to the daily stimuli of life. We do not often have cause to come into contact with differing frames, or worldviews, unless we travel to another land where another style frame is consistently used. (If we were only to interact with one foreigner, we might still blame their behavioral idiosyncrasies, bizarre dress, or peculiar processing speed on an unprovoked strangeness.) It is only when we find ourselves in a new land, that we see the cultural lenses that the locals wear are quite normal to them, and we are the ones whose frames stick out.

Missiologist Paul Hiebert in *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* reflects on this same concept: "Like colored glasses, culture affects how we perceive the world, without our being conscious of its influence. Only when the lenses become dirty, or we put on other glasses, are we aware of their power to shape the way we see the world."[4] Being cognizant of the cultural lens through which one sees the world does not come naturally. Despite the fact that one's own worldview is ingrained in one's perception, recognizing it as something other than cosmic reality itself—that the way in which one comprehends reality is a learned aspect of enculturation—is a difficult and counterintuitive endeavor. Traveling and witnessing to people groups of different backgrounds gives monocultural people the opportunity to realize that there are alternative ways to experience and react to the world that aren't inherently backward or underdeveloped. This powerful, world-shaping reality of cultural spectacles should be a central focus of missional endeavors if their aim is to share the Divine Gospel of Christ without ineffectual, extraneous cultural mispackaging.

I posit that the missionary sojourn has oftentimes consisted of a culturally insensitive insistence that locals of a disparate land, which we (as Westerners) are visiting and are subsequently foreign to, don our specific world-outlining spectacles—which exist to delineate, interpret, and understand an entirely different context. This is done with little thought as to the glasses those locals would be forced to remove and the potentially damaging side effects of doing so. Local missions, on the other hand, while undoubtedly still prone to human error as they are necessarily maintained by error-prone humans, are predisposed to more effective communication of the Gospel because spectacles can be shared with only minor adjustments, rather than the dramatic shift from cat eye frames to aviators.

However, to rule out foreign missional contexts in their entirety would be to negate the journeys of the early apostles, to render moot the incredible spreading of Christianity through their transformation and application of Jesus' teaching into cultural contexts entirely outside of their own first-century Jewish upbringing. The Gospel of Christ, without a shadow of a doubt, is cross-cultural and universal. It does not stagnate in one particular historical context, nor within one particular culture, but has been seen, time and time again, to adapt to and reveal more of itself by being brought to light amidst other worldviews.

If missions are to be a global enterprise, they require a missionary's utmost intentionality to humble oneself by becoming aware of one's own cultural spectacles, to stretch oneself by spending intensive time and effort to learn how life is viewed through another culture's pair of glasses, and to act as bridge by drawing meaningful biblical connections between these various perceptions of reality. Languages are the frames in which these lenses sit, and without understanding the chosen foreign context's frames, the fullness of the Gospel won't be conveyed, or communication will reside in an unstable realm in which misconceptions of life-saving truths are common. This kind of study is a long-term effort, and short-term mission trips, while viable for self-discovery or voluntourism, do not lend themselves to meaningful transmission of Gospel truths. Those who are unable to spend the years necessary for exchanging their world-viewing

glasses would see their missional efforts more effectively employed at a local level, wherein their cultural spectacles are shared with their neighbors.

Language's Effect on Perception

To communicate something in another language is not always a simple matter of translation. There are many examples of concepts that remain unique to linguistic contexts, arising amidst a specific environment, time, and place. For example, the Australian people group of the Kuuk Thaayorre use compass directions instead of the "right" or "left" we more often employ in daily conversational English. A natural extension of this linguistic difference is that these people are far more capable of determining cardinal directions than the average English speaker.[5] Thousands of American English speakers struggle with the eating disorder "anorexia," a term available to them linguistically,[6] while Inuit speakers with no word for "stutter" do not experience the phenomenon of stumbling over consonants while attempting to communicate.[7] People groups who live in the rainforest do not have a one-to-one translation for the English word "bush" because its ambiguity wouldn't serve in a context where survival requires a specific knowledge of plant life.[8] Perceptions of colors,[9] emotions,[10] familial structures, gender roles,[11] and every other conceivable aspect of reality shift depending on the linguistic frame the user claims as his or her own.[12] The significance of language in human perception is foundational and key to any type of cross-cultural communication.

