

**ABSTRACT**

**THE INTERNATIONAL CHURCH EXPERIENCE:  
HOW ENGLISH-SPEAKING INTERNATIONAL CHURCHES REACH, DISCIPLE,  
AND MINISTER TO THEIR TARGET AUDIENCE**

by

Paul Dreessen

Spread out around the world are English-speaking international churches being used by God to reach, disciple, and minister to the English-speaking international community. How are these churches reaching out to diverse and transient communities? What are the common strategies used for effectiveness? These are the questions I have attempted to answer in this ministry transformation project. The purpose of my project was to discern how English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience to discern best practices which are transferable to other international churches.

What does a church in a small, coastal, tourist town in Costa Rica have in common with a church in one of the largest metropolitan cities in Brazil? What can a church plant in Panama learn about making disciples in a transient community from an established church close to a military base in Germany? How do these English-speaking churches reach out and minister to expats, internationals, and even nationals? These are the questions answered.

Building on my findings through scripture, literature, and conducting research that included 23 responses on a questionnaire, eight interviews, and one focus group, I was able to make the following conclusions. There are English-speaking international churches who are successful in reaching their target audience. Many are using some of the same methods to help fulfill Jesus' final mandate to make disciples of all peoples (Matt. 28.18-20). These churches use

their worship service, various groups, and the internet to achieve these purposes. The goal of this project was to discover what these methods were and to share with others how these methods can be transferable.

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AND MINISTER TO THEIR TARGET AUDIENCE**

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Doctor of Ministry

by

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **NATURE OF THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter provides the framework for evaluating the effectiveness of how international English-speaking churches in non-English speaking countries reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience in order to discern best practices transferable to other English-speaking international churches in non-English speaking countries.

In this chapter, I will address my own experience with the English-speaking international church and why I have chosen this topic. I will investigate the purpose for this project and the problems these churches face. I will speak to the manner of research I will conduct and the rationale for this project. There will be numerous key terms that must be defined to better understand the language used in this project. I will identify the parameters of who will be included in this study and the literature that will help to shape my conclusions. I will indicate the research methodology I plan to incorporate.

#### **Personal Introduction**

“A funny thing happened on my way to lifelong ministry - I discovered the International Church!” (Martin, “International Pastor” 3). These words written by my friend and mentor would sum up well my own experience with the English-speaking international church. My first exposure to an international English-speaking church was during my seminary years when one of my professors spoke about pastoring one in Hong Kong. After I graduated from seminary, my wife and I were interested in missions and cross-cultural ministry, but as best as I can recall I had no other knowledge of English-speaking international churches.

This all changed when my wife received a forwarded email from her boss back in December 2001 when he stated, “*Anyone interested?*” Attached to the email was a letter from a retired pastor looking for a full-time pastor to come serve in an English-speaking international church in San Jose, Costa Rica. This began a 6-month journey which culminated with me becoming the pastor of International Baptist Church, San Jose, Costa Rica. I have pastored this congregation for the past 18 years. During this time, I have become well-acquainted with the English-speaking international churches all over the world.

The English-speaking international church is unique in a variety of ways, even more so than other language churches. Because English is such a universal language, these churches are spread out all over the globe. It is estimated there are over 1,000 international churches (Evetts 5). They are made up of a diverse constituency. They certainly have a large number of foreigners or expats, and at the same time, many English-speaking churches also have nationals. In some of these churches the nationals actually outnumber the internationals.

Not only are these churches diverse nationally but they are also diverse economically. Within a single congregation you may have wealthy businessmen and entrepreneurs who worship side by side with low-income manual laborers and refugees. The only real commonality for these people is the English language. This, of course, is spoken with a wide range of accents.

It has been estimated over 200 million people are living outside of their country of origin (Just Landed). If this were a country, it would be one of the largest in the world. Many of these people speak English, and yet, many of these people are unreached or unchurched. The English-speaking international church is unusually positioned to reach this burgeoning population. There are many churches doing an effective job at reaching and discipling their target audience. Others are not doing so well. My interest is to discover the commonalities of the churches that are being

effective. Those reaching their target audience, ministering to the community, and making disciples of English-speakers are doing exactly what we are commissioned to do (Matt. 28.18-20).

Because I am a practitioner, I have a burning desire to know what these churches are doing. During my 18 years of serving in Costa Rica, we have had some success in reaching and discipling our target audience. Yet, I feel in many ways, we are just touching the tip of the iceberg as to what God is calling us to do. I have found some of my best learning has come by reading about, hearing about, and actually visiting other churches.

If English-speaking international churches are going to grow, they have to reach and disciple more people than they will lose. This brings up one of the great challenges facing the international church. These churches by nature are transitional. They have been compared to pastoring a parade (Martin, "Ethnic Churches" 164). You always have people coming and going. The challenge is how do you reach and connect more people than you are going to lose because you will lose people. The losses primarily come from the reality that internationals will come and go. Many are not going to settle permanently in the country. This is usually different from a national or native church. In these churches, when you reach someone and they grow up in the faith, you can reasonably expect them to be around for a while. The international church does not have this luxury. Add to this the fact the target audience for an international church is often spread out geographically and is not a homogeneous group. In this case, one size does not fit all.

I have been on a journey with international churches as both a practitioner and researcher. On this journey I have come to love the ministry opportunities of this unique type of congregation. I have wrestled with this incredible challenge—*how can these churches become more effective in reaching and discipling their target audience?* It is my hope and prayer some of

the answers I will find through this paper will help me to be a better pastor of an international church and will help other similar churches become more effective.

### **Statement of the Problem**

English-speaking international churches that are healthy and growing have the potential to reach one of the largest unchurched people groups in the world. How can this happen? How do English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience? What are the commonalities of effective English-speaking international churches? Can a strategy be developed that is transferable to other English-speaking churches around the world?

The major problem to be addressed in this research would be stated this way. How does one define a healthy, growing congregation that is reaching its target audience, is effective in making disciples, and is using strategies transferable to other similar churches? This is the question I will be answering in this project.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how English-speaking international churches in non-English speaking countries reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience to discern best practices that might be transferable to other English-speaking international churches.

**Goal:** To discover best practices for how English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience. *Note: the target audience is unchurched English speakers.*

**Project:** A book or manual that describes the best practices or methods for how English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience.

What is the product I would desire to come out of this project? The final product I desire is a book or manual to serve as a helpful resource for other pastors and leaders of English-

speaking international churches. I hope this project would become an introduction to those who might consider planting, pastoring, or serving in this type of church.

## **Research Questions**

### **Research Question #1**

What practices do English-speaking international churches use to reach, disciple, and minister their target audience for ministry?

### **Research Question #2**

What are the results of these practices to reach, disciple, and minister their target audience for ministry?

### **Research Question #3**

What are best practices for reaching, discipling, and ministering to English-speakers in non-English speaking countries are transferable to English-speaking international churches in non-English speaking countries?

## **Rationale for the Project**

Why is it so important to investigate how these churches reach and disciple their target audience? Here are several reasons. First, the Great Commission (Matt. 28.18-20) compels Christians to make disciples of all “ethnos” often translated as nations. According to Paul Borthwick, “The ‘all nations’ phrase of Luke 24.47 and Matthew 28.19 literally means ‘every ethnic specific group.’ God’s mission is that people of every ethnicity would have an opportunity to experience his love and respond to his invitation to a life of following Jesus” (112). This has been the impetus for the missionary enterprise for the last 300 years. It is not uncommon for an English-speaking international church to have 20 to 30 nationalities represented. Rather than having to go to the nations or to target various ethnic groups, these groups are attending these



particular churches. Some represent countries that remain closed to the gospel or to missionaries. English-speaking international churches are uniquely positioned to help fulfill the task Jesus left to his disciples.

Second, many of these churches are thriving in areas where Christianity has died or declined. For example, in many European countries the Protestant churches are dying or have already died. Yet, these English-speaking churches in the same cities and sometimes even meeting in the same facilities are growing. They are reaching people the national churches are not or cannot reach. Bob Marsh writes about the incredible opportunity of these churches reaching Europe. In reflecting on God's previous activity at Pentecost he says:

Twenty centuries later that work of God is being repeated, as people "from every nation under heaven" gather in cities around the globe. Nowhere is this more evident than in Europe. London is consistently listed as the most international city in the world with more than 160 language groups. It is followed by other European metro areas like Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam and Munich. Each of these cities has hundreds of thousands if not multiple millions of international citizens, most of whom speak English to some degree. (58)

Third, and closely tied to this, would be the fact international churches are reaching nationals even though English may not be their first language. International churches in Germany have German nationals attending. International churches in the Netherlands often have a solid Dutch population which makes up a portion of the congregation. In the church I pastor, statistics have shown up to 40% of our attendees are Costa Rican (internal church survey 2015). Not only can these churches effectively reach the international population of a country, it has been shown these churches are effective in reaching and making disciples of the national population.

A fourth reason would be there is not a lot of research on this topic. At least not research which has been published. My own research has shown there is a vacuum when it comes to either scholarly or practical work that has been done. This is unfortunate for a number of reasons. These churches do not have access to materials that can help them. The material that deals with this topic in a U.S. or western setting is large. Some of what is written can be transferable, but much of what is written does not apply to the culture and context of these churches. For this reason, more research and writing needs to be done on this subject.

Fifth, statistics and trends indicate the English-speaking population around the world continues to grow. English is the language of the world wide web. It is estimated that 80-90% of it is in English. English is the language of business. Most major corporations that are global have decided their language will be English and their management will use English in their meetings and plans. English is the language of travel. Many English-speaking western countries tend to have people who have the resources to travel globally. In countries where these travelers visit, English is essential among the native population. In the little country where I live, most Costa Ricans know they must learn English if they are to get a job in tourism which is the number one industry.

These are five compelling reasons why it is important to take on this project. David Packer writes:

The Lord is doing something in the international churches around the world. He is building His kingdom. Those of us who have served in them can tell you it is not always easy, but the Lord is good and faithful to supply us with what we need. I am reminded of what Major Ian Thomas said of the Christian life: It is not easy to live the Christian life, but neither is it hard. It is impossible. I would say the same of pastoring an international

church - we must depend on God's miraculous strength and guidance to serve effectively.

(157)

It is my prayer this project will help pastors and leaders of these churches lead effectively. It is an impossible task, but we serve a God who makes all things possible.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

1. **English-speaking:** Denotes English-speaking churches located in non-English speaking countries
2. **International:** Primarily made up of various nationalities and cultures
3. **Reach:** Attracting those in the community who are not connected to that church
4. **Disciple:** Helping others to become fully devoted followers of Christ
5. **Minister:** The way those in the church connect and care for one another
6. **Target audience:** Other English-speakers who could be internationals or locals
7. **Transferable:** What can be used in a similar way by a different church
8. **Cross-cultural:** Ministry that takes place across clearly defined cultures

### **Delimitations**

As previously stated, there are over 1,000 English-speaking international churches spread around the globe (Just Landed). There are a number of global movements to plant new English-speaking international churches. The purpose of this study was to help pastors and leaders of these churches to better understand the best practices for reaching, discipling, and ministering to their target audience. These churches represent numerous different denominations, and I will primarily focus on the evangelical churches. More specifically, I will focus on the churches affiliated with the International Baptist Convention. These churches are located in both Europe

and Latin America. I will analyze the information from selected international churches in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East as well.

The churches I will study will vary in size and style. Most of my information will come from pastors of these churches though I will attempt to interview and survey key leaders of these churches and denominational leaders. The churches I will not include in my study would be those that are not evangelical. These are the parameters that will guide my research.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

There is not a lot written specifically about English-speaking international churches in the scriptures or in books. Though you will not find words like “English-speaking,” “international” or “multicultural” in the Bible, there are plenty of sections of scripture from the Old & New Testament that are applicable. I had been thinking theologically about the international church for a number of years and being able to do in-depth research on this topic was powerful. Revisiting sections of scripture like the call of Abraham, the Exodus, Jesus’ Great Commission, and Paul’s missionary journeys gave me new insight into familiar passages regarding the international church. A number of commentaries were used in the exegesis of certain passages.

The review is dependent on literature that came from a missionary or cross-cultural perspective. There has been much written in this field, and I found books in this genre to be particularly helpful especially in the area of church planting and church growth. The literature available written specifically on the topic of English-speaking international churches was limited. One source which helped immensely was Darryl Evetts’s dissertation entitled *Making Disciples in Transient Communities*. Not only was the content of the dissertation good but the various sources he used became some of my own sources. Another source was David Packer’s books which were an immense wealth of knowledge specific to international churches. Other

writings I used were from Rodney Woo and Bruce Milne. Three of the four above authors are friends of mine and submitted their responses to my questionnaire.

As part of my Doctor of Ministry lectures, I was introduced to Dr. Gregg Okesson. His lectures on migration in the Bible were eye opening. This led me to include a section on human migration in the Bible in the review. This information was coupled with Evetts' research concerning present day human migration and the opportunities it presents.

So much of what I have learned about English-speaking international churches has come out of my conversations with people who have lengthy experience with these churches. Dr. Jimmy Martin has been a friend and a sounding board for me as a pastor over the last 15 years. He has written and spoken regularly on this subject in his role as the General Secretary of the International Baptist Convention. I have listened to Jimmy preach, interacted with him personally and in meetings, and had numerous personal conversations with him about the subject matter of this project. The IBC has a quarterly magazine called Highlights. Jimmy and other writers regularly contribute to this magazine, and I have gleaned much from their articles. I would add Ken MacHarg to this group as well. Ken and his wife attended IBC, San Jose many years ago while they were serving as missionaries in Costa Rica. Ken has blogged and written about international churches and having conversations with Ken and reading his articles has shaped my thinking on this subject.

### **Research Methodology**

The primary means of gathering information outside of the biblical and theological research consisted of the following: a questionnaire to pastors and key leaders, several interviews online, and one focus Zoom group, all with participants from English-speaking international churches.

The success of the research was greatly dependent on those who participated in the research. Certainly, those who are most closely connected to English-speaking international churches understood best. All of the participants were practitioners and pastors. In some cases, they were leaders of organizations that work directly with these churches.

On all three instruments the researcher formulated questions that attempted to answer my three research questions for this project. The questions loosely fell under the three research questions. In the questionnaire, one question allowed the leaders to rank what they saw as most important in relation to their church reaching, discipling, and ministering to their target audience. The rest of the questions in the questionnaire, in the interviews, and in the focus group were more open ended. The research was certainly more qualitative than quantitative.

The researcher was reliant on three organizations as the primary means of recruiting participants. They were the International Baptist Convention ([www.abc-churches.org](http://www.abc-churches.org)), the International Churches Network ([www.internationalchurches.net](http://www.internationalchurches.net)), and the Latin America LEAD Team. Of these three organizations, the researcher is much more connected to the IBC and the LAM LEAD Team. He used the websites of the IBC and the International Church Network to recruit participants for the questionnaire. The goal was to send at least 50 invitations and to have at least a 50% response rate. For the interviews, the researcher personally recruited participants from the IBC. The goal was to interview 8 to 10 pastors or leaders. For the focus group, the researcher relied on the LAM LEAD team with the goal of 4 to 7 participants in this group.

The participants for all three instruments were not required to go through any sort of assessment tool before their participation. What they were required to do was to sign the release form before participating. They were given the option to request a pseudonym in case they would rather not have their name, church, or organization identified in this ministry transformation

project. Since most of the pastors and leaders did not have their churches in closed or highly sensitive areas, most were comfortable using their true identity. One person did request for the use of a pseudonym.

The participants were chosen based on the following criteria. They must be a current pastor of an English-speaking international church or have pastored one of these churches in the recent past. They must be a leader of an organization that works specifically with these types of churches. This is the main criteria and is given in detail in chapter 3. This project did not use any other criteria like education or denomination. However, because of the organizations research relied on, most of the participants were Baptist or evangelical. A description of this is explained in chapter 3.

One of the criteria that was difficult to identify was the desire to have pastors of healthy, growing churches. How does one define church health? What about church growth? Is it all based on numbers or should there be other considerations? There is a wealth of material written in both books and articles on this subject. To try and limit the answer to these two questions in a single sentence or phrase may be too simple. The researcher wanted to define the basis and the criteria of healthy growing churches versus unhealthy dying churches. This project used the following criteria as laid out in the article, “Is Your Church Healthy and Fit?” (Planck). Here is a detailed working definition:

There are many ways to define a healthy church and some have crafted fantastic concise definitions, while others have developed key markers to determine church health that provide a wonderful framework. Our experience indicates there are four key factors that show up in a healthy local church.

