

Congregations in Transition by Jotham Johann Jhang

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Is your congregation in transition? If your answer is “No,” please see me and I will probably try to convince you that she is in transition. For the vast majority of you who do indeed see transitions in your congregation, you will probably agree that much of the community around your central facilities is also in transition.

Today, in the age of the ipod, tivo and videophone, we realize that the changes in our communities occur just as fast, if not faster, than rapid advances in technology. Who knows what device you will be holding in your hand in 5 years? And who knows which communities will be living and moving around the walls of your congregation?

Various studies of churches have revealed that the average life span of a congregation is around 85 years. They also reveal that congregations often die when they can no longer relate well to the communities around them. In congregations that live well beyond 100 years, we discover that factors such as extraordinary leadership and, more importantly, their ability to relate well to their communities, help them get beyond the age issue. Being able to meet and engage people “where they are,” rather than “how we would like them to be” is another key ingredient to the effective ministry of a congregation.

When Jesus was here on earth, there is no doubt that He related well to those around Him. He certainly met them “where they are.” Witness His words to Zacchaeus when He reached out to him: “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” (Luke 19:5).

Christ was willing to meet Zacchaeus where he was, as the sinner that he was, as the greedy tax collector, as the community outcast. Despite the disapproving glares from the crowd, Jesus ate with Zacchaeus and spent time with him at the sinner’s home, in his comfort zone, in his culture.

Is your congregation ready, willing and able to meet members of her community “where they are?” If so, you can go ahead to the next item in this issue. If not, we would be privileged to assist you.

The Center for United States Mission has a new area of ministry focus called “Cross-cultural and Multi-ethnic Outreach.” As the Associate Director for this focus, I urge you to consider our new seminars and workshops in this area.

“Removing Cultural Barriers,” a new workshop which will be available soon, will assist congregations in transition understand the changing communities around them and engage them more effectively. Other new seminars and workshops are being prepared at

the present time, including “Reaching out to Hindus” and “Reaching out to Buddhists.” Of course, we still offer the popular “Planting Ministries Across Cultures” to congregations that are at a higher degree of readiness for ministering to their changing communities. We also offer consulting and coaching for those interested in or planning to do cross-cultural and/or multi-ethnic outreach.

Please stay tuned as the Center continues to develop ways to assist your congregation in transition. ■

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