The Apostle Paul speaks to the foundational importance of language in the sphere of missional communication: "So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me" (1 Cor 14:9–11). As one of the founding missionaries of the Christian Church, we should heed Paul's advice. Christians cannot—and should not—endeavor to communicate foundational Gospel truths without a deep understanding of the linguistic frames of the foreign communities they are entering, as their efforts will be convoluted by their own nomic worldviews, and they will issue forth cosmic truths wrapped in a limited cultured packaging.

Chairman to AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) and missionary to Kenya, Jim Harries, explains that ignorance of cultural nuances not only handicaps communication efforts but may lead to damaging, if not irreparable, consequences. He emphasizes the need to translate the Gospel message into the vernacular setting of another linguistic community, not merely expect that they learn English in order to receive the life-saving Gospel of Christ—as Christian missions have largely functioned in the

Christian mission must always seek to empower foreign communities with the divinely inspired Word that lies outside of any singular cultural frame.

past.[13] Christian mission must always seek to empower foreign communities with the divinely inspired Word that lies outside of any singular cultural frame.

Past rejection of missional efforts was oftentimes a result of the foreignness of the cultural perspective in which it was packaged. If missionaries of today are to be effective communicators of a universal Gospel message, they must recognize the cultured glasses they bring with their communication of that message, and they must attempt to don the foreign culture's linguistic frames and cultural lenses so as to be better missional bridges of cosmic truth. American linguist and anthropologist Charles Kraft underscores the same idea in *Christianity in Culture*, suggesting that the very act of preaching this universal message must be reevaluated if those who receive it misunderstand.[14]

Miscommunication may be inescapable when engaging in a foreign context, even when the language is learned with relative fluency by long-term missionaries. It is only after years of language learning and deepening cultural understanding that long-term missionaries can more effectively avoid teaching Westernized aspects of Christianity that lead to fundamental misunderstandings about the person Jesus. Without a general fluency with the cultural context in which they engage, missionaries' own enculturated lenses will limit their ability to share Christian realities, and translators may not always be able to effectively act as bridges between the two disparate worlds.

Filling in the Narrative

Christian mission has generally fallen into two camps: long-term missions, of which benefits abound if intentional linguistic and cultural study accompanies it, and short-term missions. However well-meaning, these brief missional exploits have been largely ethnocentric—a naïve attempt to let the living and active Word communicate lifesaving Gospel truths without taking the time to properly communicate them, all while satisfying a selfish desire for a fulfilling travel experience based in imagined altruism. To reiterate, the lenses or worldviews that each human culture group take for granted as cosmic reality make the perception of their daily lives entirely different from human beings with much of the same biological makeup who live thousands of miles away. These foundational perceptive and experiential differences take years of careful study to comprehend and simply won't be accounted for over the course of a short-term mission trip. If the role of a missionary is to illuminate a Christian perspective that calls into question a foreign culture's way of life, there will be little or no receptivity to suggested changes without building trust and seeking authentic relationship. Short-term missional efforts cannot provide Christians with the proper time to learn the language and cultural conceptualizations of the foreign worlds they visit, and they discourage the level of investment needed to form genuine, trusting relationships with members of local people groups.

During my short-term mission endeavors of the past, I had never considered that being part of a sizable foreign team of eager, young, but uninformed volunteers may also sap resources or be a detriment to the locals with whom we engaged. Books like *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert have brought issues like these

to light in recent years. Rather than glorifying the travel stories from invigorated volunteers who ultimately return to the safety and comfort of their homes, Corbett and Fikkert analyze the effectiveness of short-term missions through the perspectives of the locals. They write that in our verve to help those less fortunate, we tend to "reduce poor people to objects" that are then used to "fulfill [our] own need to accomplish something." Our inability to recognize our equivalent brokenness and mutual need for the Savior who mends us all means that our short-term missional attempts tend to do more harm than good.[15]

While short-term missions of the past have rarely been the vehicle through which members of a foreign people group come to know Christ, they have, of course, been fruitful endeavors in many other ways. When the primary goal of a short mission trip is aiding a long-term missionary established in the community, short-term missionaries provide extra hands and renewed energy for the work of the Gospel to take place. If, however, the primary goal is to evangelize without a proper understanding of the world in which they are entering, and without the intention of removing their own cultured glasses and putting on those of another, then miscommunications of Gospel truths are inevitable. Most centrally, the message of Jesus' profound and universal love and grace will not be communicated in a two-week stint through a few locally translated Western-style sermons.

