

Unfinished

A publication of The Mission Society

Fall 2012 | 53



The least reached in your back yard

Examining an unprecedented opportunity for the American church



Cover photo: Cross-cultural ministry no longer requires a passport. Opportunities are all around us.

Join us in The Mission

When you partner with The Mission Society, not only do you join us in The Mission to offer Christ to the world, but you join us in embracing our core values.

Our vision

The kingdom of God advancing among all peoples bringing about redemption and reconciliation through Jesus Christ

Our mission

The Mission Society exists to mobilize and deploy the body of Christ globally to join Jesus in His mission, especially among the least reached peoples.

Our core values

INCARNATION

The Mission Society seeks to minister to others by following the example of Jesus, who fully entered the human experience. In our cross-cultural ministry, we are committed to learning the local language, living among the people, ministering in culturally appropriate ways, demonstrating love for God and neighbor, and disciple-making among the nations.

INTEGRITY

The Mission Society desires to reflect the holiness of God in all we do. Personally and corporately we endeavor to make the character of Christ manifest in our lives and our ministry.

PASSION

We are not complacent about the One who matters supremely or the work God has given us to do; nor is our ministry prompted simply by duty, or even obedience. Our life together and our ministry are marked and motivated by passion for God and God's mission. We are passionate about Jesus, our mission, and all those involved in the journey with us.

PEOPLE

The Mission Society believes that people are of primary value. Because people matter to God, people matter to us. Our cross-cultural workers, staff, donors, volunteers, prayer partners, and those we seek to reach are of greatest worth to us. Because "relationships" and not "formulas" are our method, The Mission Society exudes an entrepreneurial culture where every member is encouraged to discern and pursue God's unique direction for his or her ministry.

PARTNERSHIP

Since it is the kingdom of God that we are called to express and extend throughout the world, our ministry is about more than ourselves and our organization. We believe that working together enhances our witness and strengthens our ability to make disciples of all nations. The Mission Society therefore pursues partnership in ministry endeavors – with churches, nationals, Christian organizations, and individuals.

PRAYER

It is only through the power and presence of the Spirit of Christ that we can live up to the high and holy intentions embodied in these values. We acknowledge our absolute dependence on God and seek both His guidance and His strength each day. Therefore, The Mission Society is a praying community.

Table of Contents

"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."
—1 Thessalonians 2:8, NIV



Think: cities

4-15

"If Christians want human life to be shaped by Christ, then churches need to go into cities," says Manhattan pastor, Tim Keller.

Think: universities

16-19

More than 723,000 international students from more than 200 countries studied in the United States during 2010-2011.

Think: the next generation

21-27

A large percentage of 16- to 29-year-olds in the U.S. view Christianity with hostility and resentment, says the Barna Group research.

Perspective

Your least reached neighbor U.S. Christians live in one of the world's fastest-growing mission fields

Think: cities

Following the call to the cities, some Mission Society families are ministering among U.S. urban communities.

Renovated hearts

After moving into a downtown area, Katheryn Heinz sought to be an instrument of transformation and was transformed herself.

Diversity and the kingdom of God

Is diversity all that it is cracked up to be? Serving in a small city among refugees has given missionary Alex Davidson a new perspective on this commonly held ideal.

Befriending our Muslim neighbors

One missionary tells what he learned by leading some U.S. Muslim friends in studying God's Word.

Think: universities



Men and women from least reached nations may be on a campus near you

Think: the next generation

Our nation's next generation might be among the least reached. Here is what one church is doing about that.

Neighborhoods, nations, and the next generation

For Grace Fellowship Church, going after the next generation is just one part of a larger strategy that is missional through and through.

2	News	28
	Teaming up to reach Kenya's least reached	28
	The Mission Society launches "Team 2:2"	29
4	<i>Unfinished</i> wins award	29
	The Mission Society consecrates 13 new workers	30
	Through the economic uncertainty	31
6	World	32
	Be with them How to do local ministry the 'Jesus way'	
10	Church Ministry	34
	Blind spots In your neighborhood, who are you not seeing?	
	Calling	36
14	Break out the flatware! Open your home for community.	
	Follow us:	
	 @tms_world	
	 facebook.com/themissionsociety	
	Read our blog at themissionsocietyblog.com	

21

26



Your least reached neighbor

U.S. Christians live in one of the world's fastest-growing mission fields



Anywhere you go, there are individuals, population segments, and people groups who are “less reached” than their neighbors.

It was January, 2001, and we had just launched what is now the Church Ministry division of The Mission Society. The good people of Trinity United Methodist Church in Opelika, Alabama, had invited us to present the Global Focus Seminar to their annual church leaders’ training meeting.

At one point during the seminar, we were explaining the concept of “unreached people groups” and showing that most of them were found in a geographical region known as the “10/40 Window.” One of the participants interrupted to make a startling observation. He was the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship campus director at Auburn University.

“Among the student body at Auburn,” he said, “there are people from 70 of the unreached people groups found within the 10/40 Window.”

I was stunned. Opelika is a little town with only about 25,000 residents. But less than 10 miles away was a university that was home—at least temporarily—to some of the least reached (and no doubt hard-to-reach) peoples on

the planet. If Jesus followers in Opelika wanted to share the gospel with 10/40 Window unreached people groups, they didn’t have to get a passport or buy an airplane ticket. They just had to drive to Auburn!

The least reached among us

The Mission Society was established in 1984 to take the gospel “where it had been least heard or heeded.” Two years ago, we adopted a new Statement of Mission that placed a strategic priority on joining Jesus in His mission, especially among the “least reached” people.

The original Joshua Project criteria for declaring a people group “unreached” was that it was less than two percent Evangelical Christian and less than five percent Christian adherents. While that was an admittedly arbitrary percentage, the assumption behind it was sound; namely, that the believing community within a people group could not be reasonably expected to evangelize the rest of their group without outside assistance if less than this minimal percentage were witnessing

Christians.

While the distinction might seem only a matter of semantics, we have chosen to use the language of “least reached” rather than “unreached” people groups. The reason is simple: “least reached” is a relative term, one that applies in any country or area of the world. Anywhere you go, there are individuals, population segments, and people groups who are “less reached” than their neighbors. The implication of our mission statement is that whether you live in Louisville, Kentucky or Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, it’s incumbent on Christian disciples to identify and then reach out to those who have had the least opportunity to “hear or heed” the gospel.

The opportunities before us

The February 2012 issue of *Leaven - A Journal of Christian Ministry* (published by the Religion Division of Pepperdine University) carried an article, “The Mission Field Next Door: A Status Report on North American Missions.” In it the authors observe, as many have, that North American Christians today live in

the midst of one of the world’s fastest-growing mission fields. The article outlines theological, cultural, and church realities that define the missionary challenge and opportunity faced by the church right here in the United States.

In relation to the cultural realities, the authors note that the environment in which American Christians minister today is radically different than the one our grandparents or even parents faced. “(F)or us to be faithful to God’s mission now we cannot escape becoming cross-cultural workers. Ministry in America today is cross-cultural.” The authors go on to highlight six cultural factors that call for a cross-cultural approach to ministry on the part of the American church.

1. Urbanization – Two generations ago, 75 percent of the population of the United States lived in rural settings. Today, 75 percent live in cities. Churches have not kept pace with this massive change, either culturally or geographically.

2. Pluralism – America has moved from *E Pluribus Unum* (from many, one) to a nation of many tribes. Whereas in the past Americans tended to downplay our nation’s diversity—for better or for worse—today our differences are celebrated, as well they should be. However, this presents the church with a major challenge. Unless it learns to minister cross-culturally, these differences will present major barriers to sharing our faith.

3. Globalization – In a word, the world is moving to North America. A few years ago, I might have needed to document this. Today, that’s unnecessary. I daresay that your city or town or neighborhood is living proof of this fact. Tragically, most congregations have hardly begun to address the opportunities, much less the challenges, presented by the increasing diversity of our population.

4. Segregation of the poor – While the poor have always existed in America, “(w)hat is changing in America is the concentration of the poor into ghettos and the character of their poverty,” the authors write. “The layers of brokenness among America’s poor recently won us the distinction of having the most disadvantaged poor children of the developed nations.” The article goes on to note that congregations that are reaching the poor with the good news are, sadly, the rare exception rather than the rule.

5. Decline of institutions – With the near universal access to information, people today are less dependent upon—and committed to—the institutions that used to guide their thinking, define their community, shape their lives, nurture their faith, or command their allegiance. As a consequence, the church needs to reimagine what it means to be “faithful to its ancient faith” while at the same time being relevant to its contemporary neighbors.

6. Post-Christendom – From the time of Emperor Constantine until very recently, the church has held a privileged position in the Western world. One does not have to be a particularly astute observer of the times to know that this is no longer the case. “In a culture now being described by many as neo-pagan,” write the authors, “the church is often disrespected and marginalized.” Unless the church simply throws in the towel and slips into ever-increasing irrelevance, it will have to learn to cross an enormous cultural chasm in communicating the gospel to a world that is largely ignorant of its teachings, indifferent to its doctrines, and hostile to its proclamation that “Jesus is Lord.”

Together these cultural trends present an extraordinary challenge and an exciting opportunity to the North American church.

The Life who leads us

This issue of *Unfinished* addresses some of the ways in which we can begin to respond to our least reached neighbors, whether rich or poor, black or white, young or old, members of the Daughters of the American Revolution or recent immigrants. But no effort to reach the least reached in our back yard will have any prospect of fruitfulness unless it reflects what is arguably the single most important characteristic of effective cross-cultural ministry: it must be truly incarnational.

Before the Apostle John declared, “This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son,” (John 3:16a, *The Message*), he made the amazing statement that “the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14, *The Message*).

The American church will have little impact on the least reached among us until it leaves the safety of its sanctuaries (what an interesting word we use to describe our places of worship!) and gets meaningfully engaged with the most unreached segments of the population—unless it “moves into the neighborhood” of American youth culture; moves into the neighborhood of our teeming cities; moves into the neighborhood of the immigrants and refugees who are trying to make new lives for themselves within our borders; moves into the neighborhood of the Saturday night clubbers and the Sunday morning golfers.

I’ve visited several churches that posted signs at the exits of their parking lots announcing, “You are now entering the mission field.” It’s true. May God help the American church to discover and embrace the least reached in our own back yard. ☩

The Rev. Dick McClain is president and CEO of The Mission Society.



Think: cities

Cities are all the rage. In the United States, some recent metrics even point to downtown areas gaining in population more than suburbs. Housing trends show that people like walkable, mass-transit-connected living environments.

