

NEW Harvest

~ Equipping mission planters to multiply the harvest ~

Center for U. S. Missions

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Unique Aspects of "Big City Evangelism"

by Mike Ruhl

Peering out the window of an Airbus A320, I gaze down at Phoenix, Arizona, with mile after mile of homes, neighborhoods and bustling commerce complexes. Phoenix is in the fastest-growing county in the U.S. by actual number of residents. The countless red and gray rooftops are an exciting reminder of the enormous fertility of urban/metropolitan mission fields in our big cities. At least three aspects of "big city evangelism" make it unique.



vinced of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and teachings when so many attractive (and potentially deceptive) options exist? Remember that while

Christ's appeal went first to the Jews of his day, it went far beyond any one ethnic, religious or social group. After his resurrection, the apostles and others took the Gospel to Greeks, Romans, Africans and Asians; to the lowest slaves and the most

powerful rulers. The Gospel was, and remains, for all people.

1. Population Density. In big cities, hundreds of thousands of people live in close proximity. Living close together, people get their understanding of other people, cultures and their messages (the gospel included) directly from personal observation, rather than mass media. The secular city comes to its understanding of Christians by the same personal observations. As Christians move into increasingly-crowded sites, they proclaim the gospel also through their lives, manners and morals, in an "instant" fashion. Pulpits are augmented by relevant, sanctified lifestyles which communicate Gospel truth in authentic fashion.

2. Human Diversity. Big cities are diverse in race, ethnicity, language, economics, and, of course, religion (spirituality). How can people be con-

Remember also that only a relatively small portion of those who heard the Gospel received it as truth for their lives. The intelligentsia of Athens could not bring themselves to believe in a God who lived, died and rose again. While the Apostle Paul had greater "success" in evangelizing "lower classes of people," these communities too had issues of hypocrisy, infighting and unbelief. Evangelism will continue to be a significant challenge in diverse American cities. For effectiveness' sake, we should use all the tools at our disposal to proclaim a faithful Gospel: multilingual services, ethnic music and meals, and a deeper understanding of the social conditions so necessary for under girding a person to repent, confess and believe.

3. Urban Media. Big city evangel-

ism is deeply impacted by the urban media. Some churches earn the labels of 'shepherds' and "stewards," while others are labeled as "proselytizers." Authentic urban evangelism must "stay its biblical course," and not weaken the witness by uttering a politically-correct sounding Gospel. City congregations simply need to evangelize as though television cameras were following every move. For if the message is "good" enough to draw attention on the evening news,

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Friendship  Ablaze!

Friendship Ablaze!, a major new resource for churches who wish to help their members share Jesus with their friends, is available free at www.friendshipablaze.com. Click on "Downloads" to open, download or print the materials. You can also participate in discussion forums with other users and give us your feedback via the website.

The comprehensive materials include planning guides, sermon outlines, Bible studies, PowerPoint presentations, with supporting material on schools, prayer and assimilation. ■

Seek the Peace and Prosperity of the City

by Ken Behnken

A majority (52%) of people today live in metropolitan areas. Yet sadly, rather than planting new churches in the city, the church is deserting our cities and running to the suburbs. How can we bring peace to our cities if Christians are not living there?

God dictated a letter to Jeremiah, a letter to the Jewish leaders taken in chains to Babylon when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem. This letter gives us tremendous insights into how God wants us to be in ministry in the cities where he has placed us.

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."... For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. (Jer. 29:4-7,11)

These words are still excellent guidelines for reaching the city. We need leaders in the city who are willing to do the following:

Settle down

We need leaders whose families are willing to enter into life with the city, willing to call the city their home, to raise their families, make friends, shop, plant gardens, live the Gospel, share the Gospel, and use their gifts and talents to help others improve their lives. When others rush to the suburbs, they become more determined to call the city their home. They settle down and let the Lord use them to touch other people in the city.



Increase in number

These are leaders who love the city and pass on that love to their children. They teach their children the culture of the city so that the city becomes a part of their lives. They teach their children that the love of Christ is learned and caught through their lives. The only way the city will be conquered for Christ is if we increase the numbers of Christians in the city. Families pass on the love of the city to their children and their children to their children. Missionaries are born and raised in

the culture of the city.

Seek the peace

True peace comes in knowing the One who says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." (John. 14:27) The presence of Jesus Christ is in the city "in us." Luther reminds us that we are to be "little Christs." Peace comes to the city as the leaders, their families and friends let people see Jesus Christ, the True Peace, in and through their lives. As Christians work for the "shalom," the peace of the city, by practicing their faith and living their peace in Christ, True Peace comes to the city.

Pray

These commands of the Lord are no easy task. This is not something that just flows naturally from our human nature. Pastors and leaders working in cities around the world will tell you there are hardships, sufferings, difficulties, disappointments, and struggles to raise a family in the city, but they will also tell you of the rewards and blessings. All city missionaries are quick to let you know how important prayer is. "Without God it is impossible." "With God all things are possible." (Matt. 19:26) Constant communication with the Lord of the City makes city ministry possible. His desire is to prosper the work of his missionaries in the cities. The Lord's promise is that when the work of the Lord prospers, the missionaries and their families prosper. The Hebrew word for prosper is "shalom," not meaning financial wealth but happiness and peace.