Four Key Factors

For a church to be healthy she must see:

1. *People walking toward and across the line of faith.* You must witness individuals who are separated from God come into a relationship with him through Jesus. How you do this depends on a lot of factors.
2. *Ongoing life change.* You must see individuals becoming more mature in their relationship with Christ, growing in relationships, attitudes, actions, thoughts, and perspective. As they are transformed personally, the community in which they find themselves will be transformed as well.
3. *Disciple-making and church multiplication.* Healthy churches see the Kingdom of God expand beyond itself. Healthy churches produce disciples of Jesus who reproduce themselves. When disciple-making is happening to a third and fourth generation, church multiplication will often result.
4. *Self-Sustaining (finances and people).* Healthy churches are able to sustain themselves. This includes developed systems that produce the finances, people, and leaders to support the ongoing mission of the church. (Planck)

These criteria were chosen because it closely relates to the purpose statement for this project. Though the researcher will not be able to do any sort of in-depth analysis on the churches that were represented in my project, he tried to choose leaders of churches that fit the above criteria. The method of data collection and analysis are described later in this chapter.

### **Type of Research**

The type of research was qualitative. Almost all of the questions on the questionnaire, in the interview, and the focus group were asked to get the participant's opinion. There was only one question on the questionnaire that was quantitative in nature. Because the project used three



different approaches to gather information, the type of research used was also the mixed method approach. The questionnaire was placed on SurveyMonkey. All participants received an introductory email with the link to the questionnaire. The researcher recruited volunteers for the interviews via an email and then set up a time to conduct the interview. The researcher invited the focus group through an email and then set up a time to meet. The researcher used Zoom for the interviews and the focus group and recorded the sessions.

### **Participants**

1. Pastors and leaders of English-speaking international churches  
Possibly denominational leaders or leaders of missionary organizations  
Why? These are the people who are the practitioners on the field.
2. Various associations and conventions of English-speaking international churches  
Why? They have a broad perspective of the churches this project is examining.

### **Instrumentation**

- \*Questionnaire: international church questionnaire (ICQ)
- \*Interviews: pastors and church leaders interviews (PCLI)
- \*Focus Group: pastors focus group (PFG)
- \*Reading research: (RR)
- \*Participant Observation: (PO)

This project will name the instruments being used with abbreviations. For example, “Church Leaders Survey” CLS, “Church Survey” CS and “International Church Case study” ICCS. (See above)

RQ#1: ICQ, PCLI, PFG, RR, PO

RQ#2: ICQ, PCLI, PFG, RR, PO

## RQ#3: ICQ, PCLI, PFG, RR, PO

**Data Collection**

The researcher developed a questionnaire to input on SurveyMonkey. Once the questionnaire was in place, about 50 pastors and leaders of English-speaking international churches were selected. The researcher sent them an email introducing himself, describing the project, and inviting them to the link that would allow them to complete the survey. When the survey was completed, the researcher was contacted automatically by SurveyMonkey through an email which gave him direct access to the results of the questionnaire. The researcher did do a follow up email after a month to remind those who had not yet participated that they could still be a part of the project.

The interview was conducted in the following manner. The researcher contacted a select group of pastors and leaders and invited them to participate in an interview. He then gave them some time slots to see if they would be available. If they were unavailable for one of the allotted times, the researcher invited them to contact him directly to look at the possibility of another time to conduct the interview. When the interview was set, the researcher sent them a reminder the day before along with the questions to be asked in the interview and a link to the interview on Zoom. They also received and needed to sign a release form ahead of time. The interviews were both conducted and recorded on Zoom.

The focus group was conducted in the following manner. The researcher contacted those he wanted to participate by inviting them to be a part of the focus group. He then gave them some possible times to meet. Once the researcher had determined the participants and the best time, he confirmed with everyone. The day before the focus group, the researcher sent a reminder along with the questions which was used as a guideline for the discussion. The

researcher sent an invitation to Zoom along with the link. He asked them to sign the consent form ahead of time. When the focus group was conducted, everything was recorded on Zoom.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis was used in the church survey interviews. The researcher used a multi-method system with three different instruments. The questionnaire was done through SurveyMonkey which had a built-in system to analyze the data. The researcher listened to and transcribed the notes from the interviews and the focus group. He then organized the data into themes and categories based on the research questions. The researcher took extensive time to evaluate the coded responses and placed them under various categories. He tallied the results of all the dominant themes that had emerged. He then took the top 3 to 5 themes under the categories. These are what ultimately became the results of these projects. The results of all the findings are included in chapter 4 with the conclusions in chapter 5.

### **Generalizability**

This project is significant because it will allow pastors and church leaders of English-speaking international churches to have an overview of how other similar churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience. The context would be English-speaking international churches around the world. If this project obtains and identifies the principles for how these churches reach and disciple their target audience, then these can be transferable to other like churches. If an English-speaking church in Paris, France can apply some of the methods of an English-speaking church in Buenos Aires, Argentina, then the project will be successful. The major obstacle is the great variety of these churches and the significant differences of their ministry context.

## **Project Overview**

Chapter 1 introduces the problem this project is trying to answer. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological foundations for the project as well as the pertinent literature that addresses the main topic. Chapter 3 provides the research design, methodology, and instruments used in this project. Chapter 4 describes the results of the research and what the evidence discovered points to in the research. Chapter 5 describes the findings and all of the conclusions based on these findings.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter will address the biblical and theological foundations for the international, English-speaking church. This review will help determine how English-speaking international churches reach and disciple their target population. This review contains insights from various literature on this subject and explains the research methods used in this project to gain this vital information.

Since everything that is done must be grounded in scripture, what are the biblical and theological foundations for an international, language church? Can one find in the pages of the Bible a strategy for reaching and discipling a diverse group of people united primarily by language? Are there particular passages that speak to subjects like cross-cultural and international ministry? The intent of this chapter is to examine the various materials that are available on this subject with the purpose of arriving at some set conclusions.

#### **A Biblical Basis for an International Language Congregation**

Is there a biblical basis for a ministry in an international language church? The answer is yes. There are a significant number of books that cover the topics of missiology and cross-cultural and international ministry. These books will serve as the primary resources for this specific topic. A beginning point is to look at the biblical basis for international cross-cultural ministry.

Why is a biblical basis so important? Through a biblical foundation, believers can understand their motivation for what we are called to do as Christians. “It is essential, therefore, for Christians to understand the grounds on which the Christian mission rests. Only then shall we

be able to persevere in the missionary task, with courage and humility, in spite of the world's misunderstanding and opposition. More precisely, biblical Christians need biblical incentives" (Stott 3). Where does this incentive come from? The Christian's incentive comes from the pages of scripture. In both the Old and New Testament are passages that form a basis for a ministry which reaches across cultures and are international in their focus.

### **Biblical Foundations**

#### **The Genesis Narrative**

Many missiologists trace the beginning of God's redemptive activity or God's missionary movement to the call of Abraham. "Our story begins about four thousand years ago with a man named Abraham, or more accurately, Abram as he was called at the time" (Stott 3). Though this is a good beginning place, it might be more accurate to go to the story that precedes the call of Abraham. This is the story of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11.1-9). The point made here is there was a unity of language which allowed the people to communicate. Rather than unifying the people in their worship of God, it led to their rebellion against God. Rodney Woo argues:

The implication in Gen 11.1 is that there was basically one unifying language for all the inhabitants of the earth, in fact, the biblical writer emphasized the fact that humanity had one specific language before the Tower of Babel event. Unfortunately, this linguistic unity was used to further man's desire versus God's. (75)

This led to their sinning against God. They wanted to make a name for themselves (Gen. 11.4). In response to their efforts, God confused their language. There is great power and potential when people are unified by a common language. There is also greater potential for sin. God scattered the people and made communicating with one another much more difficult. Eric Wright states, "The resulting dispersion of people into competitive language groups ensures that the

spread of sin will be somewhat contained” (52). So much so when the people wanted to use this unity for the wrong purposes, God confused their language. Immediately after the Tower of Babel episode the book of Genesis tells of God’s dealing with Abraham.

Many scholars see the call of Abraham (Abram) as the beginning of God’s missionary mandate, his new strategy after he had scattered the people at Babel. “God’s new strategy was to select one individual as his friend and partner. From all possible options, God elected Abraham and his descendants as the key to establishing his kingdom throughout the earth” (Willis 31). God calls Abraham to take a step of faith: to leave what he knows to go into the unknown. His act of obedience corresponds with a promise from God himself. He will bless Abraham and his descendants and make them a blessing to all peoples (Gen. 12.3).

There is much to be considered from this one climatic story. Abraham had to leave his own country, his own people, and his father’s household (v. 3) in order to receive God’s promised blessing. The promised blessing included posterity and land, but the most significant part of the blessing was to be a spiritual blessing. “No greater blessing is conceivable. It is the foundation of the covenant of grace which a few years later God went on to elaborate to Abraham” (Stott 5).

This blessing was not limited to Abraham or his descendants. This blessing of grace was to extend to the nations. “All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (v. 3b). This shows a God who is on mission. “The nations are not gathered in automatically” (Stott 9). Rather, beginning from the time of Abraham the called out ones are sent to proclaim this blessing to the nations.

Having considered the call of Abraham, this review will examine briefly the story of his direct descendant, his grandson, Jacob. The story of Jacob is recorded primarily in Genesis 25-

35. The story served as a model for international ministry is recorded in Genesis 28.10-31.21. The promise of God to Abraham has been fulfilled. Abraham has been blessed with land and descendants. Isaac is the son of promise. Isaac has twin sons with his wife Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau. Time passes and Esau becomes the favored son of Isaac while Jacob is the favored son of his mother. A plan is devised for Jacob to trick his twin out of his inheritance by his mother. The plan works, but the result is Esau holds a grudge against Jacob and resolves to kill him when the opportune time comes.

This forces Rebekah and Jacob to make a radical decision. He will relocate to a new country to get away from Esau and to avoid the prospect of being killed. The land chosen is the region Rebekah came from called Paddan Aram. It is during Jacob's sojourn in the land of his relatives he learns to make a home in a foreign land. During his twenty year adventure, Jacob learned to adapt to another culture. He learned the hard lesson of not being aware of cultural differences when he was promised the younger daughter of his uncle Laban, only to discover their culture dictated the older be married off first. The story of Jacob's time in Paddan Aram serves as a case study for all those who would live for an extended time in another country. The blessing God had promised Jacob's grandfather continues even in the time of forced exile. "Jacob comes to Laban as a fugitive; the blessing he won by deceit has driven him from his father's house and he himself is now deceived in the house of his relatives. But the blessing gives notice of its presence in the service of Laban and Laban acknowledges it" (Westermann 484).

Jacob's sojourn in a foreign land serves as an example for all future internationals on how to make a strange land one's home. Though Jacob may have not included God in the equation of why he was going, the providential meeting in Bethel (Gen. 28.10-22) confirmed God was indeed leading him. Jacob adjusted to the culture of the land and was able to not only survive but



to thrive. He persevered in spite of the many challenges that accompanied living in a foreign land. In the end, he experienced God's continued blessing. This is the experience of many in the international community who have made another country their home.

### **The Exodus Account**

The book of Genesis closes with all the descendants of Abraham going to Egypt. God has had his providential hand on his people and has been fulfilling his promise of blessing the nations through them. Egypt is one of these nations. They are able to endure a devastating famine because of the godly and extraordinary leadership of Joseph, the great grandson of Abraham. Time passes, 400 years to be exact, and a Pharaoh rises to power who does not know Joseph or his offspring. God raises up Moses to deliver his people as is retold in the Exodus account.

What is important here is how God delivered the people out of captivity from the Egyptians. When they left Egypt, they were not alone. Many others from all kinds of various backgrounds were with them. Exodus 12:38 says, "Many other people went up with them . . . ." There is not an explicit account of these people. The Hebrew word can be translated several different ways, but it clearly connotes a group of foreigners. Some scholars have estimated up to 80,000 Egyptians and people of other races (Propp 414). These people were not Israelites. The many other people are composed of Egyptians and perhaps some of the Semitic populations (Kaiser Jr. 433). They were people from other ethnic groups. In the Exodus account God was fulfilling his promise to Abraham to make his descendants a "blessing to the nations."

### **The Historical Narratives**

Following the Pentateuch are the various historical narratives. Though these are primarily a history of the Israelites there are a number of stories that serve as a biblical foundation for cross-cultural ministry. Though the information is limited, there are clearly a few places that

show how God was concerned about reaching all peoples. The following examples from the historical narratives will show the importance of cross-cultural ministry.

*The story of Ruth.* The book of Ruth tells the story of a Moabite woman named Ruth. Ruth serves as an example of cross-cultural ministry. The heroine of the story is not from the tribe of Israel. Furthermore, she is a woman. Yet, she stands as an example of God extending His grace and protection to the foreigners that lived among the Israelites. “Since the woman Ruth is a Moabitess, not an Israelite, the effect of the book, if not its purpose, is to create a sympathetic feeling toward foreigners who put themselves under the protection of Israel’s God” (Coogan 325).

Interestingly, this beautiful story has been used by missionaries in bridging gaps between cultures. Knight writes:

When missionaries were able only in 1948 to reduce to writing the Tamahaq language, spoken by some of the veiled Tuaregs of the Sahara Desert, the portion of the Bible which they chose to translate first of all into that tongue was the little book of Ruth. The reason given by the National Bible Society of Scotland was that in this case it was women who were translators. It was primarily with the Tuareg women, for whom the story would have a special appeal, that they had been able to make contacts. (15)

The fact the book ended with the genealogy of David shows God’s concern for the foreigner during a time when Israel was swept up with feelings of nationalism.

*The Story of Naaman.* The second example is the story of Naaman found in 2 Kings 5. Naaman was the King of Aram. The Bible describes him as a commander and a valiant soldier who was highly regarded (v.1). By any measuring standard, he is portrayed as a great man.

Traylor says:

Verse 1 provides a fourfold description of Naaman's greatness. He was the number one military leader of the nation of Syria. He was held in high esteem by his master, Ben-hadad king of Syria. He was highly honored by the people of Syria for the great military victory the Lord . . . had given to Syria through Naaman's leadership. He was personally a mighty warrior of great ability and courage. (61)

But there was a problem; he had leprosy. Though there are a number of diseases referred to as leprosy in the Bible, most had these two things in common. The disease was incurable and caused one to be an outcast from society. If it was what is commonly known as Hansen's disease, the repercussions would have been significant. Wilkins writes:

The modern conception of leprosy brings to mind the dreaded and debilitating illness known as Hansen's disease, prevalent in low, humid, tropical, or subtropical areas of the world (mostly in Asia, Africa, South America, and the Pacific Islands). While it is not highly contagious, the horror of the illness, which can waste away human limbs and extremities such as ears and noses, has led to the isolation of people with the disease. (340)

Naaman finds himself in a hopeless situation. But there was a young Hebrew slave girl from Israel who served Naaman's wife. She suggested Naaman see a prophet in Samaria, a Jewish prophet by the name of Elisha. The wife passes this advice on to her husband. Naaman is a desperate man and he is willing to try anything. He obtains permission from his master the king and he is allowed to travel to Samaria with a letter from the king (vv. 2-6).

After a series of interesting events that include the King of Israel eventually Naaman does locate Elisha the prophet (vv. 7-9). The prophet's remedy for the incurable malady is an interesting one. Through a messenger Elisha instructs Naaman to wash himself seven times in

the Jordan River and he will be cleansed (v. 10). One would think Naaman would be overjoyed at this point, but this was not the case. Instead he is angry. Why? First, he thought he would be personally met by Elisha. He was not. Secondly, he had an expectation of some sort of special formula that would bring healing like the waving of a hand (v.11). Instead, Elisha ordered him to go to a small river and wash himself seven times. This caused Naaman to be so angry he left in a rage.

After some coaxing from his servants, Naaman finally did what Elisha had instructed him to do. He went down to the Jordan, dipped himself in the water 7 times and was healed of his leprosy. His flesh was restored even better than it was before. Scripture records it was “like that of a young boy” (vv. 13-14). The result of this miraculous healing is Naaman went back to Elisha, stood before him, and proclaimed; “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel” (v. 15).

He returned to Aram as a changed man. Not only had he been healed of his leprosy, but he had encountered the God of Israel. This story is a wonderful example of a foreigner traveling to a distant land seeking and hoping for something that would make his life better. In this case it was physical healing. He did not stay in that land long, but during the time he was there he came to know the one true God. He then took his new-found faith back to his home country. This is the same story of many who end up in international English-speaking churches. They have traveled to another land for various reasons. They may have been sent by their company or their government. They may be looking for work to provide for their family or just wanting a new adventure. Whether they know it or not, they are often looking for something. They are looking for a community of people like them, who at least speak the same language, and are also strangers in a foreign land. Hopefully, they find even something greater—the God who

established his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Though they may be foreign to this God as Naaman was, they can encounter a healing of their souls.

These two stories from the historical narratives demonstrate God's heart for the foreigner and serve as a model for cross-cultural ministry which is essential for ministry in an international context.

### **Poetic Literature**

The poetic literature refers to the Psalms and other poetic writings in the Old Testament. The book of Psalms is the ancient book of worship and songs for the Hebrew people. Yet the Psalms has an overtly missionary emphasis. Peters puts it this way:

It is a profound fact that 'the hymn of praise is missionary preaching par excellence,' especially when we realize that such missionary preaching is supported in the Psalms by more than 175 references of a universalistic note relating to the nations of the world.