In the meantime, inner-cities have become a hotspot for missions. During the 2010 Lausanne III conference in South Africa (attended by 4,000 church leaders from 198 nations), Manhattan pastor Tim Keller told the crowd that if Christians want human life to be shaped by Jesus Christ, then churches need to go into cities. Among city dwellers, he indicated, are young adults; people of great influence, like filmmakers, authors, and businesspeople; the poor; and “unreachable” people (people are more open to the gospel in the cosmopolitan city, noted Keller, than in their hometown).^{*} Cities are also home to many ethnic minorities.

And seminaries are taking note of this ministry opportunity, developing schools and programs for urban studies. For example, among the offered courses in Fuller

Theological School’s urban studies track, are Complex Urban Environments; Incarnation and Mission among the World’s Urban Poor; and Homelessness, Congregations, and Church Partnerships.

Following the call to the cities, Mission Society families are also moving into U.S. urban areas. Not only is their presence and ministry being used by God to shape these communities, but these cross-cultural workers are also being transformed by their new friends and environments. In the following, three missionaries tell how they have been formed and what they have learned as they have made their home in downtown and refugee communities in U.S. cities.

**Reported by The Christian Post, October 21, 2010*

“The state with the fastest growing immigrant population isn’t California or New York, but North Carolina. Number two: Georgia.”
—reported by Erich Bridges in “Reaching the unreached in the urban center.” Shown: Charlotte, North Carolina.



Katheryn Heinz still remembers the day she and her husband, John, closed on the house in Lexington, Kentucky's East End. "We had just walked in. My purse was still hanging on my shoulder. I peeled a piece of old paint off of the mantel and thought, *What have we done?*" The 98-year-old house was in great disrepair. Even people in that neighborhood advised the Heinzes not to buy it. Now, five years later, this newly renovated home is, for the Heinzes' neighbors, a place where Saturday morning pancake breakfasts are served and a place to find help and prayer. For seminary students and local church leaders, it's a place of reflection and learning. For all, it's a place to be heard, a place where change can happen. And, Katheryn tells, maybe one of the biggest renovations has been in her.

Renovated hearts

Experienced and trained in urban ministry, Katheryn Heinz moved with her family into Lexington, Kentucky's East End. As she sought to be an instrument of transformation, she was transformed herself. Here, she tells what the city has taught her. It's a message for every cross-cultural minister, at home or abroad.

By Katheryn Heinz

When we moved into our home in the East End five years ago, I came with a seminary degree, missionary training, experience living in South Central Los Angeles, an internship with addiction recovery in South Chicago, and several years working in public health and free community healthcare. I had been an active participant in local politics that affected members of this neighborhood and had studied community development practices. I had met many people who lived in this neighborhood and thought of them as friends. My husband is a true partner in ministry and also a seminary graduate with lots of experience in various urban ministries. We moved in with a passion for Christ and His people, willing to do whatever it took to bring a tangible message of love, good news, and healthy community. Despite our education, our experience, our passion, and our faith, we quickly found that we also came with a great naiveté and illusions of control and understanding.

"We knew we had to go through the steps of learning, even here in the United States, even in a city we had lived in for years, in a neighborhood that we had 'served,' with people we 'knew.' ... The cultural differences run very deep."

Humility

I could easily tell of all the ways I have been changed by the love and hospitality of our neighbors. Even today, a sweet neighbor stopped by unexpectedly with some homemade calabaza (squash) soup, still hot from the stove. I could easily tell of how our neighbors have taught us far more about community than I could have ever offered them. I could easily tell you of how my understanding of poverty and need has changed so drastically that it hardly resembles the definitions that I brought with me. (How much of the need that I previously saw was my own need to feel useful and needed or a reflection of my own bloated lifestyle?) However, I think that my most profound change has been one of humility.

We knew we had to go through the steps of learning, even here in the United States, even in a city we had lived in for years, even in a neighborhood that we had "served" with people we "knew." We thought we spoke the same language



If you would like to know more about the Heinzes' ministry, see *Unfinished* issue 44 on our website, themissionsociety.org, or visit <http://tinyurl.com/issue44UF>. Shown, Katheryn Heinz with neighbor, Tim.



When we looked to the "true experts (those who are from here)," writes Katheryn, "I realized that the world I thought I saw was not the world lived out among my neighbors." Clifford Nutter (above), one of those "true experts," is a dear friend to the Heinzes.

and had roughly the same culture, but discovered that the cultural differences run very deep and are only shown to those who recognize that they need new eyes to see and new ears to hear. It wasn't until we wanted to learn and looked to the true experts (those who are from here) that I realized that the world I thought I saw was not the world lived out among my neighbors.

Complexity

I went through the steps of learning a new culture at first, because I knew that was what I was supposed to do. Now I do it, because I know of no other way. Issues are no longer simple, no longer clear-cut. We didn't move into a neighborhood. We moved into a family. Drug dealers are uncles and brothers trying to pay child support or young boys with concerned parents trying to find their way into manhood. Prostitutes are hurting women who are trying to survive the only way they know how. A vacant house is a collection of communally shared memories, only to be touched with great respect. The perceived food shortage, at least in our neighborhood, is much more complicated and confused than simply a lack of fresh vegetables or money. A scene of violence on the street is always about more than the violence, as it plays out a lesson on the world unseen, a primer of the rules of the street. Even though no household is completely untouched by these difficulties, none are defined by them. I have found that at no point in seminary or ministry experience was I

ever given new eyes to see and ears to hear this particular neighborhood. You just can't get that from the outside. No matter how much I knew or thought I knew, it meant nothing without first earning the trust of the people and understanding the cultural context. This was necessary before we could ever make a difference.

Community

The difficulties of urban situations are very real, but as I was willing to learn the fullness of my surroundings, I shed my illusions of having all the answers. As an admittedly broken person, I became more real. We've been told that the way we moved in was very appreciated and that this neighborhood doesn't need "another great white hope." What this neighborhood needed was someone who was willing to understand, to listen, to bring a fresh renewed vision of real hope, and to join in a mutual search for answers to problems. I needed to discover the deep, hidden parts that hold the beauty and pain of a people. I needed to join God as He works to unfold His divine promise to redeem the pain and unlock the beauty, so that He overcomes all.

I know that I'm different after five years, because when I moved in, I could have more easily shared "my great accomplishments" in urban ministry. Now, I couldn't possibly bring myself to do such a thing. Who can so neatly draw a line of what is mine, yours, God's? I can only say that I remained as faithful as I could and discovered my place as

"I have walked alongside several friends over the years, and can bear witness that their lives have been completely transformed. As one of them says, life is now 'more than good.'"

we moved in was very appreciated and that this neighborhood doesn't need "another great white hope." What this neighborhood needed was someone who was willing to understand, to listen, to bring a fresh renewed vision of real hope, and to join in a mutual search for answers to problems. I needed to discover the

The Mission Bootcamp is a missions discipleship curriculum that the Heinzes have developed for the church. It combines biblical study, theology, missional practice, and cultural understanding with interactive, practical group learning. Over the past four years, more than 100 people have gone through variations of the Bootcamp experience to become more equipped to live out their faith in the world.



a neighbor, a friend, a learner, an encourager, a disciple, a servant, and dropped any idea that I was anyone's "savior."

From this vantage point, I have walked alongside several friends over the years, and can bear witness that their lives have been completely transformed. As one of them says, life is now "more than good." It is not simply that they found a stable home or a stable job, although they have. They discovered who they really were, and they were strong and open enough to allow God to do that delicate heart surgery to repair their brokenness. I don't think that

would have happened if I weren't willing to go under the knife myself. That kind of healing radiates powerfully from our innermost being to every extension of our life. I came in as an educated expert with good intentions, and my neighbors shaped me into a humbler, wiser servant and disciple who better understands that the power of God is not only stronger than my own, but it is the only thing that can heal the brokenness I found, not only in my neighborhood, but also in myself. ✠

John and Katheryn Heinz seek to help the traditional downtown church navigate the changing urban culture, and to learn how to effectively communicate the gospel in word and deed to this urban culture. They have spent the past nine years immersed in building relationships cross-culturally in their downtown community in order to learn how to love God and their neighbors better, always pressing towards a better and fuller witness of God's kingdom. They are developing a practical missions discipling model that equips churches to empower

their congregations to live out their faith within the life of a city. John and Katheryn are adjunct faculty at Asbury Theological Seminary, where they earned an MA in World Mission and Evangelism and an M.Div., respectively. They both have prior professional experience working with a range of urban issues including mental health, addiction recovery, public health, and community advocacy. They live in the East End neighborhood of Lexington, Kentucky with their two-year-old son Luke and are expecting a daughter in October.





Diversity and the kingdom of God

Is diversity all that it is cracked up to be? Serving in a small city among a community of refugees has given Alex Davidson* a new perspective on this commonly held ideal. Here, he tells why he believes our focus on diversity may need to be adjusted.

As a cross-cultural worker with The Mission Society, I work among refugees resettled into the U.S. by the United Nations. In our small city, which has been called “America’s most diverse square mile,” on any corner you can meet people from Afghanistan, Burma, Congo, Dominica, El Salvador, Iraq, Iran, Nepal, Somalia, and so on. The children study together in school. The parents work together at the factories. They worship together at the church, mosque, and temple. It would seem that if there were a heavenly vision of diversity on earth, this would be it.

Yet for all of its apparent harmony, our city remains a strong example of the powerful gravity exerted by circles of familiarity. The folks who are comfortable with or even actively promoting cross-cultural relationships are a minority. Generally speaking, Nepalese still hang out with Nepalese. Congolese take walks with Congolese. Karen-Burmese go to church with other Karen, Chin-Burmese with other Chin. In my friendships with internationals, I see strong undercurrents of mistrust, suspicion, and guardedness. If you were a fly on my shoulder, you would have heard some of these comments from my neighbors:

“You cannot trust Arabs,” said the Kurdish man.

“You cannot trust Kurds,” said the Arab man.

“I hate American black people,” said the Somali boy.

“Somalis are like gangsters,” said the Sudanese girl.

“Those people from Burma are so rural,” said the Nepali Brahmin-caste man.

“These refugees, bless their hearts, are bringing down the value of our homes by the colors of paint they choose,” said the white city councilwoman.

A geographic measure of diversity has been achieved in our community, certainly. And one could find some equally poignant examples of stated desires for interracial harmony. But as a whole, reconciliation is still a long way off.

In 2007, renowned Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam uncovered an inconvenient truth about diversity. He conducted broad surveys in an attempt to show that a diverse community is a happy community. Instead, he found that great diversity is followed by great misery.

To quote Putnam, those in diverse communities tend to “distrust their neighbors, regardless of the color of their skin, to withdraw even from close friends, to expect the worst from their community and its leaders, to volunteer less, give less to charity and work on community projects less often, to register to vote less, to agitate for social reform more but have less faith that they can actually make a difference, and

to huddle unhappily in front of the television.”

