



# **Ministering Among the Changing Cultures of North America**

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***Serving the Church to Advance God's Kingdom"*  
*"Striving Together for the Faith of the Gospel" (Philippians 1:27)***

Mission to North America • 1700 N Brown Road, Suite 101 • Lawrenceville, Georgia 30043  
Phone: 678-825-1200 • Fax: 678-825-1201 • Email: [mna@pcanet.org](mailto:mna@pcanet.org) • [www.pca-mna.org](http://www.pca-mna.org)

## **Introduction: So [you think] you want to call a church planter?**

The conversation occurs often. An MNA staff member is asked, “Where can we find a Hispanic church planter?” (Or it may be African American church planter, or a church planter for a more specific Latino ethnic group, or a church planter for any of a host of other ethnic groups who have growing populations in North America. Most often in the PCA, it is either an African American or Hispanic American church planter.)

The conversation continues along these lines:

***“What is it that has brought you to the point of looking for a Hispanic church planter?”***

“There’s a big Hispanic population in our town now, and it’s growing rapidly. We need to get a church started.”

***“Do you know anything about the people of this community?”***

“Well, they’re mostly Mexicans, but there are some Nicaraguans and Venezuelans as well. Some are real transient, stay here awhile and move on to other cities. Others get jobs and stay here.”

***“And what is it specifically that leads you to want to plant a church?”***

“Well, there’s no reformed church in their community.”

***“Are there any churches in their community?”***

“There are a few small ones; seem to be mostly Pentecostal.”

***“Have you explored what ministries they are doing that you might participate in?”***

“Oh, we just wouldn’t be able to do that; their theology is really out there, and their worship – well – you know what that’s like!”

***“Have you visited any of these churches?”***

“No.”

***“Have you spent time with any of their pastors, to see what God is doing through them?”***

“No.”

***“Do you know any of their pastors – have you met any of them?”***

“No.”

***“Do you know anyone in this community?”***

“No. A few of our members have conversations with them at work. A few of them work for some of our members’ businesses.”

This conversation brings into focus a host of factors as we address the challenge of church planting in North America. This paper is devoted to setting forth some of the key issues that we believe should be considered as we seek to minister among the changing cultures of North America. In summary:

- The North American culture is rapidly and constantly changing and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. There is no reason to believe we will arrive at a point where the changes stabilize and we begin to experience a relatively homogeneous or stable culture once again; in fact, all signs point to an acceleration of the extent and longevity of constant cultural change.

- In the past, these changes were confined primarily to the port cities and a few other communities. They were confined to the center cities. Today, new immigrants are rapidly moving into suburbs, small towns and even rural areas. Upwardly mobile ethnic minorities are moving into the suburbs more and more. The poor are being displaced to the suburbs, as their substandard housing in the cities is displaced by the wealthy moving back into the cities. These changes are rapidly impacting the communities and neighborhoods which the typical PCA church counts as its target area for ministry. In the years to come, few communities in North America will continue to be the domicile of only one ethnic group or even one socioeconomic class.
- Ministry in such a context is an entirely new experience for the PCA, indeed for all of the evangelical church in North America. It may sound like an exaggeration, but it is nevertheless true: never before in the history of the world has a culture become what North America is and is becoming. These changes present truly unique challenges for the advancement of the Gospel – for which there is no previous experience that supplies ready answers.
- Ministry must begin and go forward through relationship building. God’s blessing of the PCA in our world missions endeavors leads us naturally to think we should approach newly arrived immigrants (as well as African Americans and other ethnic minorities who have lived in North America for generations) by calling in the professionals, sending in church planters to an unfamiliar community in our midst, just as we send missionaries to a foreign country. While church planting is the ultimate goal and the only means through which God ultimately advances His Kingdom in this age, even our church planting methods – if successful – will be very different in many instances from those to which we are accustomed.

So hang on for the ride as we explore some issues together in this paper. At the beginning, jettison your desire to grab a church planter from somewhere who can pass a presbytery exam, speaks the language and seems enough like that group of unfamiliar people over there that maybe he can get a church started – and the further desire to then push him off the pier to sink or swim in the uncharted waters (very deep and shark-infested, we might add!) of church planting.

In her short history, the PCA has tried this method many times, and it has almost always failed. When it fails, the consequences are devastating. The church planter and other families involved, in most cases, are wounded permanently. The majority of the pastors who have this negative experience leave the ministry (or at least the PCA), and if they remain in the PCA, they harbor hard feelings, in many cases for the rest of their lives. Members of the core group or others from that people group who know of the situation become offended and discouraged with the PCA, and this also can affect future relationships and what otherwise might be good potential opportunities for a very long time. A further result is that PCA leaders often conclude, “I guess we can’t make it among ethnic groups; maybe the PCA is only for the kind of people we are already mostly made up of – middle and upper economic, highly educated white folks.”

Can God advance the Gospel through the PCA among the ever-growing variety of people groups in North America? At Mission to North America, we believe He will, as we trust Him to guide us through the very challenging process of discovering how He can work through us by His Spirit. We believe that He will work through us as we are willing to discover how He will use some of the distinctives and gifts He's given us to do His work – if we are at the same time willing to let go of some things we cherish but which may not be essential to the building up of the Church, and ignore, accommodate or even celebrate and enjoy the non-sinful and even God-created differences that easily divide us.

If the opening conversation above represents an approach that is likely to fail, what approaches have we seen that God seems most often to bless? You may obtain a DVD from MNA that tells the story of three churches who have successfully developed ministries across ethnic and socioeconomic lines. These three churches are: Covenant Presbyterian in Harrisonburg VA; Redeemer in Jackson MS; and Harvester Presbyterian in Springfield VA. In these and many other positive PCA examples, God has used these six steps to extend His Kingdom through the work of the church:

- 1. Pray for hearts of love for our neighbors and for God's leading.**
- 2. Encourage lay people to initiate outreach, supported by pastors and staff.**
- 3. Through loving our neighbors and forming relationships with them, begin to discover their needs.**
- 4. Develop word and deed ministries: tutoring children, ESL, VBS, adult Bible studies, are good ways to begin.**
- 5. When the work has grown sufficiently, call staff members or church planters to lead the work.**
- 6. Continue to increase lay involvement, in addition to church planters and pastors.**

### **The constantly changing cultures of North America**

Consider the changes taking place culturally in North America. Most of those reading this paper will live to see the day when people of so-called minority ethnic backgrounds comprise more than 50% of the United States population. The majority of these people will be new immigrants who have no background in the Christian faith. What will be required for the PCA to be a growing and vibrant church in this kind of culture?

