



Together in Mission2

The Rev7:9 Intro Manual

MISSION NATION

PUBLISHING

WWW.MISSIONNATIONPUBLISHING.COM

Together In Mission2

The Rev7:9 Intro Manual

Three Biblical Principles and Eight Best Practices
for Reaching Across Cultures for the Sake of Christ's Mission

Contributors : Jon Diefenthaler, Yared Halche,
Tesfai Tesema, Robert Scudieri



*Funds for the publishing and distribution of this manual were partially provided by a gift from the Endowment Fund of **Lutheran Church of the Risen Savior in Green Valley, Arizona** to extend Rev.7.9 resources beyond Florida and Georgia. Risen Savior is a congregation of loving people who have a heart for the Lord and His mission. Though located in a nearly all-Caucasian retirement community, the congregation currently offers significant support to **Iglesia Lutheran Santa Trinidad** – a circuit wide mission to Spanish speaking people in nearby Tucson – as well as 30 other local, national, and international ministries that serve people outside of the four walls of their churches.*

All rights reserved. No part of this publication can be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references are translations and/or paraphrases of the authors.

©2022 MISSION NATION PUBLISHING

Table Of Contents

A Word of Thanks to the National LWML for Supporting Rev7:9	3
Why Rev7:9?	4
The Book of Acts: God's Strategy for Reaching People Across Cultures	7
Biblical Principle 1: God's Mission (Missio Dei)	8
Biblical Principle 2: God's Mission Agents	8
Biblical Principle 3: God's Mission Vision	9
Best Practice 1: The Role of the Holy Spirit and Prayer	11
Best Practice 2: Sharing God-Given Resources	15
Questions for Discussion	17
Best Practice 3: Mission Partnerships	18
Best Practice 4: Dealing with Disagreements	24
Best Practice 5: Using Different Approaches for Different Cultures	31
Questions for Discussion	37
Best Practice 6: Never Lose Hope	38
Best Practice 7: Mission Multipliers	42
Questions for Discussion	52
Best Practice 8: Traits of Cross-Cultural Missionary Leaders in Acts	53
Conclusion	60

A Word of Thanks to the National LWML for Supporting Rev7:9

For sixty years the Lutheran Women's Missionary League has lived out its pledge to "dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us."

Over the last sixty years the LWML has raised millions of dollars in support of missions in the United States and overseas. This has led to the formation of missionary hearts in women dedicated to "willing service, whenever and wherever He needs us."

At the 2021 national convention of the LWML, delegates committed \$88,000 to help Mission Nation Publishing inspire and equip churches to reach an ethnic group different from their own. That grant, supplemented by a \$10,000 grant from the Florida-Georgia District, was enough to begin Rev7.9, a pilot program of the Florida-Georgia District and Mission Nation Publishing. Twenty congregations are experimenting with new and current resources to help inspire and equip them to reach all people with the Gospel.

Our Savior Lutheran in Lake Worth, Florida, is one of those congregations. Between 2010 and 2020, the population of Lake Worth increased by 20%. At the same time, the ethnic population of Lake Worth increased from 9% to 19%. Our Savior's pastor, Jake Roedsens, sees this change as a glass half full. What about you?



Why Rev7:9?

Robert Scudieri

Normal Grace Church was located in a major city. The congregation had been in the same location for seventy-one years. During that time, a lot had changed – the neighborhood, for instance. In 1949, only white, English-speaking people lived in the area. Many walked to church. African American families gradually moved in, replacing the white citizens who had lived there. Just about all members of Normal Grace lived in suburbs and commuted to worship on Sundays. Normal Grace's pastor, who had been there for twenty-three years, eventually retired but agreed to stay on until a new pastor could be found.

The judicatory of Normal Grace was contacted. The mission executive, with the support of the retired pastor, suggested they bring on board an African American missionary. As Christians guided by the Holy Spirit, the members of Normal Grace saw this as an opportunity. The mission executive found a missionary who was available, and outreach to Normal Grace's African American neighbors began. As a result, many African American neighbors joined Normal Grace.

That is when the trouble began. The retired white pastor could not understand why the missionary had to have a separate worship service with music he did not consider appropriate. The new people created more trash, which cost more to remove. New, unfamiliar smells entered the building. One time a door was left unlocked after the African American service. Eventually the African American pastor and members were asked to leave. One year later, the church building was sold to an African American church of a different denomination.

What went wrong? The church was guided to do something for which it had no preparation or experience. The congregation's heart was in the right place, but neither group was prepared for what would come next.

In 1949, 95% of the population of the United States was white, English-speaking people; by 2020 it was 59%. Some churches today may feel threatened by this changing U.S. demographic, seeing it as a glass half empty. We prefer to see it as a blessing and a call to mission action. In the last forty years, as the church in North America has lost its place at the center of the culture and membership has declined dramatically, a merciful God has graciously sent Christian immigrants and refugees to strengthen the church. In the past, missionaries from America were sent overseas. Today, the sons, daughters, grandsons, and granddaughters of those who were converted are returning the favor.

The mission of Mission Nation and Rev7:9 is to inspire and equip churches to reach an ethnic group different from their own. The Book of Acts is a history of the Holy Spirit doing just that. While often seen as a simple history of the expansion of the church, it is more than that. It is a testimony of the fulfillment of the words of the prophets: "For my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7). Malachi predicted, "Then all nations will call you blessed" (Malachi 3:12). These are just two of the many places where prophets in the Old Testament shared the vision that God's church would be a place for every ethnic group. Jesus came to save people from every nation, expanding the grace of God beyond the confines of one people group. Yet His church today is often segmented into monocultural ethnic groups.

As we looked for resources to counter this unbiblical predicament, we identified a program developed by Dr. Ken Behnken, former mission executive of the Pacific Southwest District. Called Together in Mission, this tool helped Anglo churches bring the Gospel to new ethnic groups. When I contacted Dr. Behnken and asked if we could use the program, he readily agreed but told us it would have to be updated.

We created a team to do that, comprised of two missionaries to America with doctorates in mission (Dr. Yared Halche, mission executive in the Southeastern District, and Dr. Tesfai Tesema, missionary in San Francisco for the California-Nevada-Hawaii District) and two Anglos (me and Dr. Jon Diefenthaler, former president of the Southeastern District).

At our first meeting, we recognized that while the original Together in Mission program needed updating, something even more was needed. The original was written from the perspective of an Anglo church. Dr. Tesema and Dr. Halche were the first to say that a revised Together in Mission needed insights from the new people being reached. The plan for an updated version was scrapped, and Together in Mission2 was born.

Dr. Diefenthaler did a wonderful job exegeting basic principles for cross-cultural mission work from the Book of Acts. The four of us spent days discussing the principles and then divided them up. Each wrote one or more papers on the principles and shared them with each other to get feedback. Lively discussion followed. What you have is the result of those discussions. Even though each chapter is written by one of us, it represents the thinking of all of us.

In the Book of Acts, the apostles go into the world to spread the great news of God's love shown in Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. Luke's second book is not just an account of the work of the apostles. It is a recounting of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit's work to show the world how Jesus overcame death and how all humanity now has a path to eternity.

Luke's Book of Acts ends abruptly. More could have been included. But the acts of God's Spirit will not end until the return of the Lord. Today, that Spirit forms other "sent ones," commissioned to bring the Good News to people of every nation — even, or especially, to those who live next door. We pray this manual will bless you as you go on your way.



Questions for Discussion

1. Read Daniel 7:14. Who is the "He" in this text? What is the relationship to Jesus' words in Matthew 28:16-20?
2. Why do you think the new mission at Normal Grace did not succeed?
3. If you had been a member of Normal Grace, what would you have done differently?

The Book of Acts: God's Strategy for Reaching People Across Cultures

Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler

"Transition" is a word that can be used to describe the shape of 21st century Christianity. In the world's Southern Hemisphere, some church bodies are growing by leaps and bounds. Lutheranism in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Madagascar, for example, is fast approaching 20 million members. In North America, on the other hand, we Lutherans are declining right along with other Christian denominations, and with them we are witnessing a rising tide of "nones," persons who claim no religious affiliation.

At the same time, the population of the United States continues to grow, from 205 million persons 50 years ago to nearly 330 million today! Much of this increase has been fueled by the immigration of a variety of other ethnic populations to our shores. Many became Christians in their native lands and have sought to come together for the Word and Sacrament ministry that will sustain them in their faith life and assist them in the Christian upbringing of their children. Others in this same multiethnic slice of the demographic pie, one that includes second-generation as well as first-generation immigrants, form a significant portion of the vast North American mission field that is indeed plentiful and ripe for harvest.

We believe this new reality presents one of the better mission opportunities God is putting in our laps as Lutheran Christians in this new age. Some of our older and largely white congregations are looking for new ways to reach out to their communities. At the same time, multiethnic immigrant groups are in need of space and support for their ministries. Each of us has resources that can enhance the outreach efforts of the other, and when we are able to join forces for the sake of Gospel outreach, all of us are blessed, and above all, the mission God has entrusted to us all as followers of Jesus moves forward in our corner of the world.

The purpose of this first section is to identify the foundational principles that we believe are essential for the forging and the success of such a mission partnership between two different Christian culture groups in a single worshiping community.

The principles are grounded in the mission of God as it is set forth for us in Holy Scripture.

Biblical Principle 1: God's Mission (Missio Dei)

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations notes in its 1991 “A Theological Statement of Mission” that ...

- “Mission begins in the heart of God and expresses His great love for the world.” (see John 3:16)
- “It is the Lord’s gracious initiative and ongoing activity to save a world incapable of saving itself.” (see Ephesians 2:8-9)
- “From beginning to end the mission is God’s, as He acts according to His eternal plan.” (see I Timothy 2:4)

A God-centered view of mission provides a word of caution and encouragement as we come together in order to plan and implement a mission partnership. On one hand, it clearly prevents inflexibility on the part of any of us, discouraging us from insisting that “my way” is the only way — or the best way — for us to work together in a mission partnership. At the same time, this perspective assures us that we are on God’s side, carrying out His will for humankind. Because we are, our labors will not be in vain.