Many of them bring hope of salvation to the nations. (115-116)

There are numerous Psalms that include God's concern for the nations. There are a number of Psalms that speak about making God known among the nations. Here is a sampling of those psalms.

*"Declare his glory among the nations!" (Ps. 96.3)*

*"The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad. Let the distant shore rejoice." (Ps. 97.1)*

*"I will praise you, O Lord among the nations, I will sing of you among the peoples." (Ps. 57.9).*

*May the Nations be Glad (Ps. 67).* This psalm falls under the classification of a harvest Psalm. "The psalm makes only one reference to a specific event, and that is the harvest" (Ross 442). As the people brought in the harvest, they would have a time of worship. The psalm is a

hymn of praise thanking God for his blessings in their lives, and it expresses a desire of the people that comes from the heart of God. The twofold desire coming from the heart of God is God will bless his people so they can be a blessing to others (v. 1) and God's name will be praised among all people (vv. 2-5).

*Psalm 137.* This is an interesting psalm which at first glance does not seem appropriate as a psalm about cross-cultural ministry. In fact, the psalm actually is quite nationalistic and exclusive in its focus. Its final verse about seizing infants and dashing them against rocks certainly does not rank as a high point for this psalm. It has even captured the attention of some in the secular world as a song repeating the first verse swept the music charts with its Caribbean sound. The song *Rivers of Babylon* originally written by Rastafarians became a hit song in the 70's ("Rivers of Babylon").

However, verse 4 does have a key theme for language churches. "How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" The setting is when the Israelites are in exile in Babylon. The Hebrews were musical people, and evidently their captors wanted to hear their songs, particularly their music, about their homeland. In response to this request, the author of this psalm asked how they can sing songs of the Lord in a foreign land. This question has been asked in different ways by the people of God who sojourn to other places. One way sojourners have dealt with this is by continuing to worship and sing songs in their native language.

Here then lies the connection. For many who attend an English language church while living in another country, the services allow them to sing songs to the Lord while living in a foreign land. This would not only be true of English language churches but of language churches in general. Language churches both historically and today answer the question the Psalmist poses. It is possible to sing songs to the Lord in a foreign land if you have a church or worship

service that uses the language you understand. (I was first introduced to this concept by Ken MacHarg through conversations and an article he wrote which appeared in the Tico Times newspaper. I found the article on the website [www.missionaryjournalist.net](http://www.missionaryjournalist.net), and as I was completing my bibliography for this dissertation I discovered the website is now invalid.)

### **The Prophets**

The section known as the prophets in the Bible speaks to the topic of missions, cross-cultural, and international ministry. Isaiah has some sections that have a missionary impetus. Habakkuk contains a promise that status, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord” (Hab. 2.14). There are several unique stories that come from the prophets that can be helpful when thinking about the ministry of international churches.

*The story of Ebed-Melek.* Of the various stories mentioned in the Old Testament addressing God’s missional heart, this story would probably be the most unfamiliar. This story is not mentioned in any literature that typically covers missions in the Old Testament. However, there is a connection to international and cross-cultural ministry. The story of Ebed-Melek is found in the book of Jeremiah. He is mentioned in chapters 38 and 39. He is first seen coming to the rescue of the prophet Jeremiah after Jeremiah has been thrown into a cistern because of his inflammatory preaching against the King and his officials. In this cistern it seems Jeremiah will die a slow, agonizing death at the bottom of the well covered with mud.

But Ebed-Melek the Cushite, a foreigner from the country of Ethiopia, intervenes. He was an official in the royal palace, and he petitions the king to rescue Jeremiah from his life threatening predicament. The king who earlier had granted permission for Jeremiah to be thrown into the well acquiesces and allows Ebed-Melek to rescue Jeremiah. He even allots 30 men to help in the rescue efforts. Ebed-Meleck, with the help of these 30 men, is successful in the rescue

mission. Though the text does not say, it is a fair assumption to conclude Jeremiah is a very grateful man.

Pertaining to international ministry, a bond is formed between a national, Jeremiah, and an international, Ebed-Melek. This is an important aspect of cross-cultural ministry - strong relationships between nationals and foreigners. The bond evidently was so strong the Cushite was willing to put his reputation perhaps even his life on the line. This act of kindness would come back to Ebed-Melek in a powerful way.

Jeremiah 39 recounts the fall of Jerusalem. As the story unfolds, Jeremiah is in the courtyard of the guard (v. 15). He has a word for the man who rescued him. In spite of destruction all around, Jeremiah wants his Cushite friend to know the Lord has not forgotten him. The message is twofold and contrasting. I will bring disaster on Jerusalem, but I will rescue you. The rescuer becomes the rescued. Why is God doing this? Because Ebed-Melek trusts in the Lord (v.18). Concerning this story, Walter Brueggemann writes:

Ebed-melech is singled out for exceptional treatment. He will be delivered (n-ts-l). 'I will save you' (mlt). The oracle uses two powerful verbs for God's rescuing action. God promises to do for Ebed-melech exactly what God would not do for Zedekiah or for Judah. Ebed-melech is singled out, an exception is made. The reason for the exception is that Ebed-melech trusted in Yahweh (batah)...He intervened for Jeremiah; he saved the prophet. He made the presence of the prophet viable. Thus it is his daring service on behalf of the prophet that is his act of trust. (159-160)

*The story of Jonah.* Of the twelve minor prophets, none have a more missionary focus than Jonah. One cannot read this popular story without considering the missional emphasis of this minor prophet. Timmer states:



Nearly every book or article written on Jonah will deal to some degree with the question of mission, and for good reason: almost everyone recognizes that the events described in the book have some relation to God's plan to bless the world through the seed of Abram (Gen.12.1-3), a plan that runs like a thread through the OT. (21)

This book was written at a time when Jewish nationalism was running very high. The prophet was called by God to go to a foreign nation and not just any foreign nation. The city was Nineveh, part of the Babylonian empire, a hated group of people by the Jews and for good reason. They were known for their dominance and brutality. In the midst of this setting there is this magnificent little story with a very clear message. "In a word, the message of the book of Jonah is, first, an appeal to the Israelites of the late Old Testament period to realise that God loves the heathen nations just as much as he loves them" (Knight 53).

To demonstrate God's love for the heathen nations, the author of this book tells a story. A prophet named Jonah is called by God to go and proclaim a message of repentance to the ungodly people in Nineveh (Jon. 1.1-2). Jonah, being a devout and ardent Jew, refuses to be the message bearer to these people in fear that they will actually respond to his message and repent. He heads in the exact opposite direction of Nineveh, which is west to the Mediterranean Sea. God will not leave Jonah alone. A storm comes, and the experienced sailors of the boat are scared for their lives. Jonah reveals to them the reason for the storm and even gives them a solution for calming the storm. They are to throw Jonah out of the boat and into the sea. They are hesitant at first, but the severity of the storm causes them to do exactly what Jonah has suggested (Jon. 1.3-16).

A giant fish swallows Jonah, and this is enough for Jonah to decide he will be obedient to the call of God on his life though he still does not like it. After the fish vomits him up on shore,

Jonah obeys the command of God and goes and preaches the message to the nation of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh not only hear this reluctant prophet's message, they respond to it by repenting. God withholds the destruction he was going to bring to this nation (Jon. 2-3).

Jonah is not at all happy about the outcome. In his angry prayer he reveals something extremely important about the character of God. The Lord is a "gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love" (Jon. 4.2b). God uses nature once again to show Jonah his concern for all people. He sends a plant to provide Jonah with shade. Then a worm comes and destroys the plant. The story ends with Jonah still angry and God proclaiming once more his love and concern for all of humanity and all of his creation.

Of all the minor prophets, Jonah is the most explicit about God's redemptive mission to the nations. Hicks says, "The Book of Jonah may be the most missionary book in the entire Bible" (59). Yet the lead character did not recognize the missionary heart of God. The lesson of Jonah and its relation to cross-cultural ministry is God is concerned about all peoples even those we would consider hostile to the gospel. Hicks continues:

If God's people had been alert and teachable, they could easily have understood the meaning of this story to be a call to them to move toward other peoples with the news of Yahweh's gracious restoration and forgiveness on the basis of repentance. We must remind ourselves to make a clear distinction in this saga between Jonah's understanding and attitude and that of Yahweh. As the story proceeds we see clearly the redemptive intent of God and his desire that this wicked nation might repent so that he could restore them to fellowship with himself. The limitation, then, is Jonah's (and Israel's) failure to respond to the Lord's missionary purpose and intent. (59)

There are several other minor prophets that include a cross-cultural emphasis. In the book of Zechariah are found these words: “This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you’” (Zech. 9.23). One commentator says:

The prophet depicts a Jewish person in exile who is preparing to go back to Jerusalem. Till recently, the exiles were despised and rejected. But now they are surrounded by a procession of people from the nations who want to go with them. They have to show the procession the way to God of Israel and the Israel of the Lord. (Bos kindle loc. 92)

The international church finds itself in a similar situation with some similar possibilities. Many who make up the international church are in a sort of exile. When they gather to worship and as they live and serve in a country that is not their own, they have the possibility of pointing nationals and internationals toward the God they worship. The result can be that some will repeat the same words found repeated in Zechariah: we have heard that God is with you. This seems to be especially true of international churches that reside in countries where the dominant religion is completely different. Tucked away in a hard to locate book in the minor prophets these words are written: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the water covers the sea” (Hab. 2.14). How will this happen? How will the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God? Certainly, there are numerous ways this can happen. One of the primary ways Habakkuk’s word will be fulfilled is through the witness of international English-speaking churches.

### **New Testament Writings**

The New Testament writings have much to say about cross-cultural and international ministry. From the first gospel to the final apocalyptic vision there is much to be found on God's missionary mandate to reach the nations. The following section is an attempt to summarize some of the findings on this subject.

### **The Gospels**

The first four books of the New Testament record the life, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. All of them clearly demonstrate that in the person of Jesus Christ, God was bringing to fruition his plan of world redemption. It has often been said Jesus was the first missionary. He left his exalted place and entered humanity as a baby. He came and "made his dwelling among us" as the Gospel of John eloquently states. This section will begin by looking at two critically important motifs the Gospels reveal about Jesus as the first missionary: 1) the incarnation and 2) the apostle or "sent one."

*The Incarnation.* "Only God could think up the incarnation. Man-made religions exalt men to the status of god; only the Bible teaches that God actually became a man" (Willis 43). For many the incarnation is a great mystery. For the Christian, particularly the missionary, the incarnation serves as a model for ministry. Of all the ways God could have offered salvation, he chose to do so by sending his only son, Jesus. "In a bold and completely unforeseeable manner, the story of God takes on a new identity through a baby, born in a manger. In Genesis 12, God acts through an old barren couple, now he accomplishes his purposes through a poor unwed mother" (Okesson Slide 35). Jesus came into the world at a particular time and in a specific culture. He had to learn to be human. "He was not born with the knowledge of language or culture. In this respect, he was an ordinary child. He learned language from his parents. He learned how to play from his peers. He learned the trade of a carpenter from Joseph and studied

the Scriptures and worshipped in the same manner as did all young men of his time” (Lingenfelter and Mayers 4).

Cross-cultural ministry means one is willing to live among others. One is willing to learn from and relate to others. Statistics, observation, and experience have proven that ministry effectiveness increases greatly among those who are willing to plant their lives in a country or ministry. Short-term mission trips have become extremely popular in the West. While they do have their place, nothing can take the place of someone willing to plant their lives among a particular group of people for the long haul.

*Jesus the Sent One and the Sender.* Toward the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, he gathered his disciples and shared with them these words. “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20.21). In this short but precise sentence Jesus reveals two important truths. He is both the sent one, and he is also the sender. “Therefore, Jesus is “sent by God,” and he in turn sends his disciples” (Garrett 65). Jesus responds in obedience to the one who has sent him. He then expects the same type of obedience from those he will send as he commissions them. This then brings this review to a critically important component of Jesus ministry in relation to cross-cultural ministry, the great commission.

*Jesus Final Commission.* All four gospels and the book of Acts records Jesus’ final commands (Matt. 28.18-20; Mark 16.15-16; Luke 24.46-49; John 20.21; Acts 1.8). The two passages to be examined will be from Matthew and Acts. Final words are important. They often express the deepest desire of the one saying them. Matthew gives us a record of Jesus’ final word to his disciples. Jesus stood at the top of a mountain along with his disciples and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and

teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28.18-20). This statement is often called the Great Commission. It has been one of the guiding scriptures for missionaries and all who are called to cross-cultural ministry. There are several important elements to the final commission.

Jesus begins by reminding his disciples where their authority derives. The authority comes from God. “The authority of Jesus is not a derived authority; it is the authority of God himself present in the midst of human history” (Newbegin 14). Jesus is bestowing the authority that has been given to him to his disciples. The authority comes from God. It is not just a little authority or partial authority that has been vested to Jesus. It is all the authority God has which is given to Jesus. He in turn bestows this upon his followers. There is a transference of that authority. This answers an important missiological question: By whose authority are Christians proclaiming their message? They are under the authority of God who has given his authority to his son and who has now transferred that authority to believers. In Newbegin’s book, *The Open Secret*, he says:

The confession I am making is that Jesus is the supreme authority or, using the language of the New Testament, that “Jesus is Lord.” This confession implies a claim regarding the entire public life of mankind and the whole created world. It is a claim that by following the clue that is given in the story that constitutes the gospel, the believing community will be led to a true understanding of all that is and to a right practical relation to it. (16)

This authority has now been given to the disciples. Now Jesus proclaims what they are to do with this authority that Jesus has transferred to them. They are to go and make disciples. The Greek words and structure are important here. The phrase translated as “make disciples” is in the imperative. Therefore, it is a command. The surrounding words are in the participle form

showing continuous action. Their association with the command to make disciples also places them in the imperative. “The circumstantial participle ‘go’ followed by the main verb is a common Matthean stylistic trait, and it becomes in effect another imperative, ‘Go and make disciples’” (Osborne 1080). Another way of translating this phrase would be “as you are going.” Thus, it is a command and a way of life. All disciples of Christ are on a mission from God. What is the nature of this mission? To make disciples of all nations. The Greek word here is “ethnos.” It is the basis for the English word for ethnic. It can be translated a number of different ways, but it clearly has the idea of various people groups. Jesus’ original mandate was to make disciples of all ethnic groups.

An unfortunate mistake of mission strategy historically has been the tendency to send missionaries to specific countries without the recognition that within the man-made borders of a country there could be numerous ethnic groups with their distinct language and culture. Fortunately, over time, due in part to the work of Donald McGavran and William Cameron Townsend, mission organizations today have come to understand the importance of recognizing and ministering to the various ethnic groups present in a country or region. How ironic this important mission’s strategy was put in place by Jesus at the beginning of his commissioning.

The mission then is to make disciples of all ethnic groups. This brings up another question: *what is a disciple?* The text indicates two overriding characteristics. First, they are to be baptized. They are to be converted. This is the starting point. A person must come to the recognition of who Jesus is and what he has done for them through his death and resurrection. They must “declare with their mouths and believe in their hearts that God has raised Jesus from the dead to be saved” (Rom. 10.9). They are to publicly declare this through believers' baptism. Secondly, they are to obey everything Jesus has commanded them.

Entire books have been written on what a disciple of Christ looks like and how they are to be formed. These books have given definitions, characteristics, processes, and other pertinent information. “We want to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ” (Hybels 169). The end product of one’s obedience to Christ’s command is that they would be about the business of making fully devoted followers of Christ of all ethnic groups. This is the summation of the Great Commission.

There is a final promise that accompanies this commission. It is Jesus’ promise to be with his followers always. When a Christ follower takes this mandate seriously and they go about the business of making disciples, then they are assured of this—Christ will be present with them. It is in Acts that one sees how Christ has promised to be with his disciples.

### **The Early Story of the Church: Acts**

Acts is the story of the beginning and the expansion of the Christian church. It begins where the gospels ended, particularly the Gospel of Luke since it is the second volume of a two volume history of Christ and the church he established. Both volumes are written by Luke. Luke records in Acts 1.8 Jesus’ commission in another way. Luke’s recording of Jesus’ final words is as follows: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1.8). It is worth noting some important distinctions in the verse.

First is the promise to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus earlier had given his disciples his transferred authority. He had promised them he would be with them until the ends of the earth. Now he is promising the third person of the Trinity to come to them in a special way. When the Holy Spirit comes, he will empower his people. He will be the promised presence



Jesus spoke of earlier in Matthew. This is how Jesus would remain with his disciples even after his ascension.

What is it that the Holy Spirit will empower them to do? He will empower them to be his witnesses. A witness is simply one who testifies to what they have seen and heard. Witnesses played important roles in the culture of that time as they still do today particularly in a court of law. This is the word Jesus uses. The word in Greek is “*marteō*” from which the English word “martyr” derives. This would certainly come to describe those earlier followers of Christ. As they became witnesses of the resurrected Jesus, many would lose their lives giving testimony of what they had heard and seen Jesus say and do.