This reality presents a great opportunity for the Church, as noted in papers presented by the Maclellan Foundation:

Samuel Escobar writes, "migrants are people in transition" who are experiencing a loss of roots and a sense of homelessness. Because of this transitory state, "such people in transition are open to become believers, ready to assume a faith in a personal way." The Church has the opportunity and responsibility to evangelize these people as they seek to establish themselves in an alien land. One of the most striking phenomena involving migration is the revitalization of the Church in American and Europe through mission-minded immigrants. Often

it is not the traditional church of the white man that is evangelizing communities, it is the migrant church. According to Jongeneel, "Christian migrants are more mission-minded than the members of established congregations and churches in Europe," and Philip Jenkins makes note of the rising Protestant Hispanic presence as well as the increase in Asian Christianity in the United States. Jenkins also points out that there is a rise in non-English speaking worship services throughout the U.S. and Europe, reflecting this changing demographic of the Church due to migration. In short, migration presents both challenges for the traditional church as it adapts to the flux of immigrants and a great opportunity to see the gospel of Christ furthered in every tongue and nation. (from Maclellan Foundation papers; original source: Escobar, Samuel. "Migration: Avenue and Challenge to Mission." *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXI, No. 1, (January 2003))

People who immigrate to North America begin forming new cultures upon their arrival in North America. These new cultures are very different from the cultures of their countries of origin. These new cultures will not remain static; they will change with each generation and even within each generation. From one people group who arrives with a homogeneous culture will come many new cultures within a very short time, often even in the first generation of living in North America.

This is unlike any previous experience in the United States. North America has seen significant periodic influxes of people groups in the past. With a few exceptions, these people groups either settled into largely isolated cultural pockets, usually in the major cities, or they assimilated into the mainstream without substantially affecting it. Today, for the first time in history, there is a major ongoing influx of new people groups all across North America who are impacting virtually every community in North America, urban, suburban and rural.

Not only are new cultures being created by the presence of new people groups, but *these new cultures will be constantly changing, and they will bring constant change even to the dominant American culture.* Further, every indication is that they will not settle into insular communities that preserve a homogeneous culture, but that this kind of change will be ongoing. While some other nations are currently experiencing similar changes, this is unlike anything in the history of the world, for no other past nation or culture has experienced an ongoing immigration of peoples from such a multitude of other cultures.

The result is that North America is becoming a new context for ministry altogether. *The key to a vibrant future PCA in a changing culture is that we become highly skilled in the contextualization of the Gospel in an ever changing and increasingly heterogeneous and pluralistic American culture.*

Before we go further, let's note a couple of basic assumptions:

- The first has to do with language. A lexicographer or an anthropologist will cringe quite a few times in reading this paper because of the way we use the word

“culture.” For our purposes here, we’re using that term to indicate the functional world in which an individual lives. His or her ethnic background, education, the mix of people with whom that person interacts, his or her working world, religious background, current religious beliefs – we are using the word “culture” as the term to denote the milieu of relationships and values in which someone lives on a daily basis. If we were being more technical, other terms might properly be used in many places, and certainly the word “subculture” would be more appropriate in many instances in which, for convenience, we use the word “culture.”

- The second is our belief that in the final analysis there are only two basic human conditions: in Christ and not in Christ. *Eph. 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.* If that is true, then it seems that our task should be very simple: everyone who is in Christ should form one culture. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. For one thing, it is much more complicated because we are fallen, and that fallenness causes sinful divisions. But even when the Church is gathered around the throne in heaven, as prophesied in Revelation, ethnicities will still be distinguished. This implies that even in a perfect world, ethnic distinctives, at least, are still visible. Within each culture, God’s people discover what it means to be God’s people in that cultural context. Thus, cultural distinctives remain, even as Christ has called us to be one in Him, and even as we strive toward unity in Christ in this life, awaiting perfection and completion in the age to come.

## **Ministry in a constantly changing culture**

Now let’s go back to that conversation in the Introduction. What are some of the problems that it highlights?

In the PCA, our experience with international missions, along with our experience in past suburban Anglo-majority church planting during the times when those suburbs were majority Anglo, has so shaped us that we are accustomed to only two main approaches to ministry. The first approach, which shapes most of our ministry in North America, is that we believe we can reach only people like the majority of our current membership. With some exceptions, the PCA has ministered effectively mostly among people groups in North America who have the following characteristics: Anglo, educated and middle to upper income. And when we seek to develop new ministry among them, what do we do? We send in the professional to plant a church. In the culture of the Anglo-majority suburbs (note that Anglo-majority suburbs are a diminishing demographic because of the major influx of new immigrants into the suburbs), the professional can work pretty much in isolation and form a self-supporting church in a relatively short time.

The second concept, which shapes most of our international ministry, is that we send Anglo missionaries from our majority North American culture to do crosscultural ministry in another culture that is different from the majority PCA culture in North America. Increasingly, we also focus on the training of nationals in other nations. In the international context, we expect to minister effectively among people very different from us in terms of ethnicity, education and income levels. But in North America, we wonder if we can be successful in crosscultural ministry.

Given our international experience, and our experience in much of our North American church planting, our approach to ministry in North America seems simple: as the nations come to us and North America is increasingly filled with people groups among whom we have ministered in other nations, let's send someone over to minister to that foreign looking group (across town or even across the street) in the same way we send a missionary to another country.