Pray the Lord of the Harvest for workers in the city. Pray the Lord of the Harvest to use you to seek the peace and prosperity of your city. ■

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

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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.

Staff Updates

Two gifted people have been led by the Holy Spirit to join the Center's staff recently.



REV. GLENN LUCAS, left, Director of Training, will coordinate all the mission

training seminars and online courses for the Center. He brings a rich background and wealth of experience as a parish pastor and Mission and Ministry facilitator for the Pacific Southwest District. He is a dynamic communicator, coach and trainer and also has authored software database programs for churches and schools. He and his wife Donna have three sons.

MICHELLE CONNOR, (photo right, upper) became Coordinator for the Center for U.S. Missions on July 31. She has served in the international mission field in Kazakhstan and is a commissioned Director of Christian Education. Her sparkly, spiritual voice greets and guides all who contact the Center for United States Missions.

As Coordinator, Michelle provides administrative oversight and support for all activities of the Center. Her enthusiasm for missions, cross-cultural ministry, and for serving the Lord are great gifts she brings to the task.

A third staff member, **KEIKO YOSHIMURA** (right, lower), has assisted the Center for some time, first as a volunteer, then in an internship, and now as employee.

Keiko ("KAY-koh") is from Saitama, Japan, a suburb of Tokyo, where she taught English at a Lutheran School for 11 years. A desire for full-time ministry led her to earn her MA in Theology and Culture at Concordia University, Irvine. In addition to assisting in the Center's office, she also works for Concordia's School of Theology and for a Lutheran church and preschool in international student ministry and Japanese ministry.



Links

1. Leader's Insight: Informed, but not Transformed (an article by Brian MacLaren, Leadership magazine contributing editor, at [www.christianitytoday.com/leaders/ newsletter/2005/cln50815.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/leaders/newsletter/2005/cln50815.html).) "Too many 'educated' Christians have gotten lots of information but are the least Christ-like." This article has a lot to say about ministry in the city or wherever we teach and preach.

2. "Transforming the City" at <http://www.telchar.com/telchar/theocity.htm>. Twenty-five urban experts, working in four international teams, created this working document, focused on two important questions in urban ministry today: What does it take to be effective in urban ministry? How do we commu-

nicate what we know about urban ministry?

3. Urban Cross-Cultural Church Planting Models by Jerry L. Appleby at http://www.ethnicharvest.org/links/articles/appleby_models.htm

Book

Theirs Is the Kingdom: Celebrating the Gospel in Urban America by Robert D. Lupton. This story of a pastor who moved his family into the city is over 10 years old, yet the same situations still occur in inner cities everywhere, the same issues still exist, and the solution is still found in Jesus Christ. This book helps to challenge the mindset of American suburban Christians.

Research

"Mission is no longer about crossing the oceans, jungles and deserts, but about crossing the streets of the world's cities.

"In 1900, urban dwellers comprised less than 10% of the world's population. Today, sprawling urban centers are home to 50% of the world's people and will continue their rapid growth in the foreseeable future. This in itself places the cities of the world at a strategic forefront of global mission and evangelism. This is especially true of the United States where 90% of the population lives in an urban setting."

from *A Theology as Big as the City*, by Ray Bakke, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997: p.13.

Upcoming Seminars

Groups Ablaze—(SG)², Strategic Growth Through Small Groups; 9 am Fri. Oct. 14 to 2 pm Sat. Oct. 15; Presenter: Ed Kruger; Our Savior’s First Lutheran Church, Granada Hills, CA; \$30 per each participant; plus an additional \$70 per congregation if outside the local circuit.

Igniting Congregations—A focus on increasing worship attendance; for healthy congregations who wish to grow. Offered regionally: Sept 23-24, 2005 in Detroit; Nov. 4-5, 2005 in Orlando; Feb. 17-18, 2006 in San Diego; April 28-29, 2006 in Houston.

Behavioral Interviewing

Presenter: Dick Gahl
Jan 30 to Feb. 1, 2006
Pacific Southwest District

See www.centerforusmissions.org.
Click on Seminars.

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certainly it will draw attention on the sidewalks and streets of our neighborhoods.

The future of “big city evangelism” will not unfold in the privacy of club-style churches or safe home environments. Cities, where large numbers of diverse people live their lives in public ways, are a contentious and exciting public forum for competing ideas and philosophies. Authentic Christians do have a heavenly mandate to speak what they believe. The city church has such strong, saving words, coupled with loving actions and integrity. And that evangelism strategy will always speak convincingly to urban communities of America. ■

Adapted from an article by Roger Johnson on CityVoices.com

Mission Quiz Questions

What do the states of Texas, California, New Mexico, Hawaii, and the District of Columbia, have in common?

The majority of residents in these states are of some ethnicity other than non-Hispanic white (Anglo).

What do the states of Maryland, Mississippi, Georgia, New York and Arizona have in common?

These four states are “next in line” (currently 40% non-Anglo) to have resident populations with a non-white majority population.

Which ethnic groups are inside the RDA (Reasonable Drawing Area) of your congregation? Are you planning to reach them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

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