Short-term missions may also be fruitful endeavors for the individuals who attend such trips, whether through self-discovery, the perspective-broadening experience of cross-cultural interaction, communicating international needs at the local level, or being called to a more long-term service in the mission field. If, however, one's primary goal is to travel and sight-see, take a few self-aggrandizing pictures with doe-eyed babies, and revitalize their Instagram feed, I would suggest their church members' money be better spent elsewhere. However well-intentioned these trips begin, American short-term missions are commonly rooted in ethnocentrism.

Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina's essay entitled, "How to Write About Africa" parodies the incredibly ethnocentric lens through which we as Americans often view the African "country." I reflected on his words as I traveled amidst the lush green Ugandan countryside, through villages of giggling children, past banana stands and shoeless feet: "African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life—but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause."[16] I found myself surrounded by a people group who were incredibly vivacious, vocal in church, eager to move and praise with their bodies, quick to smile and welcome; yet, like Wainaina suggests, my vague and general romanticism of the Ugandans with whom I interacted was inherently insufficient due to my brief stay. Rather than discovering the three-dimensionality of their personhood over the course of a longer trip, my short visit limited my ability to know the depth of each person's character because of the language barrier and lack of time spent with each individual. As Corbett writes, "If we reduce human beings to being simply physical—as Western thought is prone to do—our poverty-alleviation efforts will tend to focus on material solutions. But if we

remember that humans are spiritual, social, psychological, and physical beings, our poverty-alleviation efforts will be more holistic in their design and execution."[17]

After my trip to Uganda, I felt convicted by the fact that I had fallen into the same traps short-term missionaries had fallen into for centuries throughout Africa's history: being inspired by sunsets that fill the sky, enjoying heart-warming dances with locals, holding orphan babies, rebuilding mud homes, and leaving in the same neat-and-tidy way we had arrived, perpetuating anecdotal stories of being forever changed by those who were barely, if at all, changed by us. I did not want the only lasting impact of our two-week stay to be the red dirt staining the white soles of my Reebok sneakers. But my desire to leave an impact on the people we met was simply the perpetuation of the ethnocentric view Wainaina mentions in his essay.

Long-term cross-cultural ministry does not teach us to disregard everything we have heard about a certain location; it simply fills in the narrative with real places, real stories, real people, real faces; it makes more complete that which was initially singular and partial.

Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaks about the danger of a single story in her TED Talk about the problems inherent with the flat characterization of those who experience so much more than famine, AIDS, and political upheaval: "The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."[18] Long-term cross-cultural ministry does not teach us to disregard everything we have heard about a certain location; it simply fills in the narrative with real places, real stories, real people, real faces; it makes more complete that which was initially singular and partial.

A New Emphasis: A Discussion and Conclusions

Christian missions must begin with the primary goal of cultural engagement prior to any attempt at teaching a Westernized Gospel truth. And if missions are to involve intentional long-term study, short-term missional avenues that do not offer this opportunity should be limited to aiding missions that are already long established within a community. They should not create new, uncontextualized evangelism methods.

Might I suggest a new emphasis within mission work? What if the concept of "missions" was not relegated to pictures of foreign, brightly colored bazaars or rolling African plains? What if, when you think about Christian missions, you pictured aisle 17 at your local grocery store? What if we were all called to be missionaries within our own communities?

Since the iconic writings of the renowned eighteenth century missionary William Carey,[19] Christian missions have considered Matthew 28:19–20 as the Great Commission to to go! Over there! Start making disciples already! This cultured compulsion for ministers to commit their lives to making converts from the "heathens" of underdeveloped

foreign lands may have fueled mission work in centuries past, but I argue that a better translation of the original Greek text would read, "As you go" or "as you are going, make students of Christ Jesus ..." This subtle distinction conveys a radically different picture of Christian missions. The missional mind of the Lord has been present since He first created Adam from the dust and desired an intimate relationship with him. Through the centripetal missional force of the Israelites' revelation of Yahweh's power and provision, people throughout all time and place have found their identity in the Lord.[20] Jesus' sending out of the disciples before He was taken up into heaven was a continuation of God's heart for mission from the beginning. Our call is the same: continued, not isolated; mundane, not sacred; every day, not for two weeks out of our high school summers.