Taking this approach, we usually try to identify church planters from the new people group in our community, with the purpose of planting homogeneous churches composed mainly or entirely of that people group. Our assumption and plan (we often don't feel we even need to ask people in the ethnic group because we already know) is that these churches will prefer to use exclusively the language of the country of origin of the people group. If they are from a Spanish speaking country, we assume they will want their church and any ministry among them to be in Spanish, their heart language.

This is the presumed method that drives us to the question, Where can we find a church planter? On the surface, this approach appears to be a sound one. However, while this has been the most common PCA approach, it also has resulted in failure in most cases. It fails or has limited results because it fails to understand the complexity and uniqueness of the changing North American culture. And it will fail for perhaps an even more basic reason: *our plan is to send a church planter in to labor alone, to start from scratch, in relative isolation. Effective ministry, effective church planting cannot be done that way in today's complex and changing culture.*

The Gospel is the same in every age. The reformed tradition guides our interpretation of the Scriptures. But our ways of forming relationships, planting churches and ministering among the people of an ever-changing North American culture will be different from our past ways and also different from historic missionary endeavor. There is no blue print. And if we are successful in this endeavor, all bets are off. We will be called to give much, sacrifice much and change much in order to see people come to Christ, and join together in God centered God honoring and biblically directed worship and ministry.

The methods with which we are familiar fail because the new immigrants for the most part do not form pockets of homogeneous culture in continuity with their experience in their countries of origin. Neither do they assimilate uniformly into American culture, forming a homogeneous and easily defined third culture.

Our natural inclination is to address most vigorously the need for the advancement of the Gospel among the first generation of new immigrants. They are highly visible to us, because their language and customs are different. But David Moran makes this observation, which most of us do not readily see: "...the fastest growing – and for ministry most neglected because they are not as visible – are second or third generation, English dominant, and suburban [non-Anglo ethnic groups]."

There was a day when newly arrived immigrants gathered mostly in our major port cities and remained for generations in homogeneous cultural pockets. Today, even the newest immigrants move immediately into the suburbs, small towns and even rural villages all across North America, and very quickly they and their children begin assimilating into all aspects of the local way of life and begin functioning in the English-speaking world.

As children grow up speaking English and make their own changes to the cultural milieu in which they find themselves, the second and third generations do not remain loyal to first generation language-of-the-country-of-origin churches. Therefore, ministry must be oriented toward the first, second and succeeding generations, all at the same time.

Thus our method requires multiple approaches to multiple and ever-changing cultures within each people group. This is highly complicated and there is no missiological manual already written; the North American Church must write that manual (some other denominations are ahead of the PCA in this), and the manual's content will be ever-changing.

David Moran makes this further observation regarding the Hispanic experience specifically, which applies to most other people groups also, "My view is that Hispanic-American culture is not best described as bicultural or synthesis, but rather as an extremely dynamic culture, not static, which has been forged and continues to be forged by its reaction to other cultures and its own migratory history. As such, Hispanic cultures in the United States possess their own unique identity." (Moran, p. 8).

Some immigrants lose much of their cultural identity within a generation or two. Others retain language and cultural distinctives for generations. Some retain cultural distinctives but not language. The core issue for ministry is that there is no uniform or unchanging pattern.

Such cultural flux means that people who develop successful ministries will understand – and love – the people of the particular community or people group among whom they are called to minister and will deliver ministry through highly relational methods appropriate to that culture. Harvey Conn and Manny Ortiz note that the response of the North American Church (including but not exclusively the PCA) has not always been positive in light of such cultural change. The evangelical church's past flight from the city is a case in point:

For its first three hundred years beyond the coming of Christ, the church saw cities as gifts of God, royal routes to the evangelization of the world. Now the



picture is not so bright. In the western world the church moves to the outer edges of the city, fearful of what it perceives as emerging urban patterns (p. 79).

Conn and Ortiz also summarize the positive call:

When conditions change – such as when the makeup of the community shifts – we must make ministry changes that are appropriate for the new context. This does not mean that we change our understanding of biblical absolutes regarding the church. But our programs and methods may need to be evaluated in light of the new context. The church needs to ask, “How do we speak to the culture and condition of the people in our community without compromising the gospel?”

... Since we are serving people who live in a reality that is both dynamic and concrete, we must be willing to take on the posture of a servant (I Cor. 4:1), seeking to know the people and serve them with integrity.

Too often our desire for control leads us to suppress change. We want life to move in a straight line; the future should be like the past, everything predictable and sure. This is not the reality of life. ...given the inevitability and rapidity of change in our society, we must be fluid enough to discern and accommodate (pp. 270-271).

### **PCA experience, even though limited, illustrates this complexity**

PCA Korean churches illustrate the complexity of cultural change between first, second and succeeding generations. In the first generation, almost all Koreans immigrants gather in Korean language churches. Since some pastors in the first generation do not learn English, the Korean language presbyteries were formed in the PCA to accommodate this reality. But in the second generation, these different church cultures are observable in the PCA (this list is only a sample; there are many more):

- Homogeneous second generation Korean English language congregation whose church life is governed and hosted by the first generation Korean language church (the English language church is a member of a Korean language presbytery)
- Homogeneous second generation Korean English language congregation whose church life is independent of a host church (church may be a member of either English language or Korean language presbytery)
- Majority multi-ethnic Asian English speaking congregation, led by second generation Korean pastor
- Majority Anglo congregation, joined by a significant percentage of second generation Korean and other Asian members, led by Anglo pastor
- Majority Anglo congregation, joined by a significant percentage of second generation Korean and other Asian members, led by second generation Korean pastor

Historically, African Americans have belonged mostly to homogeneous African American churches in North America. However, more recent years have begun to see a growing variety of church experience among African Americans. PCA churches or mission churches include African Americans in these cultural/ethnic combinations:

- Homogeneous African American church
- African American and Anglo combination, led by African American pastor
- African American and Anglo combination, led by Anglo pastor
- Multi-ethnic majority mix led by African American pastor
- Predominantly and historically Anglo congregation led by Anglo pastor, with growing number of African Americans joining

This variety illustrates our central point: there are a growing variety of cultures developing. The church can minister effectively among all of them, but must adapt to each distinct culture in order to minister effectively. No two churches are going to look alike, and no two are going to do things the same way in terms of cultural customs.