In summary, Putnam writes, “People living in ethnically diverse settings appear to ‘hunker down’—that is, to pull in like a turtle.”

Blessing or bane?

Putnam’s findings are not only a challenge to the assumptions of a classic liberal scholar like Putnam, they are a challenge to the values of biblically-minded Christians like myself, for whom the heavenly vision of Revelation 7:9, when representatives of every tribe, tongue, and nation gather in adoration around the throne of God, has been a centerpiece of a commitment to reach every nation and to invite them to the party. Only a diverse crowd of worshippers can fulfill this heavenly vision. It is the pinnacle of Unity Amidst Diversity, as they cry out in worship as if in one voice.

So if diversity is such a heavenly blessing, then how can it be such a bane on earth? I discussed my thoughts about Putnam’s article with a ministry friend of mine, Grant Haynes, director of Global Frontier Missions, a mission training school in Clarkston, Georgia. Haynes said, “While it is true that tribalism is a major challenge in our work among refugees, there are signs of great progress. Last week, we hosted a block party in one of the apartment complexes here.

There were kids from Bhutan, Iraq, Burma, Somalia, Sudan, all playing together, and their families brought out food to eat and share from their cultures, and everyone had a great time.”

Yet, Haynes agreed, such an encounter didn’t just happen spontaneously. It didn’t “just happen” because the right amount of diversity was there. Rather, it took the intentionality of a group of missional teenagers to pull the event together. Because of their love for Jesus (who they see in strangers from every culture), because of their compulsion to bring into the present the future vision of God’s kingdom, they schemed and strategized to create an environment in which each culture was welcomed, each individual deemed worthy of attention. In coordinating this simple neighborhood party, these Christians acted as mediators to bring out in some small way the best in each culture and each individual. It is this type of work that is at the heart of reconciliation.

Not the end goal

And reconciliation is always exactly that: work. Reconciled communities don’t just happen naturally, given the right environment. That’s a fallacy of neo-liberalism: The idea that we can just “Coexist,” doesn’t seem to work out, no matter

“I wish that all the hipster do-gooders that jump into diverse communities (like me) could effectuate change by just hosting a few block parties and buying ethnic food. But as good as all these things are, they are not in themselves ‘the hard work’ of reconciliation. They are, at best, signs of the kingdom, but not the thing itself.”

how many bumper sticker icons tell us to. (I’m assuming that the bumper sticker is intended as an imperative statement: You, coexist!) The answer to Rodney King’s question “Can’t we all just get along?” if we simply look at our past record of performance, would seem to be an unequivocal “No, we cannot.” There is no “just do it” when it comes to humans living in harmony with each other.

Diversity is not the end goal. The goal is the kingdom of God, the ultimate reconciled community. Diversity is a necessary marker of the kingdom, but it is not sufficient. Making a diverse community will not alone bring about the kingdom of God.

Reconciliation is and has always been hard work. There is no culture in history where differences were easily overcome. This truth seems to be woven into the fabric of human identity. The bulk of the New Testament epistles are about reconciliation: How are Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians to sit down and have “table fellowship” together? This is the perennial question of the church of any age. How will the insiders and the strangers become one?

The answer, biblically, is through the hard work of Jesus Christ. “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace through his blood on the cross” (Col. 1:20, ESV).

Reconciliation began as work—on Jesus’ cross—and

continues to be work, as we take up our own crosses. The work that it takes to reconcile individuals and communities is not light duty. For it is only by slogging through the muddy work of forgiveness and naming injustice and bending down in humility that reconciliation can truly happen.

Simple answers to complex problems never work. Wishful thinking, even by believers, never amounts to much. I wish just getting people into the same room would make all our biases and tribalisms and racisms disappear. I wish that all

“As we turn our attention to the least reached people among us, we must realize it will take time to overcome the barriers that exist in our hearts and the space between our cultures.”

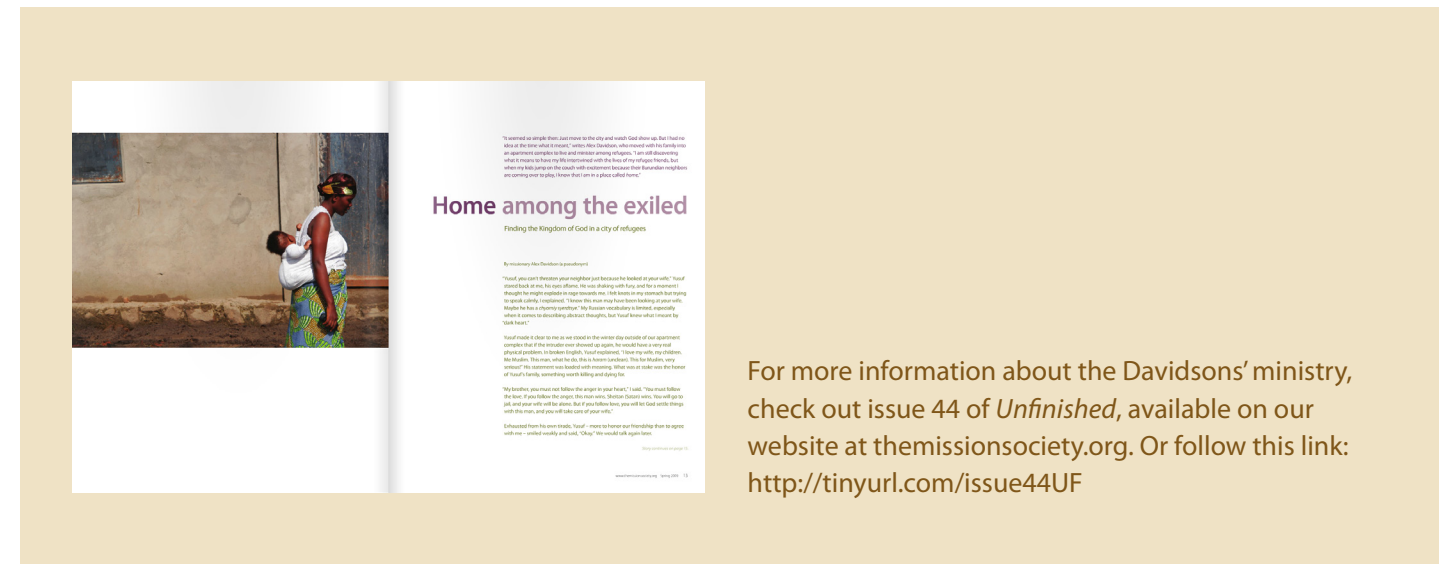
the hipster do-gooders that jump into diverse communities (like me) could effectuate change by just hosting a few block parties and buying ethnic food. But as good as all these things are, they are not in themselves “the hard work” of reconciliation. They are, at best, signs of the kingdom, but not the thing itself.

And we are most certainly called to demonstrate signs of the kingdom! But we ought never think we’ve arrived at the thing itself until the King himself rejoins the party.

Until then, we are like Paul to the Corinthians, “entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, [as] ambassadors for Christ.”

The key to reconciliation

The work of reconciliation takes longevity, a long obedience in the same direction, to steal Eugene Peterson’s title. At



For more information about the Davidsons’ ministry, check out issue 44 of *Unfinished*, available on our website at themissionsociety.org. Or follow this link: <http://tinyurl.com/issue44UF>

seminary, I met a pastor of a young multicultural church. He shared a few of his strategies on becoming a diverse church. He himself is a black American, and their church staff was intentionally composed of varying ethnicities and genders. So was their musical worship team. They try to incorporate different styles and flavors in their Sunday service, and talk about race and identity issues constantly in order to avoid thinking they have “arrived.” But what he said next surprised me: “We will not truly be a multicultural church until our youth grow up and start marrying each other across racial lines. Only then we will know if our message matters.”

The work of reconciliation takes depth, and intentionality to avoid contentment at playing in the shallow water. One of my closest friends, an African American, told me after we had been friends for a couple of years, “You know, I’ve had a lot of white friends in my life. Friends from church, work, school, etc. But when you and your wife invited me over for dinner, I knew that your friendship was real, and that you saw me as a peer. I can only count on one hand the times that’s happened to me.”

One of my mentors at The Mission Society constantly tells me that relationships that lead people to Christ are comprised primarily of time. Not doctrine, or emotions, or sermons, or projects. Just time. Hours of time, in which the life of the Holy Spirit, embodied in the believer, overflows, seeps in, creeps in, percolates down, and touches the deep places in the heart of the seeker.

It is the same with the ongoing work of reconciliation. As we turn our attention to the least reached people among us, we must realize it will take time to overcome the barriers that exist in our hearts and in the space between our cultures. Living in a diverse community is a constant reminder to me that it takes time to build trust, to reach the deep places where transformation happens. It can’t be done quickly or casually but only with long-suffering intentionality.

But as we continue that work, as ambassadors of Christ’s reconciliation, we can take heart that the One who began such a good work among us will continue to perfect that work until He comes again. And we will all join in on the party. ☩

***Alex and Michelle Davidson** (pseudonyms) are cross-cultural witnesses among refugees in one of America’s most diverse cities. In partnership with a local non-profit, they entrepreneur service programs and seek to live out the gospel in relationships. They have a special interest in reaching their Muslim neighbors.

¹ *The Boston Globe*, August 5, 2007, “The downside of diversity” by Michael Jona



Photo courtesy of Gary Fong/Genesis Photos

Befriending our Muslim neighbors

One missionary tells what he learned by leading some U.S. Muslim friends in studying God's Word.

A few years back God started bringing Muslim customers to my company. This opened the door for me to enter the Muslim community in a rather untraditional way. I found my new Muslim friends very warm and inviting. It wasn't long before I was being invited to the mosque, joining in Ramadan celebrations, and even being asked to take pictures at their ground-breaking ceremony. I have been honored in many ways by their hospitality and their friendship.

Some of the relationships grew to the point that our families began inviting each other over for dinner, picnics, boating, and even fishing outings. We would often talk together openly and honestly about our beliefs, of which there are many similarities and, of course, differences. But the differences have not been "deal-breakers." In fact, in many ways, our differences have provided catalysts for deep discussions about scripture, syncretism, and culture. All the while, we have maintained respect for one another that has been formed by our friendship.

The invitation

Recently I felt that these relationships had so developed that we should form a small study group. The focus would be on the prophets. (Muslims believe that clear signs were given to the prophets and that by obeying these signs, one could stay on the "straight path" and perhaps enter Paradise one day.) I invited six Muslim friends and two Christians. We ended up with three Muslims, a Christian friend, and myself.

