

NEW Harvest

~ Equipping mission planters to multiply the harvest ~

Center for U. S. Missions

June 2005

published quarterly Vol. 5, No. 2

Ostrich Evangelism

by Mike Ruhl

Jesus' ascension into heaven (Acts 1:1-11) includes a powerful reminder of the multi-faceted mission field which we are called to reach with the good news of the Gospel. There Jesus declared: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

His words remind us of the different contexts in the mission field. The *Jerusalem context* is local community mission, where your congregation is located. The *Judea context* is the regional mission field, perhaps your state or region of the country. The *Samaria context* is the cross-cultural mission field: generational, ethnic and worldview groups within your reach. And the *ends of the earth context* is the global mission field.

Since the mission field is multi-faceted, the church must not assume the "ostrich position" when it comes to understanding the world that Christ has commanded it to reach. We cannot "bury our heads in the sand," ignoring immigrant migrations, post-modern shifts in thinking, ethnic group values and other cultural trends.

This kind of knowledge and insight into contiguous culture can be frightening, somewhat overwhelming, and even disturbing to the existing, internal culture of a Christian congregation. Yet our call to witness demands that we become *culture watchers*. Missional congregations know the importance of exegesis. Certainly spending quality time exegeting

Scripture is indispensable to the confession and life of a congregation. Likewise, quality time spent *exegeting the culture* is indispensable as well.



In fact, the Old Testament contains a splendid example of culture watching. The writer of 1 Chronicles describes how the tribes of Israel aligned with David in his battles against Saul. When he gets to the men of Issachar, he describes them as those who "understood the times and knew what Israel should do." (1 Chronicles 12:32)

How can the church use the Scriptures to address the world (multi-faceted mission field) if it does not know what is going on in the world? How can a congregation reach effectively into its immediate community

if it does not know, understand or embrace (without compromising the Word) the culture of the community?

The mission of the church is empowered by a dove, the Holy Spirit, that lifts eyes to the mission field, not by an ostrich, with head buried in the sand. And the Spirit is called Counselor and Comforter. The Spirit brings both of these gifts to God's people as they engage in culture watching for the sake of mission. ■

Ken Behnken to Retire

Ken Behnken, founding Executive Director of the Center for U.S. Missions, will retire June 30. Since mid-2004, when Mike Ruhl was called as Executive Director, Ken has assisted the transition by serving as Director of Training for the Center.

Throughout his career, Ken has served the church in many capacities. After pastoring congregations in Texas, California and Minnesota, Ken returned to California to begin over 20 years of service in missions on the staff of what is now the Pacific Southwest District. As immigration and cultural diversity increased in the District, Ken helped plant 78 culture-specific congregations in 15 different

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The Changing Role of Demographics

by Ken Behnken

For years, a demographic study has been a useful tool for church planters, determining characteristics of people living in a neighborhood and giving data regarding income, education, books read, music enjoyed, types of homes, size of families, ethnicity, and more. Since demographic segments tended to have like qualities, this data helped the planting team contextualize church activities and outreach strategies in accord with specified characteristics and life styles.

Walker Smith, president of Yankelovich Partners, a market research and consulting firm, notes that recent studies indicate that demographics have become increasingly less important. According to their study, subgroups are emerging within traditional demographic groups. The rise of mixed-race, or multiethnic, individuals is an example, as is the shift between married and single households. In the 1950's, 80% of U.S. households were married households. Today married households are only slightly more than 50%.

Smith continues, "Adding to the difficulty of categorizing consumers is their refusal to be stereotyped by

race, age, education, and income level. Americans living in a multicultural society no longer fit neatly into one demographic profile that lets companies *or the church* [italics mine] determine lifestyles and the best way to reach them."

Demographics can still help church planters study their communities. However, a deeper look is needed. Focus groups, community service groups, school personnel, and children's sports groups can provide more in depth understanding of who we are trying to reach. Community involvement and building one-on-one relationships puts real faces on paper-bound demographics.

A recent article in *Entrepreneur* magazine claimed "generographics" will be key to future successful marketing. Created by Phil Goodman, president of Generation Transitional Marketing of San Diego, this marketing strategy includes generational mindsets. Goodman believes that websites will be retooled using buzzwords geared to

the major generations--seniors, boomers, Gen X and echo boomers (millennials). Products and services will be described with these buzzwords, and images will be used that fit their generation, so they will buy products and services in accord with their generational mindsets.

What does this have to do with the church? Rather than one-size-fits-all web pages, think how effective it could be for church websites to have a home page with general information, but also have icons, descriptions, and pictures that link to pages relating to different generations. Generational pages could introduce programs, books, music, and interactive blogs on topics of interest to that generation. Gospel presentations and personal testimonies could be shared specifically for that age group. A person from each generation could edit pages relating to their generation to keep them fresh and relevant.

Marketers realize their products do not appeal to all generations. They find a niche, communicating to, and developing products for, particular group. The church, on the other hand, has a message for all people. Our task is to deliver that message so that it strikes a chord in a personal life. Jesus was a master of contextualizing the Gospel message for his audience, whether a crowd of 5,000, a Samaritan woman, a woman caught in adultery, a tax collector or his disciples. The church too must know the people with whom they will share the Gospel message so that the message connects with a life and the Holy Spirit can bring about change that lasts eternally. ■



New Harvest is published four times a year to provide information and encouragement for the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the United States.