There is a pattern Jesus gives in this commission. They are to be witnesses first in Jerusalem. When Jesus was speaking these words, they were all in a room in the city of Jerusalem. Jesus is saying a witness begins where they are. Wherever it is God has placed someone that is where the disciple is to be a witness. Yet, this person is not limited in their witness to one geographical location. The next place Jesus mentions is Judea. This would be comparable to the state or province where Jerusalem was located. There is a pattern emerging. One begins by being a witness where they are, but then they continue to be a witness beyond where they are. They are to be a witness to the surrounding state or province, and then the geographical region expands. Samaria would be comparable to the country where Jerusalem was located but Jesus does not stop there. The final words of this commission say the disciples of Christ are to go to the ends of the earth. There are no boundaries. Wherever the ends of the earth might be is where the followers of Christ are to go.

The disciples would eventually be obedient to Jesus’ final mandate, but one other critical event still needed to happen. They needed to wait for the promised Holy Spirit to come. This

event is recorded in Acts 2. They remained in Jerusalem and waited. Then the day of Pentecost arrived. On this important Jewish holiday, God-fearing Jews from all over the Mediterranean region were present. Then God's Spirit—the Holy Spirit—arrived. There were three miraculous signs that accompanied the Spirit's arrival. One is pertinent for our investigation. The disciples were able to speak in the languages of all the different hearers. Whether the miracle was in the speaking or the hearing is debatable, but the point is crystal clear. The gospel was heard in the native tongue of all who were present. This has been called the reversal of Babel. "The event was surely nothing less than a reversal of the curse of Babel" (Bruce 32). Bruce refers to Babel as God's reversal. Woo says Babel represents God bringing events to full circle. "In one sense Pentecost brought the tower of Babel full circle as the God who scattered people into linguistic fragments was now gathering them into a unified people" (Woo 77). A list of the nations represented is given in verses 9-11.

The Apostle Peter then stood before all in the crowd and did what Jesus had declared. He was a witness to all he had seen and heard, and he gave meaning to everything everyone had just experienced. This is the same Peter who had denied even knowing Jesus just over a month earlier. His preaching was before a crowd which most certainly would have included some who had been involved in the conviction and crucifixion of Jesus. How was Peter emboldened to do this? Because he had received what Jesus had promised—the power that comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit. The response to the message Peter preached was extraordinary. "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (Acts 2.41). The first Christian church was born.

This first church was almost completely Jewish and for a time remained in Jerusalem. They obeyed the first part of Jesus' command by being witnesses in that place. Many people

continued to respond but it would require something cataclysmic to move them toward obedience to the pattern Jesus had set before them. The cataclysmic event came in the form of the first martyr. Stephen, one of the first deacons, was stoned to death because of the message he was proclaiming. His martyrdom inadvertently forced many of those initial believers to scatter away from Jerusalem to parts of Judea and Samaria. As they scattered, they continued to proclaim the message of salvation.

There are four important occurrences in the book of Acts that are pertinent to missions strategy and to international ministry: 1) the conversion of Saul (ch. 9), 2) the conversion of Cornelius (ch. 10), 3) the church at Antioch (ch.13), and 4) the first Christian council at Jerusalem (ch.15).

*The Conversion of Saul (Acts 9).* Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus is one of the well-known stories in the New Testament. The point that is critical in this investigation which Acts records is the purpose for Saul's conversion. When the Lord appears to a man named Ananias instructing him to go to Saul and take care of him, Ananias is understandably reluctant. As the Lord explains in further detail to Ananias his plans for Saul, he says these words, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles..." (Acts 9.15). Saul, trained as a Jew, a persecutor against the new sect called Christians will become the primary instrument God will use to reach the Gentiles. It will be both Paul's missionary endeavors and his extensive written instructions to individuals and churches that will set the course for the gospel message being made readily available for all cultures.

*The Conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10).* Immediately after the account of Saul's conversion, there is the story of a Gentile named Cornelius. This story unfolds in three scenes. In Acts 10, Cornelius and his family are introduced and described as "devout and God-fearing"

(Acts 10.2). However, Cornelius was a Roman centurion, a Gentile. In the minds of most new Christians who were from a Jewish background, this meant the Good News was not for him. But it was. An angel of the Lord came to Cornelius in a vision. He let him know his “prayers and gifts to the poor” had been noticed (v. 4). Cornelius was to send some of his men to a place called Joppa and find a man called Peter. Cornelius obeyed the instructions given to him.

Act 10 unfolds with the Apostle Peter who was a devout Jew. During a time of prayer, Peter had a vision. The vision was quite alarming because it had to do with him eating food that was not kosher. Peter was resistant to the dream. He did not dare to eat what was not clean. Then God instructed him to not “call anything impure that God has made clean” (v. 15). Further instructions were given, and Peter was told to accompany the three men who were on their way from the house of Cornelius. The three men arrived, and Peter received them and hosted them for the night. The next day Peter went with them as he had been instructed.

Peter arrived with the men at the home of Cornelius. There was an exchange of information that both Cornelius and Peter have received from the Lord. The conclusion to all of this shared dissemination of experiences is Peter concluded the gospel message is for all people not just the Jews. This is a watershed insight for Peter. He states it this way, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation what is right” (v. 34). This message is for everyone from every place and for all time. The story ends with Peter baptizing Cornelius and his household. Peter was acting in obedience to the original command of Christ to make disciples of all nations. There remained however a huge barrier which had to be scaled before this message could truly be offered to everyone everywhere. There needed to be agreement from the larger body of Christians. This led to the first council at Jerusalem which will be examined below.

*The Antioch Church (Acts 13).* Concerning this chapter, Fernando writes:

There are versions of the International Church dotted across church history landscape. Geographically identified as the church at Antioch, perhaps this body of disciples is more appropriately called the first International Church (Acts 13.1-3). It started with Jewish expatriate believers meeting in current day Syria. They heard and acted on Jesus' Great Commission to be witnesses at home, in the region, in the country, and abroad (Acts 1.8). They invited Greek and Roman Gentiles into the church despite the obstacles of contrasting nationalities, differing cultures, a mosaic of color, and mixed classes" (micn).

The list of names of the leaders of this congregation show how truly diverse they were. "The list of prophets and teachers "symbolized the ethnic and cultural diversity of Antioch," a city with a cosmopolitan population" (373). It should be noted that one of the reasons for the cultural diversity of this church is because of its location in a major cosmopolitan city. This is so often where the many different nationalities converge.

What makes this church even more amazing is it was a mission sending church. It was this church that sent Paul and Barnabas out on their missionary journey. This church was not just satisfied in being an ethnically diverse congregation. They wanted to make sure the gospel would continue to travel and reach all kinds of people. The church at Antioch remains one of the great models from the New Testament of a vibrant and effective international church.

*The First Christian Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15).* The question at hand has been referred to as the Gentile question. The Gentile question was essentially this: *could a Gentile follow Christ without becoming a Jew or without following all the traditions and customs of the Jewish faith?* There were several key events that preceded this council. Peter was involved in the conversion of a Gentile soldier named Cornelius. Saul, who is now named Paul, goes on a

missionary journey. He is sent out by the church in Antioch which already has non-Jews in leadership (Acts 13.1). He is accompanied by fellow missionary Barnabas. They preached the gospel, and many who responded were Gentiles. The emerging Christian church must answer the Gentile question.

Fortunately for the Gentiles and for Christianity, the resounding answer was “Yes, a Gentile could become a follower of Christ without having to take on the traditions and customs of the Jews.” They did not have to worship in the temple. They did not have to observe the Sabbath in the same way the Jews did, and most importantly for the Gentile man, they did not have to be circumcised. A letter was sent out encouraging Gentiles not to do a few things that might be offensive to their Jewish brothers and sisters. They were also to abstain from sexual immorality (Acts 15.24-29). Other than that, a Gentile could become a disciple of Christ without taking on the culture of the Jews.

The significance of this decision cannot be underplayed. This would free up the gospel to continue to move at a rapid rate in the 1st century. More and more Gentiles would respond to the message. This decision ultimately allowed for the Christian message to be contextualized to the various cultures where it was planted. This decision would pave the way for the church to become more and more diverse. This reality is a critical component of the international church experience.

The rest of the book of Acts is the story of movement. The church began in Jerusalem. Jesus gave the mandate to make disciples of all nations. They were to start in Jerusalem and go to the ends of the earth. As the book of Acts comes to a close, the Apostle Paul is in Rome. This is 2,541 miles from Jerusalem. (This is the distance by foot travel. Ocean or air travel would be less.) He is under house arrest, but the message he proclaims is not arrested. The gospel is free to

travel, and it does. Much more important than the distance is the barriers the gospel crosses. It is a faith for everyone. That is why Paul can write, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3.28).

### **The Writings of Paul**

The conversion of Saul of Taurus had a huge impact on the movement of the gospel. Not only because of the missionary activity of Paul which was extensive but also because of his prolific writing. A total of 13 of his letters make up the 27 books of the New Testament. Some of these letters were written to churches Paul planted. Some were written to churches Paul did not plant but had a strong association. Some were written to leaders of those early churches. In almost all of these letters, Paul speaks about the unity Christ brings to Christians out of our diversity. It is one of his major themes.

In *A New Humanity* Bruce Milne, former pastor of a diverse international church for many years, writes about a new humanity that comes out of the book of Ephesians. “In his letter to the Ephesians he claims that Christians are a new kind of people, forming a new kind and quality of community - a new humanity in Christ (Eph. 2.15)” (Milne 15). In Ephesians Paul writes, “His purpose was to create in himself one humanity out of two, thus making peace” (Eph. 2.15). The two divided groups in the context of this letter were the Jews and the Gentiles. This idea of a new humanity serves as a framework for unity across all the barriers that have traditionally separated people.

First, there was the racial or cultural barrier. Jesus in his ministry stated, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11.17). He was quoting from the prophet Isaiah. It was a time when Jesus was chastising the people at the temple for what they were doing and not doing. One thing Jesus was making clear is the temple was to be a place for worship and

prayer for everyone. The barrier that divided the Jew from the Gentile was removed in the book of Acts. Paul was on the forefront of seeing racial and cultural barriers come down as he shared the gospel with both Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul clearly espouses the view in Christ that all are equal.

Second, there was the gender barrier. This began with the ministry of Jesus. Milne states: As in many Islamic cultures today, morality was to be safeguarded by keeping women in seclusion. By contrast, Jesus speaks openly with a woman, so that his disciples are amazed (John 4.27). Women people his audiences (e.g., Luke 11.27). He is a friend of the sisters Mary and Martha (Luke 10.38-42; John 11 passim). Women are among his followers and support him out of their resources (Mark 15.40-41; Luke 8.1-3). This must have been quite a sensation.” (31)

Paul would continue with the practice of elevating women in his writings. He does this by giving them instructions (1 Cor. 7). He includes them in his list of greetings (Rom. 16), and he serves with them during his ministry (Acts 18.18-22). The ironic thing is many people who do not understand the context in which Paul wrote misunderstand his writings and come up with the erroneous conclusion he was anti-women or a male chauvinist.

A final barrier Paul would cross were people on the margins of society. In his letters, he included instructions for the slaves (Eph. 6.5-8). He exhorted those who owned slaves to treat them with dignity, and on one occasion even encouraged a slave owner to receive his runaway slave back as a free man (Eph. 6.9; Philem.). He made sure widows were taken care of in a local church (1 Tim. 5.3). He addressed the family structure and instructed parents in the manner they should take care of their children and even more remarkably, how the children should respond to their parents (Eph. 6.1-4). Other New Testament writers would follow Paul’s lead and give



instructions to their readers as well. James encouraged several churches scattered in the diaspora to “look after widows and orphans in their distress” (Jas. 1.27).

International churches cross these barriers every Sunday. They are made up of people from many different nationalities and ethnic groups. On an average Sunday there is a kaleidoscope of people represented. These do include people from the margins. The foreigner, the widow, the orphan, and the refugee all typically are those who attend. All of this is made possible because of the vision Paul espoused in his writings of a new humanity.

### **Other New Testament Writers**

In this final section on the biblical foundations for the international church, there are other writers and writings to be considered. The non-Pauline letters are limited in their dealing with themes that relate directly to the international, multicultural experience. Of the remaining nine books in the New Testament, only two will be considered: James and Revelation.

James has been cited previously. The author is writing to a group of scattered churches. The reason for their scattering is primarily because of growing persecution. James has several themes that emerge as one reads through this letter. The theme that relates directly to the international church experience is James’s emphasis on not showing any favoritism. This is explicitly stated at the beginning of chapter 2: “My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism” (Jas. 2.1). Evidently, the congregations James is addressing are diverse congregations. This diversity included a diversity of race, culture, and gender. It also included economic diversity. This is what James is primarily addressing. In this same chapter, he even gives an illustration of what showing favoritism looks like (Jas 2.2-4). In the church of Jesus Christ, favoritism is anathema to the gospel. In the international ministry

context this is especially so. James gives clear instructions followed by a vivid illustration on how we are to not be exclusive but inclusive.

The final book for our consideration is the last book in the Bible: Revelation. This book with its veiled language and spectacular images often confuses Christians. To further exacerbate the problem is all of the end time speculation that occurs even among some prominent Christian scholars. But when one moves past all of this, there is this incredible vision of how things will be when the triumphant Jesus returns and sets everything straight. That vision contains a picture of the great diversity of those who have been ransomed by the Lamb:

*After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands and they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. (Rev. 7.9-10)*

The final and eternal gathering of the redeemed people of God will be internationally global. People from every tribe, nation, and ethnic group past and present will be represented. Milne writes:

Here is diversity as it has never been experienced during the entirety of history. No United Nations mandate has ever summoned such a heterogeneous company. Nor will it. No matter how long history plays out, for this company includes, as Jesus noted in Matthew 8.11, not only geographical breadth of human community, representing every nation on the earth's face, but also the succession of the generations across history's passing ages. (71)

### **Migration in the Bible**

A final topic for consideration is the phenomenon of migration in the Bible. This phenomenon is seen in both the Old and New Testament. However, it is a good topic to consider before moving into the biblical foundations which come from the New Testament. The Bible frequently records people on the move. Evetts writes, “Transient people throughout history were intrinsically related to God’s redemptive mission, sovereignly planned and executed by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (28). Some of these people moved on their own volition and some were forced to move. In the pages of scripture when a person moved by choice it was often in response to the calling of God. This form of migration will then be called “migration as calling.” Other times people moved because they were forced by someone else to move. This will be referred to as “forced migration” (Okesson Slides 10-33).

There are some examples of migration in the first 11 chapters of the Bible. The most notable would be the forced migration of people which God caused at Babel. “From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11.9). Immediately after this event there is a migration of an individual by calling. “The Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you’” (Gen. 12.1). Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, migrated for an extended time. He went from his home in Israel back to where his mother had come from in Paddan Aram (Gen. 28.1-5). His migration was primarily by force as he was fleeing for his life from his brother. While migrating, the Lord met him along the way and made his migration more of a calling (Gen. 28.10-22). He would ultimately migrate back to his home many years later.

A lengthy story that came about by forced migration is the story of Joseph (Gen. 37-50). His migration was caused by his jealous brothers who sold him into slavery (Gen. 37.12-36). In time God would elevate Joseph to the second highest position in all of Egypt. His family,

including the brothers who betrayed him, would also end up migrating to Egypt because of a great famine. This would be a form of forced migration. At the end of the story, all of the descendants of Abraham are in Egypt. It is notable that even though Joseph was forced to migrate, he was able to see the hand of God in his migration. In a conversation with his remorseful brothers Joseph says, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50.19). Concerning this, Stevens writes, “He told them again how God had overruled their intended evil and made it turn out good. To hold grudges was not appropriate for people who had received such rich blessings from God” (135).

The closing of Genesis and the opening of Exodus provide the account of the largest migration of people recorded in scripture. Four hundred years go by. Then, a new Pharaoh arises who does not know Joseph nor what he had done for Egypt. The Hebrews are forced into slave labor. Before the huge migration story there is another migration of a pivotal character in the exodus account. Moses must migrate from Egypt to Midian because he has put his life in danger. He remains there until God meets him in the desert in the form of a burning bush. His migration to the Midian desert may have been a forced migration but now Moses experiences a migration of calling as God leads him back to Egypt. The purpose was the deliverance of the Hebrews from the hands of their oppressor.

Exodus 12 to the end of this book is a record of this incredible migration. Exodus 12.37 records the number of men who were a part of this incredible migration. The number is listed at “six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.” Ultimately they end up at the precipice of the promised land. This is a return to the land Joseph and his family had left many

years before. The book of Joshua relays the story of how the Israelites were able to return to the land of their forefathers.

The Hebrews would continue to be a people who would migrate usually by force. The period known as the exilic period would record both the northern and southern kingdoms being forced into a foreign country after being conquered. Many of the major prophets predicted this time of relocation. They saw it as a form of divine judgment from God because of their disobedience to His laws. Some of the other prophets wrote during the period of the exile. Two books take place during the exile: Ezra and Nehemiah. One book laments the fall of Jerusalem and the people going into exile. The book is appropriately entitled Lamentations.