PCA experience among Korean Americans and African Americans is complex, but it is relatively simple compared to the complexity that the Hispanic cultural assimilation will bring. Among Hispanics, the complexity is far greater due to such factors as the rapid growth of great numbers of immigrants, the movement of significant numbers of immigrants to all sizes of population centers all across North America, the readiness of the first generation to learn English and the variety of nations and cultures from which Hispanic people come.

Here is a partial list of current Hispanic church formations in the PCA (note that all have ministries in English, at least for children):

- Spanish language congregation functioning independently
- Spanish language congregation sponsored and hosted by English language congregation, led by Hispanic pastor
- Spanish language congregation sponsored and hosted by English language congregation, led by Anglo pastor
- One church with shared leadership and some shared ministries, but with separate Spanish language and English language worship services
- One worship service in English (including some of the worship in Spanish), but with a separate meeting for adults for the sermon portion of worship, with sermons in Spanish and English
- Bible studies in Spanish with Bible study group members worshipping in English language worship service
- Majority Anglo congregation with worship entirely in English, seeking to draw second and succeeding generation Hispanics into participation
- Majority Anglo congregation, worshipping in English language, with first generation Hispanics participating; Spanish translation provided for some church functions

When people think of ministry to Hispanics, they often think only of forming a Spanish language church, as reflected in our Introductory conversation. In some cases, Hispanic pastors who cannot speak English have been called as a solo church planter.

But some observers estimate that ministry exclusively in the Spanish language will reach only 10% of the Hispanic population, and that ministry exclusively in the Spanish language will reach less than half of even the first generation Hispanic population and will miss the children altogether. If a ministry is conducted in Spanish only, it will miss many of the first generation altogether, and even those whom it attracts will move on quickly as they and their children move into the English speaking culture. Thus, if the work is lacking pastoral leadership that is bilingual, it is almost certain to fail.

### **What, then, is the role of church planting, and how do we mentor church planters?**

Planting churches through people coming to Christ is our ultimate goal. The local church is the only ongoing stable and self supporting base for ministry. Planting churches is always the ultimate goal in establishing ongoing ministry in any community and among all people groups:

- The local church is God's ordained means of extending His Kingdom in this age.
- The local church is the base for permanent presence in a community or people group.
- Effective leadership can be developed only through the local church.
- More people come to Christ through new churches than through established churches; thus an ongoing practice of planting new churches will see more people come to Christ.
- In communities in which there is no PCA presence, planting churches is the only way to begin to develop that presence.
- While an existing PCA church may have the desire to assimilate new people who are different from the majority of the congregation, there may be factors that make it very difficult for the existing congregation to make the changes necessary to accomplish that. Thus, in some communities already served by PCA churches, the only way to reach new people in the community may be through planting new churches.

Our critique of the Introductory conversation should not be taken to mean that we are in any way diminishing the value of church planting. Nor should it be taken as in any way discouraging the seeking and mentoring of church planters. On the contrary, we should constantly seek to find or train church planters from every people group among whom we seek to develop ministry, both to work within their own ethnic groups and to work among other ethnic groups. Where may potential church planter candidates be found, or where may good candidates for mentoring be identified?

- Men trained and experienced as pastors in their country of origin.
- Men trained and experienced as pastors serving in their respective people group in North America.
- Men from the people group among whom we seek to develop ministry who are trained in North American seminaries. Recruiting and provision of scholarships are essential if this is to happen in any numbers.

- Men from the people group among whom we seek to develop ministry who are mentored and trained by PCA pastors and elders, as they live and minister in their current cultural context. MNA's Leadership and Ministry Preparation (LAMP), under the direction of Brian Kelso, provides an effective way to offer this mentoring.
- Experienced pastors, including former missionaries, from any cultural or ethnic background, who have the skills and commitment to develop crosscultural ministry. We should urge more Anglo men to answer God's call to work with other ethnic groups in North America. It is a strange inconsistency that we send Anglo missionaries to plant churches in other countries as our primary, even exclusive, missions strategy for decades, but in North America we search only for a church planter who is from the non-Anglo ethnic group we are seeking to reach. Rarely, if ever, does the querying person in our Introductory conversation picture an Anglo church planter as the answer to his quest, or actively seek out Anglo candidates.

A strong caution must be noted regarding the last point above: pastors who have ministered effectively in another country (including nationals from that country) are not necessarily well prepared to minister in the changing culture of North America, even in a community primarily made of people from the country in which they formerly ministered. This is true whatever their ethnicity and however effective they may have been in leadership in that other country. Their experience may actually work against them, in that they may expect ministry to be led and developed in ways too similar to their previous experience. They must have the ability to adapt to the entirely new and (we cannot overemphasize) constantly changing cultural environment unique to North America.

If the country in which they have previous experience has a dominant language other than English, they must be bilingual and able to develop ministry in the English speaking context as well as the other language. But language is only one issue, and actually one of the simplest to address. The far greater cultural issues are the simple realities that life is very different from the country of origin in every way for people who are newly arrived and assimilating into the North American culture, and the church planter must be capable of ministering in these new and uncharted waters.

There is one further aspect of seeking and mentoring church planters that we must frankly address because it is the reason for many of the failures. The simple reality is this: because we do have a godly desire to plant churches and reach people with the Gospel, and because seemingly there are so few candidates for church planters to address the new and changing cultures, too often we act in desperation, calling men who may be well equipped to lead in established situations, but who do not have the gifts and experience required for church planting.

Participants in MNA Assessment Centers have actually said, "Well, he doesn't seem like he has very much leadership ability to me, but maybe that's just cultural. Maybe among his people group, he will be ok." And because we want to send out more church planters, we proceed with such a candidate. Every candidate sent out with this reservation has failed. The reality is that the going is tougher in our ever changing

culture, and those who will minister among people groups in which the PCA is not strong require, if anything, an even greater equipping and mentoring in order to plant churches.