Biblical Principle 2: God's Mission Agents

The chief “agent” whom God chose to carry out His mission to our fallen world is His Son, Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 1:1-4).

It was through Jesus that God entered the world “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Through His suffering and death on the cross, Jesus endured the wrath of God, atoned for all of our sins, and crushed the head of Satan (II Corinthians 5:16-21). The grave from which God raised Him delivers us from the curse of death and gives us the hope of new life both now and in the world to come (I Corinthians 15:55-57).

This is not only the Gospel that must be at the center of our message, but it is the Good News that Jesus has enlisted us to proclaim, in deed and in word, to people in the world around us as well as to each other. By virtue of our baptisms into Christ Jesus, we can see ourselves as God’s mission agents, partnering with Him as He seeks to fulfill His plan of the world’s redemption (John 20:21, Matthew 28:18-20).

For the carrying out of this mission, God has empowered us with the gift of His Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). This is the reason the Spirit calls us together as “church,” as worshiping and mission-equipping communities that nurture us with God’s Word and sacraments and direct our outreach efforts. We cannot expect our mission partnerships to go as well as we might hope and pray unless we come together for this purpose (John 14:27).

Biblical Principle 3: God’s Mission Vision

God’s mission is for every baptized person. It is for all people, without distinction on the basis of race, language, class, or any other earthly criterion. It includes female and male, poor and rich, young and old, healthy and sick, powerful and oppressed. For the first Christians, it began on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem among Jews who had assembled there from all over the Mediterranean world to celebrate one of the major festivals of their ancestral faith (Acts 2:5-13).

From that starting point, it moved into Samaria, a forbidden territory for Jews, as deacon Philip assumed the mantle of God’s mission agent. He was also directed by an angel of the Lord to reach out to an Ethiopian man, whose position at the court of the queen in his homeland had rendered him a eunuch. Their faith conversation resulted in a baptism (Acts 8:1-8, 26-40).

Through the apostles (Peter and Paul in particular), God made it abundantly clear that the promise of a Messiah first made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and obscured for much of his family’s history to that point included the Gentile world as well as the Jewish nation (Acts 10:34-43, Acts 13:44-48).



From the apostle John, moreover, they received a vivid picture of the multicultural complexion of the heavenly multitude of God’s own people (Revelation 7:9-12).

In 21st century America, we are catching another glimpse of the mission vision that God sets forth in His Word. People from many nations and tribes, whose native languages differ from our own, have come to us. The foreign mission field is still in play. But that same field is often right outside the doorsteps of our churches. The multicultural complexion of this vision also suggests that no nation or tribe is more favored by God than another and that no one particular culture is the best. On the contrary, all groups have unique gifts and experiences that can only serve to strengthen our outreach efforts.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did you grow up in the church? If so, what changes have you witnessed since then, both within its walls and in its relationships with the world outside?
2. Is a God-centered view of mission a new concept for you? Do you believe it is biblically grounded? In what ways, if any, does it change or reinforce your understanding of mission and outreach?
3. Where is the "Samaria" in your community? In other words, where is the community that is scandalous, impure, or considered to be an outsider or even the enemy of your community?
4. While God's view of mission is all inclusive, what are the chief obstacles that keep us from putting it into practice? Why are most churches monoethnic and not diverse?

The entire New Testament can be read as God's mission manual for the followers of Jesus in every age. It is the Acts of the Apostles, however, that stands out and it out to be required reading in the forging of any mission partnership. What follows are eight best practices to consider as different ethnic groups minister together to bring the love of God to their Jerusalems, Judeas, and Samarias and to the ends of the earth.

Best Practice 1: The Role of the Holy Spirit and Prayer

Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler

The first Christian mission efforts were empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit and undergirded with prayer.

Some examples:

- “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” and “they were joined together constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:6-8, 12-14)
- “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” and “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching ... and to prayer” (Acts 2:1-4, 42)
- “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them” and “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God” (Acts 4:8, 31)
- “The Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away” (Acts 8:39-40)
- “Then the church ... was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit” (Acts 16:5)
- “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia” (Acts 16:6-10)

The task of carrying forward God’s saving mission to our world needs to be viewed as a team effort. There is the human partnership between two Christian groups with differing cultural backgrounds that may decide to come together for this purpose. The ways in which this partnership is structured may vary. But there is also the one and only divine partner that God has promised to provide for us. This is, of course, the Holy Spirit.



The utmost importance of this same divine partnership is the reason Jesus urged the disciples in Acts 1 not to “leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the gift [of the Holy Spirit] my Father promised.” Unity among human partners is what the Holy Spirit brings as they seek to find way to work together for the sake of God’s mission. When the Day of Pentecost arrived in Acts 2, Jerusalem was crowded with God-fearing Jews from a variety of countries and cultures who spoke many different languages. But with the sound of Spirit’s arrival in the place where Jesus’ disciples had gathered, they all came together, and the ethnic and linguistic barriers between them came down. As a result, the Holy Spirit, working through the preaching of the apostle Peter, led three thousand people to be baptized (Acts 2:41).

This unifying influence of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary for any human partnership between Christian groups, especially those with differing cultural backgrounds, to work successfully. At any time, a relationship that is aimed at “integration” can easily be confused with “assimilation.” Whereas assimilation assumes that one of the partners will take on the cultural characteristics of the other, integration allows for differences, sees them as an asset, and even celebrates them.

Unity in the midst of such diversity, therefore, requires the Holy Spirit to enable us to view one another through the lens of the one Lord Jesus Christ rather than the lens of our own particular culture.

Much of the rest of the Book of Acts makes it very plain that the mission efforts of the apostles and the first Christian church were Spirit-directed. It was the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:29 who led Philip to go alongside the chariot of the eunuch from the foreign land of Ethiopia and helped him understand the Gospel promise set forth in the Scriptures. Once Philip had baptized this man, the Spirit of the Lord, suddenly and without explanation, “took Philip away” in order to preach the Gospel in other towns in the region of Judea (Acts 8:39-40). It was the Spirit once again in Acts 16:6-10 who redirected the missionary journey of Paul away from the Asian province of Bithynia to the coastal city of Troas, from which he crossed over to Macedonia in order to push the mission of God forward on the continent of Europe, beginning at Philippi.

Finally, it was the Holy Spirit who emboldened Peter and the other apostles to testify to the risen Lord Jesus in the midst of the hostile environment described for us by St. Luke not only in Acts 4, but throughout his narrative of the first Christian church. This courage, along with the direction and the unifying influence in carrying out God's mission, was given to the early Christians after they asked God to send the Spirit. They continued in the constant practice of prayer with one another. The Book of Acts is filled with such references. Acts 2:42, for example, informs us that prayer was one of the essential features of the early Christians' life together. And in Acts 4:31, St. Luke tells us that after they prayed about the threats issued by the Jewish Sanhedrin to Peter and John, "the place where they were meeting was shaken," and "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

Prayer is a powerful tool that Jesus has placed into the hands of all of His followers. Engaging in prayer together creates an opportunity for differing parties to put aside their own feelings and fears and to throw open the window to the Holy Spirit to come into their midst in order to unify them, direct the ministry they are seeking to share, and empower them to carry it out together.

As our ascended and exalted Lord, Jesus also promises to be our intercessor, the One who brings our needs and the challenges we face to the attention of our heavenly Father. An effective partnership between Christian groups, especially those with differing cultural backgrounds, is one that undergirds all of its efforts with prayer and trusts in the promises that the Lord Jesus gives to us.

In any such partnership, it is equally important that all parties come to see prayer as a dialogue, one in which we carefully listen to what God may be saying to us as much as we use it as a means to speak to God about what we think we may need from Him. Recommended, therefore, is the practice of "listening prayer." Here, the group employs a passage of Scripture as the platform for receiving the "word" God may have for its members at a particular moment. The members of the group listen to the reading of the passage several times, pausing each time for a period of silence, reflection, and sharing.

The process may start with identifying a word or phrase in the passage that stands out for each person, followed by other steps that may include inviting group members to share feelings or memories that come to mind. This process always culminates in the group sharing with each other what they believe God is directing them all to do for the sake of their mission partnership. A person familiar with listening prayer or spiritual direction will be helpful in introducing this practice to the two mission partners.

Questions for Discussion

1. When it comes to tapping into Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit in furthering God's mission, how does your congregation compare with the early Christian community described in the Book of Acts and with the multiethnic group with whom you are seeking to partner?
2. How do you explain the relationship between prayer and the work of Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts? In today's church?
3. How do you plan to make use of prayer that enlists the help of the Holy Spirit in meetings for the planning and implementation of this mission partnership? What difference do you believe this will make?

Best Practice 2: Sharing God-Given Resources

Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler

For the sake of the mission, the first Christians were willing to openly share their God-given resources with one another:

- “All of the believers were together and had everything in common” (Acts 2:44-47)
- “Barnabas ... sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:32-37)
- “Ananias ... also sold a piece of property ... [but] kept back part of the money” (Acts: 5:1-6)
- “Brothers, choose seven men ... known to be full of the Spirit” (Acts 6:1-6)

There is a human side to the partnership between two Christian groups, especially those with differing cultural backgrounds. A willingness to pool all God-given resources for the sake of moving God’s mission forward is one of its most essential features. In Acts 2:44-45, St. Luke tells us that for the first Christians, working together meant they had everything in common. Nothing was held back as they sold their possessions and goods and then gave to anyone as they had need.

This practice suggests that in forging a partnership between two such Christian groups, “host” and “guest” congregations may not be the best terms for describing their relationship. One group may indeed hold the title to the church building and grounds. But this should not make the other group an unequal partner or simply a tenant that is allowed to use the facilities. The space they share needs to be seen as God’s gift to both groups, given to everyone to express and to put to work for the sake of His mission the unique gifts and abilities with which the Holy Spirit has endowed each of them.