One prophet traveled and preached to Israel's enemy. Jonah migrated for a season in his life because of the calling of God. He initially migrated in the wrong direction until God corrected him and set him back on course. Jonah's migration was by calling. His attitude and resistance made his calling a forced migration.

In the New Testament, there are numerous accounts of the movement of people both by force and by calling. Jesus had the most miraculous and unprecedented migration. He came from heaven to earth. The significance of the incarnation will be written about and more time will be spent on this topic in the theological foundations section. One important point coming from the early life of Jesus was his migration to Egypt. It was a migration that would fall into both categories. It was forced in that it was to escape the evil plan of Herod to annihilate all boys under the age of two. It was also a calling because an angel told Joseph in a dream to go to Egypt (Matt. 2).

Acts records a number of stories on the movement of people. The early church is a case study of people on the move. At Pentecost people from the surrounding regions were gathered in

Jerusalem (Acts 2). They would hear the gospel being proclaimed and some would respond. Those who responded would take the message of the gospel with them when they returned to their own countries; perhaps this would be migration by calling. Even before the missionary efforts of Paul and others began, the gospel was already moving by people on the move.

The first Christian church that formed in Jerusalem would be forced to scatter because of persecution, migration by force (Acts 7). As they scattered, many were also called to go to other places, migration by calling. Phillip is a remarkable example. He was a newly appointed deacon who scattered and went to Samaria. While he was there he proclaimed the Messiah (Acts 8.4-7). While in the midst of this fruitful ministry, he was redirected by an angel of the Lord. He was to head south to a desert road (Acts 8.26). It was here he encountered an Ethiopian eunuch. Phillip helped to illuminate the scripture the Ethiopian was reading, and the outcome of this divine appointment was most likely the first Ethiopian Christian convert. The eunuch would continue to move down to his own country taking the gospel with him. Phillip would be moved again literally by the Spirit of the Lord and would end up in a place called Azotus, where he continued his itinerant ministry.

A final example is the great missionary, Paul. He was a man on the move, and it was migration primarily by calling, though there were a few times he was forced to move as a prisoner. Paul's call to be an evangelist came at his conversion, and he remained true to that call. In a day when one traveled by foot, beast, or boat Paul covered an incredible amount of territory. As actor David Suchet shares from personal experience, "Paul was a man on a mission. I was really impressed that he crisscrossed the Mediterranean on three occasions walking some 10,000 miles on foot and many more by sea in the 40s and 50s of the 1st century AD" (Suchet).

Previously, Paul had stated his desire to take the gospel to Spain, but church tradition indicates he never made it out of Rome but instead died as a martyr for the faith.

These are just a few examples of migration in the Bible, and there are many others. As modern Christians live in an unprecedented day of human migration, it is critical to understand there are biblical foundations for this phenomenon. Andrew F. Walls says, “Migration represents a more significant event in Christian history than the Reformation itself” (qtd. in Okesson “Lessons from World Christianity”). Throughout the Bible and all through human history God uses the movement of people to accomplish His purposes and propagate the gospel. The English-speaking international church is a recipient of people on the move. It reaches people who are migrating. Therefore, it is uniquely positioned to make global impact in a way many other churches cannot make.

### **Conclusions**

What can we conclude having considered the biblical foundations for international cross-cultural ministry? Here are some important conclusions that connect the biblical foundations to ministry in an international cross-cultural ministry.

**God is a missional God.** A term often used to describe this is the Latin phrase “*missio Dei*”. Though this term has a number of different meanings with various writers, there is consensus that God has been active throughout history with a clear purpose. Christopher C.J. Wright describes the mission of God this way, “The God revealed in the scriptures is personal, purposeful and goal oriented. The opening account of creation portrays God working toward a goal, completing it with satisfaction and resting, content with the result” (C. Wright “Mission of God” 63). His purpose is to redeem all of creation since the fall. His missional purpose continues

today. God invites people to participate in his missional activity. Henry Blackaby says, “God is always at work around you. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work” (32).

God crosses all kinds of barriers to achieve his purpose. The greatest example of this would be the incarnation. God left his heavenly home in the form of his obedient son coming to earth. It has become cliché but remains true. Jesus was God’s cross-cultural missionary.

God calls people to participate in his missional activity. When God wants to achieve a purpose, he calls a man or a woman. “When He is about to do something, He takes the initiative and comes to one or more of His servants. He lets them know what He is about to do. He invites them to adjust their lives to Him, so He can accomplish His work through them” (Blackaby 74). From Abraham to Moses to Jonah to the Apostle Paul, all were ordinary men who God called to join him in his redemptive work. His methods have remained unchanged through the pages of history. This is still the method God uses. He calls people ,and he calls local churches to join God in his redemptive activity. Stott writes:

The nations are not gathered in automatically. If God has promised to bless “all families of the earth,” he has promised to do so “through Abraham’s seed” (Gen. 12.3; 22.18).

Now we are Abraham’s seed by faith, and the earth’s families will be blessed only if we go to them with the gospel. That is God’s plain purpose. (9)

**Incarnational ministry is critical.** The incarnation is one of Christian’s foundational beliefs. It has a certain level of mystery humans cannot fully grasp. Yet, it serves as an incredible model for cross-cultural ministry. Jesus made his dwelling among humans. He knew what it was like to be human. He took on a culture, and he learned a language. Though strategies like short term missions have become popular today, there is something very powerful and effective when a person decides to plant their lives in another culture and to minister in that context. This is



appropriately called incarnational ministry, and until the Lord returns there will always be the great need for this type of ministry. “What Jesus accomplished definitively in the incarnation is continued by Christians in whom he continues to live. Thus, in a secondary sense, the miracle of the incarnation continues in every generation through the witness and ministry of Christians” (Hicks 64).

**The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is essential.** Jesus gave his disciples his great and final commission, but they were not able to begin to accomplish the commission until the promised Holy Spirit came. It was only after the Holy Spirit came in a unique way at Pentecost were the disciples able to accomplish the commission given to them. It has already been stated that God is on mission and Jesus was sent by God as a missionary. Because of the unity of the trinity, it is also important to note the Holy Spirit has a missions’ objective. “The Bible reveals the person and work of the Spirit as being intensely missionary in character and purpose. The Spirit is a missionary Spirit who desires to bring home the lost children of God” (Greenway 54).

There are a number of works the Spirit does in the life of a believer. Two are pertinent to consider concerning international ministries. First, the Holy Spirit calls and empowers the believer to go. Acts 13.2 is a great example. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” This is true for all believers. It is especially true for those who serve in other countries and in cross-cultural settings. The second way which is pertinent is “the Holy Spirit breaks down our social and racial prejudices and makes us love people who are different and welcome them in the kingdom of Jesus Christ” (Greenway 55). One cannot minister to people of various racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds without the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

**Crossing cultural barriers is possible.** The gospel could not be fully unleashed until it crossed the wide chasm presented by the “Gentile question.” Jesus was a Jew. The church began in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish culture, and the center of the Jewish religion. Most of the initial believers were Jews. As the gospel moved from Jerusalem to Judea and then to Samaria, many Gentiles started responding. A huge cultural shift was happening. When the “Gentile question” was answered at the first Christian council this allowed for the cultural chasm to be crossed. From its inception, the gospel has been crossing cultural barriers.

**A new humanity is achievable.** Paul and other New Testament writers had a vision of a new humanity. Because of the radical inclusiveness of the gospel, it is available to everyone. It does not matter whether one is a Jew or Gentile. It does not matter whether one is rich or poor, whether one is male or female, whether slave or a slave owner. As the famous evangelist Billy Graham so eloquently preached, “the ground at the foot of the cross is level” (qtd. in Gilbreath).

### **Theological Foundations**

“What do theology and mission have to do with each other?” (C. Wright “Mission of God’s People” 19). The goal of this project is to determine how English-speaking international churches reach their target audience. Therefore, not only is it important to think and reflect on the biblical foundations for international and cross-cultural ministry, it is essential to consider the connection between missions and theology.

A good beginning point would be to define what is meant by the term “theology.” There are a plethora of ways one could define this word. Perhaps the simplest and most concise definition is thinking about God. Dr. Fisher Humphreys puts it this way, “Theology is a word used in so many different ways that it is foolish to argue about how it ought to be used. People

are entitled to use it in different ways if they wish. What I can do is to tell you how I intend to use it. I use it to mean thinking about God” (7).

This study will attempt to think about God in the context of a language church reaching across cultural barriers in order to make disciples of the nations. The only way we can consider God’s thoughts which are not entirely possible to know (Isa. 55.8-9) is to consider some of the themes that emerge from the Bible and from other Christian writers who have given thought to this topic.

### **Guiding Principles**

A good starting point would be to lay out some principles that will guide this review in considering God’s thoughts about multicultural, international ministry. There are three critical principles in formulating the theological foundations. These principles are encapsulated in these three words: 1) Biblical, 2) Evangelical, 3) Contextual.

**Biblical.** Glasser and McGavran write:

God has not left men and women to wonder and speculate concerning the eternal verities about Himself, humankind, sin, salvation, eternal lostness, eternal life, eternal conduct, freedom of will, the worship of idols, and the deification of human ideals, whether of power, sex, or money. On all these and other matters of enormous interest to human beings, God has given a clear revelation of His will. This is called special revelation. It is contained in the Bible, which is God’s Word, His deliberate disclosure of His holy will through inspired writers. (101-102)

The belief in the inspiration and authority of the Bible guides the below considerations of theological foundations. It is possible to develop a theology about various doctrines or practices without seriously considering what scripture teaches on that subject. There are numerous

churches today including English-speaking international churches that are not guided by the teachings of scripture. A high view of the authority of the Bible will be a guiding principle.

**Evangelical.** In today's world, the term evangelical holds many different connotations. Some of them are negative and are related to the current political climate in the United States. In many countries, the word is not as convoluted, but it is still often misunderstood. The working definition for this project is summarized in this manner:

The term *evangelical* comes from the Greek word that means "good news." Evangelism is sharing the good news of the salvation that is available through Jesus Christ. An evangelical, then, is a person dedicated to promoting the good news about Jesus Christ. Combined, the description "evangelical Christian" is intended to indicate a believer in Jesus Christ who is faithful in sharing and promoting the good news. ("What is An Evangelical Christian?")

A theological foundation will have as its undercurrent the belief that the church is ultimately responsible for proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ.

**Contextual.** "Contextualization can be defined as making concepts and methods relevant to a historical situation." For the Christian and the church, this means making the gospel message understandable and culturally relevant to those you are trying to reach. This is sometimes referred to as "missiological contextualization." Sanchez writes, "missiological contextualization can be viewed as enabling the message of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ to become alive as it addresses the vital issues of a sociocultural context and transforms its worldview, its values, and its goals" (318). The challenge for an English-speaking international church is that this church often has multiple cultures represented. How does one make the gospel relevant to such a broad representation of cultures? How does one make the good news contextual to so many

nationalities? There are no easy answers but that does not mean the international church should not avoid the hard work of contextualizing the Christian message for the various people who attend.

### **Doctrines**

**Mission of the Church.** In the Biblical Foundations section, it was demonstrated God is on mission. The culmination of that mission was sending his son. “The word mission is derived from *missio* (Latin) meaning ‘to send’” (Simmons 138). God is a sending God and therefore a missionary God. Jesus the “sent one” took aside his disciples and then sent them. It is important to understand that he did not plan for them to accomplish his mission alone. Instead, he established his church. It began in Jerusalem, initially with 120 people (Acts 1.15). It grew rapidly to at least three thousand after the Holy Spirit came and empowered the believers (Acts 2.41). Then it expanded rapidly after the diaspora began. The local church has been the primary instrument God uses to carry the gospel and develop disciples. Bill Hybels coined the phrase, “The local church is the hope of the world.” The Bemidji Covenant elaborates by saying:

The local church is the hope of the world. Bill Hybels said that. It could seem a presumptuous, maybe even grandiose, thing to say. The local church is the hope of the world? Until you remember that each local church, like ours, is a tangible expression of the Church, created by Jesus Christ to be His physical presence on Earth while He resides in Heaven. If Jesus is the hope of the world, then, by extension, His Church is the hope of the world. And the local church puts flesh and bones on the statement He made to Peter, I will establish my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. So, we’re taking a few short weeks at the start of this new school. The local church is the hope of

the world. Jesus says, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” Mark 16.18 (The Evangelical Covenant Church of Bemidji)

Because the local church is the hope of the world, it is an imperative that evangelism and discipleship happen through the local church. It is imperative that local churches reproduce themselves by planting new churches. English-speaking international churches should be local churches that present the hope of Jesus Christ in their community.

**Nature of the Gospel.** What is meant by the nature of the gospel? It is basically defining what the gospel is and what the gospel does. The gospel means good news. The gospel transforms lives. Transformed lives can transform families. Transformed families can transform communities, and transformed communities have the potential to transform a city or a country. The gospel reconciles people to God and to one another. The one involved in proclaiming the gospel cross-culturally must have this conviction. Glasser and McGavran write:

Reconciled people live better in this world than do the unreconciled. The church, made up of saved sinners, is a community whose members obey God’s law and care for each other. Thus they, by God’s grace, achieve a better life than do non-Christians....The salvation of Christ influences all aspects of human life, making them sweeter, more just, more harmonious, more peaceful, and more abundant. Eternal life is a reality and so is abundant temporal life. (110)

Jesus said, “I have come so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10.10 NKJV). For one to be involved in international ministry they must believe this down to their core.

**Triune God or Trinity.** God is revealed in scripture as the triune God. He is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Every Christian minister and every Christian

missionary must be shaped by a Trinitarian doctrine. “The ministry into which we have entered is the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son, to the Father, through the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world” (Seamands kindle loc. 98). The concept of ministering with the doctrine of the Trinity in mind has many different implications. One is the necessity of doing cross-cultural ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the other is the unity the trinity brings to ministry that is crossing cultural, racial, and ethnic boundaries.

“We acknowledge our utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our missionary calling... God’s primary method for evangelism and church planting is the ministry of Spirit-gifted and empowered men and women preaching and teaching the Word of God” (Glasser and McGavran 107). A huge part of the Trinity is unity: three distinct personalities with different roles but all in perfect unity.

**Incarnation or Incarnational Ministry.** Jesus’ great descent shapes how international, cross-cultural ministry should be done. Incarnational ministry means living and working with and among those one is trying to reach. The international setting often means adjusting to two cultures. One culture is adjusting to the country where the church is located which is usually not one’s native country. Another culture is adjusting to a completely different culture which is the culture of the ex-pat or international community. Unless one is willing to take adequate time to learn both cultures, ministry can lack effectiveness. Having a proper understanding of the theology of the incarnation is essential. A person will do the hard work of learning the cultures, the customs, and perhaps even the language of the place they are called to serve if they are guided by the important belief that Jesus’ incarnation serves as an example for cross-cultural ministry. They will have the mindset of living and planting their life in that setting for the long haul. This is part of what it means to do incarnational ministry.

Another component of incarnational ministry relates to how one should make disciples. Simply put, believers should follow the example Jesus set. In the book, *Master Plan of Evangelism*, author Robert Coleman gives two important aspects of making disciples that come directly from the ministry of Jesus. Jesus started with people. He called a group of men to follow him. He spent an exorbitant amount of time investing his life in them. “It all started by Jesus calling a few men to follow Him. This revealed immediately the direction His evangelistic strategy would take. His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men the multitudes would follow....Men were the method of winning the world to God” (Coleman 27).

Secondly, Jesus taught them the way of life in the kingdom. He wanted them to emulate his life, his teaching, his work, and his way of living. Coleman writes:

Jesus intended for the disciples to produce His likeness in and through the Church being gathered out of the world. Thus His ministry in the Spirit would be duplicated many fold by His ministry in the lives of His disciples. Through them and others like them it would continue to expand in an ever enlarging circumference until the multitudes might know in some similar way the opportunity which they had known with the Master. By this strategy the conquest of the world was only a matter of time and their faithfulness to His plan. (97)

Every local church, whether in a cross-cultural setting or not, would do well to follow Jesus’ example when it comes to making disciples.