### **How, then, do we develop Ministry in this Ever-Changing Culture?**

While praying, searching for and preparing to mentor new church planters, let's begin to minister in some ways that will prepare us to come alongside a church planter (rather than send him in to work alone) and that will begin to form a foundation of relationships from which a church plant may be launched effectively. We are familiar with the concept of pre-evangelism and evangelism. There is a preparation for the Gospel that opens the heart and the mind to the actual hearing of the Gospel. Think of this (we compare it to evangelism deliberately because evangelism is at the heart of church planting) as "pre-church planting." What are some ways we can begin ministry and prepare the way for church planting in our complex culture?

There are a couple of questions we really have to raise at this point, though they are questions that make us squirm:

- First, are we willing to pay the price? This is hard work! And it's so complicated! Isn't there a simpler way? I'm really comfortable with sending in the professionals because I feel so inept. Yes, it is hard work and it is complicated. And the truth is that we don't have to do it! We can live in a Christian and mostly Anglo world, and a few others here and there will even want to join us. But if we believe God has called us to advance His Church in this culture, we have to roll up our sleeves and do the hard work – and the hardest work of all will be prayer. More about that in the paper's conclusion.
- The other question we should consider here: are some of us called to this hard work of outreach across cultural lines, while others are not? Basically, the question can be rephrased this way: are some of us called to bear witness, while some are not? Here's the reality: in North America today, all people outside of Christ are of a different culture. Life outside of Christ is very different from life in Christ, whatever your cultural milieu otherwise. That is more true than ever, and increasingly so, whether you are a high income white man or a lower income member of another ethnic group. Increasingly, North American Christians face the choice: live an isolated life in a tiny little world – or meet, get to know, learn to love and seek to bear witness among people who make us uncomfortable. And increasingly, North American high income Anglo Christians will find they have more in common with lower income Hispanic Christians than with other high income Anglos. In fact, many PCA members have seen more people come to Christ when working in a lower income community among an ethnic group different from their own than they have among their cultural peers.

Now back to the question of where to begin ministry. It is good to review here the six steps observed among the three churches in the DVD, mentioned in the Introduction:

#### **1. Pray for hearts of love for our neighbors and for God's leading.**

- 2. Encourage lay people to initiate outreach, supported by pastors and staff.**
- 3. Through loving our neighbors and forming relationships with them, begin to discover their needs.**
- 4. Develop word and deed ministries: tutoring children, ESL, VBS, adult Bible studies, are good ways to begin.**
- 5. When the work has grown sufficiently, call staff members or church planters to lead the work.**
- 6. Continue to increase lay involvement, in addition to church planters and pastors.**

We must always be thinking and working toward church planting as the ultimate goal, but here are some good reasons for beginning with the above steps:

- While there are limits on the extent to which people are willing and able to form relationships with people where they sense little in common, most PCA churches can assimilate many more people, and many more kinds of people into their midst than they may realize before they try. Even when a new church is established in the long run, it is good for existing PCA churches to develop ongoing relationships and ministry across cultural lines with the new people groups in her community. This is good because it creates new opportunities for ministry for existing PCA church members and it brings greater functional unity to the Body of Christ.
- In light of the major influx of non-Anglo ethnic groups into the suburbs, many PCA churches are well positioned for ministry among people who are of different ethnic backgrounds but live in the same communities as the PCA members. That is, we don't need to plant a church as a new base for ministry, because that base already exists in our already existing church.
- If the first step, when we know next to nothing about the people group, is that of bringing in a church planter, the failure rate is high due to the reality that the wrong man is chosen in many cases – not because he is not equipped, but because we don't understand, or worse yet, we misunderstand, the culture of the community we seek to reach. If we take the time to get to know people there and minister among them for awhile, we have much greater ability to figure out how a church can be planted and how the church planter should be equipped.
- Generally speaking, the best leadership for any ministry is leadership arising out of the culture in which that ministry exists (as we've already mentioned, this should not cause us to shy away from encouraging Anglos to minister among other ethnic groups). Therefore, the ideal is that we commit ourselves to the long-term process of training and mentoring church planters and other pastors from the culture in which they are going to minister.

Let's talk about some further details of the six steps above:

- The best beginning point for ministry always is to form relationships with the people – i.e., get to know and love them personally. What are their needs? What ministry is already taking place in their midst? What are the best entry points for new ministry? People rarely come to Christ through impersonal proclamation, but rather most come to Christ through hearing the Gospel in the context of a personal relationship, in which we love our neighbors as ourselves.

- Begin with ministries to children. Parents usually face great challenges in rearing their children and are grateful for assistance. This is especially true if their children grow up speaking English, while the parents have little ability in the English language. VBS is an effective means of ministry in almost any community or cultural context. After school tutoring is another almost universal means of outreach to children, particularly in communities of need.
- Meeting the needs of newcomers is a huge opportunity. English as a Second Language (ESL) is a ready entry point for ministry among new immigrants. In most communities, literally putting a sign in front of the meeting place is sufficient for recruiting. Those who lead classes do not necessarily need to know any language other than English.
- Another ESL possibility: in our Anglo-centric culture, we naturally think only of our forming and leading ESL schools. A wonderful next step is our equipping people of other ethnic groups to lead them, forming their own means of outreach.
- Be willing to serve people in the community, addressing their needs selflessly, whether or not they will ever become a part of the existing PCA congregation. Encourage and celebrate initiatives taken by fellow church members in serving the practical needs of their neighbors.
- Seek to build the kind of atmosphere in our worship and fellowship that will invite as many as possible to want to participate. Ask what kinds of changes need to be made intentionally in the life and work of our churches in order to be able to welcome others who are different from us. In many cases, this may mean sacrificing personal preferences for the sake of building up the Body. We should be continually asking the question, how can we line up our customs with the culture we are trying to reach, within biblical limits? For example, some congregations include in their worship hymns and songs in a variety of languages represented in their communities, such as Spanish, Swahili, or Creole, mixing the language used in song with subtitles, so that one worship service includes several language groups in the lifting of praise to God.
- Instead of the strengths of our reformed and Presbyterian heritage being barriers, as they often are, put them to the maximum use for outward facing ministry, while at the same time appreciating that the work of the Spirit and the Gospel is present in other traditions as well. The PCA can offer time, talent and treasure that strengthens already existing churches and ministries of other traditions. The PCA's educational resources particularly can be of help in strengthening others, even if they do not become members of the PCA.
- Church staffing: the make-up and ongoing mentoring of church staff members will be different if we are committed to ministering among people who are not part of the mainstream culture of the congregation. Staff members should be called and equipped with ministry among the people groups in our communities in mind. In some cases, calling a bilingual staff member will provide opportunity both for outreach and church planting, and also assist in assimilating new people into the congregation. Such staff positions will also open up opportunities for leadership development among a growing variety of people groups, since not everyone who is called to ministry or other leadership in the church is necessarily gifted for church planting.