Later on, Acts 4:32-37 emphasizes that “no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own,” and this included lands and buildings. For the sake of the mission, beginning with the needy persons among them, all resources were put at the unfettered disposal of God’s Holy Spirit. In Acts 5:1-6, therefore, the apostle Peter accuses Ananias and Sapphira of giving the “lie to the Holy the Spirit” when they sought to keep back for themselves a portion of the money from the sale of the piece of their own property.

Like these first Christians, any contemporary Christian groups need to be on the same page with respect to their reasons for partnering with each other. Consider whether your motivation is worthy. Is it primarily for the survival of one group or perhaps both groups? Are financial reasons driving it? Is it to help the group with a different ethnicity become like the other? Any of these motivations are not only self-centered but may reveal a lack of trust in God and in each other. The opportunity for mission outreach to the diverse community around both groups can be the only God-pleasing motivation. When this is the case, neither group will want to keep back anything for itself. Both will be inclined to be all in, to seek ways to strengthen each other, and to let the Holy Spirit direct all of their God-given resources to furthering His mission to the community to which God has called them to join forces to reach.

Useful as well for groups with differing ethnic backgrounds is intentionally creating opportunities to learn about each other's culture and thereby hopefully to understand and respect the differences. Senses of timing, ways of dressing, modes of worshiping and decision-making, approaches to parental supervision of children, and roles of food and fellowship meals are important points for conversation between such groups before as well as during the course of their partnership. Unless these are addressed, misunderstandings and conflict over cultural differences will distract from the groups' common mission.

The resources that two Christian groups with different cultural backgrounds need to share with each other also include persons capable of assuming leadership positions who are willing to work together for the sake of their common mission. Acts 6:1-6 alerts us to the need to handle the selection process of such persons carefully and prayerfully. When a need arose among the first Christians for the managing of the daily distribution of food for the growing number of widows in the community, the apostles called for the choosing of "seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom." Recognizing that looking after physical needs of people like the widows in their midst was an aspect of God's mission rather than their mission, they approached the process of choosing and then of consecrating the seven not as a call for volunteers or as an election on the part of the majority of eligible voters, but as one that required prayer in which God would lead them to identify the individuals they would set aside for this ministry.

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever experienced someone like Barnabas who was “all in” when it came to carrying God’s mission forward? Tell us more about this person. What do you think holds so many of us back from being like Barnabas?
2. Acts 5 seems to provide a stark warning about the type of mission partnership this study envisions. What is this warning?
3. How does your congregation select its leaders? How does this compare with the way the apostles selected the seven deacons in Acts 6?
4. What is your plan for selecting a leadership team for this partnership?

Best Practice 3: Mission Partnerships

Robert Scudieri

The multiethnic church at Antioch (Acts 11:19-30) provides a mission partnership model that: 1) included a number of ethnic groups, 2) did not neglect the needs of the monoethnic mother church in Judea, and 3) made use of the gifts of everyone in their midst.

The first lesson we learn from Antioch is the openness to reach all groups with the love of Jesus. The variety of ethnic groups in the Antioch church was not the result of human strategy. Jesus had given the church the Great Commission — to go into all the world to share the incredible news that death had been defeated. Right away the church faced a major crisis. The twelve apostles were still in Jerusalem when persecution began; Christians were killed or imprisoned. The faithful were driven out of their homes, away from their families and jobs. Some became refugees and made their way to Antioch, the third-largest city in the Roman Empire and a military port populated with people of commerce arriving from every nation and culture, along with refugees.

Like most port cities, Antioch was ethnically diverse. Not content to secure a building in which to segregate and hide and complain about their condition, Luke tells us: “Some of them (the Christians from Jerusalem), men from Cyprus and Cyrene ... went out to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20).

Those suffering for their faith shared the Good News with nonbelievers. What were they thinking? After having their lives threatened and being driven out of one city, did they want to go through that suffering again?

They did this because of an impulsion. The Holy Spirit in them could not be contained. Before this, we do not hear of the Gospel being publicly preached to Gentiles. The Gospel took root in Antioch — in fact, it was in Antioch where the followers of Jesus were first called “Christians.”



Every ethnic group, every person deserves to hear the Good News. That this does not happen more is a result of sin. Since immigration laws were changed in 1965, the United States has become more diverse. But many churches have stayed monoethnic. If we can learn to partner with those different from us, like the Antioch church did, the Gospel can flourish.

In the United States ninety percent of congregations are made up of at least ninety percent of the same race, according to Michael Emerson and Christian Smith in *Divided by Faith*. This is not only because of racism. There are sociological reasons. In America, the church has been “disestablished” — separated from the government. When the government or a king ruled, the people were compelled to adopt one faith. Separating religion from the monarch created a religious marketplace where groups reach out to others like themselves. Christians are no exception. We attract people with similar ethnicity and the same preferences for worship style. According to Emerson and Smith, “the United States can be characterized as the mega-mall of religious consumerism.”

Because of past abuses, African Americans, who for centuries were kept out of white churches, developed a culture different from their white brothers and sisters. A typical worship service lasts for two hours; sermons last for an hour or more, and if people in the congregation do not raise their hands and shout out “Amen” and other words of encouragement, it is not “worship.”

When we make it our mission to reach new ethnic groups (our “Gentiles”), we align ourselves with what God wants for all of humanity.

Immanuel Lutheran Church in Whitestone, New York, started as a church for German immigrants. Over the decades, the first generation moved away and a more diverse population occupied their homes. Today, Immanuel worships in English, Hindi, Tamil, and Mandarin. The groups worship apart most Sundays but meet together once a quarter on a special church holiday, such as Pentecost, Reformation, Christmas, or Easter. Worship during those times is in English, except that everyone sings the hymns in their own languages. Sunday school at Immanuel is in English for all children, as families want their children to worship in the language of their home countries but also learn English.

Another lesson we can learn from Antioch is that even as they suffered, their hearts broke for the help needed by Jewish believers in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). The Jewish people suffering famine were not people like them, but people who scorned and detested Gentiles. The mission church provided support to the mother church. The diversity that described the believers at the church in Antioch spilled over to the needs of other parts of the body of Christ, like the Christian Jews in Judea. It was a partnership of need — the need of hungry people and the need of Christians to supply what was needed.

One of the most important questions a church can ask is: “What difference would it make to the people around us who are not like us, who do not know us, if our church disappeared tomorrow? Would anyone care?”

When I was pastor of Christ Memorial Lutheran Church in East Brunswick, New Jersey, we conducted a survey of the economically poor in our area. Most were single mothers, white, African American, or Hispanic. Our members went door to door at a low-income housing project not far from our church and asked, “What is your view of Christ Memorial?” These apartments were only one mile from us; however, not one of the people we spoke to remembered ever seeing or hearing of the church. That sobering moment caused us to question what we could do to help the underprivileged in our town. As we spoke to social workers, school principals, and the people themselves, three needs came to the top of the list: better transportation so the people could get to where the jobs were, better transient housing, and an all-day child development center.

We did not know anything about running a child development center, so we did what you do when you do not know what you are doing – we prayed and formed a committee. After that, two people who had been involved in starting a child development center joined the church. One of our members learned his company was offering large grants to churches that would begin a new service to their communities. This would subsidize our first year of operation. A partnership formed between the church, a local business, and people eager to see a child development center address the needs of community members. But our partnership with God’s Spirit was the most important, as we were to find out.



Our church had a long history of youth ministry. At the time we were renting space in our fellowship hall to a secular preschool. The preschool was a significant part of our income; it helped foot the bill for a large mortgage our church had struggled to pay. But the committee doing the research had no hesitation — we would give the preschool a year's notice and begin planning to open an all-day Christian child development center.

One month before the daycare was to open, after signing up a good number of children, the director with whom we'd contracted changed her mind. But God was

working even in that situation. One of the daycare's board members had read an article about the closing of a center on the other end of town and called to see if there was any furniture for sale. The director of that center told her the daycare was not closing; it had been bought by a synagogue. She explained she was a Christian and would love to serve in Christian childcare. Her daycare had been chosen as an example of quality childcare by Rutgers University; teachers from the university even brought their students to observe her leadership. She became our new director, and Crossroads Child Development Center has now been sharing Jesus with children from middle- and lower-income families for more than thirty years.

The third lesson for a mission partnership is how the church in Antioch made use of the gifts of all its people. No group was on top. Everyone in the church had a role to play. Luke tells us that in the church in Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas (a Greek Jew), Simon called Niger (most likely a dark-skinned African), Lucius of Cyrene (a Greek Gentile), Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch — in other words, he was someone once close to the king who'd had John the Baptist murdered), and Saul, one of the persecutors of these same refugees (Acts 13:1-3). This diversity did not end at Antioch city limits. The multiethnic Gentile church in Antioch was the first base for Christian mission work around the known world. The gifts of Jews and Gentiles were necessary to expand the witness to Christ's saving love to areas far beyond Antioch. And along the way people from new ethnic groups were added.

Many Christian people who come to America have been forged in the fire of persecution, hunger, war, or oppressive regimes. Jason Li is one of those people. When Jason came to the United States from China to get an advanced degree in engineering, he left behind an atheist state that persecuted Christians. The first Sunday he was in the United States, Jason's roommate invited him to go to church. Jason went because he did not want to offend. He told me he got nothing out of that first time at church. But his roommate kept inviting him, and Jason could not say no. After he became involved in a Chinese language Bible study, God's Spirit used the words in Jason's native language to touch his heart. He was baptized and became a member of a Chinese Lutheran church. But the Spirit wasn't finished with Jason Li.

In time it became clear that the Lord was calling this talented young man into full-time ministry. His parents in China had been supporting him in America but now gave their son an ultimatum: Give up Jesus, or we will send no more money. Jason's small church stepped in to cover the cost of a seminary education. Today, Jason pastors a church in Los Angeles and is pursuing a doctorate at Concordia Seminary.

The women and men God is bringing from other lands are gifts to the church here. At a time when the church in America is declining, when young people are rejecting the wonders of the Gospel, the Lord has arranged to suffuse the church in America with people of great ability and great faith — enough faith to leave behind family and friends and old ways of work and living to sow Gospel seeds in a new world.