**Movement or Migration of People.** A detailed analysis has been made in the Biblical Foundations section on migration or the movement of people. A theology of migration would



simply acknowledge that behind all the movement, behind people relocating from one city or country to another, is the hand of a sovereign God. Evetts writes:

The unprecedented movement of diaspora peoples on a large scale and at great frequency has set a global trend that has marked the 20th and 21st centuries. This phenomenon now touches most countries in the world. The latest research reveals around the globe, 200 million people now live and work outside their homeland. In reality the numbers are higher when you include the second and third generations who are related to them. With socio-cultural factors such as globalization and urbanization, there are strong reasons that this global phenomenon will increase in scale and significance. (15)

Pastor and futurist Erwin McManus speaks about global movements that are shaping the contemporary church. He says these movements can either create friction in the church or traction for the church to move forward. All of the movements he mentions have an impact on the local church. The two movements that have the greatest impact on the English-speaking, international church are the movements of radical migration and urbanization. “The first significant global shift is the emergence of radical migration” (McManus 43). “The second significant global shift is urbanization” (McManus 44). The church needs a theology that addresses both because both of these shifts have great implications for the international church. International congregations are churches trying to reach and disciple primarily migrants, and they are almost all located in urban areas. If believers live with the recognition that none of these movements are happening without God’s knowledge or permission, it will help them to minister in an ever-changing world. As Ray Bakke so eloquently puts it as he reflects on migration and urbanization, “When I began to look seriously at the problems of cities, I realized that the Lord is doing something very unusual in this generation. He seems to be shaking up the world” (28).

**New Humanity.** The doctrine of a new humanity is important theology for the international church. The coming together of the people from various nations, races, and ethnic groups is a foretaste of heaven. Churches tend to be homogenous. There are many reasons for this, and there is nothing inherently wrong with this reality. However, a homogenous church does not model the new humanity teaching Paul gave in Ephesians. It does not reflect the vision of John on the island of Patmos of a multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshipping the Lamb. The New Testament gives a beautiful picture of the church being diverse in the makeup of the people who attend but unified around the person of Jesus Christ. This is often referred to as unity in the midst of diversity (Woo 39).

### **The Great Potential for the International Church**

#### **1. The English-speaking international church has incredible potential for reaching the world.**

Reeve writes:

God is sovereignly and supernaturally planting and building international churches in unparalleled numbers around the globe. The unprecedented diaspora scattering has created cutting-edge potential for the International Church to reach every tribe, tongue, and nation. The International Church is the collection of God's people diverse in nationality, culture, color, class, and church background, gathered together in many cities and locations around the globe to worship God, hear from God, and tell others about God.

(Reeve)

The biblical and theological foundations showed a God who is on mission. His mission is to redeem His fallen creation. He calls people, and he uses the gathered people of God to join Him in this mission. Every local church has to be clear about their overall mission and their unique calling. The overall mission has been given to the church by Jesus. Christians do not

choose the mission of the church. That has already been given. It is to make disciples of all the nations. This mission is for every church regardless of their language and context. Many who write on the topic of church growth advocate for having a clear purpose statement. In addition, writers like Rick Warren have emphasized the five purposes of the church. These five purposes are worship, fellowship, discipleship, evangelism, and ministry. These are non-negotiables. Every local church should be clear about their God-given mission and their biblical purposes.

Many churches, however, feel God has given them a very specific vision of who they are to target. There are different words that have been used to describe a church's vision and target audience. The word used is calling.

The English-speaking international church is usually made up of many nationalities. Many of these will only be in the country and church for a short period of time before returning to their home country or moving to another country. If they can be introduced to the faith or have their faith strengthened while they are in that country they can take what they have gleaned with them. Some come from countries that are closed to the gospel. If a person from a closed country ends up responding to the gospel while living in another country and attending an international church, then they are in a very strategic position when they return to their home country.

English-speaking churches have diplomats and multinational business people attend. These are people of influence and mobile people. These churches have educators, usually teachers at international schools. An international church has students. They may be attending an elementary school, high school, university, or graduate school. Many have military personnel, particularly if they are located at a military base. Depending on its location, an English-speaking church may have retirees. Others have a significant number of refugees who attend.

One author describes the makeup of an international church this way:

They are globetrotters—generally highly educated, entrepreneurial, people of comparable means and full of adventure. However, in certain regions of the world, expatriates are composed of migrants who are historically required for the host country's economic benefit. Ratios in some countries can be as high as four expatriates to every one national. Expatriates comprise everyone from street cleaners, maids, and taxi drivers to bankers, surgeons, and lawyers. Among most expatriates, there are biblically literate Christians desiring to make an impact for Christ in their corner of the world. (Reeve)

## **2. What makes an English-speaking international church unique?**

Every church should discern the specific group God has called them to reach. An example would be a cowboy church, surfer church, or language church. For most English-speaking international churches, their unique calling is clearly defined. The calling is to reach the English-speaking people in their community or city. There are some nuances to this unique calling. Some English-speaking churches see their primary target as the English-speaking missionaries serving in the country or perhaps the diplomats or refugees. A language church does have the distinct advantage that their unique calling is defined by the language a person speaks.

This does bring up two tensions the English-speaking international churches deal with. These tensions are closely related and are felt by many English-speaking churches: how to reach the nationals of the country and what to do about those who are not English speakers. In many countries, many of the nationals do speak English. This then serves as a natural bridge for reaching the nationals that reside in the country where the church is located. Some countries prohibit many forms of proselytizing. This brings about another set of problems, but it does eliminate the tension of reaching natives. Some English-speaking churches provide translation which helps non-English speakers to attend.

### **3. How best practices for reaching, discipling, and ministering to English speakers in non-English-speaking countries are transferable to English-speaking international churches in non-English-speaking countries.**

The purpose of this project was to evaluate how English-speaking international churches in non-English-speaking countries reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience in order to discern best practices that may be transferable to other English-speaking international churches in non-English speaking countries. There are some principles every international church can apply. Most of these have already been mentioned.

One comes back to the primary mission of the church. “The primary mission of the Church and therefore, of the churches is to proclaim the gospel of Christ and gather believers into local churches where they can be built up in the faith and made effective in service, thereby planting congregations throughout the world” (Hesselgrave 20). This is the task of the international church. Some are fulfilling this mission very well. Others are not quite as effective.

The second part of the question is to determine what practices are transferable to other similar churches? Because international churches are so unique, it is hard to know for sure what may be transferable from one context to the other. It will be important to determine principles because it is principles that can be transferable.

#### **Research Design Literature**

The purpose of this project was to evaluate how English-speaking churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience to determine best practices transferable to other like churches. This research falls into the category of qualitative research. “Qualitative Research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons,

opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research” (DeFranzo).

The research undertaken was exploratory research. The instruments used did gain an understanding of opinions, motivations, and to some degree, results. The research instruments were a questionnaire, interviews, and a focus group. All of these used open ended questions which allowed those who were being researched to give their opinions. This would fall under the mix methods approach according to Sensing and other writers. The questions were asked in a way to try and obtain objective results.

The majority of questions on the questionnaire were open ended. One question allowed the participants to rank several methods as to their importance. This was the only question quantitative in nature. The interview questions and the questions in the focus group were all qualitative. Certainly, there are some deficiencies with this type of research. Perhaps the biggest would be the information obtained is more subjective than objective. At the same time, I believe it is the qualitative method that best obtains the information needed for this project.

### **Summary of Literature**

There is not a lot written on the subject of English-speaking international churches. At least, the literature does not address the subject directly, or the work would not be considered scholarly. Most of the research for this project revolved around these major sources. Biblical commentaries served as the groundwork for much of the research on the biblical foundations. These were often paired with books that came under the category of missions or missiology. In many of the books on missions, there would be a chapter or chapters written on a biblical basis for missions and also a theological framework for missions.

There were a number of books that were written on the theology of missions. These represented a variety of theological persuasions. For this project, the books that would be classified as evangelical in nature were the ones most relied upon. Other writings from varying theological positions were reviewed.

Books and articles that addressed cross-cultural ministry proved to be a reliable source. Again, there does seem to be a void in the amount of material written. Since most English-speaking churches minister across cultural barriers, books on cross-cultural ministry proved to be a reliable source.

There is much written on the topic of church growth and health. These types of books were helpful at some level. Some of these books are referenced and proved to be helpful but often the audience for who these books were written for was quite different. Most were written from a North American author with readers from the United States in mind. What was gleaned from these books were the principles that were universal. Therefore, they were applicable to an international setting.

An important source was the personal recollection of the author of this project of articles, speakers, and conversations. The problem that came from this was the ability to identify in detail a particular conference or conversation. Closely connected to this problem would be the challenge of documenting a statement, quote, or thought coming from a conversation that took place several years in the past.

Looking at other doctoral dissertations helped immensely, particularly those addressing the subject of the international church experience. In some of those dissertation sources were mentioned which allowed for further study.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

English-speaking international churches are strategically located in major cities and countries around the world for the expansion of the gospel. If these churches are successful in reaching the English-speaking community in their geographic locale, the goal of making disciples of all the nations can be bolstered. Reeve writes:

The International Church is a *kairos* call to a profound need and compelling opportunity. God is sovereignly and supernaturally planting and building international churches in unparalleled numbers around the globe. The unprecedented diaspora scattering has created cutting-edge potential for the International Church to reach every tribe, tongue, and nation. The International Church is the collection of God's people diverse in nationality, culture, color, class, and church background, gathered together in many cities and locations around the globe to worship God, hear from God, and tell others about God. (Reeve)

As was highlighted in Chapter 2, across the world people are on the move. "An estimated 214 million people in the world today are migrants, living in a country different from where they were born. Nearly half of those migrants are Christians- about 105 million, far more than the proportion of Christians in the world, which is about 33 percent" (qtd in Alcántara 24). Many of these Christians who migrate speak English and need a church home. Clearly, the potential impact for the international church is great? But not all of these churches are effective in reaching their target community. What is it that the churches that are effective are doing? Are there patterns or similarities that can be transferable to other international churches. Are there



ways to measure a church's effectiveness in reaching, discipling, and ministering to their target audience? The goal of this research is to determine best practices of effective English-speaking international churches that would be transferable to other like churches.

The primary methodology or instruments that will be used are interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. All three methodologies will be with pastors and leaders of English speaking, international churches. Included in this group will be leaders of organizations or associations of these types of churches.

### **Nature and Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project was to evaluate how English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience to determine best practices that are transferable to other English-speaking international churches. The outcome of this project would be a book or manual that would be available to others who are interested in the topic of English-speaking international churches.

### **Research Questions**

In order to determine how English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience this project used the following 3 questions to guide the research.

#### **RQ #1 How do English-speaking, international churches reach, disciple and minister to their target audience?**

All three instrumentation will be used to answer this question. In the interviews, questionnaire, and focus groups, questions will be used to gather answers. The questions will be categorized by the three areas mentioned above. How does a church 1) reach, 2) disciple, and 3) minister to their target audience.

**RQ #2 How effective are these practices in reaching, discipling and ministering to their target audience?**

Using the three categories of reaching, discipling, and ministering, this question will try and determine the effectiveness of various churches in accomplishing this goal. This will also be determined by using the instrumentation mentioned above. All three instrumentations will have questions that will address the effectiveness of the different ministry practices. Probably the best way to measure effectiveness would be to put some sort of numbers together. For example, “How many new people have been assimilated into your church in the last 6 months?” These are the types of questions that will determine effectiveness.

**RQ #3 Which of these best practices can be transferable to English-speaking, international churches in non-English speaking countries?**

A set of questions in all three instrumentation will be utilized that will help determine the transferability of set practices. For example, a question could be, “Could this outreach effort be easily done by similar churches in completely different countries and contexts?” Again, the researcher developed several questions in all three forms of instrumentation to determine this. The key issue for this question is how these practices would transfer to other ministry settings.

**Ministry Context**

The English-speaking international church has a unique but diverse ministry context. Because these churches are spread out around the globe, in many different countries with many different cultures, the ministry context can vary dramatically. Add to this the diversity of the congregations themselves and the result is an interesting mix. To identify unique dynamics that are common is a challenge. However, there are a few commonalities for every English-speaking international church.

An obvious one is that English is the primary language. This means English is used in the worship services, most of the Bible studies, and in the means of communication.

A second commonality would be the transient nature of the international church. Most of these churches are made up of people on the move. An international church, whether in a major city, in a tourist community, or made up of military personnel all face the obstacle of having a very transient constituency. A third commonality would be the diverse makeup of these churches. As previously stated, international churches are diverse in a multitude of ways. They are typically diverse ethnically, culturally, and denominationally. These three commonalities shape the context for ministry of the international church.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selection**

The criteria for selection are to interview practitioners. This would be pastors of international churches and key lay leaders. In addition, leaders of denominations, associations and networks will also be participants. The reason for choosing this group as participants are the following. Pastors and key leaders understand English-speaking international churches the best. They are in the churches, and they are giving leadership to these churches. Most of the pastors and leaders interviewed as a part of this project will be people who have had substantial experience in leading the international church. There will be a few who are perhaps new to this ministry context, but the majority will be seasoned practitioners.

### **Description of Participants**

The participants for the project are pastors and leaders of English-speaking international churches or, in some cases, leaders of a denomination or network of English-speaking international churches. It is estimated that there are over 1,000 of these types of churches around

the world. However, the pool from which the researcher chose participants came from the International Baptist Convention and a few other evangelical churches and networks.

On the website [internationalchurches.net](http://internationalchurches.net) there is an exhaustive list of English-speaking international churches. The researcher has the contact information of all the churches affiliated with the International Baptist Convention. These were the two primary sources that were used to gain participants' contact information. Most of the participants came from Europe and Latin America. I included two pastors from Asia and none from Africa. Some participants were chosen because the researcher had a knowledge of the person, church, or ministry. Others were chosen because of the region they represent. The goal was to obtain a broad representation of pastors and leaders in different regions. Because of the theological bent of most of these churches, the participants were primarily male. There is no particular age group that was included, though many who were a part of the project fell into the age category of 35 to 65. The ideal participant was to have the minimum of a college degree with many having completed masters and doctoral level work. Most of the participants, because of the above limitations, were primarily Anglo, though I hoped to have a few who are different ethnically. The nationality will be more diverse though probably the dominant group will be US citizens. All participants will be age 18 or older. Participants will be of sound physical and mental state.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The risks are limited because all participants will be licensed or ordained ministers over the age of 18. Below describes the methods used to make sure the information remains confidential.

### **Where and when it will take place or be distributed**

Questionnaire: the online questionnaire was distributed and collected between October 1 and November 30, 2019.

Interviews: The interviews were conducted between October 1 and November 30, 2019. The researcher arranged a time with each interviewee. They met online at the set time.

Focus Group: The questions were emailed one week in advance to each participant. The group convened between October 1 and November 30, 2019. They met online at a pre-arranged time.

### **How it will be conducted and collected**

Questionnaire: the questionnaire was conducted and collected via SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>).

Interviews: the interviews were conducted online by the principal investigator and the data was collected via video with a password protected Ipad.

Focus Group: the focus group was conducted online by the principal investigator and data was collected via video with a password protected Ipad.

### **Applicable group for each method**

Questionnaire: selected pastors and leaders of English-speaking international churches

Interviews: selected pastors and leaders of English-speaking international churches

Focus Group: IBC LEAD Team

### **How data will be protected and deleted**

Questionnaire: The questionnaire was password protected and placed in a password protected file that can only be accessed by the researcher.

Interviews: The interviews were password protected and placed in a password protected file that can only be accessed by the researcher.

Focus Group: The focus group was password protected and placed in a password protected file that can only be accessed by the researcher.

All protected files will be deleted by June 1, 2025.

Two types of tools were employed for research: Ipad and laptop. Both tools were used to record interviews and one focus group through a password protected Zoom account only known by the researcher. All participants were given the option to use a pseudonym.

### **Instrumentation**

In order to determine how English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience all three types of instrumentation were used.

1. Questionnaire- This will be done online using a web-based instrument, SurveyMonkey. A list of questions will be developed that can be answered online. The questionnaire is a set of questions that have specific answers. The questionnaire is used rather than a survey because it collects more hard data. The interviews and focus groups will provide opinions and more open-ended data. A number of 50 will be sent with the goal of receiving at least half (25) back.
2. Interviews- These will be done either in person or online using skype or a similar web-based means of communication. The goal is to interview 10 to 15 people. The format will be semi-structured.
3. Focus group- One to two focus groups will be assembled and interviewed. A natural, already formed group are the LEAD teams that are a part of the IBC. A LEAD team uses the acrostic, L.E.A.D. The letters stand for Learning, Encouraging, Achieving and Dreaming. “A LEAD Team is a gathering of relationally and missionally committed leaders from a geographical region or affinity group. Teams meet together regularly to build meaningful relationships, focus on spiritual growth, and work together to see mission accomplished through multiplying (planting) new churches, and nurturing church health” (“Strengthening Your Church”). These LEAD teams are already formed in the International Baptist Convention.

The researcher will get the Latin American LEAD team to participate and one of the LEAD teams from Europe.

### **Reliability & Validity of Project Design**

The three instruments used in the research were a questionnaire, interviews, and a focus group. The questions used on all three instruments were designed to gain information for the three research questions. All three instruments utilized were qualitative in nature. “In qualitative research, validity—or trustworthiness— and reliability—or consistency— are discussed in terms of the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the instrumentation and results of the study” (Simon and Goes). The research done was credible and reliable because of those who participated in the research. All participants were practitioners who know and understand English-speaking international churches. A future researcher could find very similar participants as those who were part of my research.