In *Everybody Always*, Bob Goff reframes Jesus' radical love in the context of our modern lives. He redefines mission work in a similar way:

> We don't need to go on "mission trips" any longer. Jesus' friends never called them this. They knew love already had a name. I've known some remarkable and courageous missionaries. Perhaps you have too. But for many, when they think of missionaries, they think of Spaniards with chest armor, a galleon, and the flu—and then all the indigenous people die. Instead of saying you're a missionary, why not just go somewhere to learn about your faith from the people you find there and be as helpful as you can be? The neat part is most of the people I know who go on "mission trips" are already doing exactly that. We don't need to call everything we do "ministry" anymore either. Just call it Tuesday. That's what people who are becoming love do.[21]

Missions are every day. We are all missionaries. If your daily circumstances do not lend themselves to ministering to people thousands of miles from home, try ministering to a neighbor or a friend. Through localized missions, the best degree of communication will take place through shared linguistic worldviews—shared cultural spectacles through which the innate stuff of life are a given, so that Christian truths are more easily transmitted. By redefining mission work in this way, it need not be feared or relegated to only certain individuals. This mindset allows the mission of Christ's Church to be within every believer's grasp. Whether down the street or in Timbuktu, we should all feel privileged to witness about the work of God in our lives. Those who feel called to the special vocation of long-term mission work should feel excited at the prospect of removing their own cultural glasses through which they interpret the world so that they may learn to comprehend reality through the lens of different culture.

Hiebert recognizes that "effective communication is central to our task [as missionaries]. There is little point in giving our lives or in going ten thousand miles if we cannot bridge the final five feet."[22] Missions must prioritize language learning for the sake of conveying Gospel truths. Because only long-term missions offer the time to do so, locality within short-term missions should be encouraged. Short-term missions are a viable form of self-discovery and service-oriented voluntourism, but effective Gospel communication requires linguistic fluency. If one cannot learn to wear the

cultural spectacles of a foreign land, remaining within one's own linguistic frame should be an equally compelling alternative, as one can share Gospel truths with ease at the local level and avoid cross-cultural miscommunication. As believers, we should be excited at the prospect of conventionalizing Christian mission. If missions are local, they are accessible—an opportunity for us to share in the joy of professing our love for the Savior who first called us to be His own. Whether we are led to follow Christ's command to stay (Mark 5:19) or to go (Matt 28:19–20), let us delight in bringing others into the fold of His grace, regardless of the time or place.

* Various portions of the abstract are intentionally translated into Hausa and Vietnamese so that communication and comprehension is necessarily limited by linguistic and cultural barriers.

Full Abstract

Language is foundational to human cultured experience. If worldviews of varying cultures are seen as spectacles, central to comprehending the human experience, effective missional efforts rest on one's ability to interact with another culture's linguistic frame by putting on their specific world-delineating glasses. Short-term missions, unable to invest in long-term language learning, should not seek to invent new modes of evangelism without a proper knowledge of the cultural context in which they find themselves for this short period. If missions are to be effective vehicles of Gospel truths in foreign cultures, they must be linguistically focused and long-term. If missions must instead be short-term, one should first look to their immediate context wherein no vast cross-cultural bridges must be traversed. This means that all believers have tangible access to supporting Christian mission, as life-long language learners in Lagos, or daily witnesses to God's grace at one's local Starbucks.

ENDNOTES

[1] A common or shared language.
[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963).

[3] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 5.
[4] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2006), 31.

[5] Alice Gaby, "The Thaayorre Think of Time like They Talk of Space," *Frontiers in Psychology* 3 (August 2012). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00300.
[6] Jack Martin, Kathleen L. Slaney, and Jeff Sugarman, *Wiley Handbook of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology: Methods, Approaches, and New Directions for Social Sciences* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

[7] Jack M. Schultz (PhD in Anthropology, professor at Concordia University Irvine), in discussion with the author, Spring 2020.
[8] Schultz, discussion.
[9] Debi Roberson, Jules Davidoff, Ian R.L. Davies, and Laura R. Shapiro, "Color Categories: Evidence for the Cultural Relativity Hypothesis," *Cognitive Psychology* 50, no. 4 (June 2005): 378–411, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogpsych.2004.10.001.
[10] Robert Alan LeVine, *Psychological Anthropology: A Reader on Self in Culture* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
[11] Schultz, discussion.