Will our churches "speak to Gentiles"? When congregations, districts, and the national church partner to reach all ethnic groups, and when partnerships develop between different cultures, we will mirror the church in Antioch, and the church can flourish.

Questions for Discussion

1. Read Luke 19:41-42. What is it that breaks your congregation's heart? Have you ever seen your pastor cry over those in your community who shut out Jesus?
2. What difference would it make to your community if someday your church just disappeared?

3. What partnerships does your church need to form to reach an ethnic group different from your own?
4. What major risk will your church have to take in order to create partnerships?

Best Practice 4: Dealing with Disagreements

Robert Scudieri

"Personal choices in the context of one's social network, not official church teachings, are the primary shapers of beliefs and actions for the religious of the United States." — Divided by Faith, p. 136

Two groups clashed in Jerusalem in 48 AD, fueled by differences in race. Diehard Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, tested by persecution, insisted new believers had to follow Old Testament Jewish laws. They knew their Bible and had put their lives on the line. These Jewish Christians followed the Mosaic food laws and rules about when and how to honor holy days. They definitely knew men needed to go through the rite of circumcision; baptism was not enough. This set them on a road of collision with Gentiles, another social network led by St. Paul, God's missionary to Gentiles.

The cause of this earliest church fight was the predictable result of Jesus' "Go-Mission," God's will for His disciples to go to every nation with the Gospel (Matthew 28:16-20). In other words, people outside the Jewish social order were invited to believe in Israel's Messiah. Greeks, Africans, Ethiopians, and Europeans were being evangelized.

For some Jewish Christians this was reason to celebrate; others were afraid sacred truths would be watered down. The two squared off at the first international church assembly. Jerusalem, where the twelve apostles stayed, was the obvious venue. How could this be resolved? Acts 15 gives us insights and ways for the church today to face disagreements. Those insights are needed now as much as at any time in American Christianity, when churches have the opportunity to embrace so many new ethnic groups. For years missionaries were sent to other parts of the world; now the world is coming to the United States. Will this be a curse or a blessing?

Lately several books have been written to help us understand the tensions that come when a church tries to reach an ethnic group different than its own. One is *Divided by Faith*, informed by a survey of two thousand Christians. The authors found that white evangelicals seem to be one force preserving the racial chasm. In fact, they say that in America nearly ninety percent of those who call themselves “evangelicals” are white. Most do not segregate intentionally; in fact, the majority of Christians desire a church that looks more like Revelation 7:9, where a multiracial congregation surrounds the throne of God, together singing God’s praise. Unfortunately, that scene does not describe most churches in America.



The other book is *The Elusive Dream*, written by an African American woman. Korie Edwards bought a house in a white suburb after she finished her degree in engineering. She joined a white megachurch because it was close and because she was thrilled by a sermon the head pastor had preached about the need to include every ethnic group in worship and the commitment the pastor had made to sacrifice to make it a reality in their church. She left after several years of no integration and no sacrifice on the pastor’s part. She went back to school and earned a degree in sociology to study why Christian churches (white, African American, Latin, and Asian) were so segregated and what could be done.

Are you serious about reaching “all nations” with the love of God? Acts 15 shows us three principles God wants us to understand to deal with problems that may arise because of sin.

Ask how these principles might help your church as you begin to reach an ethnic group different from your own.

Principle 1: God’s church will do all it can to share His love with every ethnic group

The Greek word for “nation” is “ethnos.” God wishes with all His heart for an ethnically diverse family. In fact, God planned this a long time ago. “Simon has described to us how at first God showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this” (Acts 15:13-15).

The family of God does not consist of one particular ethnic group. These verses reflect a few of the many times the Lord God foretold the salvation of every ethnic group:

- “Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him” (Genesis 18:18)
- “May His name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. Then all nations will be blessed through Him, and they will call Him blessed” (Psalm 72:17)
- “Nations will fear the name of the Lord. All the kings on earth will honor Him” (Psalm 102:15)
- “In that day the heir to David’s throne will be a banner of salvation to all the world. The nations will rally to him, and the land where he lives will be a glorious place” (Isaiah 11:10)
- “The Lord will be awesome against them; for He will banish all the gods of the earth, and to Him shall bow down, each in its place, all the lands of the nations” (Zephaniah 2:11)

Peter knew the verses; he did not know the plan. But one day he was given a glimpse. In Acts 10 Luke describes Peter praying on a rooftop in the seaside town of Joppa. We are told he was very hungry. In this multiethnic port city, Jews in Joppa kept as far away from Gentiles and Gentile food as they could. But it was noon, and Peter was hungry. As he prayed, he was jolted by a vision: A tablecloth was descending from heaven with a mixture of foods, both kosher and non-kosher.

In his vision Peter was ordered to prepare the food and eat it. On the tablecloth were both “clean” and “unclean” animals — a violation of the laws of Moses. Poor Peter was disgusted and fearful. He had spent his life staying away from such strange food. His family would have ostracized him; his synagogue family may have stoned him. (It is worth noting most fights that occur when one ethnic group becomes a guest in another group’s church building are in the kitchen. Things do not get put back in their “right” place. Strange smells repulse some members. The kitchen may not be as clean as it was before.) But for Peter, it was not just the invasion of a place; it was a sacrilege, a violation of God’s law.

Christians today are called to reach these “Gentiles,” the “others,” because they are dear to the heart of the Father. “God showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself.” A new day was dawning. The old law no longer had the power to kill. Faith in God’s Christ was now the way to life. This is what God intended from the beginning, and this is what forms the church’s mission today.

We are those people — most of us anyway (those not born as Jews). We Gentiles were “grafted on,” as Paul says in Romans 11:17. In the second chapter of Peter’s second letter, he reminds his Gentile worshipers, “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.” And all this by grace and undeserved love. If we have been chosen by grace, we can see how God can bring other “Gentiles” to Himself. We can love them with grace and undeserved love. God’s desire is for His church to reach every ethnic group.

Principle 2: Learn about the ethnic groups in your community and their stories

Families fight. How do we keep from tearing each other apart? We begin by listening. Find ways to listen to others’ stories.

“The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling them about the miraculous signs and wonders God has done among the Gentiles” (Acts 15:12).

The leaders in Jerusalem were on edge. Word had come that large numbers of Gentiles were joining churches in Antioch. Some wanted to put a stop to this; some wanted to control it. They needed firsthand information. Barnabas was sent as Jerusalem’s initial contact, but as the number of Gentile Christians exploded, Barnabas needed help. He called for Paul to join him. These trusted leaders went before the Jewish-Christian leaders to share what they had heard.

One of the benefits of watching sports on television is the back stories. TV producers know that the game is more interesting if the audience is drawn in by descriptions of the players — how they overcame challenging childhoods, gritted it out in school, or sacrificed to overcome the odds. The same approach can be used to get to know people from different ethnic groups, especially if they have overcome challenges to their faith.

Gagan Gurung is a missionary from Nepal. When he was a child, ethnic prejudice forced his family to flee Bhutan because they were Nepalese. Gagan spent twenty-two years in a refugee camp in Nepal. A Christian missionary, a former Hindu, arranged to baptize Gagan, but at the last minute Gagan got cold feet. He ran into the mountains and hid in a Hindu temple. Later God interceded again in his life: A strange light warmed him and gave him the ability to understand the unfamiliar language he was reading. He opened the Bible and saw God's great love for him. Then God opened a door for Gagan to become a missionary, first in Nepal, then in St. Louis, Missouri. In his new country he led more than fifty Nepalese immigrants to baptism.

When you listen to someone's story, he or she becomes a real person. In one respect, that person becomes a part of you.

In Jerusalem the church leaders listened to Paul and Barnabas. Then "Peter got up and addressed them. The whole assembly became silent" (Acts 15:7-12). The leaders heard the stories and celebrated that increasing numbers of Gentiles in Antioch were becoming a part of the growing church.

When tension seeps out because of the involvement of a new ethnic group, a church has to believe God wants all nations to know His love.

Principle 3: Remove barriers that might prevent a new ethnic group from becoming part of the church

Discarding long-held assumptions might cause pain. James declared to the emissaries from Antioch: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements" (Acts 15:28).

In Antioch this meant "abstaining from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled and from sexual immorality" (Acts 15:28-29). While we would agree to ask new Christians to abstain from sexual immorality, asking them to refrain from drinking blood or meat of an animal that had been strangled would not be necessary. Yet it was necessary for the early Christians, since those things were what made people proper Gentiles.



What about today? What is necessary to require of folks from an ethnic group that might want to join with your church? To avoid fights, each group has to understand and respect the needs of the other.

It might surprise you that the largest LCMS church in Manhattan is an African immigrant church. Christ Assembly on Staten Island was begun when Rev. Phillip Saywayne, a Lutheran from Liberia, approached St. John Lutheran and asked for space for a growing church of African immigrants. The pastor kindly offered them a small space in the school

library. In a short time the number of African worshipers expanded to more than one hundred, outgrowing the library. At that point, the pastor of St. John suggested the Africans become part of his congregation.

An attempt was made to do this. However, the Africans were used to a worship service that lasted for two and a half hours, with at least a forty-five minute sermon, and perhaps one or more preachers after the first. The organ and traditional hymns were unfamiliar to the Africans, who used electric guitars and drums to complement their large choir. The one hundred worshipers dwindled to five: the pastor, his wife, and their three children.

Pastor Saywayne asked permission to return to the library. There, the Africans returned to the style of worship they were used to. This time, when Christ Assembly outgrew the library, the Atlantic District helped them find a building of their own, and the Africans worked to convert an abandoned bagel factory into a worship area with classrooms and offices. The dedication of the new church building lasted four hours, followed by a meal of African delicacies. On Sundays, cars from all over New York now jam the streets around Christ Assembly.

What if St. John had refused to allow the Africans to use its library? Or what if the pastor of St. John had objected to guitars and drums in the African worship? What is truly necessary for the “Gentiles” to follow? How patient, how loving, how forgiving, how generous can your church be?