The research is transferable. All of the questions used are available as an appendix to this chapter and are easy to access and to replicate. The process used is given in a step by step fashion for someone to follow. The only challenging area would be the data analysis. But if a future researcher followed the steps taken to code and analyze the results, this could be done and would produce similar results. Because of the nature of my research the results were more subjective than objective. At the same time, a future researcher could follow the steps laid out and to do a similar investigation.

### **Data Collection**

This chapter examines the type of methodology that will be used to evaluate how English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience to discern best practices.

Recruitment. Step-by-step procedures for how participants were identified and invited and contacted via email, phone, and personal conversation. Below is a step-by-step process of how the research was conducted. The research conductor was the author of this project. The participants were recruited over the internet with a personal email asking them to participate. This research was conducted from October 2019—November 2019. The method of recruitment was through established connections through the researcher. Almost all participants were part of the International Baptist Convention or from the churches listed on [internationalchurches.net](http://internationalchurches.net). Those who are not involved in the IBC were pastors and leaders serving at an English-speaking international church.

### **Step One: A Qualitative Research Approach**

This research is qualitative in nature as defined by Sensing. "...qualitative research systematically seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Qualitative research is grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of lived experience" (Kindle loc. 1627). Another writer says this about qualitative research. "All qualitative research approaches have two things in common. It focuses on the phenomena that occur in natural settings and it involves studying those phenomena in all their complexity. (Leedy and Ormrod 133). This research takes the qualitative approach because the researcher spoke to pastors and leaders of English-speaking international churches who are daily working in the context of these churches.

The primary methodology will be tools that can be replicated by someone else in the future who can obtain similar information. This project used primarily a multi-method approach as influenced and defined by Sensing in his book *Qualitative Research*. He states:



The multi-methods approach advocated in this book allows various perspectives to engage in a critical dialogue that leads to several sets of rich data, resulting in the possibility for deeper understandings. And those understandings can be communicated to readers in such a way that makes the information useful to others. (Sensing kindle loc.1588)

This project used different approaches. This fits in with the multi-method approach. The three different instruments that were used are interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups.

### **Step Two: Questionnaire**

The first method was the questionnaire. Sensing says that “a questionnaire is a paper and pencil instrument for doing an interview” (kindle loc. 2812). However, most questionnaires used today are web based. For this reason, the questionnaire for this project was . Another compelling reason to do this was because of the geographic locations of the participants. The participants came from churches spread out around the world. It would have simply required too much time to try and distribute the questionnaire in any other way. The questions that will be used were primarily open ended (Appendix A.1).

The questionnaire was sent out individually to various participants along with the online consent form. Since this is the largest group, participants were selected from the list of churches in the International Baptist Convention and on the list from internationalchurches.net. Most of these were selected randomly, though the researcher selected some pastors and leaders he knows personally. They were given 10 days to respond with a follow up email on the 10th day to those who had not yet completed the questionnaire. The follow up email extended the deadline by 5 days. If the participant did not respond in that time frame, they were not contacted again. To protect the confidence of the research, the questionnaire that is answered and received was stored

in an online file that only the researcher had access to. This file is guarded with a password only known to the researcher.

### **Step Three: Interviews**

The second method that was utilized is the researcher-conducted interviews of pastors and leaders. The interviewees were selected by the researcher. The researcher attempted to select pastors and leaders that represented various size churches and diverse geographical regions. All participants who were interviewed were first given a consent form. If the interview was done via the internet, the consent form was distributed through an email as an attachment sent to the participant before the scheduled time of the interview. If the interview was done in person, the interviewee was given a consent form to fill out in person before the interview begins.

This method was chosen, because it is one of the best methods to obtain the information needed for this research. According to Sensing, "Interviews allow people to describe their situations and put words to their interior lives, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences that otherwise are not available to the researcher by observation" (Kindle loc. 2630-2635). The type of interviews that were conducted would fall under the category of structured interviews. I gave allowance for some semi-structured interviews.

After the consent form was filled out and received, the interview began. At the beginning of the interview, a description of the purpose of the dissertation was read as well as how the content of the interview will be kept in confidence. An anticipated time frame was also given. The interviewees were then taken through the questions listed on the interview guide sheet (Appendix A.2). When the interview was over the researcher thanked the participant for their time. They were reminded once again that everything will be kept in confidence and that sometime in the future the research project will be in print and available to read.

**Step Four: Focus Group**

The third method to be utilized is a focus group (Appendix A.3). Two focus groups were planned for this project. Both of these groups came from the LEAD team in the IBC. These groups were assembled through a secure web-based service like Zoom. A month before the proposed date, the researcher sent an initial email inviting each person to participate giving a proposed time and date along with an attached consent form (Appendix D). If the proposed time worked for the majority and if they were willing to participate in the focus group, they were to return the digital consent form. The researcher sent two follow up emails reminding all participants of the time and date of the focused group. One email went out two weeks before the scheduled time, and the other went out one week before the scheduled meeting.

**Data Analysis**

The data from the questionnaire was the easiest to obtain through SurveyMonkey. Survey Monkey provided simple tools to analyze the data as well. The interviews and focus group required much more to adequately analyze the data. First, the researcher listened to all the interviews and took copious notes. The researcher listened to the interviews more than once to make sure he had the notes needed. The researcher did the same thing with the focus group.

Once the data from all three instruments was collected, the researcher categorized them under the three research questions. Some of the information fell easily into one of the categories. Others were not as clear, but in time, as the researcher analyzed the data, he was able to discern which results from the questions fell into which category. The researcher discerned which questions and methods were dominant. He also discovered the dominant themes and answers that came from the data obtained from all three instruments.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

English-speaking international churches are scattered over the globe. They are in most major cities, close to military bases, and found in resort areas that attract the ex-pat community. They are very different in size, worship style, and cultural context. However, they are united by two commonalities. First is the common language of English which is the primary language of all of these churches. Second is their desire to reach and disciple the English-speaking population in their area. The purpose of this research was to determine how international English-speaking churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience in order to discern best practices that are transferable to other international English-speaking churches.

This chapter identifies the participants in the study, the position they have in their church or organization, and their demographic makeup. Then the chapter presents coded qualitative data from the questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews. There is one quantitative chart. This chapter concludes with the major findings that have emerged after the analysis of the data.

#### **Participants**

This project used three different tools to attempt to obtain the information needed to answer the research questions. The questionnaire was sent to 51 participants. A total of 23 responded. From this group, the researcher was able to interview eight different pastors or leaders, and he conducted one focus group. Only one of the pastors in the interview was female. Another interview was conducted with a husband and wife team. The focus group consisted of four male pastors who were all from Latin America, four different countries, and three nationalities. All of the participants were pastors or leaders of English-speaking churches located

in different geographic areas around the world. Of the 23 respondents, 20 were male with three females. Most were U.S. citizens, with the others being British and South African citizens respectively. Though the questionnaire did not ask for the age of the participants, most fell between the ages of 35 and 65.

Approximately two thirds of those who were invited to participate in the questionnaire were people the researcher knew personally with strong interest. The others were selected randomly from various lists he had obtained. It is important to note that the researcher did not receive a single response from someone who he did not know personally.

Here is the demographic profile of those who participated in the questionnaire.

### **Questionnaire**

23 participants: 20 males & 3 females

3 nationalities: 20 - USA , 2 - UK, 1 - RSA

11 countries represented: Costa Rica, Spain, Bolivia, Brazil, Germany, Italy, Argentina, Singapore, Mexico, Honduras, Vietnam

Here is the demographic profile of those who participated in the interviews.

### **Interviews**

8 participants: 6 males & 2 females (1 couple)

2 nationalities: USA and UK

6 countries represented: Costa Rica, Panama, Brazil, Italy, Germany, Vietnam

Here is the demographic profile of those who participated in the focus group.

### **Focus Group**

4 participants: all male

3 nationalities: USA, UK, RSA

4 countries represented: Costa Rica, Brazil, Argentina, Honduras

The process of coding the interviews and focus groups included listening to all the interviews and the focus group while taking notes. In some cases, the researcher listened several times to the recorded interviews and focus group. He took the questions from the questionnaires, focus group, and interviews and placed them under one of the three research questions. The researcher coded the interviews by putting them in the order he listened to the interviews. He maintained this order throughout his data analyses. This was followed by the process of reviewing the notes in order to identify recurring themes and phrases. After categorizing these words and phrases, the researcher counted each word or similar phrase. The researcher tabulated the numbers for each word or phrase and presented the words or phrases mentioned the most. In doing this process he was clearly able to see the dominant words or phrases that emerged.

### **Research Question #1: Description of Evidence**

**RQ #1: How do English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience?**

In the questionnaire , the first four questions (Q1-4) related to granting permission to participate in the study and sharing basic information about themselves and their ministry. This was followed by six questions (Q6-10) which were designed to obtain answers to the three research questions. The first question was used to determine how these churches are trying to reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience. Below is the question and all of the responses.

**Q4 - Describe the ongoing ministries of your church?**

1. Life Groups, Sunday School Classes (children-Adults), 2 Sunday Worship Services, Church Member Classes, 2-3 Large Outreach Events per year, Youth Ministry

2. Worship, Age graded ministries, Geographical zone groups, language groups, ministry teams
3. Multiple Bible Study opportunities, local missions, Children's ministry, Intentional fellowship
4. Sunday services on the beach, mid-week men's and women's bible studies, small group fellowship dinner, drug rehab bible study, orphanage visits, individual counseling and discipleship
5. Worship service with children's ministry, youth ministry, small groups, discipleship
6. Corporate Worship, Weekly Small Groups, Children's Sunday School, Youth Ministry, French Bible Study, Benevolence Ministry, Mission Support.
7. Preaching & worship, Bible studies, benevolence

8. Sunday worship, 2 weekly Bible Studies, monthly fellowship events, monthly activity, special holiday services or events. We have small groups for adults and youth, prayer and counseling ministries, international missions partners in Peru, Cuba, Honduras, and Tanzania, local missions including our own food pantry (Messiah's Market), Virginia Academy (our Christian k-12 school)
9. We are a fully functioning church body. We strive to minister to every member of the family with excellence. Ministries include: nurseries, children's church, Awana program, youth group, youth small groups, Adult classes, adult small groups, women and men's Bible studies, Men and Women's retreats and conferences, Marriage ministry, Prayer ministry, prayer services. Outreach: prenatal center, Homeless feeding, English and Spanish classes, Food bank, clothing closet.
10. English Classes (for local favela children), Monthly Markets (for refugee and local food producers), Projeto Hub (entrepreneurial skills training for young adults from local favela).
11. Congregational Care, Christian Education, Missions, Fellowship, Worship
12. This is a very broad question. As a church we have regular ministries for mothers, youth, and singles. We have small community groups that meet generally in homes or at times at the church building. We have ministry to men that involves setting up accountability groups of four men to meet regularly. We also support numerous missions and missions agencies, as well as some homes for children and a seminary.
13. Praise Team, Children's Ministry, Greeters, Hospitality, Tech Team, Small Groups (including one for young adults), Prayer, Outreach



14. We are a church that ministers and reaches out to English Speaking Internationals in our area.
15. discipleship, evangelism, missions, age group ministries, men and women's ministries, prayer
16. Women's, Men, Youth, Children;
17. The main ongoing ministry of the church is our weekly Sunday morning worship service; we also use social media to broadcast this service. We also seek to connect people in discipleship groups. We currently have a weekly group for ladies, one group for men, one group for young adults, and one group of couples. We also minister to the sick by serving alongside the hospital chaplaincy at the public hospital in the city. We do various other servant evangelism projects throughout the year such as distributing Bibles and assisting community projects.
18. Discipleship, Women's Men's, Youth, Children, Music, Recitation (Scripture), Mum and Tots, Women's Bible Study, Serving the City
19. We have a relatively broad variety of ministries, with our men's and women's ministries probably being the strongest at this point, along with our young adult ministry. Our youth ministry is good, but in need of leadership. It, along with the children's ministry are limited to Sundays at this time. Our missions ministry, including ministries to the homeless and in brothels, is strong, but limited in participation.
20. We use five "M's": Magnificare (worship), Manutenzione (setups, physical plant), Maturità (from nursery up to adult, teaching and training), Membri (member: visits, welcome committee, events), Missione (missionary activities: sending groups or supporting missionaries, Mission of Light (human trafficking), small group ministries)

21. Adult Sunday School, Adult home groups, Men's Ministry, Women's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Young Adult Ministry, Children's Ministry, Music Ministry, Alpha Course, Library Ministry
22. Worship, Bible studies, small connection groups, youth ministry, children's ministry, outreach ministries to expats and to local citizens

**Q6 - What is the primary way people get connected to your church?**

1. Word of mouth or internet search
2. Website, word of mouth
3. Online, travelers from hotels, friendships
4. Sunday service
5. Social media
6. Website and Word of Mouth/Relational
7. Internet
8. Word of mouth
9. Personal invitation from current members
10. Personal invite from a member
11. Personal invitation, word of mouth.
12. Hearing about us through members and social media
13. Every Sunday we announce a visitor center to which visitors can go following the service. Those who serve at the center are trained in welcoming people and making connections between them and others who are part of the church. They also share the options for involvement with the visitors.

14. Most people find out about our church through the website or Facebook. They primarily get connected to the church by visiting and connecting with someone there.
15. Word of mouth. Relationships. People in our church inviting other people.
16. combination of small groups, Bible studies, and age group ministries
17. Word of mouth and web site
18. People most often find our church by "word of mouth" hearing about our church from people who attend
19. Through the website
20. Sunday services, Bible studies and Life groups. Our Spanish Language Life Group has also done an excellent job in reaching out.
21. For the Italians, small groups are the entry point. Rarely will they show up on Sunday without knowing some of our people through a group. For the Anglophones, on the other hand, it is primarily a visit on Sunday morning with some coming through groups. Then, we have a monthly "First Step" meeting to get them to commit as Associate Members and join a ministry and small group. From there, they are encouraged to become members through our "Next Step" class, which includes baptism by immersion if needed.
22. I am not sure how to answer this question. There are two issues that are parts of this: Coming to the church the first time and getting connected to the people in the church. Europeans in general, and Germans in particular, do not quickly open themselves up socially. An advertised presence, a meaningful church program (Marriage seminar, for example), or just a good reputation for biblical preaching and a loving congregation, may be why people attend the first time. People "connect" with the

church most often simply because they meet someone who they connect with -- the expats are all looking for friends, or meaningful programs for their children, of a biblical preacher, or something familiar in the church program. With our inability to

visit gated communities (American military, etc.), and the social isolation of Europeans (they do not invite strangers in), our main ways of reaching out are through advertised programs. Connecting with others is through talking, so we allow an extra amount of time for people to socialize after the worship service. The coffee area is very important!

23. Personal invitation and online search

Question 8 was designed to show how these churches disciple others. Helping people to grow in their faith is the purpose of discipleship. Below is the question followed by the responses.

**Q8 - What is your strategy for helping people in your church grow in their faith?**

1. Provide healthy Bible teaching, godly small groups, and invest church member development.
2. Sunday services, small groups, ministry involvement
3. Don't have a great strategy.
4. Exposure to Gospel, integration of Word & faith into life, authentic community
5. assessing 'where are they at', encouraging attendance in bible studies, individual discipleship, encouraging service to community
6. Worship service, small groups, volunteering
7. Bible study
8. Worship services, Bible studies, service projects

9. We are developing our discipleship pipeline which starts with our new members class (Next Steps), which leads them into our core theology class (Foundations: a 10 week experience with teaching and small groups) followed by connection to small groups and other classes offered through our CommunityU, Sunday evening class environment.
10. We believe that personal spiritual transformation occurs best in smaller settings. Jesus modeled this by investing in 12 and even more so in 3.
11. Preaching through the Bible; encountering God through worship, prayer and sacraments; encouraging opportunities for growth through small groups, Alpha, Weekends Away; providing opportunities to serve in a team, either at Church or in the community.
12. Sunday School Classes after service and other programs running in the week
13. We offer Sunday School classes for all ages, and we seek to engage each attender in a discipleship triad.
14. LIFE groups, located around the city, meet weekly for Bible study, fellowship, and ministry. We just started GROWTH groups which meet for a set period of time and focus on a particular area of growth (the first 2 were Survey of the OT and Experiencing God).
15. Sunday teaching as first level, then we encourage them to get involved in Discipleship through Men's, Women's, youth, children's ministry as a next level to connect deeper with God and with the community. We also encourage volunteering/serving.

16. growing them through the Word, e.g., preaching and teaching, classes, discipleship groups, mentoring and accountability groups
17. Small groups and discipleship.
18. At this point, our main functional strategy to help people grow in their faith, is to help them connect in Christian community. The idea is that they will be encouraged as they gather regularly with believers toward going out and living out Christianity (Heb. 10.24-25). We feel that the Bible based preaching toward application provides a level of needed spiritual nourishment that when acted on in produces working faith which takes on the growth process. The connectivity within the body, helps a person organically grow as they find and use their spiritual gifts. We are in the early stages of structuring service teams and ministries around the idea of people discerning and using their spiritual gifts within the context of the body.
19. Our vision is, "Everyone growing and helping others toward maturity in Christ." We do that most effectively through discipleship triads (6 months, focused on personal growth).
20. Plugging them into a small group.
21. Discipleship relationships and/or small groups. Our small groups are not primarily Bible studies. They are holistic, a place where anyone can participate regardless of their progress in maturity and it is where individualized attention is given to the growth plan of each believer.
22. We try to do it all -- small groups, special thematic programs, adult Sunday School, etc. We have found through surveys that the only teaching most people connected to our church get is from the pastor's sermon.