[12] William A. Foley, *Anthropological Linguistics: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).
[13] Jim Harries, "Cultural Linguistics, Mission, and Theology for the Majority World," *Australian Journal of Mission Studies* 12, no. 2 (December 2018).
[14] Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).
[15] Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor … and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 62.
[16] Wainaina, Binyavanga. "How to Write about Africa." *Granta* 92 (May 2019): para. 10, https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/.

[17] Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 57.

[18] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," filmed July 2009 in Oxford, United Kingdom. TED video, 18:33, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.
[19] William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens. In Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, Are Considered* (Leicester, 1792).

[20] R. Reed Lessing, *Jonah: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2007).

[21] Bob Goff. *Everybody Always: Becoming Love in a World Full of Setbacks and Difficult People* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, an imprint of Thomas Nelson, 2018), 72–73.
[22] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 168–169.

Mission and Migration: Ask Those Who Are Doing It

Robert Scudieri

I had the privilege of preaching at Concordia Seminary a few decades ago. I began by looking at the chapel filled with white Anglo men and said, "You do not look like heaven." Years later a pastor came up to me and said, "I heard you in chapel tell us we did not look like heaven and I was angry. But today I know what you meant." He got it!

At Mission Nation Publishing our desire is to produce resources that will inspire and equip churches to reach new ethnic groups. In the eighteen years I spent as head of national missions for the LCMS I met some pastors who had a passion for a church that would "look more like heaven," a la John's vision in Revelation 7:9: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." There were some churches (and districts) that attempted to reach new immigrants and were wildly successful; others tried and failed because they were not equipped for this work. Unfortunately some just gave up.

Each year more than five hundred thousand immigrants are admitted to the United States. At the same time, the church in America is in decline statistically. With the immigrants, missionaries are now coming to America. Many are Christians "tried by fire" who have suffered for Christ and have come through the fire. They are gifts from God to the churches in America. For the past six years Mission Nation has been privileged to tell their stories and stories of some who have been touched by their ministries.

I was moved by the focus of this issue of Lutheran Mission Matters to share stories of some who are doing this and who got it right. For many it took several attempts, but they saw the importance of not giving up. We can learn from them. One person is Rev. Jason

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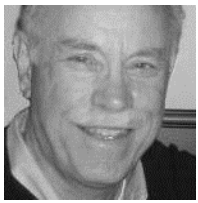


Robert Scudieri grew up in New York City, a place of immense cultural and ethnic diversity. He has served as a parish pastor as well as executive with the LCMS Board for Mission Services. He is the founder of The Center for US Missions and Mission Nation Publishing, and a co-founder of The Lutheran Society for Missiology. He serves on the editorial committee for Lutheran Mission Matters. Last year he retired as the president and publisher of Mission Nation Publishing. bscudieri@gmail.com

Li. Jason came to the United States from communist China to study engineering. The first Sunday he was at graduate school his roommate invited Jason to church. Jason was not at all interested but went because he did not want to offend his roommate. Then the roommate kept inviting and Jason kept going, not getting anything out of it, until he was invited to a Bible study in Chinese. The Spirit of Jesus came through His Word to stay in Jason Li. Here is more to the story, a story of sacrifice and redemption. You can see and hear it at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_5y3YO8JSc&t=12s

The late Pr. Peter Kelm was passionate to help churches in the South Wisconsin District reach new Americans. We discussed this in an interview a few years ago. He spoke about the great variety of immigrants that have come to Milwaukee and why and how churches can prepare to reach these faithful Christians. One important distinction is between pastors and missionaries. Not until recent times have our seminaries given attention to raising up missionaries. Check it out at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-NyaTAVo9s&t=8s.

Concordia St. Paul Professor Samuel Deressa came to America as an immigrant from Ethiopia. He has personal experience finding a church that would welcome an immigrant family. Professor Deressa compares the church in his homeland to the church in America. How is mission different between the two? Hear his insights at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0OR8UvS8FQ&t=16s.