In preparation of our first evening together, I tried to anticipate the various barriers that would surely surface. One potential barrier was the Muslim idea that the Bible has been corrupted and that Christians do not treat the Word of God as holy. The last thing I wanted to do was to show up with five different versions of the Bible. So I borrowed five Bibles of the same translation from my local church. I made sure that they were clean—no writing in them, and no torn pages. Next, I read through all the applicable verses concerning Adam (which Muslims regard as a prophet) and came up

U.S. cities are home to a growing number of Muslims. In fact, according to *USA Today* (February 29, 2012), the number of U.S. mosques is up 74% since 2000. The name and photo of the writer of the article below are withheld for security reasons.

with what I thought would be the right questions to lead the group to the "correct" biblical conclusions.

Originally we planned to meet at a neutral location, the local Starbucks. However, one of my Muslim friends thought that location would be too noisy and asked if we could meet at his "Masjid," since he had the keys. I could have fallen off my chair! A Bible study at the mosque? Thank you, Lord.

That evening, as soon as I walked in the mosque, I sensed tension—like trouble was on the way. I opened in prayer and ended the prayer "in Jesus' name." One of the men asked since we were in their Masjid, if, out of respect, we could refrain from praying like that. They assured us if they were in our church, they would respect our ways.

That could have gone better, I thought to myself.

The "disaster"

The next step was to make sure everyone had a Quran and a Bible. I took out the five Bibles and started handing them out. One gentleman took one, but the two others would not hold a Bible. (They would not handle a "corrupt book.") This led to the first friend handing his Bible back to me. Now my anxiety level was climbing. *What next?* I wondered.

We took turns reading about Adam from the Quran, and my Christian friend and I read the biblical account. As the facilitator of the study, I then started asking the questions that I had so diligently prepared. Surely the biblical lessons of the fall of man and God's sacrificial act to cover their shame would be easy for my friends to comprehend. But any time I mentioned anything that was not mentioned in the Quranic version, my Muslim friends would not respond with the answer I thought they should.

Finally, one of the men explained that they would need a scholar to explain what these things meant, because they had not been taught on these issues. Unfortunately, I started to be a little insistent that we unpack the biblical verses, and they pretty much shut down after that. It is a good thing that we had become such good friends over the years; otherwise, that could have been the end of our study.

I felt that this first night had been a disaster. And I had my doubts on meeting again.

The revelation

At home I shared the disaster with my wife. In her wisdom, she started asking questions—helping me get to the root of the problem I was experiencing. She asked, "Did you go into this study with an agenda?"

"No," I said. "Well, maybe. I mean, everyone agreed that I would facilitate things to keep the group on task! So, of course, I prepared for the study."

"So," she asked, "who was in charge of the study?"

"Well, I was!"

"Who is supposed to be in charge?" (Oops!) "Did you leave any room for the Holy Spirit to work?" she asked.

(I think I hear the phone ringing! Need I say more?)

A week later we met again. Before we began, I asked to discuss what had happened the previous week. Surprisingly, my Muslim friends apologized for not engaging in a deeper discussion of God's revealed Word. They tried to explain there are issues of misinterpretations about which they have to be careful, so they rely heavily on their scholars. After I

"I came up with what I thought would be the right questions to lead the group to the 'correct' biblical conclusions."

apologized for getting irritated with them, we agreed that there will be many things about which we disagree. Instead of trying to get the other to see one's point of view, we decided it would be best if God reveal to us His truth. I opened in prayer, asking God to reveal to us in our dreams and

visions or by His angels what His truth is on the matters about which we disagree.

We went on with a great discussion about Noah. I didn't have a single question prepared. I just allowed the discussion to flow on its own. One of the Muslim men made note of how descriptive were the dimensions of the ark. When we got to the promise of the rainbow, another stated that from now on, when he sees a rainbow he will remember this night and thank God for His promise. Three hours later we ended with hugs and words of endearment.

The next week I asked one of them to open in prayer. He asked God to reveal His truth to us, stating he was not interested in the words of men, only the truth from his creator. At the beginning, I thought these studies were going to be the way for my friends to discover and learn God's redemptive plan of salvation. What I didn't know was that I was going to be the learner. What I learned was to trust God to reveal His truth and get myself out of the way. †

“Seventy-five percent of international students are never invited to an American home, and 80 percent are never invited to church during their time in the United States.” –Dr. Douglas Shaw, president and CEO of International Students Incorporated

Think: universities

Men and women from least reached nations may be on a campus near you

By Reed Haigler Hoppe

Mei* left her home country of China, her family and friends, and everything familiar to pursue her studies in the United States. A bright student with big dreams for her future career, Mei had been chosen to attend the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. At the time, Mei had no idea how moving to the United States would forever change the trajectory of her life.

“I think I had always believed that there must be some supernatural power governing the world, but I was not sure who or what the unknown power or person was until I came to the United States. There I joined the international students Bible study held by the International Student Ministry,” said Mei.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of international students flock to the United States for higher education. The best and the brightest from their countries of origin, these students are in a unique position to become the next generation of leaders in the areas of business, government, medicine, education and other fields. Many of these international students represent least reached nations, or

people groups with little or no access to the gospel. Some of these students come from countries which are completely closed to foreign missionaries, and many have never before heard of Jesus.

More than 723,000 international students from more than 200 countries studied in the United States during the 2010-2011 academic year. Students from China constituted the majority of international students studying in the United States at 21.8 percent (157,558 people). India followed as the second top country of origin with 14.4 percent (103,895 people), and South Koreans made up 10.1 percent (73,351).

A life changed

“I was unsure about what I believed because I went through a very difficult time during high school, when I was a rebellious and troublesome teenager. I would have dropped out of high school if I did not hear the voice from somewhere down in my heart telling me to get back to the right track. I got a fairly good score in the national college entrance exam and went to college in northern China, which is several thousand miles away from my home,” said Mei.



Photo courtesy of ISI

“While in college, I kept working on my plan of going to America – a dream that I had held since primary school. I made it and came to the United States, a journey that has changed my life forever and will continue to have an effect on my future.

“Since I had always wondered about the unknown person who protected me and cared about me, I was motivated to read the Bible. I wanted to know more about Jesus. I learned what sacrifice He gave in order to save us, and what free gift we are offered just because we are God’s children. The stories in the Bible alone could not persuade or convince me to accept that there is a God and an only God who is our Father and who can forgive all of us no matter what kind of evil things we do. I had many questions while reading the Bible. I really appreciate the teachers and leaders in my Bible study class who have always been patient with me and my endless questions. Without them I could not have established a personal relationship with God and finally accepted him to live in my heart.”

Mei was baptized on June 25, 2012. She plans to return to China and teach ESL classes.

International student ministries

Several Christian organizations have realized the opportunity to share the gospel with people from all over the world as they pursue education in the United States. Ministries such as International Students Incorporated, Interservice Christian Fellowship, Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ), and a host of individual churches and campus ministries are doing just that.

The Wesley Foundation at the University of Georgia (UGA) is one of several organizations which partners with Athens First United Methodist Church’s International Student Ministry (ISM) in Athens, Georgia, to welcome international students to its area. An international student may request to be paired with a “friendship partner” family from the church or university. Students meet together regularly with these partners to get acquainted and to help the international students adjust to living in the United States.

ISM also hosts a “Snack and Chat” event each month during the school year to assist volunteers and international students to get to know each other better. These social

“Since I had always wondered about the unknown person who protected me and cared about me, I was motivated to read the Bible. I wanted to know more about Jesus,” says Mei, who came to study in the United States from China. She was baptized earlier this year. (Stock photo and pseudonym used for security purposes.)



events always include a free dinner followed by seasonal cultural activities, such as pumpkin carving, a traditional Thanksgiving meal, a Christmas tree trimming party, a Valentine hip-hop dance, an Easter movie presentation, etc. Athens First United Methodist Church also provides

a weekly dinner and Bible study class for international students each Friday evening at the church. In addition to these times of sharing and learning, conversations about religion and spirituality also naturally occur during the social events and time friendship partners spend together one on one.

“Genuine friendships develop over time,” says a Mission Society missionary and former University of Georgia Wesley Foundation staff member who attended Snack & Chat. “Through sharing life together, the Americans often have the opportunity to share Jesus.”

International Students Incorporated (ISI) President and CEO Dr. Douglas Shaw was born in India and studied in the United States for his MA and Ph.D. degrees. As a former international student himself, Shaw understands the importance of reaching out to international students.

Shaw notes that 75 percent of international students are

“Fifty percent of our most influential leaders graduate from just eight of our nation’s 2,474 four-year colleges. ... Ninety-three percent of students on these campuses have no regular Christian influence in their lives.”
—Christian Union

never invited to an American home, and 80 percent are never invited to church during their time in the United States. ISI volunteers work with more than 600 campuses across the country to befriend these international students and help them adjust to their new culture.

ISI partners with volunteers, schools, and churches to reach out to these international students during what can be a very difficult and lonely time in their lives. Working closely with international student advisors and other college and university officials to help students, ISI’s volunteers offer friendship to any student regardless of race, nationality, or religious preference.

Reaching out

The influx of international students to the West can be significant in world mission, says Jim Ramsay, The Mission Society’s vice president for mission ministries. Ramsay is currently doing doctoral work at Bakke Graduate University in the area of mission response to the global changes resulting from mass urbanization and globalization. After researching the topic of international students, he offers: “Mission organizations seeking to reach into more closed



Through the ministry of Athens First United Methodist Church’s International Student Ministry (ISM), students are coming to faith in Christ and being baptized (shown). Last year, more than 450 students from almost 40 nations attended events hosted by ISM.

parts of the world would do well to give attention to this phenomenon. As international students come to faith and are formed into communities of believers, they can be equipped to carry the gospel message back to their home culture.

“Contact the international student group at a college or university in your town. Ask to be partnered with an international student to help them get adjusted to life in the United States. Take them shopping, to the grocery store, have them over for meals with your family.

“The Bible is very clear what our role is to foreigners in our land. We are to show the love of Christ and reach out to internationals during what is often a very difficult and lonely time in their lives. What they need most is a friend.”

To get involved with international students in your area, contact a nearby college or university and ask for the international student department. †

Reed Haigler Hoppe is The Mission Society’s associate communications director and is an ordained deacon in the Alabama-West Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Get connected

International Students, Inc. offers some advice for reaching out to international students in your area

How can my family or church connect with an international student?

Contact your local college or university and ask for the International Student office. This department can connect you with international students and inform you about programs in which you can participate. You can also contact ISI to see if it serves on one of the universities near you, then connect with its ministry.

What activities might be helpful and enjoyable?

Here is a list of activities that international students often need assistance with or enjoy doing:

- Friendship. Have the student over for meals. Go for a walk and learn about one another’s culture. Just share your life with an international student.
- Transportation. Airport pick-ups, trips to the grocery store or mall, etc.
- Language assistance. Although most international students may be fluent in English, often their families are not. Reach out to a student’s spouse and help them with conversational English.
- Special activities. Go to the zoo, an art museum, or take a day trip to the beach.
- Errands. Help the student with going shopping for groceries, clothing, any furniture needs they have, etc.