More and more churches now have the opportunity to reach new ethnic groups. Ideally, welcoming a new ethnic group into your church would be easy. In practice, there will be disagreements. Those times are also opportunities – times to drill down to the core of our faith.



If your church is given the chance to embrace a new ethnic group, be prepared for friction. At those times it might be helpful to 1) find ways to affirm that it is God’s desire that every nation come to the altar of the Lord; 2) seek out ways for the saints in your church to get to know and listen to people outside your ethnic group, hear their needs, and find ways to meet those needs; and 3) be careful not to put a burden on those new sisters and brothers whom God has given you as a gift to show His love and to work together to bring His love to others.

“Ideally, interracial churches would be places where all racial groups can call their own, where each racial group has the power to influence minor and major changes. Where each group is not just tolerated but appreciated.”
— *The Elusive Dream*, page 40

Questions for Discussion

1. Read Acts 8:26-40. This account emphasizes the extreme culture-crossing power of the Gospel. Where have you seen the Gospel cross cultural boundaries?
2. What major risk does your church have to take to reach a new ethnic group?

Best Practice 5: Using Different Approaches for Different Cultures

Robert Scudieri

The apostle Paul was willing to use a variety of Gospel-centered approaches in mission efforts. Sometimes that provoked disagreement.

Read Acts 17:10-14. In Berea, Paul and Silas went to the *Jewish* synagogue, where people “examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true.”

Read Acts 17:16-31. In Athens, Paul went to the *marketplace*, where his audience consisted of *heathen philosophers*. What did he use to begin a conversation about Jesus? “From one man God made every nation of men ... so that men would seek Him.”

St. Paul had an obvious stubborn streak. This was the second of his four missionary trips. This trip lasted from 49 to 52 AD; in every city he made it a point to ask for time to speak to Jews. Just before he entered the synagogue in Berea he had come from Thessalonica, where, as the historian St. Luke tells us, “He preached in the synagogue there, as was his custom.” Luke says Paul reasoned with the Thessalonians for three sabbaths, showing them from their Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. Paul opened their eyes to believe Jesus had to suffer and come alive from the dead. This did not go over well with everyone.

While most in that Thessalonian synagogue found joy in this good news and many accepted Jesus as Messiah, another group was of a different opinion. They agreed among themselves to do away with Paul. The dissenters gathered a mob to attack the house where Paul was staying. The Christians had to hide Paul and spirit him out of town after dark to an adjacent city, Berea. But what was the first thing Paul did? Luke tells us that “they went to the synagogue of the Jews.” Why did Paul persist in going to synagogues?

For one thing, at a young age Paul had become an expert in Jewish beliefs, a Pharisee, a promising spiritual leader. He had been prepared for this. Paul grew up in Tarsus, a “college town,” a place well known as a site where classes in Jewish history, philosophy, and law were taught. In some cases a prominent professor would find a place in public, gather a group, and begin to teach. Paul soaked this up. He told the Christians in Galatia, “I had advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries” (Galatians 1:14). The synagogue was the place to go if you wanted insights on Jewish salvation history and law.

Before 70 AD there was a vast network of synagogues around the world. Jews who lived too far from the Jerusalem temple had nowhere else to go. While the temple was the universal center for teaching and sacrifices, the synagogue became the place for Jews far from the temple to gather to study, worship, and socialize. Before 70 AD, authorized agents called apostles went two by two to designated cities to collect the annual temple offering. They went to that international web of synagogues in twos to protect the offerings from thieves, but also to protect the integrity of the collection.

Jesus also sent out missionaries two by two, but Jesus did not invent the office of the apostle. He did change the office in an especially important way, though.

In Roman and Jewish law, apostles were legal agents, with authority to represent the senders as if the senders themselves were present. They could sign contracts, marry on behalf of the senders, and even sacrifice the Passover lamb on behalf of people who had authorized them as their apostles. But while Jewish groups sent out missionaries, they were never called “apostles.” Jesus’ apostles went with one authority: to represent Jesus, going around the world to bring the power of the Gospel, which could open the door to eternal life. Of the twelve apostles, eleven gave their lives after being tortured in cruel ways. This did not stop them from loving those who disagreed with them.

Missionaries sent out by the earliest church were called apostles; while not members of the Twelve, they were authorized bearers of the power to forgive sin. And Paul is the missionary-apostle par excellence. He knew Jewish culture, and when he needed to, he would shape his message for discipling Jews. But he did not keep that message confined to his neighborhood or his theological community. If he got in trouble when he preached to Jews, it would be worse among the Gentiles.

Acts chapter 17 continues the account of Paul's Gospel efforts. Even when threatened with physical harm, his enthusiasm never diminished. Angry Jews he had offended in Thessalonica showed up in Berea, stirring up trouble. He again was whisked away. This time Paul was put on a boat and brought to Athens.

Paul approached synagogue after synagogue in this major Greek seaport; he also went to their public markets. He repeated what he knew from Tarsus: Go into a public square, gather a crowd, and teach. But these were not Jews. He caught the ear of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, the thought leaders of the day. He provoked their interest so much that he was invited to speak at the Areopagus. This was an outcropping of rock where a crowd could sit and listen to a speaker. He preached; they listened.

Paul preached in different ways to Jews in a synagogue (Acts 13:16-47), rural pagans (Acts 14:15-17), and sophisticated Greek philosophers (Acts 17:22-31). Paul could not use arguments from the Bible with Athenian pagans, but hanging around Athens, waiting for Silas and Timothy, he had observed some things about the spiritual beliefs of Athenians.

There were many religious statues and altars around the city; one he stopped to look at had an inscription that said, "To the unknown God." He had their attention. Here were people who knew the unknown God, a God they worshipped but knew nothing about. Paul talked about this God, explaining who He was: Jesus, whose love drove Him to die on a cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. But death could not keep Him; to show His power God raised Him from the dead. Predictably, there were those who ridiculed Paul, not able to accept that someone could come alive from the dead. And he caught the attention of others who said, "We want to hear more."



Paul's mission model encourages us to treat different audiences in the ways that allow them to consider following Jesus. When Marshall McLuhan said that "the medium is the message," he meant that the way we communicate has much to do with what people hear.

How is your church doing with that? Are you reaching all people or only those "like us?" What if Paul had spoken only with Jews? Would you and I be Christians today?

In America, the Athenian "marketplace" is all around us. Missionaries from other

countries are being sent to bring Christ to the United States. Churches today have opportunities to announce the Gospel to people who in the past we could only disciple by going overseas. How is this being done, and being done successfully? Who could help churches in America reach every ethnic group?

- **Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS)** is a wonderful tool to help churches bring light into the lives of people from different cultures. For eighty years LIRS has shown Christ's love to immigrants and refugees from around the world. More than five hundred thousand people seeking safety in America have seen Christ through this Lutheran organization. You can take advantage of specially designed programs in partnership with LIRS.
- **People of the Book Lutheran Outreach (POBLO)** can be your partner to reach Muslims in America with God's love. POBLO has more than twenty years' experience helping churches share Jesus' love with Muslims. With more than twenty mission fields around the United States, one of this group's missionaries might be located near you.
- **Christian Friends of New Americans (CFNA)** has perfected a tried and true method of helping churches meet the physical and spiritual needs of immigrants. One of its missionaries, Gagan Gurung from Nepal, has helped Ascension Lutheran Church in St. Louis baptize more than forty Nepalese refugees. CFNA is available to help churches organize a ministry to new immigrants.
- **Mission Nation Publishing** is a six-year-old organization that provides resources to churches that want to reach ethnic groups different from their own.

You can also contact your district office for help. Most districts have someone on staff that can lead you to reach an ethnic group different from your own.

A missionary to immigrants in southwest Florida approached Mike Duchene, the pastor of Peace Lutheran in Naples, Florida, with an invitation to support new Spanish-speaking and Creole-speaking refugees. Peace was an all-white, English-speaking congregation in an upper-income neighborhood located near communities where immigrants have settled.

The pastor of Peace was eager for his church to do what it could to help the new Americans. With the aid of a district-supported missionary, leaders from the Haitian group and the Spanish group were identified. To move forward as a unit, the pastor called for a voters' meeting to affirm the congregation's commitment to such a ministry. At the meeting, almost everyone seemed enthusiastic, but when it came time to vote, an older woman raised her hand to offer a qualification. "It is OK if they come here to worship, but they should have to use English."

The chairman of the church's mission board answered with a question: "How many of you grew up in churches where German was still spoken?" A third of the voters raised their hands. The pastor shared his background hearing worship in Slovak in the SELC District, which at one time had been a separate synod of Slovak-speaking churches. People at the voters' meeting laughed. They got it. Lutheran churches in America grew out of immigrants coming to our shores in the sixteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries.

Different cultural groups make up populations in every state and city of America. They are opportunities for Christian churches to show love to the immigrant. As the Bible says:

- "Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt" (Exodus 23:9)
- "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:18)
- "And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:19)
- "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28)

Has the Lord brought an ethnic group different than your own close to you? This is an opportunity for mission.

First, thank the Lord for considering you worthy for this important mission.

Second, pray for God's wisdom, especially for His help in finding a leader from among the new group. This person should be a "bridge," someone who can successfully work in two cultures.

Third, be generous enough to accept changes that may have to be made to accommodate the new group.

Finally, be patient and forgiving. Misunderstandings will occur. That is why Jesus died. Remain in His love for each other and allow the Holy Spirit to help you bridge cultural differences.

Questions for Discussion

1. Read Acts 17:22-27. Where is today's "marketplace," the place where Christians can openly share the good news of God's love?
2. The apostle was a commissioned agent of God who represented Jesus to people. Who does that today?
3. What would have to happen before your congregation would rejoice to reach an ethnic group different from your own?
4. Name two major changes that your church would need to make in order to welcome a new ethnic group.

Best Practice 6: Never Lose Hope

Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler

Despite opposition, setbacks, trials, and tribulations, the first Christians never lost hope that the mission of God that Jesus had enlisted them to pursue would go forward.