President Mike Gibson is President of the LCMS Pacific Southwest District, one of the most multiethnic districts of the LCMS. Mike had the blessing of supervising a missionary reaching Chinese immigrants in California. President Gibson knows the challenges and the blessings of reaching across cultures and shares his learnings in this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kooTAyoBnDs

Dr. Terry Chan is the chair of the Asian Mission Society and Pastor of Christ for All Nations Lutheran Church in San Francisco, CA. His congregation is composed of Asian, Hispanic, African, and Anglo members. Terry just finished a doctoral program where his focus was understanding how churches can be prepared to welcome people from other cultures. He shares some of the lessons he learned at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_solyL63Co&t=16s

President Mark Adrain shepherds one of the most missional congregations in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Four Hispanic missionaries work out of Messiah Lutheran in Tampa, Florida. I asked Mark in the following interview if it was a sacrifice for the Anglo church to support missionaries to Spanish speaking people. Hear what he had to say here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_solyL63Co&t=16s

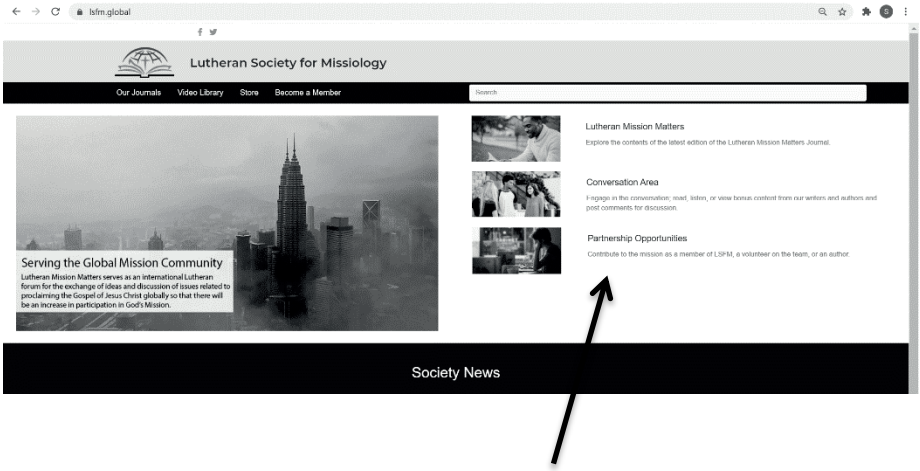
Professor William Schumacher is the new President/CEO of Mission Nation Publishing. He came to Concordia Seminary after ten years as an evangelistic missionary in Botswana. I had the privilege of interviewing Will as he shared the differences between

mission work in Africa and America. How is missionary work carried out in an area that knows it is on a mission field as opposed to the United States. In 2001 the LCMS declared the US a mission field, but just saying it doesn't make it so. Learn from Professor Schumacher at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lBieuaGPiTc&t=817s

Recently, a pilot program began in the Florida Georgia District to develop new resources that can inspire and equip churches to reach new ethnic groups. A website has been created where those resources can be found. As new resources are discovered they will be added to the site. You can see it at https://www.missionnationpublishing.com/rev7-9

The book of Acts is through and through an account of how the Gospel transverses cultures to bring salvation to the world. God knew what He was doing when He sent Jesus the Christ to humankind, and He did it well—no, He did it perfectly. Jesus showed us that God wants people of every nation to know His love and the way to eternal life. Today, Jesus is celebrating with that heavenly, multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual Revelation 7:9 crowd surrounding God's throne.

Enter the conversation:
“Why Lutheran Mission Matters.”



Be sure to check out the upcoming issue’s Call for Papers (including the theme) and Submission Guidelines near the end of this edition or online (https://lsfm.global) under Partnership Opportunities.

Review

LEADERSHIP FORMATION IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT: Missional Leadership Revisited. By Samuel Deressa. Foreword by Gary M. Simpson. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2022. 210 pp. Paperback. $29.00.

This dissertation-turned-book, with reference to a significant number of missional and leadership texts and themes, explores the practice of four Oromo congregations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as researched in 2014.

From the get-go, specifically on page 2, and repeatedly throughout the text, the author is clear about the purpose of this work: "The aim of this book is to explore such experiences by focusing on the study of congregational culture within which emerging leaders (like myself) are being formed and empowered in the African context. It explores the connection between two important concepts: spiritual formation and leadership formation."

There are a few challenges in reading this text. Frequent grammar and spelling errors distract from the thoughtful content of the various chapters. As well, perhaps by reason of being a dissertation, the number of sources quoted can be distracting: pages 51–52 bounce the reader through ten different texts, and the bibliography runs to thirteen pages.