- Take advantage of any opportunity for experience with people who are different from us. Even transient or one-time experiences or contacts will encourage us and help us gain experience in ministry.
- As we reach new people, give them the honor of serving in our established congregations as soon as possible. Some ways in which people might be able to serve immediately: using construction skills on a short term missions trip; using language skills on a missions trip; serving as a teacher or assistant in an ESL school; any personal skill – one new immigrant attending ESL teaches sewing classes for members of the PCA church that offers the ESL school.
- Whatever the forms of ministry, concentrate particularly on building leadership that is indigenous to the group with whom we seek to minister, especially giving to emerging leaders the acceptance and opportunity to lead.

ESL ministries are a particularly effective way to minister among a variety of cultures and are among the least difficult to implement. ESL ministries also can be used for pre-church planting. Jerry Baker, who is the Language Missions Ministries Specialist for the Georgia Baptist Convention, summarizes the method they have used, which could be implemented by many PCA churches or presbyteries:

- A team of church planters actively looks at areas of high ethnic concentration to find an area for a potential ethnic church plant.
- They identify an established Southern Baptist Church in that general area.
- They go to the church and encourage them to start an ESL School.
- At this point, the church planters only monitor what the volunteers within the church start to do.
- An ESL School is started. They have devotions during their break time. They include Scripture in the classroom. They hand out tracts.
- They start heart language Bible Studies for the students.
- Then as the Bible Study grows, they bring in a church planter or pastor and hold a worship service once a month for this group.
- As that takes hold, they increase the number of worship services each month.
- Then the established church running the ESL School calls a pastor to head up this new ethnic congregation within them.
- In addition, the Southern Baptists encourage their ethnic churches to start ESL Schools as an outreach in their community.

Mercy ministries and community development ministries offer additional pre-church planting opportunities. A study by PCA member Any Sherman, titled *The Community Serving Activities of Hispanic Protestant Congregations*, identifies the services, listed below, that are offered by evangelical Hispanic congregations in ministry to other Hispanics in their community (none of those surveyed were PCA).

Since these are services that Hispanic churches offer in predominantly Hispanic communities, the list provides a good guide as to the kinds of services a PCA church might offer in reaching out to people of a different culture. They are listed in order here by the number of churches offering the services, with the services listed higher on the list offered by the most churches. Some services are helpful only in lower income



communities, but others could be used to serve any socio-economic group. Note that this list includes only the top 25% of the total services offered by churches in the survey. For a complete listing, the Sherman paper is available on the MNA web site:

- Pastoral counseling
- Food assistance
- Family counseling
- Clothing assistance
- Referrals to other helping agencies
- Emergency financial assistance
- Aid to immigrants
- ESL classes
- Aid to prisoners and their families
- Tutoring programs
- Substance abuse rehab and counseling
- Parental training

As cultural change becomes more and more a way of life, we will be called more and more to demonstrate the reality of the Gospel in deed even as we proclaim it in Word. The Maclellan Foundation papers offer some helpful observations on this theme in an article they entitle, *Transformation & Holistic Faith*:

*Assumptions:* Transformation is a difficult concept to grasp since it can mean many things to many people. However, the 1983 Wheaton Conference sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship proposed the following definition: According to the biblical view of human life, then, transformation is the change from a condition of human existence contrary to God's purposes to one in which people are able to enjoy fullness of life in harmony with God (Jn 10:10; Col 3:8-15; Eph 4:13). This transformation can only take place through the obedience of individuals and communities to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whose power changes the lives of men and women by releasing them from the guilt, power and consequences of sin, enabling them to respond with love toward God and towards others (Rom 5:5) and making them "new creatures in Christ" (2 Cor 5:17).

*Trends:* Over the past couple decades, there has been a renewed recognition that ministry needs to be more holistic than we allowed it to be in the past. The concept of evangelism is not as important as it was previously valued to be. Evangelism is not only saving souls, but also transforming lives, societies, cultures, and nations through the integration of faith and life. As Christianity spreads in the Third World, so does the concept of transformation in cultures which inherently integrate religion and life. According to Vinay Samuel, the key elements of transformation are

- ⌘ An integral relation between evangelism and social change
- ⌘ Mission as witness and journey in the world
- ⌘ Mission in context
- ⌘ Truth, commitment to change, and imagination
- ⌘ Theology, Christian mission, and understanding are always local
- ⌘ Freedom and power for the poor
- ⌘ Reconciliation and solidarity

⌘ Building communities of change

However, according to Barna studies, Americans still struggle with the compartmentalization of faith and life and are less inclined to live out a holistic faith.

*Relevance:* While in the past evangelism meant giving merely the message of the Gospel, those who are convicted by the need for transformation realize that evangelism needs to be more than just words. Effective ministry should care for the body and mind as well as the soul, reaching out to the needs of the whole person. The message of Jesus Christ should transform and change those who hear it, and through them, transform societies, cultures, and nations. It is important for Maclellan to support those groups that have a holistic outlook on ministry, realizing that faith is more than mere knowledge. We need to be concerned not only with planting churches, but we also need to be concerned with the kind of churches we are planting.