ISI has many resources available on its website. These include brochures, books, Bible studies, country profiles, religion profiles, and videos. We recommend “How to Develop an International Student Ministry in Your Church” and “Foreign Missions in Your Own Backyard” to get you started. For more information about how to connect or how to start an international student ministry in your church, visit isionline.org.





Think: the next generation

Digital tools, consumer culture, and media have produced, says author Thomas Bergler, “the deadening effect of popular culture.”* With hearts and minds shaped by a cacophony of influences, our nation’s next generation might be among the least reached.

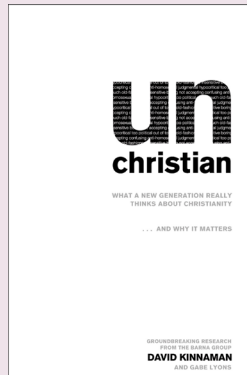
Here is what one church is doing about that.

An interview with youth pastor, Randy Rainwater

About 20 years ago, the people of Grace Fellowship Church in Snellville, Georgia, started saying, “We’ve got to reach kids. The bills are getting paid. People are coming to church. We’re teaching the Bible, but we’re not reaching kids.” Today, about 1,800 neighborhood kids call Grace home. And the church makes kids a priority. “There are more Grace staff members in children’s and students’ ministries than the rest of the church combined,” says youth pastor Randy Rainwater. “That’s a decision that the church makes to reach the next generation’s kids so that they will set their hearts on God. We believe that that is not a suggestion. We believe that’s a commandment.”

Grace Fellowship’s story is about much more than a dynamic youth ministry. It’s about a congregation dedicated not only to reaching out to its own young people, but to the thousands of kids in the county, the vast majority of whom live in post-Christian culture and for all practical purposes could be numbered among the least reached. Here Rainwater outlines some major factors in teen culture and tells how even a small church can begin to effect the next generation for Christ.

*From *Christianity Today*, June 2012



A good read:

***UnChristian: What a new generation really thinks about Christianity... and why it matters*, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons**

Based upon groundbreaking research among 16- to 29-year-olds, *unChristian* helps you understand their mindset, their skepticism, their experiences, and their points of spiritual openness. Readers will learn why negative perceptions exist among young people and how Christians can positively contribute to culture. “This should be a book for every Christian to consider somberly and prayerfully,” writes one online reviewer.

Also see: *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith*, by David Kinnaman.

In this 2011 release, the author reveals the long-awaited results of a new nationwide study of 18- to 29-year-olds with a Christian background. Discover why so many are disengaging from the faith community, renew your hope for how God is at work in the next generation—and find out how you can join in.

Do you think it's accurate to call the next generation least reached?

Well, watch TV and see what you think. It's hard to name a Christian influence in popular media. I think our culture has painted [Christians] as unloving. And some of the ways that we—in the evangelical community—have gone about things probably wasn't always the wisest. In teen culture, I don't think that there are a lot of voices that are “evangelical.” [Editor's note: Research for *unChristian* reveals, “Disdain for evangelicals among the younger set is overwhelming and definitive.” See more above.]

What are the biggest influences on teen culture right now?

Besides the influence of popular media, I think there are three megafactors: absence of fathers, video games, and pornography. The big one that is shaping our teens is the absence of dads. With dads out of the homes, moms have to fill so many roles. And when you're having to make the money, fix the meals, drive the kids everywhere it takes, at the end of the day, there just isn't much time and energy to lead spiritually (although women are capable of that—we see that throughout scripture). It takes two people to fill all of those roles, and half of our kids in the United States are growing up without that. So the other two big megafactors—video games and pornography—are filling the void created by our not teaching the Bible and spiritually leading our kids.

What do you see as repercussions of these cultural influences on teens?

Kids do not know the Bible. Even kids in our churches do

not know the Bible stories, or even the order they come in. And part of the problem is that, in our desire to be relevant, most of our teaching about the Bible becomes about the application, and the kids wind up not knowing the overarching story, the “metanarrative,” of scripture. So, for example, the story of David and Goliath becomes a lesson about God helping me overcome my obstacles. And that's a big part of the story, but the story is also about God having this people who He is caring for.

So when we talk about the next generation, this is a generation that knows a lot about our religion, but they know very little about the Bible and about our faith. And between the sex and money scandals, and the way that we, as the generation before them, have handled things, we've disempowered the gospel in their eyes. When our marriages look like the world's marriages, when our character looks like the world's character, why would they listen to our stories?

I've heard the average age for kids to encounter porn today is 10. When I say to the dads, “Why don't you talk to your son about pornography?” the reason is because the dads themselves are looking at pornography, and they don't feel like they can tell their kids not to. My generation has lost its moral footing, and we feel like we've lost our voice to the generation behind us. Scripture tells us that every generation is responsible for the generation behind it. And we've lost that.

How is Grace Church addressing that situation?

At the end of the day, we think what is really important is creating an “Oikos,” which is Greek and is used for an image for community. The scripture doesn't really teach about



For the past 15 years, youth pastor Randy Rainwater (third from left) has been working to shape a program that discipled and empowers leaders—like these young men, who “graduated” from Grace's youth program.

the nuclear family. The scripture teaches about Oikos. So, we think community and discipleship are crucial. It's not that we don't think evangelism is crucial. We do. We see hundreds of kids come to faith every year in our youth and children's programs. But we don't really measure by how many kids come to faith. We measure by community and by how many kids are choosing to be disciplers.

So what we do is that we try to have young adults, college kids, and parents discipling high school kids; and we have high school kids and adults discipling middle school kids. That's our model.

So how do you teach kids to disciple?

We have a couple of roles—teachers and disciplers. As a pastor, I teach. Then the disciplers follow that up. So on Wednesday nights, 28 times a year (not during summer or for three weeks during Christmas) we do a thing for middle school kids called “LUG,” Living Under Grace.

We start out LUG with 30 minutes of just fun. Our goal during this time is that we want kids to go to school and say, “You will not believe what we did at church last night.”

After that, kids separate into their small groups for an hour. They talk about what I taught the week before and about what they've been studying in scripture all week long. And the high school disciplers (“LUG heads”) help the kids process their experiences by walking them through heart, mind, soul, and strength (something we call “kairos circles”).

So a discipler might start off saying, “What was going on in your life this week?” The kids might answer with something they read in scripture or something that happened during the week. And a discipler might say, “What



“A big part of what we do is cross-cultural ministry,” says Rainwater. “We have about 70 kids on international ministry trips right now.” Shown here: Grace student during visit to refugee community.

did you feel about that?” (Kids lead with their feelings.) So let's say, a girl had a big fight with her mom and dad, and now she hates her dad. We'll say, “Okay, you're feeling like you're ready to leave your family and run off with this boy. But we can't stay in our feelings ('heart'). What do you think the Bible will say about what you're feeling? Let's look and see.” And so we look at the scripture (“mind”). Then for the character or “soul” component, we will ask, “How does who you are need to be changed here based on what scripture is telling us?” For the “strength” component, we ask, “How can we get people in your life to hold you accountable so you can move forward?” So the disciplers help the kids process their weeks using this progression of heart, mind, soul, and strength. The groups do this for about an hour. Then they come back together, and I teach for 20 minutes about what we will be studying the next week.

You have figured out a balance between entertainment and discipleship.

We do a good show. We do. This fall, for example, we did a 12-foot tall version of angry birds. We do stuff like that. And we do some skits. We shoot for excellence. But kids don't come for the show. If you're building off the show, kids won't stay for that. Kids come because they're listened to. Kids come because their discipler calls them and invites them. They come because people care about them, because they're growing, and because we're going to empower them to do the Great Commission.

If you want to be relevant today, you have to empower kids to lead. We have about 1,800 kids who call Grace home. They're not going to come and listen to us talk unless we're



"The Barna Group estimates that 80 percent of those reared in the church will be 'disengaged' by the time they are 29," reports Drew Dyck in "What do teenagers need from youth ministry?" (CT online) But at Grace, many who were disciplined as middle schoolers now serve in ministry, several of them on Grace's staff. Shown above is its Wednesday night worship service for middle schoolers.

teaching them how they can lead. I think that's biblical. I think that's what Jesus did. Jesus didn't just teach; He empowered.

A big part of what we do is cross-cultural ministry. We have about 70 kids on international ministry trips right now. And every Wednesday night, we'll put between 100-150 kids on buses to go to a community of refugees in Atlanta to share the love of Christ with the kids who live there.

This all seems so amazing. What would you say to church people who have a very small youth group and don't know how to even begin to fashion something that might help them to really disciple their kids well?

I would say: Look at the early church. In the early church they ate together; they studied the Word; they prayed together. Concentrate on forming community. Look for "people of peace" in your church. In other words, look to see who God is moving in, and ask those people to work with you to help reach out to the kids. (I always say that the best way to find community is not to go looking for community, but to look for what God is doing and then see who is around. That is your community.)

And the other thing I would say is to find leaders. We look for kids with exemplary faith, exemplary character and leadership skills, and we really try to build off of those kids.

I'm sure in every church in America, you've got kids who are leaders. And when I say leaders, I don't mean that

they're the attention getters. I mean they're people who people follow. Leaders are also those who are able to impact kids who are different from them. So find those leaders in your church and say, "Hey listen, would you help me lead a discipleship group with some middle school kids? We'll do it at my house, and we'll have burgers. Let's go find some middle schoolers who would like to hang out with you."

A lot of our kids are in sports. In fact, all of our guy high school interns have full-ride athletic scholarships to college. Sports is good, and we want to support sports. So I will go to a kid and say, "I want to be there when you win the state football title. I want to be supportive in that. But there are bigger things than this." We want kids to know that God is epic, more epic than anything else in the world. In fact, one of my volunteers was a two-time national champion on Alabama's football team. He played under "Bear" Bryant. He played for the Vikings and Packers in the NFL, and he told me, "When we won the national title in Alabama the first time, it was neat, but," he said, "I thought it would feel different." Sports is great, but it's not epic.

So find exemplary kids, maybe kids who are really committed to sports right now, and empower them to be leaders in your youth group.

What do you wish churches understood about reaching the next generation?

When Joshua and his people crossed into the Promised Land



During "LUG" (Living Under Grace) on Wednesday nights, high school students ("LUG heads") teach the Bible and lead discipleship groups of middle school students.

and began the Canaanite conquest, they built monuments because, Joshua said, "One day your children will ask, 'What do these stones mean?'" And I think kids growing up today look at our churches, and they ask, "What do these stones mean?" We've got to answer that question well. We've got to say, "I'll tell you what these stones mean. These stones mean that there's a God. And these stones mean that we are called to be here for Him, and to fight the battle." The reason Joshua fought the battles and not Moses was because Moses' people weren't willing to fight them. Those dads and grandpas should have fought the battles. But instead, they were buried in the desert, and their kids had to go fight the battles.