Getting over the bumps in the road is worth the trip. Readers will find intense documentation of recent years' cultural, missional, and leadership conversations, as well as discussion of relevant specifically theological points. Also, for the newcomer to dissertation work or as a reminder to those who finished one years ago, he demonstrates or documents all the appropriate steps: literature review; description of theological, biblical, and theoretical perspectives underlying the work; description of methodology; documentation of results; and reflection on those results. He gives attention, as well, in view of the personal nature of the research, to informed consent and confidentiality issues.

The "funnel" of figure 7 on page 115 gives readers a quick summary of the text, a visual that could be borrowed for planning similar studies in one's own ministry context. Leadership formation "pours out" of a funnel for which the input is a mixture of identity (which can be described in theological terms), congregational (holistic) practice, and cultural identity.

This reviewer reveals his appreciation for this dissertation and book by means of the author's own words, his comment toward the end of chapter 3 on theological and biblical perspectives, in which he has viewed Luke (4:16–21) and Acts as essential missional documents: "Leadership is about the ability to inspire and empower each other as a community of believers by sharing each other's burden in fellowship. It is an authentic opportunity to be part of the perichoretic life of the Triune God expressed in our shared life, and how we make an impact on the lives of others [inside and outside of the church]" (44).

Rich Carter

Lutheran Mission Matters Call for Papers May 2023:"Theological Education for Pastoral-Missional Leadership"

The editorial committee of Lutheran Mission Matters (LMM) invites you to submit an article for the May 2023 issue on the chosen theme, "Theological Education for Pastoral, Missional Leadership."

Our November 2020 issue had as its theme, "Theological Education in a Missionary Age," and the response was such that another issue devoted to a similar topic was deemed helpful. Those essays laid a broad foundation for ongoing discussion. The range of topics engaged specifically the mission focus of theological education, including attention to new delivery systems, from the TEE models developed on mission fields to appropriate use of current forms of distance education. More importantly, a "missionary age," even if always part of the church's context, raises the key questions of the goals of theological education: what kind of person, what "attitudes, knowledge, and skills" (i.e., competencies) are to be inculcated specifically in and for the mission context of today's church?

"Theological Education for Pastoral, Missional Leadership" gives a double focus. First, for the purposes of this discussion, we are focusing on *pastoral* formation as a major objective of theological education. Theological education is much broader, of course, and we recognize and value its role not only for other professionals such as deacons and commissioned ministers (LCMS), both male and female, but also among the diversities of gifts within the laity. Secondly, as is appropriate in a journal dealing with mission matters, we want to discuss pastoral formation in the context of today's mission challenges. This concern, too, is much broader than pastoral formation, as mission leadership also engages the whole church with its diverse vocations as participants and partners in our Lord's great mission to all nations. But pastoral ministry means pastoral leadership in that mission, as stewards of God's gifts of grace that empower God's people to be the body of Christ in the world.

So limiting this specific issue in this way, how do our models–and even our conversations about this topic–reflect and relate to the current challenges and opportunities of *this* missionary age? How do the goals of pastoral formation relate to a world of multiethnic, global, post-Christendom, high-tech realities filled with social and moral questions that folks no longer care to address from a theological perspective? How do we assess and evaluate models of residential education as a valued context for formation as well as other models and delivery systems that were not normative in the 16th, 19th, or even 20th century, not to mention the 1st?

You are invited to submit articles, studies, or observations about "Theological Education for Pastoral, Missional Leadership." *Lutheran Mission Matters* is a peer-reviewed publication, available online at https://www.lsfm.global and in the Atlas (American Theological Library Association Serials) database or as printed journals. The journal is in its thirtieth year of publication.

LMM articles are generally up to 3,000 words in length, although longer articles will be considered. The deadline of February 1, 2023 is negotiable. Articles dealing with aspects

of the theology and practice of Lutheran mission other than this issue's theme will be considered for publication, space permitting. Send your ideas and questions to the editor of the journal, Dr. Victor Raj (rajv@csl.edu), with a copy to the Editorial Assistant at LSFMdesk@gmail.com.

If you wish to submit a manuscript, please consult our submission guideline found at the back the journal or here https://www.lsfm.global/our-journals/

Please let us know soon of your willingness to be a part of this publishing effort.

In Christ's mission to the world, and on behalf of the Editorial Committee,
Rev. Dr. Victor Raj
Editor of Lutheran Mission Matters

Submission Guidelines

We welcome your participation in writing for *Lutheran Mission Matters*. Please observe the following guidelines for submission of manuscripts.