*Resources:*

Barna Research Group, "Americans Describe Sources of Spiritual Fulfillment and Frustration," (November 29, 2004).

Barna Research Group, "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," (December 1, 2003).

Samuel, Vinay. "Mission as Transformation: Unpublished lecture given at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 1998" in *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel*. Oxford: Regnum, 1999.

Samuel, Vinay and Chris Sugden, eds. *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel*. Oxford: Regnum, 1999.

Skreslet, Stanley H. "Impending Transformation: Mission Structures for a New Century." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. (Issue 23.01, January 1999).

*Transformation: An Evangelical Dialogue on Mission and Ethics*. (Journal: January 1984-present).

Similarly, Lovelace's observations, written 30 years ago, are perhaps more relevant today than when he wrote them:

It is possible for both individuals and churches to become devoted mainly to personal spiritual culture and forget outreach, especially if the process of reaching out involves touching those who may contaminate us. Thus many Protestant churches have in effect become closed systems for the nurture and servicing of the inheritors of a denominational tradition. ...

The leaders of the Reformation, of course, engaged in the form of mission appropriate to their calling and possible in their embattled circumstances: the spreading of their approach to church renewal in the waves of influence emanating from Wittenberg and Geneva. With the advent of the evangelical movement, Protestant home and foreign missions began to bloom most remarkably, first in the Pietist missions of Halle and Herrnhut and later in the interdenominational works springing up in England and America in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Associated with the verbal

presentation of the gospel in this work were tangible demonstrations of physical compassion: food for the hungry, homes for orphans and charity schools for the poor. The home missions work of the Second Awakening also attacked evils within the structure of society, promoting prison reform, temperance, peace and – with conspicuous success – the abolition of the slave trade and the release of slaves. Both the proclamation and social action components of the evangelical missionary movement were built on a foundation of awareness and concern on the congregational level, nurtured by informed corporate prayer. There was no dichotomy perceived between evangelism and social concern, and no disparity between interest in these forms of mission abroad and willingness to implement them at home. Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, pp. 149-150

This discussion is not intended in any way to be exhaustive, of course. But we hope the key thoughts will spur us on to further creativity in seeking out how we can follow the leading of the Spirit. The key to all effective ministry is forming relationships in such a way that we can express Christ's love and communicate the Gospel on a personal basis.

In most cases, the best beginning point will be for an established PCA church to begin forming relationships and initiating ministry in some of the practical service-oriented ways listed above. As relationships grow, opportunities will grow to lead people to Christ and to train and mentor them over time. Leaders will be nurtured. This will be a long-term process. As the relationships grow and the ability to engage in crosscultural ministry increases, church planters or other leaders may be identified who can be trained and mentored to lead effectively. As the momentum grows, this leadership will develop most often from within.

One further observation that is included in our Introductory conversation must be included here, and that is that we should recognize the possible – more often, likely – presence of the Gospel, godly people, and gifted leadership in the community or people group among whom we seek to develop ministry. A lack of a church in the reformed tradition in a given community does not necessarily mean there is a lack of the Gospel or the presence of the Spirit. God is at work in great ways among many people groups who have no churches in the reformed tradition. In such communities, the best beginning point generally is to begin to fellowship with existing pastors and other key leaders of ministry and explore with them what might be accomplished – and how the Church can best be built up – as we minister alongside fellow believers as peers.

### **Ownership of ministry by PCA churches and presbyteries: Are we willing to pay the price?**

Our calling is unlike that experienced by any previous church generations. We are called to evangelism among peoples who comprise a multiplicity of ever-changing cultures. Can't we just shout, "Stop!" and make it all simple? Of course we can't, much

as we might want to. But as we trust God and seek His face, He will advance the Gospel through us.

The goal is challenging, but it is God's calling to us:

Is 60:2-3 – For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Zech 8:22 – Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.

Mt 28:19-20 – Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Acts 1:8 – But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Eph 3:4-6 – When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Rev 7:9-10 – After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Rev 15:4 – Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.

If we continue in the thought that the PCA can only reach certain classes of people or certain ethnic groups, we will be marginalized increasingly, eventually ministering only among people who live in cultural ghettos – rich and comfortable ghettos though they may be.

Generally, the rest of the world is in greater need in most every way than is North America. With growing world populations and the multitude of religions around the world, the need of the rest of the world will continue to grow. But the great changes taking place in North America are substantially increasing the reality that North America is a mission field. As evidence of that, the churches of other nations are now sending missionaries to North America in growing numbers.

*Will we be faithful to our calling and perpetuate the history God has given the PCA of great and growing involvement in international missions, while at the same time making the sacrifices required for a rapidly growing outreach to a rapidly changing North America?*

Let's come back to the theme we started with, namely, that ministry in today's cultures of North America is different from our previous experience in North America and different from our experience in other nations. If this is an accurate assessment, the only way that effective ministry can be advanced through the PCA will be through PCA churches and presbyteries taking ownership of the development of ministry in these new contexts.

Taking ownership of ministry includes many commitments. Several steps or commitments are essential as a minimum:

1. We commit ourselves to discovering and forming relationships with the entire variety of people groups who comprise our communities sufficiently that we have at least some knowledge of what their lives are like and what their needs are.

2. Recognizing that we as PCA members may have to be selective because we are a relatively small presence in many communities, we commit ourselves to focusing our energies, forming close relationships with the particular people to whom we believe we are called to minister.

3. If a church is to be effective in ministry, the senior pastor must present the vision and support the ministry, just as is the case with any other ministry to which the church is truly committed – that is, this cannot be the hobby of a few church members if it is to have the maximum impact. Especially when it comes to forming relationships with existing churches and when it comes to mentoring church planters and other key leaders, the senior pastor's involvement is crucial.