The principal character in Acts 21-28 is the apostle Paul. In many ways, Paul's story parallels the story of Jesus' passion and resurrection. Like his Lord, Paul suffered captivity at the hands of enemies that wanted to kill him (Acts 21:30-32). He endured trials before Jewish and Roman authorities (Acts 24-26). He experienced a shipwreck on his way to Rome (Acts 27). But instead of death, the outcome was one of resurrection because God saw fit to preserve this great mission agent's life. "Boldly and without hindrance," as we are told in the narrative's final verse (Acts 28:31), Paul preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Luke, who is the author of the Book of Acts as well as the Gospel that bears his name, concludes both of these New Testament volumes on a note of hope. In each case, he tells us a resurrection story. More familiar to us is his account in Luke 24:1-12 of what occurred on Easter morning at the tomb in which Jesus had been buried, after which he appeared to His disciples and with His ascension concluded His earthly mission.

Acts ends with a less familiar but strikingly similar story of Paul's miraculous survival at sea from a harrowing Mediterranean storm. Luke, who was also on board the storm-tossed, helpless vessel, tells us that after many days during which "neither sun nor stars appeared" and the storm continued to rage, "we finally gave up all hope of being saved" (Acts 27:20). Yet Paul was courageously inspired to foresee life rather than death as the script God had in mind for them.

While the ship ran aground and broke apart, everyone reached land in safety (Acts 27:44). Then Paul went on to Rome, where he continued to preach, teach, and testify that "God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles" (Acts 28:28). In this apostle's ministry, therefore, we see a fulfillment of the mission to which Jesus in Acts 1:8 has charged all of His followers to aspire: "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The hope that we find in both of these resurrection stories is what likewise motivates two Christian groups with differing cultural backgrounds to come together for the sake of the mission to which Jesus has also called them. But as St. Luke reminds us in both of his New Testament volumes, the road to fulfillment of this same hope is one that is likely to test us, and even tempt us, at certain points along the way to “abandon ship.” As was the case for Jesus in Luke’s Gospel and for Paul in Acts, we can expect that opposition, as well as disappointments, setbacks, trials, and tribulations, will challenge our relationships with each other and threaten the mission that has brought us together.

Once again, the narrative parallels in Luke and Acts are noteworthy. Like Jesus, Paul was welcomed into Jerusalem by his friends but soon ran into a buzzsaw wielded by the defenders of the status quo in Judaism. They went after him, unjustly accusing him of defiling the temple by bringing “Greeks” into their sacred space. They also caused a mob scene in the city in which the crowd kept shouting “away with him.” All of this led to Paul’s arrest by the authorities (Acts 21:28-36).

Like Jesus, Paul was put on trial, first by the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-5), whose members set aside their disagreements about resurrection in order to charge Paul with insurrection. Then the apostle was brought before not one Pontius Pilate, but two Roman governors named Felix and Festus. Finally, he was handed off to King Herod Agrippa. While these public officials knew that “this man is not doing anything that deserves death and imprisonment” (Acts 25:25, 26:31), they preferred to engage in political gamesmanship with Paul and their Jewish constituents (Acts 24:25-26, 25:9).

“We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God,” Paul and Barnabas enjoined the disciples who surrounded them on their missionary journey in Asia Minor (Acts 14:22). Trials can come in various forms for Christian groups with differing cultural backgrounds as they seek to link arms on their missionary journey. One flashpoint frequently involves use of the church kitchen. It is said that this is the most sacred space in the church. The rules that govern its use are often unwritten, and conflict can occur if they are not interpreted and understood by both groups. Sometimes the smells of food from one culture may be unpleasant to the senses of the other culture. In addition, there may be differences in understanding what it means to “clean” the kitchen stove, cabinets, and tables following an event that includes a meal.

Another trial, sometimes cloaked with unspoken ulterior motives, can focus on church finances. There may, in fact, be a significant disparity between the incomes of the two groups. One group in this mission partnership may be comprised of middle- or upper-income wage earners. But the other may be day workers or minimum-wage earners, with barely enough to pay rent and provide food for their families. Moreover, the two groups may not be schooled to the same extent in stewardship practices.

These disparities may be obvious to everyone at the outset of the partnership. But when there is a budget deficit, emotions can flare up. Blame for the shortfall may be assigned to one group or the other, and the cooperation between them that is necessary for the mission of outreach to the community is jeopardized.

In general, when two groups with differing cultural backgrounds seek to become mission partners, frustrations are bound to threaten the relationship. For the members of one group, English may not be their “heart language,” and for this reason, their use of it in conversation may not be as good. One group may be accustomed to worshiping without time limits, while the other tends to keep its eye on the clock. Disappointments, moreover, can occur when either group fails to respond to the other’s fellowship invitations significantly or wholeheartedly. Even more discouragement may put the partnership in jeopardy when outreach efforts do not immediately bear the kind of fruit that one or the other partner is expecting. Any of these realities can fuel feelings of anger and even a desire to abandon the partnership.

St. Paul concludes I Corinthians 15, his great chapter on the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection for all of His followers, with these words: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (I Corinthians 15:58).

A “team” relationship between the key leaders of both groups can bolster everyone’s faith in this same resurrection promise that our Lord makes to all of His followers. It may be helpful, therefore, to schedule regular meetings with opportunities for sharing, dealing with specific issues, and agreeing upon ways to work together. If there is a language barrier, one member of the team may be appointed to serve as an interpreter.

Two groups using the same facility might develop a covenant that spells out guidelines for its use in order to avoid the landmine of misunderstanding. Rather than allowing feelings of anger or disappointment to shape the way we treat one another if mistakes are made or expectations are not met, love and forgiveness can become what both partners practice in any situation that needs to be corrected or improved.

All in all, it can be said on the basis of the resurrection stories in the concluding chapters of Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts that whenever we focus on the hope set forth in these narratives and then purposely cultivate it in our work together as mission partners, no trial or form of tribulation can keep from moving forward the mission to which God has called us.

Questions for Discussion

1. The Bible is filled with "resurrection" stories in this life. What are some of them? What resurrection stories have taken place in your lifetime? What purpose did they serve in your faith life?
2. Among all the potential trials and tribulations listed in this section (kitchen, finances, etc.), which stands out for you? When these issues arise in a partnership such as the one this study envisions, how do you plan to deal with them?
3. For a resurrection to take place, something usually has to die first. What may need to die in order for this kind of partnership to live in your church?

Best Practice 7: Mission Multipliers

Rev. Dr. Tesfai Tesema

Anglo and immigrant churches have an exciting call and opportunity to proclaim the Gospel in post-Christian America. The fact is, this call and opportunity have a greater chance of succeeding through a mission partnership that recognizes, values, and utilizes the resources each group brings to this relationship. Mission partnerships are a means for “mission multiplication.”

God has blessed the Anglo church in the United States with many resources, such as a strong biblical foundation, facilities, networks, finances, experience, and the benefit of being a cultural insider. On the other hand, recent immigrants who come to the United States from the four corners of the globe bring spiritual passion, new and fresh theological views, young families, and global mission networks to post-Christian America, all of which are a blessing to older and declining Anglo churches. Valued, appreciated, coordinated, and utilized appropriately, the gifts and resources both groups bring to the work of the kingdom can greatly impact the Western Hemisphere and overseas mission with the message of the Gospel.

In our view, this mission partnership is especially a necessity for both groups in reaching young people, such as second-generation immigrants and younger Anglo generations. Having been involved in second-generation English-speaking immigrant church plantings, I have seen how discipling immigrant children and planting English-speaking churches is of the highest priority for recent immigrants. One of the most beautiful opportunities of such a partnership is the planting of English-speaking multicultural churches and missional communities that reach out across racial, ethnic, and generational divides consistent with the mystery revealed in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (2:11-3:12).

Moreover, recent immigrant Christians who come from a growing and multiplying spiritual environment in the Southern Hemisphere have realized their migration to the Northern Hemisphere is God’s opportunity to engage the host society with the Gospel and energize a declining church with passion for multiplication.

Following are mission principles for multiethnic church multiplication from the Book of Acts:

Mission Principle 1: Valuing People, Cultural Diversity, and Spiritual Gifts

Despite the fact that Hellenists were ethnically Jews, they were culturally different from the Hebrew Jews. Obviously, this was no small thing. The twelve apostles and the community understood the value of maintaining unity and made an effort to build and maintain the partnership between the two culturally distinct groups. The fact that the apostles facilitated the election of seven deacons who were all Hellenistic Jews is a case in point. I am of the conviction that the deeper issue of the conflict may have had to do with valuing and recognizing the spiritual gift of leadership the Hellenistic Jews brought to the partnership.

One mistake Christians can make is valuing material resources above spiritual resources and devaluing other resources. It is not uncommon to hear conversations of facility and money as critical resources with little to no conversation about resources such as spiritual passion, prayer, spiritual gifts, and people. Yet it is interesting that Scripture puts as much — or more — value on spiritual gifts and people in contrast to material resources.

Notice Ephesians 4. Jesus gave to the church spiritual gifts such as the ministry of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, and teaching and then capsuled these gifts in people. “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: ‘When He ascended on high, He took many captives and gave gifts to His people.’ (What does ‘He ascended’ mean except that He also descended to the lower, earthly region? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:7-11).

Valuing kingdom workers as much as other resources such as facility and money, if not more, can also be argued on the basis of Jesus’ call for prayer for the “workers to gather the scattered sheep.” Notice Matthew 9: “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field’” (35-38).

1 Corinthians 12 also highlights spiritual gifts and members of the body (people) as God's plan for the work of the kingdom to advance in the world.

Mission Principle 2: Valuing and fostering public and house worship and fellowship meetings

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42-47).

Organizing worship and discipleship in small groups (home groups) and larger groups (temple) fosters life-on-life discipleship. These formal and informal cross-cultural gatherings will allow multiethnic ministry to pave the way for future multiethnic church planting. Cross-cultural small house meetings provide the opportunity to build trust relationships that energize passion for multiethnic church planting.

Mission Principle 3: Sharing resources to forge an integrated multiethnic church

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:32-37).