I think that we have left some battles for our kids to fight. We haven't fought the battle of pornography in the church. We didn't address divorce. We didn't lovingly, gently and with grace deal with issues that we needed to deal with. We've left this generation to fight the battles that we weren't willing to fight. We need to work to help empower this generation of young people to know the Bible, to understand what our faith really is, to be people of character who seek to reach the world for Jesus. ✚

Need help with your youth ministry?

On November 7-10, Grace Fellowship will offer a ministry conference for anyone working with youth. See more at <http://201211youthws.eventbrite.com>. And to learn more about the youth ministry at Grace, visit its websites: www.lugweb.com (middle school); www.truenorthtimes.com (high school); www.collegeatgrace.com-college (college); www.gfc.tv/gsm (training videos and materials including BELIEVE and GROW)

What you can do.

Listen. It's important in discipling.

One of the reasons kids come to Grace Fellowship is "because they're listened to," says youth pastor Randy Rainwater. He tells why the art of listening is so critical.

Teaching disciplers to listen is part of our training. And it's one of the things that we struggle with with new leaders. Adults feel like they have to talk all the time. We want them to learn to listen to what God is doing. One of the good things about Facebook is that kids just pour their hearts out on it. Spend a little bit of time on Facebook, and you'll learn a lot about how to reach kids.

We help with a student-led program on public school campuses called "Thrive." Every week, during the testimony and prayer time, these kids walk up and talk about the hurts in their lives. If a kid's parents are splitting up, he'll tell about it. Then he'll go to the corner and dry the tears and go about his day. And I've run into parents, and they will tell me, "We're getting a divorce. But the kids are doing fine." And I'm like, "You're not listening to your kids. I heard your kid this morning crying about it in front of his classmates."

We don't listen to our kids. We have to listen. Jesus listened well. He asked questions. He always asked more questions about what is actually going on in a person's life. Think of the Samaritan woman. Jesus kept taking her deeper and deeper into what the real question was. Learning to listen is so important.

Neighborhoods, nations, and the next generation

For Grace Fellowship Church, going after the next generation is just one part of a larger strategy that is missional through and through.

Interview with Grace Fellowship's lead pastor, Buddy Hoffman

What's the vision that has given focus to your ministry and to Grace Fellowship Church?

We talk a lot about discipleship. If you were to go back and download the first series of sermons I preached at Grace Fellowship, it was about why we must make disciples. Grace has never gone through an explosive period of great growth. Growth has always been almost incremental. The numbers we have today have been based on discipleship. You don't have to know a whole lot of math to know that multiplication produces exponential growth.

You often rehearse for the congregation the three priorities of Grace's ministries. What are they, and what role have they played in Grace's growth?

What we talk about are neighborhoods, nations, and the next generation. Each of those main points was a watershed issue for us. We've always been about neighborhoods, because that's about reaching your community, about making disciples where you are. If you look at the pattern of the church in Acts, the church gathered to teach, to exhort, to encourage, and to worship. They scattered to evangelize. We've always taught that—that the primary work of the ministry did not happen in, but outside, the church.

Another major watershed issue for us was when we recognized that God writes his kingdom message across generations. I started seeing in the scripture so much about generations. Look at Psalms 78:6: "So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children." We started recognizing that our work was not going to be just about what we did now, but what happened in the lives of our kids and our grandkids. If you look at Grace Fellowship, more than half of the people who attend our suburban campus are high school age and under. And downtown, 85 percent are college age and under. We have intentionally gone after the next generation. We really believe that reaching the next

generation is not an option; it's obedience.

Now that's also true with us regarding nations. At one time, if you had come to Grace, you would not have heard anybody talk about missions. But we got involved in missions, because we had some people come to Grace who took us on short-term missions, and broke our hearts for missions.

Then after 9-11, God laid upon our hearts the responsibility to reach the 1.57 billion Muslims. We were involved in the Middle East, trying to figure out how to share Jesus with Muslims. The chairman of our elder board and I were in Iraq on the anniversary of the American invasion there, and we actually got arrested. On our way back, I said to some of the group I was with, "I feel a little hypocritical going across the ocean, trying to share Jesus with people whose language we don't speak and whose culture we don't understand when we don't even know the Muslims who live in our own neighborhoods. Maybe we should do something locally."

That moved us to plant the church in Midtown and to do survey work. We found out that there are 70 mosques in Atlanta, and that Muslims attend our high schools. So we have very strategically trained our people how to contextually and clearly share the message of Jesus—that He is the singular answer; He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Communicating the gospel can be done in a way that is not hostile and not confrontational. It's the same way we've done with the next generation.

In terms of contextualizing the gospel, is there a common thread between the three ministries—ministries to your neighborhood, which—for the Snellville campus—is suburban ministry; ministries to the next generation; and ministries to the nations, which for Grace has been a special focus on the Muslim world?

Yes. The Incarnation. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He didn't just so love the world that

Planted in the mid-'80s, Grace Fellowship Church has grown into a three-campus ministry that touches very diverse population groups in metro Atlanta. The total Sunday attendance is around 6,000, with untallied thousands attending mid-week programs. Grace's ministry, explains founder and lead pastor, Buddy Hoffman, has evolved by following simple practices any congregation can do.



Photo by Brandon Allen

He sent angels, or wrote a message in the sky, or even just gave us a book. He came.

Read John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." You cannot reach people you can't touch. When we moved into Atlanta, we bought a house, and we moved in downtown. We lived there, and we worked there. Every Monday morning after I preached down there on Sunday night, I would get on my bicycle and ride down to the local [inner-city] high school at Grady, and I would pray for that school. At that time, there had never been a Young Life ministry out of there; there were no local ministries out there. This year, when our church did our Kids Life Camp, the work crew was from Young Life Kids from Grady!

You've got to be engaged. Shepherds smell like sheep, and if you're not going to live with the sheep, then you're not a shepherd. And if the church is disconnected from the community, one of the first things you have to do—if you are going to communicate the gospel like Jesus communicated the gospel—is to listen and learn the language. Jesus listened and He learned the culture. He grew up in the culture. He became part of the culture. It became part of His very identity. And Jesus told the disciples, "In the same way that the Father sent Me, even so I'm sending you."

We came to the conviction that Jesus is not only the answer; Jesus is not only the Message. He's the Method. So we get deeply connected with our neighbors, with the nations, with the next generation.

What have you learned about cross-cultural ministry that might be helpful for other congregations that want to be missionally effective wherever they're planted?

Well, what I've learned first is that it's fun. I think what slows the church down is that this whole thing sounds very fearful, but it's fun, and it's exciting.

I've grown up in the church. My mother was the secretary of the church. My dad was on the board of the church. By the time I went to Bible college, if you'd asked me how to do

something in the church, I knew how to do it. I knew how to teach Sunday school. I could have run a board meeting. I could have set up a building committee team. I had learned by osmosis.

When I went to Chicago, the evangelism director of the college I attended brought us in and mapped out the city. He showed me this triangle right around Humble Park and said to me, "You're responsible for the people in that triangle." I didn't even know what he meant. I knew how to do church, but I didn't know what it meant to be responsible for a neighborhood. And this was a scary, gang-ridden neighborhood. I remember the first Saturday I went out there. I sat in the White Castle and just looked around. I had no idea what to do.

Now I recognize that this is true for most people in churches. If you took the average board member, church leader, or committee chairman into an apartment complex, and said, "We're going to reach this apartment complex with the gospel," they wouldn't know where to start. If it's not about taking up an offering, or building a building, or running a committee, they really don't know. They don't know what ministry outside the walls of the church looks like. What we have to do is take them out there and teach them how to play the game. It's like a new game to them. It's not that they have rejected it. They just don't know that that really is the game.

Have you got a word of encouragement to a pastor or church leader who says, "I'd like to move from where we are to something that is making a greater impact for Jesus"?

I would say: Go outside. Drive around the neighborhood. Look around the community, and try to see what Jesus sees. Try to say what Jesus says, and try to do what you think Jesus would do. If you just say, "Jesus, be Jesus in me," then go to the high schools, and go to the neighborhoods, He'll do it, and you'll get the ideas. ☩

Teaming up to reach Kenya's least reached

Kenyan church leaders retool; plan to ramp up outreach to countrymen



The Mission Society hosted a cross-cultural training conference April 23 – May 4, 2012 in Nakuru, Kenya. Mission Society staff members who provided leadership for the event included the Rev. Frank Decker, vice president for member care and development; Dr. Darrell Whiteman, vice president for mobilization and training and resident missiologist; and Richard Coleman, senior director for mobilization and candidacy.

More than 70 people attended the conference, representing 28 different denominations and non-denominational movements and 10 different tribes.

Kenya's more than 43 million people represent a diverse population of ethnic groups and languages. While 45 percent of Kenyans are Protestant, 33 percent are Catholic, 10 percent are Muslim, and 10 percent continue to practice their African traditional religions.

"The purpose of the conference was to join with Kenyan ministries in training Kenyan nationals in mission service to remote parts of Kenya and beyond," said Decker. "We also wanted

to help Kenyans realize that there are still 22 unreached or least reached ethnic groups in Kenya, and to give them some cross-cultural and discipleship tools and perspectives to engage these people groups," said Whiteman.

"Our prayer is that God will use the training, not only to greatly accelerate outreach to the least reached in Kenya and beyond, but to increase the effectiveness of the precious servants of Christ who are pouring their lives into reaching the unreached with the Good News of Jesus," said the Rev. Dick McClain, president and CEO of The Mission Society.

Whiteman taught sessions on the Incarnation as a model for mission, transforming your worldview, understanding the difference between form and meaning, overcoming culture shock, and knowing our belief systems. Decker taught sessions on building trust and growing disciples, spiritual warfare, and Christian-Muslim relations. Decker team-taught with a Kenyan pastor for each of the sessions. Coleman led experiential activities for the participants that accompanied each lecture. Daily inductive Bible study in

the gospel of Mark was provided by Eric Miller, who has served in Kenya with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

One participant said to me, "You have completely changed our minds on how we should approach Muslims" said Decker. "Others who serve in very difficult places said they came to the event discouraged and even ready to give up, but now they are refreshed and encouraged to go back."

"Throughout the week I would ask participants what they were learning, and over and over again they would say, 'Incarnation. I never heard this teaching before and now I realize I have to change the way I'm relating to people in my ministry.' At the end of the first day, one of the bishops said to me, 'Well, we can go home now. The idea of the Incarnation as a model for ministry changes everything. I'm going to meet with all my pastors, and we're going to restructure the entire way we go about doing ministry,'" said Whiteman.