4. *At the same time, the PCA must see a great mobilization of the laity in ministry – outreach through ministries such as ESL, community development and mercy ministries are all best led by lay people, both men and women. One of the most positive aspects of the current North American cultural scene is that there has perhaps never been as great an opportunity for ministry led by lay people than there is today – not just opportunity, but more importantly, necessity.*

5. The driving force for ministry and leadership development must be locally and broadly based in our churches and presbyteries. We can no longer send in the professionals as our exclusive, or even primary, way of doing ministry. Even if church planters and others are brought in from other places to lead the development of new ministries, full support and participation must also come from the churches and presbytery responsible for the work. As pastoral leadership is developed, it is going to happen most effectively through training and mentoring offered by local churches and presbyteries.

David Moran lists the following characteristics for a mentoring senior pastor or church planter among Hispanic people groups. His list is appropriate to all leadership and all relationships with peoples of other cultures in addition to Hispanic:

*Culturally sensitive.* Should seek to understand Hispanic culture as much as possible.

*Love.* Love covers a multitude of sins. If the Hispanics, that the established church is seeking to reach, know the pastor loves them, they will regard him with grace and respect.

*Language.* Working knowledge of Spanish is helpful and shows interest in the Hispanic-American, but is not absolutely imperative to the pastor's effectiveness, especially if he is concentrating on the majority target who are English proficient.

*Conciliatory.* No group (Hispanic or Anglo) can have everything their way in the multicultural church.

*Realistic.* Some Anglo members will remain unconvinced and unhappy about the new direction of the church. Not everybody will make the trip.

*Disciple-making.* Established pastors discipling/mentoring potential Hispanic leadership could raise up much needed leadership for the Hispanic-American context.

The key question of this section of the paper is, *Are we willing to pay the price?* A list such as the one just above is easy to read, but it is implemented only at great price. None of these actions are carried out or qualities demonstrated except by careful cultivation and deep commitment. They are driven ultimately only by the love and compassion of Christ Himself, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If the Church in North America will continue to be advanced through the PCA, we must change our priorities to provide much greater resources for ministry. Resources committed to international missions should not be diminished in any way. However, through greater sacrifice and life style change, more must be devoted to the advancement of the Gospel in North America, for two reasons:

1. The complexity of cultural change, of which we have spoken over and over. New methods of ministry must be developed, and with that development much greater resources committed to ministry.

2. The shear-sheer numbers. Consider these North American population numbers (in thousands) and growth projections:

|  | 1990           | 2000           | %growth    | 2050           | % growth    |
|--|----------------|----------------|------------|----------------|-------------|
| <b>White, Non-Hispanic</b>             | <b>188,315</b> | <b>196,659</b> | <b>4%</b>  | <b>207,901</b> | <b>6%</b>   |
| <b>Black, Non-Hispanic</b>             | <b>29,304</b>  | <b>33,476</b>  | <b>14%</b> | <b>53,555</b>  | <b>60%</b>  |
| <b>Hispanic (of any race)</b>          | <b>22,379</b>  | <b>32,440</b>  | <b>45%</b> | <b>96,508</b>  | <b>197%</b> |
| <b>Asians</b>                          | <b>6,996</b>   | <b>10,504</b>  | <b>50%</b> | <b>32,432</b>  | <b>209%</b> |
| <b>Am. Indians &amp; Alaska Nat'ls</b> | <b>1,797</b>   | <b>2,050</b>   | <b>14%</b> | <b>3,534</b>   | <b>72%</b>  |

We often sit in meetings, struggling to figure out how to raise the resources needed to build a particular ministry. The PCA is among the most affluent of churches in what is the most affluent culture in the entire history of the world. How can it be that the Church in North America lacks sufficient resources to advance the Gospel? And if the North American Church with all her wealth lacks the resources, what hope is there the resources can be found anywhere? To provide the necessary resources for the advancement of the Gospel requires sacrifice in every way – of our time, talent and treasure.

And here's one more sacrifice that is required: our commitment to labor in love intentionally over time. Churches established in the changing culture of North America will most often be built by people coming to Christ only, since there will be only a minimal Christian base already existing among growing segments of our population. This will require much longer term commitments of time, talent and funding than that to which we are accustomed, to form pre-church planting ministries and then go on to plant churches who will effectively minister in such contexts.

Leadership development extends the long-term process even further, since the most effective leaders will be mentored from among those who come to Christ. A high commitment of our treasure is required, but perhaps more challenging to us is the commitment of our time and talent – which can only come from the commitment of our hearts.

### **Conclusion: pray for the advancement of the Gospel through the power of the Spirit**

For the PCA, the greatest challenges in ministry among the many ethnic groups in North America *appear to be* leadership development and funding. *But we believe there is a greater challenge which is at the same time a great opportunity: to see the power of the Spirit, through the Gospel, overcome racial, ethnic and cultural isolation and empower us to experience the transforming power of God breaking down the many barriers that so easily divide us, reconciling us to one another in Christ.*

Prayer is the foundation for all that we do. As Acts 1-2 tells us, it was as the 120 waited upon the Lord in prayer together that the Holy Spirit was sent at Pentecost. The Lord's promises to respond to the prayers of His people, particularly with regard to the proclamation of the Gospel, are many:

- Psalm 2:7-8 – “I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”
- Isaiah 56:6-8 – “And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant - these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. ”The Sovereign LORD declares- he who gathers the exiles of Israel: “I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.”
- Matthew 9:35-38 – “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

- Rom. 1:16-17 -- For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

The challenges that a rapidly growing ethnic diversity brings to North America are difficult to answer, as are the challenges that this growing ethnic diversity brings to the Church. The Gospel changes hearts and lives. By the power of the Holy Spirit, people of diverse backgrounds can be brought together into a united community of faith. By God's grace such a community of faith can be salt and light in the chaotic culture around us. Progress will come as we wait upon the Lord in prayer for His work – not casual and sporadic prayer, but fervent and constant prayer. The task is indeed difficult, even humanly impossible, but with God all things are possible.

This is God's calling to us – beginning with our neighbors, extending across North America and to the farthest reaches of the world. May God be praised as we seek to be faithful to His calling! As David Moran puts it, "May God help us to 'pitch our tent' among our Hispanic [and all our other] neighbors as Christ did among us and create the appropriate wineskin to receive the new wine of an abundant multinational harvest in our Mission to North America." (Moran p. 8)

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