Mission Principle 4: Fostering a spirit of cooperation in all areas of life, not just spirituality

"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.' This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:1-6)

These two groups, despite their cultural and historical differences, were successful in building a multicultural church. The goal of building an integrated multicultural church requires unconditional acceptance of the other group with openness to share all the good things God has gifted each group.

Mission Principle 5: Doubling down on family ministry

As noted earlier, the majority of immigrant groups consist of young families. This presents the opportunity for both groups to develop joint Sunday schools. Such a focus on families, especially discipling children, brings a breath of fresh air for churches that are aging while meeting the need of immigrant first-generation parents to disciple their children who are culturally much closer to the Anglo group than they are to their own ethnic parents. Such a family-focused Sunday school partnership will contribute to multiethnic fellowship and ultimately the opportunity to plant multiethnic churches.

Here are some biblical examples of family ministry:

"From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district[a] of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my house.' And she persuaded us" (Acts 16:11-15).

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!' The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole household" (Acts 16:25-34).

Mission Principle 6: Raising up next-generation leaders

In Acts 15 and 16 we see Paul and Barnabas recruiting and training younger next-generation leaders so that the ministry of the Gospel continues when their time is up. Such foresight is critical, since every generation has to evangelize its own and promote ministry multiplication. Such intentional leadership development among second-generation immigrant young people will result in the planting of multiethnic churches that minister to all people of all nations.

Here's an example from Acts:

“Sometime later Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.’ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (Acts 15:36-41).

Mission Principle 7: Focusing on overseas mission

Partnership affords both groups the opportunity to promote the message of the Gospel through church planting across the globe. Recent immigrants obviously have valuable networks and passion that can focus the partnership on world mission.

“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed 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).

Church planting across the known world is also described in Acts 11-19.

Best Practice Models

We can learn from two best-practice models: St. Andrew Lutheran Church (Silver Spring, Maryland) and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (Hayward, California):

St. Andrew called a missionary to reach out to Ethiopians through the children in the community. Missionary Mengesha has been able to attract Ethiopian immigrant children and parents, allowing the Anglo congregation to become increasingly multiethnic. The church’s decision to call an Ethiopian as a community missionary, invest financially, and make its space available has paid off.

Using the multicultural church development chart later in this chapter, St. Andrew is pursuing the assimilated multicultural church model. As time goes on, provided that the outreach continues to be successful, a multiethnic church leadership will need to evolve for the church to truly become multiethnic.

Good Shepherd recognized that its Anglo congregation was consistently declining as the demographic of the neighborhood changed. Increasingly, the church was becoming a church of black and brown people. Its leaders decided to replant the church, incorporating into the congregation the 1.5 generation immigrant population of the Eritrean church that was already meeting in the facility. The leaders also called Dawit Bokra, a young Eritrean pastor, to be the lead pastor of the newly replanted Anglo and immigrant congregation.

The following chart of multicultural church models from *United by Faith* by DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, and Kim might prove helpful:

	ASSIMILATED	PLURALIST	INTEGRATED
organizational culture	reflects one dominant racial culture	contains separate and distinct elements of all cultures in the group	maintains aspects of separate cultures and creates new culture from the cultures in the group
race of leadership	dominant race	representatives of different races	representatives of different races
degree of social interaction	can be high or low	low	high

The LCMS is in decline. In 1971 the LCMS had a membership of 2,772,648. By 2010, that number was about 2,270,921, a drop of about 500,000 people. Today that number is below 2,000,000. Since a peak in the late 1950s, child baptisms are down 70 percent, and adult converts are down 47 percent (LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford; <https://blogs.lcms.org/2017/reversing-lcms-membership-decline/>).

Another study shows that 55% of LCMS members are age 60 and over

(https://www.thearda.com/landing/lcms/D_887_4.asp). Moreover, according to a 2014 PEW study, only 22% of the members of the LCMS are parents. This means less than one-fourth have children needing a Sunday school (<https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/>).

In contrast, about 60% or more of recent immigrant groups are between 30 and 50 years old, meaning the number of children in immigrant churches is equal to, if not greater than, the number of adults. This is true in my experience of planting and pastoring two immigrant churches in this country and from my observation of the Ethiopian immigrant churches in the United States.

This reality brings a huge boost to mission, providing spiritual energy as Anglo and immigrant churches develop joint Sunday school programs. These can lead to second-generation, Gen Z, and millennial Americans creating a new LCMS consisting of diverse cultures.

The immigrant community brings to the church in North America a powerful spiritual passion. Immigrants and refugees are not just here so that the Anglo church can reach them. They're also here so that they can reach host culture people.

Daniel Yang, a second-generation Hmong church planter who is currently the director of the Send Institute at the Billy Graham Center, calls this concept the arrival narrative. This is different from what many characterize as a decline narrative that describes the North American church. Yang suggests a need to shift from a strategy of "we're going to reach them when they get here" to the powerful narrative of "immigrants are here to assist the North American church to reach this land with the Gospel."

Yang uses the movie *Arrival* to illustrate his point. *Arrival* is about aliens from another universe that arrive on Earth in twelve pods located in twelve cities around the world. The aliens aren't invasive or aggressive, but naturally, the humans are suspicious about their presence.

The government calls on the help of linguistics expert Louise Banks. Through a scientific team, Louise is able to establish communication with the aliens based on a new language the aliens offer. Their language sounds like human language but comes in the form of complete thoughts and symbols rather than words. After months of learning to communicate with the aliens using this language, the humans finally are able to ask the aliens why they came to Earth. The aliens reveal that they came to offer a weapon. This throws the humans into a panic, and they immediately stop all communication with the aliens. But Louise isn't convinced this weapon is destructive.

She goes through the range of meanings for this idea of "weapon" and concludes that the aliens actually want to give human beings a tool of some sort to use for good. It's important to note that throughout the movie, Louise dreams in this new language and begins having visions of scenes from the future. These scenes become so vivid that she can even think in the future in order to correct the present. She eventually discovers the tool the aliens came to give was this language, which reflects an evolution of higher intelligence. The aliens want to gift humans with this tool to allow them to make better decisions by knowing the future. They then reveal that in three thousand years, their species will be threatened, and they will need the help of humans to survive this threat. With this new human evolution and this new way of thinking, humans would be able to help the very species that first helped them.

Western countries used to send missionaries into other continents like Africa, Asia, and South America to share the Gospel and plant churches in obedience to God. Little did they know that some years down the road these same Western countries would need to be evangelized themselves.

In the 1980s, Lesslie Newbigin gave a series of lectures at Princeton centered on the question, "Can the West be converted?" A lot of the energy devoted to this project since then has assumed that the West would be converted by the West. But what if God wants to use the world to reach the West? What if other nations aren't here just so Americans can reach the nations? What if through immigration — politics and border security aside — the nations are here in North America so that God can use them to reach North America?

I know Ethiopian, Asian, Hispanic, and Indian church planters who are asking themselves, "How can I reach white Americans?" in the same way white Americans used to ask, "How can I reach Asians, Hispanics, and Indians?" You see, that's a different missional narrative than the declining church narrative.

Interestingly, the January 2019 edition of *The Economist* magazine featured an article titled “Camel, Meet Needle – Missionaries from the Global South Try to Save the Godless West.” Christians from the global South view North America as a mission field, and the quicker such realization takes place among Anglo Christians, the quicker and the stronger the mission partnership will become a priority.

So, what is a missional narrative? And how does this affect mission multiplication?

A missional narrative is a lens or a motivational story used to mobilize people for the Great Commission and is found at the intersection of the Missio Dei (the mission of God), the personal or group background (history of a church), and the context in which they are called to do ministry. Below is a chart that illustrates this concept:

PERSONAL GROUP BACKGROUND	MINISTRY CONTEXT	MISSIO DEI	MISSIONAL NARRATIVE
children of Boomer churches; institutional memory of the 1940s and 1950s	denominations/ church growth revivalism	cultural transformation	church decline narrative
children of communities that have experienced generational marginalization	grassroots, diversity and inclusion	reconciliation	reconciliation or justice narrative
children of enlightenment, Deists, transcendentalists, existentialism	public square, activism, nature	new creation, Imago Dei	common good narrative
children of recent immigrants and refugees, third culture navigators	language-specific, second generation	diaspora/elect exile	arrival or fulfillment narrative

Questions for Discussion

1. What is our mission, and how can we multiply that mission?
2. How did St. Paul create mission multiplication?
3. What is the mission narrative at our church? What could it be?
4. How would outreach to a new ethnic group help us with our mission?

Best Practice 8: Traits of Cross-Cultural Missionary Leaders in Acts

Rev. Dr. Yared Halche

In a time when mainline Christian denominations in the West seem to be in a downward spiral, the need for a new leadership outlook is crucial. Immigrant missionaries can play a significant role in keeping these churches' legacy and channeling the host churches' historical energy toward new mission engagements and opportunities. Three key questions beg to be answered: Are these churches open and ready to align intentionally with the new people groups and accept and adopt integrative leadership? Are immigrant missionaries ready and contextually equipped for such a unique collaborative missionary task? Do the new missionaries to America reflect traits of the cross-cultural missionaries in Acts?

We will look at the Book of Acts from a missionary leadership perspective and draw lessons that are applicable to our context:

Perspective 1: The community of God's people

In the Book of Acts, significant spiritual events, including leadership development and empowerment, took place when God's people worshipped together as a community — praying as a group, reading the Scriptures, and fellowshiping with each other. This community was a spiritually charging space where missionaries were nurtured and dispatched.

Right after Jesus' ascension, the disciples went back to Jerusalem and stayed together in prayer and worship, as we see in Acts 1:14: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers."

While in prayer they were led to appoint Matias to succeed Judah Iscariot:

“Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection. So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, ‘Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.’ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:21-26).

The Lord called Paul and Barnabas to reach out to the Gentile world with the Gospel as the church in Antioch remained in worship and fasting.

“Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:1-3).

John Piper noted in [*Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*](#): “Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more.”

The first key to mission work in Acts is a focus on the actions of the Holy Spirit among people gathered around Word and Sacrament.