Lutheran Mission Matters publishes studies of missiological issues under discussion in Christian circles across the world. Exegetical, biblical, theological, historical, and practical dimensions of the apostolic mission of the church are explored in these pages. (See the mission statement below.) While issues often focus on a theme, the editorial committee encourages and appreciates submissions of articles on any missiological topic.

Contributors can familiarize themselves with previous issues of *Missio Apostolica* and *Lutheran Mission Matters* at the Lutheran Society for Missiology's website (https://lsfm.global). Click on Our Journals to view PDFs of previous issues.

Book reviews: LSFM also welcomes book reviews. Submit reviews of no more than 500 words. E-mail Dr. Joel Okamoto (bookreviews@lsfm.global) if interested in writing a review.

Mission Statement

Lutheran Mission Matters serves as an international Lutheran forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally.

Formatting and Style

Please consult and use *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th edition for endnotes. See basic examples below and/or consult the "Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide" (http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

[1] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 243–255.
[2] Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. Edwin Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 184–186.
[3] Robert J. Priest, Terry Dischinger, et al., "Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement," *Missiology, An International Review* 34 (2006): 431–450.

References to Luther's works must identify the original document and the year of its publication. Please use the following model.

[4] Martin Luther, Ninety-five Theses (1517) in *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 31:17–34.

Quotations of or allusions to specific texts in the Lutheran Confessional writings must be documented. The use of modern translations of the *Book of Concord* is encouraged. Please use the following model.

[5]Augsburg Confession V (Concerning the Office of Preaching) in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran* Church, ed. R. Kolb, T. J. Wengert, C. P. Arand (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 40.

Direct quotations exceeding four manuscript lines should be set off from the text in an indented paragraph, without quotation marks. Omissions in a quotation should be noted by ellipsis, with an additional period to end a sentence, as appropriate.

Spelling should follow the latest edition of *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. Words in languages other than English should be italicized.

Preparation and Submission

Length: Concise, clear articles are preferred. Manuscripts should not be more than 3,000–4,000 words although longer pieces may be arranged by the editor.

Content: *Lutheran Mission Matters* is committed to addressing the academic community as well as pastors and people throughout the church and involving them in the theology and practice of mission. Use of terms or phrases in languages other than the language of the article itself is discouraged. The use of complex and long sentences is discouraged. Attention should be paid to paragraphing so that the article is easy to follow and appears inviting on the page.

Use of call-outs: *Lutheran Mission Matters* frequently uses call-outs to break up blocks of text on a page and to emphasize important points being made in the article. The author is invited to use Word's Text Highlight Color to suggest words or phrase that may be included in a call-out. The final decision will be made by the editor.

Format: Please submit articles in single spaced Times New Roman 10-point font with 0.25" paragraph indents.

Submission: Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to Professor Victor Raj, editor@lsfm.global. Submission of a manuscript assumes that all material has been carefully read and properly noted and attributed. The author thereby assumes responsibility for any necessary legal permission for materials cited in the article. Articles that are inadequately documented will be returned for complete documentation. If the article has been previously published or presented in a public forum, please inform the editor at the time the article is submitted.

Review: The editors submit every manuscript to the editorial committee for examination and critique. Decisions are reached by consensus within the committee. Authors may expect a decision normally within three months of submission. Before publication, articles are copy edited for style and clarity, as necessary. Major alterations will be made available to the author for review.

Additional Submission Information

Bio: Authors should provide, along with their submissions, an autobiographical description. Please write 2–3 sentences introducing yourself. Please include your title(s) you would like LMM to use, the form of your name you want to be known as. Tell your present position and/or your education or experience that qualifies you to write the article. If you have a head-shot photo that you would like to provide, we will try to use it. Please provide the email address at which a respondent could reach you.

Abstract: Please provide up to a one-hundred-word abstract of your article. The abstract will serve as a first paragraph to provide the reader with the basic intent and content of the article.

Complimentary Copies

Remuneration: No remuneration is given for articles published in the *Lutheran Mission Matters*, but authors will receive two complimentary copies of the issue in which their full-length article appears. Please provide a mailing address with your submission.

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Address correspondence to:

Victor Raj, Editor
Lutheran Mission Matters
14100 Sunland Dr.
Florissant, MO 63034
E-mail: editor@lsfm.global

Submission Checklist:

- o Article
- o Abstract
- o Bio & Photo
- o Call-out Suggestions
- o Mailing Address