Plans are being made to offer another cross-cultural training conference in Kenya in April 2013. ✝

The Mission Society launches "Team 2:2"

Seeks to exponentially multiply efforts among U.S. churches



The church ministry department of The Mission Society recently launched Team 2:2. The group's name was taken from II Timothy 2:2, "What you have heard me teach publicly you should teach to others. Share these teachings with people you can trust. Then they will be able to teach others these same things" (ERV).

For the past 12 years, The Mission Society has come alongside local churches to help them discover their unique missional calling. Scores of churches in the United States have been transformed and are now engaged in significant, strategic outreach in their community, nation, and world. Having experienced transformation themselves, select churches are now seeking to mentor other congregations which are passionate about joining Jesus in His mission.

Team 2:2 is comprised of capable individuals from churches that have successfully implemented The Mission Society's Global Outreach process. Within their own local

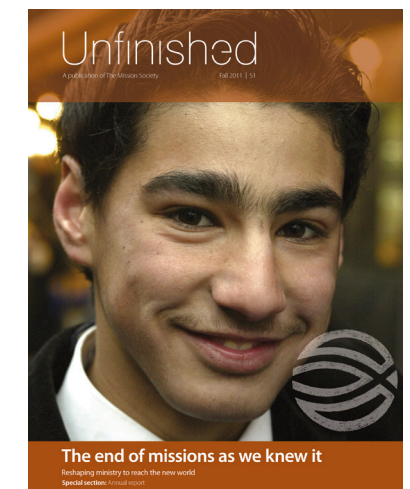
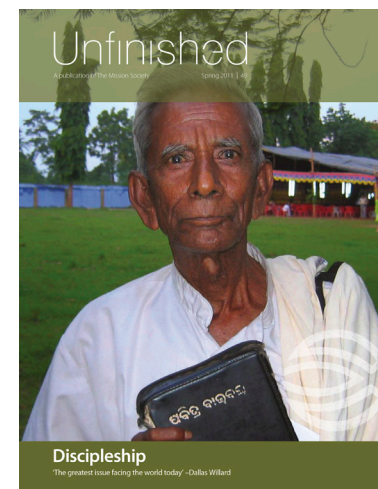
churches, these individuals will form teaching units that will serve as instructor/coaches in partnership with The Mission Society in order to recruit, train, and assist congregations to become personally and strategically engaged in reaching the world for Christ.

Upon completion of the initial training for the first group of Team 2:2 churches, Stan Self, senior director of church ministry, said, "I was overjoyed with the buy-in and excitement exhibited by the first group of men and women we trained. I really believe we are on the cusp of seeing God do a new thing with this Global Outreach ministry that He has blessed over the past 12 years."

The first four Team 2:2 churches include: Epworth United Methodist Church in Franklin, Tennessee; Grace United Methodist Church in Cape Coral, Florida; Roswell United Methodist Church in Roswell, Georgia; and The Family Church in Gainesville, Florida. ✝

Unfinished wins award

The Mission Society's magazine, *Unfinished*, received an Award of Merit in the missionary category from the Evangelical Press Association on May 11, 2012. The award given was based on the three *Unfinished* issues published in 2011. The Evangelical Press Association is a professional association of some 300 Christian magazines, newsletters, newspapers and content-rich websites from throughout North America. ✝



The Mission Society consecrates 13 new workers

Missionaries to serve in Africa, Europe, undisclosed locations, and the world at-large

On May 8, 13 new missionaries were consecrated by The Mission Society for service in Europe, Africa, the world at large, and areas that cannot be disclosed for security reasons.

Bishop Joao Carlos Lopes, president of the College of Bishops of the Brazilian Methodist Church and a Mission Society board member, spoke during the service at Simpsonwood Chapel, Simpsonwood, Georgia. Staff and board members of The Mission Society joined family and friends of those consecrated at the service.

The new missionaries are Denny and Cindy Heiberg of Gainesville, Fla.; Johnny and Amy Winkle of Atlanta; Steve and Suzanne Buchele of Georgetown, Texas; and three couples and a single missionary (not pictured) who will minister in undisclosed locations. Presently 223 Mission Society missionaries serve in 42 countries. †



Denny and Cindy Heiberg of Gainesville, Florida

The Heibergs have served in pastoral ministry for 22 years within The United Methodist Church in Kentucky and Florida. Their mission focuses upon (1) maximizing the effectiveness of missionaries through pastoral care, discipleship training, and resources for spiritual growth; (2) teaching the Global Outreach Seminar in strategic cities throughout the world, assisting pastors and national leaders to be come more effective in mobilizing churches and making disciples; and (3) discipling pastors and strategic church and community leaders to enable movements of disciple-making within churches and personal networks of relationships.



Johnny and Amy Winkle of Atlanta, Georgia

Following a year of ministry service in Kazakhstan with The Mission Society, Johnny Winkle earned a master's degree in world mission and evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary before joining The Mission Society staff, where he has served as director of advancement activities. Amy Winkle earned master's degrees from Asbury Theological Seminary (M.Div.) and Columbia Theological Seminary (Th.M.). She will pursue a degree in Hebrew and Jewish studies at Oxford University as Johnny ministers to students and in local churches. We rejoice with Johnny and Amy about the new ministries to which the Lord is leading them—all the while, we miss them terribly. We love you, Winkles!



Steve and Suzanne Buchele of Georgetown, Texas

The Bucheles are returning to Ghana following two years of ministry there. Suzanne Buchele, who holds a master's degree in mathematics and a Ph.D. in computer science, will work at Ashesi University College. Steve Buchele will serve in a pastoral role, as short-term mission team coordinator and managing a guesthouse.

The American broken dream: Today's negative economic condition has led to dramatic insecurity, highlighted by headlines such as "Deserted homes plague cities" (*USA Today*, June 15-17).



Through the economic uncertainty

It's easy to feel paralyzed. What do we do?

I've talked with thousands of couples over the years about their financial and estate planning needs, and every one of them has experienced economic uncertainty at some point. Yet today's negative economic condition has led to dramatic insecurity, highlighted by headlines such as "Families' wealth dives 39% in 3 years" (*USA Today*, June 12), "Deserted homes plague cities" (*USA Today*, June 15 – 17) and "Ga. Leads U.S. in Foreclosures" (*The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, June 15). So where should we go for certainty? And what should we do now?

Most important of all is for us to remember that this situation is no surprise for our Lord. In the Scripture, we read: "I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38, 39 GNT) God loves us in the worst of times as well as the best. He is here for us through this "valley of the shadow of death" (financially).

Next, these times require acting in faith, rather than doing nothing due to fear. "For God hath not given us the

spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (II Timothy 1:7 KJV). As you recall in the stories in Matthew 25 and Luke 19, the master put his stewards in charge of his talents while he went away. In both accounts, the steward who did nothing was not rewarded but lost everything. We have never been promised that every decision would be rewarded with blessings, but a faithful steward will be rewarded.

So what now? Invest? Yes, invest! Invest in the companies you know. Invest in the charities you support. Invest in people who are trying to make a difference. You may have funds to purchase real estate at half price in hopes that when the market turns upward you will be rewarded. You may see a young company with a good reputation (whose market you also understand) whose stock price is dramatically low; so use faith to buy the stock knowing that their quality services or products will earn positive results over time. Or if you need income, consider buying bonds or commercial annuities (or a gift annuity available in select states through The Mission Society).

Or invest in people you know. Many people have shown creativity during bad times and started companies like Kentucky Fried Chicken, Wal-Mart,

and Coca-Cola. Your keen sense of knowing other faithful people may be the key to investing in a new opportunity that is available.

Finally, invest in ministries such as The Mission Society that are making a difference in the lives of people around the world. Wherever the gospel is sent, communications and commerce follow. What better way to change the world than touching the lives of nationals who will bring God's love to their own people and, perhaps, bring jobs and opportunity to a needy people.

In conclusion, God calls us to act in faith, trusting him for the results. These terrible economic conditions have not changed our Lord and our trust in Him must remain solid as we choose to invest. Also, seek wise, qualified counsel on how to proceed with your finances and your future. "Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory." (Proverbs 11:14 NASB) As a CFP® I am available to discuss financial and estate plans with our friends and their advisors to help them achieve their God-given goals. Call our office at 800-478-8893 for a free consultation. †

Lewis von Herrmann is the vice president for mission advancement for The Mission Society.



Be with them

How to do local ministry the 'Jesus way'



"If we are not willing to follow the model of Jesus ... then it is very unlikely that much more than some charity will occur," writes Jim Ramsay. Shown: John Heinz with young friends. (Nine years ago John moved with his family into this downtown neighborhood. See story on page 6.)

When we were preparing to move our family to the nation of Kazakhstan, people often asked why we would go there to minister when there were so many needs here in the United States. Our response was that God had called us to that other place where there were not as many opportunities for people to hear the gospel. And if I were feeling particularly bold, I would respond, "Maybe that's why God has called you to stay. In what ways are you reaching out to people in your own community or region?" Since we often view things in either/or categories, the impression was that by serving in another country, we were negating the needs here. On the contrary, God calls us as a community of faith to be involved in both. In Acts 1:8, Jesus says, "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea

and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (NASB). Note that the operative conjunction is "and," not "or." By calling His followers to consider the ends of the earth, Jesus by no means was telling them to neglect Jerusalem or the other way around.

Assume the posture of learner

The needs and opportunities for ministry in our own nation are vast, as has been discussed elsewhere in this publication. But if—as churches and individual believers—we are going to address those needs, the attitude and posture we take is critical. Overseas missionaries are prepared with training in how to communicate cross-culturally. Most people recognize the need for such training. But when ministering "here at home," sometimes well-intentioned

believers underestimate the importance of the "how" of mission and focus on the "what." In other words, we pay attention to what we are doing (programs, outreaches, development plans), but we may not realize that our attitude and posture are often more critical than what we actually are doing.

In the opening article in this publication, Dick McClain outlined several cultural factors going on in the United States today. What this makes clear is that if we are to be effective witnesses for the gospel in the midst of all these complexities, we need to take on the posture of a learner. We need to do the hard work of understanding the contexts in which people live. What is it like to grow up in a refugee camp and end up in a major urban center in the United States? What are the unique

needs of a man who lives in the United States for months or even years at a time, sending most of his earnings to his family in Mexico? How can a Chinese national navigate the American culture when coming to study at a university here? What are the unique challenges of the single mother who depends on food stamps to feed her children? The list could go on. We have a lot to learn!