Perspective 2: A culturally diverse leadership

Soon after its establishment, the early church adopted a culturally diverse leadership. With the choice of the seven deacons we see a diversified leadership from among the Hellenistic and Hebrew Jewish Christians. Acts 6:5 clearly states that deacon Nicolas was “from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.”

Evangelist Philip’s preaching in Samaria and his later encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch and their marvelous conversation sheds light on the expansion of mission beyond the conventional cultural boundaries.

The call and commissioning of St. Paul entails a great deal of a contextually adaptive leadership move. Paul was born from Jewish parents and raised in Tarsus, acquainted with Greek knowledge and civilization, and entitled with noble Roman citizenship. The Lord mightily used such a diverse fabric of humanity and experiences to enrich His kingdom in the Greco-Roman world. The Lord said to Ananias, "This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). This is a direct reference to the role God was calling Paul to play as a mission leader who would be culturally sensitive to Jewish, Greek, and Roman contexts. When the Holy Spirit instructed the church at Antioch to commission Saul and Barnabas for their mission work, God was implementing His plan for the Gentile mission, as recorded in Acts 13:1-2.

The Lord used a different culture — God-fearing Gentile believers such as Cornelius — as a bridge to expand His work among the Gentile world (Acts 10 and 11). Migrant expatriates and second-generation leaders such as Apollo, Priscilla, Aquila, Timothy, and Titus were key figures in launching and enhancing such diverse worker-missionary moves into new territories.

In particular, St. Paul embraced an emerging generation of diverse church leadership and channeled their spiritual and mission energy for the mission for which the Lord had equipped them.

Evangelist Luke recorded this in a vivid way when he described the recruitment of young Timothy: "Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" (Acts 16:2-5).

In Acts, God builds a diverse mission force to reach all people with the Gospel.

Perspective 3: Commitment to mission growth and multiplication

As the Lord sent out His Word into the soil of the Gentile world, that Word took root, bore fruit, and multiplied. This is repeatedly mentioned in Acts 2: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (verse 41). Later, we read they were "praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (verse 47).

With the addition of seven deacons, the Gospel spread and disciples multiplied: "So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

As persecution broke out in Jerusalem, the disciples were forced to scatter. God used this disaster in the history of the church to spread the Good News:

"Those who had been scattered preached the Word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:4-8).

The trend continued, as we can see in Acts 11:19-22:

"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed 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. They preached the Gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith."

You may never have thought of persecution as a factor in the multiplication of the Gospel, but eventually, outreach to more and more areas outside Israel became accepted strategy to multiply mission fields. This is happening still today. Christian refugees from many nations, forced from their homelands, are coming to many rural and urban areas of America.

With the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1-2, the door to the Gospel's preaching and mission growth was widely opened among various people groups and vicinities in the Roman Empire.

The Ethiopian Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, provides an example of how mission growth takes place in our country today. The church began its ministry by providing spiritual care for first-generation Ethiopian Christians. As its ministry grew, the church decided to affiliate with the Southern Baptist denomination and gave birth to daughter churches in surrounding areas. The mother church continued to grow and moved to three different locations, each time seeking larger building accommodations.

The movement was not only physical. It was also missional. Recently the church assumed ownership of Orchard Hills Baptist Church, a once-thriving Anglo congregation in the Southern Baptist denomination. Its facility housed more than 1,300 worshipers. As the Ethiopian church struggled with lack of space, Orchard Hill's senior pastor entered into a prayerful conversation with the leadership of Orchard Hills. An agreement was reached for the Ethiopian Baptist Church to assume ownership of the building, and Orchard Hills would continue its worship in the chapel.

The Ethiopian church agreed to closely work with the older English-speaking congregation and provide it with ongoing pastoral care and ministry. The youth pastor, an Ethiopian born and raised in California as a mission leader, assumed a dual pastoral call, taking on the responsibility of serving his second-generation Ethiopian congregation as well as the older English-speaking congregation. Such an intentional partnership in mission not only keeps alive the legacy of God's people, it also strengthens the church's ability to exert stronger influence in the community by demonstrating spiritual unity among the people of God.

Partnerships like this can multiply the ministry of congregations, even those with very different cultural backgrounds. More importantly, the mission of Jesus is multiplied, just like in the book of Acts.

Perspective 4: A ministry of encouragement and mentorship

The early followers of Jesus shared mutual concerns and support; this was a fundamental part of their faith. Believers shared their life together; there was no needy among them. By building on this premise, the apostles continued their own ministry of encouragement and consolation, particularly among emerging leaders.

The progress of this ministry of encouragement was evident by the selection of seven deacons, as we saw in Acts 6. Here the apostles, through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, laid the foundation on which the future of church leadership stands. The emerging Gentile leadership developed to take on Gentile evangelistic mission, as we see in the case of Stephen (Acts 6, 7) and Philip (Acts 8).

As the name implies, Barnabas was a man of encouragement and consolation (Acts 4:26-27 and 11:22-24). He reached out to Paul and encouraged him in the early phases of his ministry, as we see in the following account:

“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people” (Acts 11:25-26).

Their missional relationship grew into a strong alliance that furthered the work of the Gospel in the Gentile world.

The apostle Paul also engaged in intentional leadership empowerment as he encouraged emerging Gentile missionaries and pastors in newly planted faith communities. He took Timothy with him on mission journeys, supporting and walking alongside the multiethnic young man. His letters to Timothy and Titus, as well as others, can be seen as early forms of “distant education” — accounts of mentorship and support provided for young leaders in the mission fields. Furthermore, Paul’s mentorship and ongoing supportive ministry was not limited to individual leaders. His approach was one of deep conviction, concern, and encouragement. His farewell note to the elders in Ephesus in his final hours with them is a profound example of a leader exemplifying love and kindness for the flock in his care (Acts 20:14-38).

Following the apostle Paul’s example, others encouraged believers and teachers in faith and ministry. Priscilla and Aquila, a Christian couple and traveling evangelists, encouraged Apollos by clearly showing him God’s way:

“Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. Apollos had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great passion and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. He vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah” (Acts 18:24-28).

Such ministries of encouragement and mentorship continue today too. For example, Mekane Yesus Church in Maryland was in dire need of partnership. The minute I informed the pastor about the possibility of a potential partnership with nearby Trinity Lutheran Church, he immediately went straight to the church, parked his car, and interestingly met the pastor as he was leaving. After a short while, both pastors believed the Lord had a plan for the congregations to join hands and serve Him together.

Mekane Yesus and Trinity formed a strong mission alliance to carry out the mission of Christ on the border between Washington, D.C., and Maryland, the area where they are called to serve. It is stirring to see an “older” congregation mentoring and tenderly taking care of the “younger” one and to see the concern of the younger church for its elders. This mutual love and concern ensures God’s saving work will continue and grow.

Questions for Discussion

1. Read Acts 11:19-26. What was it about Barnabas that made the church council in Jerusalem choose him to do cross-cultural mission work?
2. What is the best way to equip missionaries in a culturally diverse context?
3. Why is spiritual formation important in cross-cultural mission work?
4. What are the criteria you would use to evaluate your cross-cultural mission?

Conclusion

Robert Scudieri

It is questionable that the original title of Luke's second book was "Acts of the Apostle." In fact, many believe the first title was simply "Acts" or "Acts of the Holy Spirit." Acts was written in the early first century, some estimate around 60-90 AD. It is, above all, the earliest history of why and how the church grew from a small group of Jewish believers to a diverse body of worldwide adherents.

We hope you have appreciated seeing the three principles that governed the growth of the earliest church: the mission is God's mission, using women and men He chooses; the chief agent in this mission is, and remains, Jesus, who is continuing His work through His Holy Spirit; and the mission is for all people of every race, culture, language, and place.

In this manual we held up eight best practices, following the ways in which the Spirit used the early apostles to bring the greatest news in the history of the world from a backwater village in Judea to the power center of the known world. We believe the lessons lived out in Acts apply to today's challenges in the United States.

Acts is a testimony to how the Holy Spirit molded his church to become the multiethnic body Jesus announced. This was evident even from Luke's first book, especially in his account of Jesus' early life.

It is important to remember that Jesus was born in Judea but as a two-year-old became a refugee in Egypt. When his family returned to Israel, they went to Galilee, the most diverse area in the holy land. Why? What is the message we should take from God's plans for His Messiah to grow up not in St. Louis but in the Miami of Israel? Isn't it the message that "God wants all people to be save and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4)? Certainly, the disciples needed to learn that lesson. The church in the United States needs to relearn that lesson. It will not be an easy task; racial preferences have a long history.

Dolly Millender is a case in point. Dolly was sixty years old when she spoke to delegates at the 2001 National LCMS Convention. She had grown up in Gary, Indiana. She told the delegates how as an African American girl she chose to join a white Missouri Synod church. The pastor was a kind man who had ministered to her family even though they were not members of his church.

Dolly learned to play the organ as a young girl and from time to time helped out by playing for the full-time organist. Dolly loved her church. She was confirmed in that church. However, shortly before confirmation, the pastor called her into his office and said, "Dolly, I have good news for you. The Synod is starting a church for Negro families, and you will be one of the first members."

"I knew what was happening," Dolly told the convention. "There were members in the church who did not want to take Communion after me." Dolly left her church to play the organ for the new mission, but she never forgot the hurt. Years later, the white and black churches merged. Dolly played the organ for the new diverse congregation and continued for decades. She never forgot the hurt, but she never forgot to forgive.

Today God has given us an opportunity, an open door; more foreign-born people live in the United States than at any other time in our history. Many of these immigrants have never heard the Gospel. Is that why God brought them to us? Many others were faithful Christians in countries where Christians were persecuted. They were tested by fire and bring their strong faith and experience sharing Jesus on their home mission fields. They are gifts to the churches in America — including your church. How many more Dolly Millenders are outside your door, waiting to be welcomed as an asset to your mission?



We hope this resource will help your church open doors of faith to all whom the Lord has placed on your doorstep. "For this is what the Lord has commanded us, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 13:47). Today, the ends of the earth come to us.