Center for U.S. Missions, 1530 Concordia West, Irvine, CA 92612-3203; 949-854-8002 x1780; fax 949-854-6854; email: john.dostal@cui.edu. Mike Ruhl, Executive Director; Ken Behnken, Director of Training; John Dostal, Coordinator; Karen Kogler, New Harvest editor.

The Center, a partnership of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Mission Services, Concordia University, Irvine, California, and the LCMS North America Mission Executives, exists to provide research and training for mission work among unevangelized people in the U.S.

Research

A picture of new worshipers is revealed by a random sample survey of 300,000 U.S. worshippers conducted by Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce in *Beyond the Ordinary: Ten Strengths of U.S. Congregations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004). The findings, as reported by Lyle Schaller in *The Parish Paper*, were as follows:

1. In the typical congregation's worship service, one-third of the worshippers have been attending five years or less and 2% are visiting for the first time.
2. New people are not long-time members. They are people who often do not think and act like us.
3. What new people experience in worship makes all the difference. The first and most important magnet to draw new people is the worship service.
4. Meaningful worship happens in congregations of all sizes. Small churches can welcome new people and grow.
5. The majority of America's churches (63%) have fewer than 125 worshippers in a typical service. About one-third of those attendees are new in the last five years, the same percentage as in large churches. ■

Quote

"Today's consumers no longer fit into yesterday's molds."

—Chris Penttila
"What Lies Beneath"
Entrepreneur, May 2005

Book Review

Out of the Question ... Into the Mystery by Leonard Sweet, Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, 2004.

People living disconnected lives is the most pressing problem in the world. The life-giving source of the Christian faith is an honest relationship with God through Jesus Christ. But this life-giving source has been reduced to a declaration of adherence to a set of beliefs.

This engaging book addresses the challenges and opportunities of mission work among unchurched, post-modern Americans. Sweet will challenge your vision of mission by comparing the Reformational paradigm (keyword is *Come*; inward looking, concerned with being and preserving the 'pure church') and the Missional paradigm (keyword is *Go*; outward focused; concerned with Gospel communication and redemptive relationship with a post-Christendom, anti-Christian culture).

God's call to mission is a call to re-orientation, to be relationship-based and world focused. Orient means *east*. Western Christianity has become belief-based and church-focused. It will now learn from the East (Asia, India, Tibet and China) in moving beyond the rational to the mystical and transformational.

This is a call to move back to the basics of evangelism. John Baker Batsel said, "If you would speak to others with authority, you must first speak to God with intimacy."

Relationships recede when we *miss the person and only get the point*. ■

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language groups. He developed and wrote *Planting Missions Across Cultures*, a resource book available through the Center, to help congregations give birth to ministries with other culture groups.

Ken's many gifts have been a blessing to the Center for U.S. Mission. His teaching skills have blessed hundreds.

All who know him are familiar with his ready smile, personal warmth and his gift of encouragement.

His administrative skills support his staff and the Center. And his passion for the Gospel and for people shines in all he does.



"How grateful we are for the tender yet tenacious leadership which Ken Behnken has brought to the creation of the Center for U.S. Missions," says Mike Ruhl. "He has served in a *prophetic* capacity, speaking forth the vision and will of God for the church to be organized and intentional in training church planters and for expansion of mission work in these United States, and he has served in a *pioneering* capacity, bringing the Center into a functioning reality, bristling with meaningful training, ministries and developmental opportunities to advance the mission of Jesus Christ."

With gratitude for his excellent service, we pray God's richest blessings on Ken's retirement. ■

News From the Center

Coming Soon

Mission Planter Institute, July 24-29 in Irvine, California. Registration deadline is June 19.

Friendship Ablaze! Congregation Outreach Resources are scheduled to be available on our website (free download) or in paper copy for purchase by July 15.

Igniting Congregations Events
Sept. 23-24, 2005, Detroit, MI
Nov. 4-5, 2005, Orlando, FL
Feb. 17-18, 2006, San Diego, CA
April 28-29, 2006, Houston, TX
Details on our website
www.centerforusmissions.org under "seminars."

Training Materials

Train staff and lay leaders using the library of articles on our website www.centerforusmissions.org. Click on "resources," "resources by topic and type" for links to articles:

- Church Planting (15 articles)
- Entrepreneurship (6)
- Evangelism (9)
- Healthy Churches (16)
- Leadership (5)
- Leadership (regional/national) (4)
- Mission Plan (1)
- Mobilizing Members for Mission (6)
- Missional Church (12)
- Reaching Postmoderns (3)
- Staffing (3)
- Team (3)
- Urban Outreach (1)

(Some articles are included under more than one topic.)

Links

<http://www.adherents.com/>

Researchers can use this site to answer such questions as "How many Lutherans live in Florida?", "What are the major religions of India?" or "What percentage of the world is Muslim?" It presents data from both primary research sources (government census reports, statistical sampling surveys, organizational reporting, etc.) as well as citations from secondary literature which mention adherent statistics.

http://www.thearda.com/FR_Index.html?/archive/Description/CMS71CNT.html.

Use this site for denominational statistics from Glenmary. Note that some statistics are more current than others.

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Center for U. S. Missions
Concordia University
1530 Concordia West
Irvine, California 92612-3203