Set aside your status

But it isn't enough just to learn. We need to go in with a willingness to set aside our status and identity in order to identify with the people we want to serve. We call that "incarnational ministry," since it reflects exactly what Jesus did. He stripped himself of the power and status He had as the Son of God and entered into culture with the limitations of a Jewish man living in first-century occupied Palestine. (Read Philippians chapter 2 sometime with this in mind.) The incarnation gives us the posture of ministry. Often outreach within our country (and unfortunately sometimes outside) is perceived primarily as programs we do for people. We do a clothing drive, a soup kitchen, a Vacation Bible School. All those things are fine, but they don't address the distance between us and the experiences of those we desire to serve. The church is often still something outside (another

institution that does nice things), but is not for them. Someone once remarked to me in surprise at some missionaries' incarnational posture, "They didn't come to do things for me; they came so they could know me." Are we willing to take that posture with the people in our own communities and cities whose life experience, background, belief system, and even political views are very different from ours?

"Incarnational ministry ... may challenge our lifestyle, our assumptions, and even our politics. It will push us well outside of our comfort zone and force us to wrestle with issues we've never had to face before. It is messy, and easy answers will elude us."

Across our nation are communities with dozens of churches with doors indeed "open" to all people. Yet the people living in such communities may be about as likely to hear the gospel in ways they can respond to as someone living in the hinterlands of the Tibetan Plateau. We have to understand that there are cultural and social obstacles that can make churches seem as inaccessible as they would be if they were behind locked gates and guarded by

Dobermans. Making forays of ministry with predetermined programs into the community then retreating back into the safety and cultural sameness of the church is not an incarnational posture. There is a cost to an incarnational approach to ministry. It takes time. The rewards are not immediate. It may challenge our lifestyle, our assumptions, and even our politics. It will push us well outside of our comfort zone and force us to wrestle with issues we've never had to face before. It is messy, and easy answers will elude us.

Expect transformation

If we are not willing to follow the model of Jesus in the incarnation, going into ministry in the posture of a learner, then it is very unlikely that much more than some charity will occur. We will miss the transformation that the gospel message offers. The amazing thing is, as we go with this posture, it is not just the people among whom we are ministering who can experience the transforming power of the gospel, but we ourselves experience transformation in the process. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." If the Lord of the universe can do this for us, can we do less for others? †

Jim Ramsay is The Mission Society's vice president for mission ministry.



Blind spots

In your neighborhood, who are you not seeing?



The last time I led morning devotions for our staff at The Mission Society, I talked about blind spots. It just so happens that we all have them. If you don't believe me, try this little exercise by reading through then following the directions below.

Directions: First, hold this page at arm's length (if you are reading this online, your face should be about 24" from the screen). Next, close your left eye and stare at the plus sign with your right eye while being aware of the spot to the right. Now, slowly move the page toward you (or your face toward the computer screen) while staring at the plus sign. Note: At some point you should be aware that the spot has disappeared.

The blind spot you just witnessed is one that is common to all of us. It is caused by an absence of photoreceptors, or rods and cones, on the retina where the optic nerve attaches to the eye.

There are other types of blind spots that are not physical in nature. Stereotyping, buyer's remorse, and egocentrism are but three of a host of cognitive blind spots we can display. Perhaps there is no better example of someone displaying such cognitive blind spots

than Peter. He clearly missed it on the mount of transfiguration when he wanted to set aside the immediate work of Jesus, build three tabernacles, and hang out a while with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. On another occasion, after correctly answering Jesus' question as to whom He was, Peter then rebukes Jesus for telling of His coming suffering, death, and resurrection. He demonstrated a blind spot about his own loyalty by

"I asked who in town had an outreach ministry to the Hmong people. ...Almost in unison the church leaders responded, 'The who?'"

becoming indignant when Jesus suggested he would deny Him. And on two occasions he had to be shown his blind spot with regard to his feelings towards Gentiles. Peter is not alone; many of us find that blind spots come all too easily.

Adjusting our vision

Sometimes I arrive early at a church where we are scheduled to hold a Global Outreach Workshop. When that oc-

curs, I take the time to drive around the neighborhood to get a feel for the area and the people there. At one such location I noticed that virtually every church in the area, no matter the denomination, had a Hispanic ministry. Later, at a pre-workshop meal with the church leaders, I discovered that this church was also starting a Hispanic ministry. Upon hearing this, I asked who in town had an outreach ministry to the Hmong, a people originally from the mountain villages in southern China and adjacent areas of Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. Almost in unison the church leaders responded, "The who?" When I told them that a little over a mile northwest of the church there was an enclave of Hmong, they were shocked. Drawn by opportunities for work in the huge agriculture industry of the area, here was a group of people extremely nearby whom no one was reaching out to with the gospel. Clearly this group of Hmong was a blind spot for the people in that church.

Another interesting bit of information about the eye may be informative here. If you could completely immobilize the eye and head such that you fix



According to data from the Brookings Institute, the number of foreign-born people in the United States reached 40 million in 2010, a 28 percent increase since 2000—and about 13 percent of the total U.S. population. (Reported by Troy Bush. See "Reaching the unreached in the urban center," pastors.com.) Who are the groups of people in your "back yard" no one is reaching with the gospel?

an image in a constant location on the retina, you would notice that it fades to non-descript nothing in minutes. In other words, the images must be constantly refreshed on our retinas in order for us to see. Similarly, if we only fix the vision of our lives on the routine and the rote, that which is around us is in danger of fading into nothingness. We may find ourselves looking without seeing; a condition psychologists refer to as "inattentive blindness." The downside to this condition for the follower of Jesus is that we miss so many opportunities to relate the good news to those who have heard it the least.

Seeing in new ways

For those of us who suffer blind spots, especially as it relates to least reached peoples in our midst, some basic changes may be in order. Here is a good place to start:

- Pray that God will bring people across your path and that you will be open to lovingly engaging them whatever their race, creed, color, or culture.
- Be intentional about observing those around you as you go about your daily activities.

- Go out of your way to develop relationships with people beyond your safe and same culture.

- Always be open to talking about Jesus and your faith.

One of the fundamental teachings in the aforementioned Global Outreach Workshop is that we must become "go-to," not just "come-to" Christians and churches. It is not enough that we build houses of worship that people can attend. It is not enough that we come

together for worship, and learning, and fellowship. It is not enough that we limit our spiritual life to those who are like us. We must also go to the least reached among us. In order to do that, we will need to intentionally get out into our city, town, and neighborhoods and begin to see in ways we may never have seen before. ✚

Stan Self is The Mission Society's senior director of church ministry.

Join us for "Beyond These Walls"

When: October 11-13, 2012

Where: McEachern United Methodist Church, Powder Springs, Georgia
Purpose: Mobilizing, revitalizing, and equipping congregations through "best of the best" missions teaching and training so that they can fulfill their divine calling—making disciples of all nations.

Keynote speakers:

Mark Beeson, founder and senior pastor of Granger Community Church, a United Methodist congregation in Granger, Indiana
Dr. Reggie McNeal, Missional Leadership Specialist for Leadership Network in Dallas Texas

The Mission Society is among the sponsors of "Beyond These Walls."

By Richard Coleman



Break out the flatware!

Open your home for community.



Mission Society missionary Cindy Heiberg (shown) and her husband, Denny, have been opening their home to local university students for years. "Hospitality is such an important practice mentioned throughout the Bible," writes Richard Coleman. How have you opened your home? Richard wants to hear your stories.

Jesus makes some pretty strong statements in the Bible. One such statement is found in the parable of the sheep and goats, located in Matthew 25: 31-46. In it, Jesus likens those who address the felt needs of others as "blessed." However, he refers to those who fail to address the felt needs of others as "cursed." Regarding the latter, he says in verse 41: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (NIV). Ouch! What was Jesus thinking? Why would He call people cursed because of their lack of compassion? Why did He not say "cursed are you if you don't fast and pray regularly," or "cursed are you if you willingly commit certain sins?"

According to Matt. 25, one of the things Jesus expects us to do is to care for the foreigner. I fear that too many of us have neglected this important segment of our society. For example, according to statistics published by the International Institute of Education, 723,277 international students attended

U.S. colleges and universities during the 2010/11 school year. Of those students, 75 percent or more will not be invited into an American home during their entire course of study. Say it isn't so!

Hospitality is such an important practice mentioned throughout the Bible. Has our failure to show hospitality blocked us from receiving some of the blessings of Jesus? Conversely, when we've practiced hospitality, hasn't it contributed to our blessings?

I thank God for people like Estelle, a former faculty member at a university in Georgia. Before she retired, Estelle would invite 5-12 international students at a time over to her home for dinner and would break out the fine china and gold flatware. One student said he had only heard of these fine items, but had never seen them. Estelle would feed the students soul food, play games with them, and take time to learn about their lives. The students expressed great appreciation for her hospitality. Only God knows the tremendous impact she

had on their lives.

Join Estelle on the side of the sheep. Let's care for the foreigners and strangers among us. This includes more than just international students. There are many refugees and immigrants in our own back yard longing to build relationships. Consider how you can engage those around you. Maybe take an international friend to a baseball or football game; ask your international friend to take you to an event that is reflective of his or her culture; host a cooking class at your home in which you and your international friends teach each other how to make favorite recipes.

If you would like to take me up on this challenge, write me at rcoleman@themissionsociety.org. I'd be glad to hold you accountable. And even more, I'd be glad to hear about the wonderful stories resulting from your obedience. †

Richard Coleman is The Mission Society's senior director of mobilization and candidacy.



Go explore. >>>>>

Are you considering a life of cross-cultural ministry? Trying to piece together your education and experience with what God is already doing worldwide? Do you have a passion for people and cultures? But at the same time, are you maybe not so sure where to begin?

A GreenLight Internship of 2-18 months gives you the go-ahead to explore.

Explore what it looks like to live, work, and do ministry with people in another culture. Learn from missionaries with valuable experience and perspective. Make friends and engage in conversations that allow you a glimpse of the gospel through their eyes. Immerse yourself in the story that God is telling throughout the world—a story that is bigger than your own.

We are now accepting inquiries for the GreenLight Internship. If you're ready to explore, contact Kate Hilderbrandt at kate@themissionsociety.org.

"I had no idea how much higher and different and better God's plans were for my life. He was working in a foreign place I knew nothing about. He invited me and continues to invite me to be a part of it."

—Jennie Clements, Monterrey, Mexico

Follow The Mission Society on Twitter at [@tms_world](https://twitter.com/tms_world)
Join our Facebook fan page at facebook.com/themissionsociety
Read our blog at themissionsocietyblog.com



The Mission Society



The Mission Society exists to mobilize and deploy the body of Christ globally to join Jesus in His mission, especially among the least reached peoples.

Read stories of transformation from Mission Society fields around the world in our free, monthly e-newsletter featuring a video segment with President Dick McClain.

Sign up at
themissionsociety.org