23. Connecting them with small groups/Bible studies.

### **Focus Group**

The second question to my focus group was designed to determine how their church is discipling people. Below is the question along with the responses.

**Q2 - How have you retained people when they come? In other words, how have you gotten them connected once they have come?**

**Werner-** Personal contact and relationship building. They try to have some sort of follow up after a person visits for the first time (coffee, etc.). This has been the most effective way to connect people.

**Nate-** Deep relationships and discipleship. They start with a relationship with someone which leads eventually to a discipleship group. Added to this that the location of their church is in the mall in a movie theater. Right outside is a food court. Often people from the church eat at the food court after service and invite new people to join them. If a new person joins a member for lunch, the percentage of them sticking around goes way up.

**Kris-** The best way of connecting people has been through service. People who serve in the church get connected. If a new person joins the worship team or goes to one of their service projects, they get connected. Fellowship has also been helpful. Getting people connected through service and fellowship are the two keys.

**Q4 & Q5 (combined) - What is your primary strategy for discipleship and how do you overcome the challenges of reaching and discipling people in such a transient community?**



**Werner-** Stated that there has not been a culture of discipleship. This has been hard to overcome. They are offering classes, Bible studies, small groups as their primary means of discipleship. They have not developed a systematic process of discipleship. They have used the Alpha course but are going to focus on discipling their people through small groups. The challenge for them is time. They cannot do a 2 or 3 year program. They are trying to figure out how to offer the essentials of discipleship in a shorter amount of time. Also mentioned that discipleship is connected to leadership development.

**Nate-** Use triads, three people who get together for discipleship. Discovery Bible Study has been their material. The problem is that people come for only a short time. They had to go through a mental shift. Rather than just thinking about receiving people and discipling them they began to think about how they would also send them out. Their church has benefitted from some people who came from other international churches who were already mature in their faith.

**Kris-** They are really trying to cultivate an organic culture of discipleship. They hope this will help with the transient nature of the church. They are using multiple methods, one on one, triads, small groups, and service opportunities as ways to disciple people. The challenge is getting buy in from people in the church - trying to make discipleship a part of Christian community. Mentions some GAP students who are part of their church who attend and quickly plug in. Another issue is membership – commit to being covenant members. Concluded by stating “all of this is extremely difficult, tedious, and time consuming.”

**Interviews**

Question 1 in the interview was formed to determine how churches reach their target audience. The question along with a compilation of responses is below.

**Q1 - What have been the primary strategies to reach your target audience?****Dave Bollenbacher**

“We are a dedicated English-speaking church. Everything we do is in English.” The worship service is very important and is one of the primary ways they reach English speakers. They currently offer two identical services. The way people find their church is word of mouth and social media. They have a website, broadcast their services live, and utilize WhatsApp.

**Tim Faulkner**

Small groups. 90% of the Italians who became a part of the church do so through small groups. It is a little different for the expat population. Most of them will actually attend the service first. Social media is important, and they have a few outreach events they use like an Italian cooking class that is effective.

**Mark Simpson**

The primary way they reach their target audience would be attractional. People come because they want a service in English. People do find out about their church through social media, their website and Facebook page. They have a “Mum’s and Tots” class that reaches some people, and they do have a few outreach events that are effective.

**Jimmy Martin**

The most effective way is the internet and social media. The second way is through their members inviting others. And they have found outreach events to be a good way to reach their target audience.

**Nate and Jendi Korpi** (Note- This was the only interview in which the researcher interviewed a couple.)

“Everything we do at LifeBridge is built around relationships.” Everything is relationship driven. Sunday mornings, Small groups, and other activities are based around relationships. Technology plays a big part in outreach. They use Instagram, website, and other tools. Word of mouth has been important.

**Sara\* pseudonym**

Word of mouth and through different events. Because they live in a closed country, they are not able to advertise nor use social media. They have to get the word out about their church indirectly.

**Lyle Watson**

Events and courses that target the families like marriage or parenting courses. There are a lot of families that live in their area, and most do not have much in the way of resources. They do have several outreach events which target their community. They also use social media. The location of their church is strategic as it is on the only street heading into Tamarindo and they have a very visible sign.

Question 2 was on effectiveness in discipleship. The question and response are below.

**Q2 - What is the primary way you disciple your people?**

**Dave-** The message in their Sunday morning services and through small groups. They do have a systematic plan for reading the Bible that they try to take the church through. He personally tries to have 5 men he is discipling. They do not use a curriculum, but he does try to meet with them on a regular basis and is trying to get other leaders to do this as well. Their membership application process has been a good way to disciple people because it helps them know where people are in their spiritual journey and they can follow up when they interview people for membership. They also emphasize to their people that “life is worship.” “We are a sent and sending people.”

**Tim-** They use several methods. They have a membership class. They use small groups. They have a process of developing disciples based around knowing, doing and being. They have a process for developing disciples which is based around knowing, doing, and being. “All that they do has the goal of multiplication and reproduction.”

**Mark-** Discipleship through Sunday services. They also use the Alpha course. Though it is designed to be an evangelistic tool they have found it to be helpful as a discipleship tool as well.

**Jimmy-** Small groups using different curriculum. They also use triads which is 3 people meeting together regularly for around 6 months. They do use material for their triads.

**Nate and Jendi-** Recently they have been using triads based on the Discovery Bible. This is with the idea of reproduction. On the larger side is Sunday service, especially with the teaching. They use small group Bible studies and now have a prayer group where some are being disciplined. Also, what was referred to as “unstructured” times like meeting for coffee.

**Sara\***- They try to disciple people through the various ministry teams they have. If someone serves on a ministry team, they try and have the leader of that team do some discipleship. They also offer a few Bible studies during the week. They have a major space limitation. The church where they have their services is a local church. They can only have access to the building on Sundays. So, most of what they do has to be in someone's home.

**Lyle**- Weekly Bible studies for men and women. They have used a variety of different curriculums like RightNow media. They have not and do not currently offer anything for mixed groups.

Question 3 touched on the difficulty of discipling in a transient community. The questions and responses are below.

### **Q3 - How does the transient nature of the church affect their discipleship?**

**Dave**- The transient nature is a part of the church culture. This means there is a much shorter window of time in which to disciple people. This is not just year to year but also week to week. He said, "I often joke with the church that they are the most scattered sheep that I know." This means that "there is an inconsistency of availability which requires a greater degree of intentionality." This does lead to a sense of urgency which he thinks is a good thing. They try to keep their material at a shorter time frame. Because they know most of their people will be leaving, they need to take advantage of the short time they have with them. There is a mental shift that has to happen for a pastor of an international church. They have to realize that they are not just saying goodbye when a person leaves but they are sending them on to their next location.

**Tim-** Initially, their church was excited about the merger with an English-speaking church which meant the addition of many new expats. But as these expats started to leave, they recognized a lot of the difficulties that come with such a transient community. They recognize the time limitations of their people. They will not be in the country that long, and they are busy people while they are in the country. They have tried to use technology as a way of discipleship. He is a part of an organization that is high tech, high touch. People can watch a series of teaching videos and then meet with someone to discuss what they have learned.

**Mark-** This is a big issue. Mainly, they are trying to connect people who are new to the church. Do this through a monthly luncheon and a few other ways. But having new people who are only going to be there for a short time has been challenging for some of the long-time members.

**Jimmy-** Also, used the same language. This is a challenge. They do not have a long time to disciple someone, especially if your intent is for them to turn around and disciple someone else. Have to do things in a shorter time frame.

**Nate and Jendi-** This has been a point of frustration. They had a good run with several key people, and recently several of them left. This was hard and discouraging for the leaders and them personally. But even this can be a form of discipleship as some of these go and continue to teach what they have learned.

**Sara\*-** They have to do things quickly because they usually do not have a long time to disciple people. The average tenure in the country is about one year. They try to get people serving and connected as quickly as possible. If they get serving then their ministry teams can disciple them.

**Lyle-** This is very challenging. Because they are in a tourist area this affects everything including discipleship. Lyle says that “sometimes it seems like people are on vacation from everything.” This includes their spiritual growth. Trying to get people to commit to even a 5 or 6 week course can be a challenge. Also, people who are living in the country seem to travel a lot. It is challenging but they try to push through and offer ways for people to be discipled.

I had two questions in my interview that touched on discipling young people. What activities they offered for youth. The two questions are as follows with responses.

**How do you incorporate youth (ages 18 and younger) in the discipleship process and what activities do you offer for this age group?**

**Dave-** They do have a ministry for this age group called Fusion. It is led by volunteers. This group meets every other week for Bible Study along with some fun activities. They do offer two retreats each year, and at those retreats they have a time of intense Bible study. They have tried to offer something for the age group on Sunday mornings with mixed results. Right now, they are facing a real space problem on Sunday mornings, so it is hard to offer a consistent class. They do try to target this group by reaching out to the different international schools in the city.

**Tim-** They have a youth group. But outside of a few Bible studies and activities, they do not offer too much. In Italian culture someone is considered a youth until they get married, so this group does include young adults. The church does not have a younger pastor who is trying to reach more young people and targeting some young adults for discipleship.

**Mark-** Primarily through their children’s programming on Sunday mornings. As one of their leaders says, they try to make the Sunday morning time, “the best hour of a child’s week.” They have struggled in offering anything consistently to ages 11 and up.

**Jimmy-** They have a leadership team of adults that does small groups with young people. They also offer mission trips and have an annual youth camp which is called Euroventure and has youth from other English-speaking churches all over Europe come. They do offer an annual Discipleship weekend as well.

**Nate and Jendi-** Initially said, no, they did not have anything currently being offered for young people. But then said that they do have a few young people in their church and that they are very involved in serving the church and this has been an “organic form” of discipleship. On the special activities, they are only offering a children’s class on Sunday morning that happens at the same time as the sermon.

**Sara\*-** Recently they added a missionary to their church to specifically work with the children’s ministry. Space has been an issue. They only have one room available on Sunday mornings for their children’s ministry. They are about to move to a new location and should have more space. Because many of their attendees are expats, that have focused on third culture kids. She spoke about her own adopted children who were born in China, raised by American parents in Vietnam. They do face some identity issues. They have a couple that works with their youth, ages 12-18. They have tried to meet every other week. This group has more locals who attend then the children’s ministry because they can speak English.

**Lyle-** Youth outreach on Friday nights. They have a class on Sunday morning for children. They also offer two camps a year for their young people.



After compiling all of the answers from these questions in the questionnaire, focus groups, and interviews the researcher looked for patterns or themes that emerged and recorded specific words and phrases. Then he reviewed these words and phrases and began to categorize those repeated over and over. Sometimes the researcher needed to listen to parts of the interview again to make sure he understood the context of the words or phrases. After tabulating all of the results, he went with the three or in some cases four words or phrases most often mentioned. Here are the results.

### **Reaching Your Target Audience**

(Q6 on Questionnaire, Q2 on FG, Q1 on Interviews)

1. Word of mouth/invitation/relationships – 24
2. Social media/internet – 16
3. Small groups/Bible Studies – 2

### **Discipling Your Target Audience**

(Q6 and Q8 on Questionnaire, Q4&5 on FG, Q2,3,4 on Interviews.)

1. Small groups/life groups – 14
2. Sunday/Worship services – 11
3. Discipleship/triads – 8

### **Ministering to Their Target Audience**

(Q4 on Questionnaire)

1. Small groups/life groups- 9
2. Bible studies/S.S. Class – 7
3. Sunday/worship service/preaching – 5

### **Total Top 4 for Reaching, Discipling, and Ministering to Your Target Audience**

1. Small groups/Life groups – 27

2. Word of mouth/invitation – 24
3. Sunday/Worship services – 16
4. Internet/Social media – 16

### **Summary**

On reaching the target audience, two very clear strategies emerged. Most churches said the most effective way to reach out to their target audience was through word of mouth/invitation and social media. Based on this project's analysis and tallying the results, word of mouth/invitation was used 24 times while social media was mentioned 16 times. On discipling their target audience small groups/life groups were mentioned 14 times and Sunday/worship services were mentioned 11 times. Small groups/life groups also were used most often by churches for ministering to their target audience with nine tallies followed closely by Bible studies/S.S. Class. Small groups/life groups were the most frequently used program with 27 mentions and word of mouth/invitation receiving 24 mentions. Sunday worship/services and social media received 16 mentions each.

### **Research Question #2: Description of Evidence**

**RQ#2 How effective are these practices in reaching, discipling, and ministering to their target audience?**

Question 5 (Q5) was designed to receive answers to this question. Here is the question followed by the responses.

**Q5 - Which ministry is most effective in reaching new people?**

1. Sunday Worship Services and large outreach events
2. Children's ministry
3. Fellowship and meals and Bible study

4. Sunday service
5. Worship service
6. Sunday Worship
7. Preaching & worship
8. Worship
9. Our school and our groups
10. small groups, English classes, prenatal center
11. Alpha or Kids Church in terms of depth, Little Stars or Family Fun Days in terms of breadth. Markets have by far the highest attendance, but most of these are not our 'target audience'.
12. Worship
13. The community group ministry has been the best at reaching new people and plugging them in to the life of the church.
14. Web presence
15. We meet new during outreaches such as movie night/date nights. Parenting Courses and Marriage Courses as well.
16. Right now, the international worship service, but there are new developments with special talks for the city. We have a strong personal evangelism teams of 30-40 who go out regularly to share the gospel,
17. Women
18. We engage the largest gross number of people through our Sunday morning worship services.
19. Mums and Tots

20. To be honest, I think people come and STAY because of the family atmosphere. But beyond that, our young adult ministry has been most effective.

21. Small group ministry

22. Young Adult Ministry, All our small groups, Youth Ministry, Children's Ministry

23. Worship, small connection groups

Question 7 (Q7) was a question designed to obtain the effectiveness of various ministry activities. Below is the question with the results.

**Q7 - On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. How would you rank each category in importance for your church when it comes to reaching, discipling, and ministering your target audience?**

#### **Table 4.1 Ranking Categories of Importance**

Question 9 (Q9) is a question about the barriers or obstacles each church faces in trying to reach their target audience. Clearly, this question falls under the category of effectiveness. This question is trying to determine what is preventing these churches from being able to reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience. Below is the question and the response.

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
a. Preaching	8.00% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	24.00% 6	68.00% 17	25	4.44
b. Style of worship service	8.00% 2	8.00% 2	12.00% 3	52.00% 13	20.00% 5	25	3.68
c. Small groups/Bible Studies	4.00% 1	4.00% 1	20.00% 5	36.00% 9	36.00% 9	25	3.96
d. Physical building of where the church meets	8.00% 2	16.00% 4	28.00% 7	40.00% 10	8.00% 2	25	3.24
e. Advertising	32.00% 8	20.00% 5	32.00% 8	4.00% 1	12.00% 3	25	2.44
f. Internet promotion, interaction, etc. (Ex. Website, Facebook, Instagram)	0.00% 0	20.00% 5	28.00% 7	32.00% 8	20.00% 5	25	3.52
g. Ministry to the community	4.00% 1	32.00% 8	40.00% 10	20.00% 5	4.00% 1	25	2.88
h. Retreats, camps, special events	24.00% 6	28.00% 7	32.00% 8	12.00% 3	4.00% 1	25	2.44
i. Mission support and participation	8.00% 2	24.00% 6	36.00% 9	16.00% 4	16.00% 4	25	3.08
j. Volunteer training	20.00% 5	24.00% 6	28.00% 7	12.00% 3	16.00% 4	25	2.80

**Q9 - What are the greatest challenges your church faces in reaching, discipling, and ministering to your target audience?**

1. Biblical illiteracy, nominal Christians, the need for an outreach strategy to the English-speaking community besides word of mouth.
2. Space limitations, work schedules until 7:00 or 8:00 PM
3. High turnover
4. Lack of biblical literacy, transient nature of community & leadership, maintaining international identity with increase of national attenders, zero physical space to grow
5. Lack of mature believers to assist in the ministry, lack of media resources like website and advertising, additional teachers and counselors in the body
6. High turnover and majority being young believers (both physical & spiritual age) makes it challenging to have mature leaders and volunteers in our ministries

7. Current location
8. Location of a church within another, much larger church
9. People's lack of available time.
10. Qualified leadership. People who are spiritually mature and capable and willing to disciple others.
11. The high turnover of expatriates makes it hard to incorporate, equip, and release people in ministry. We have particular issues with our building (difficulty of access as it is shared with a School). We also have challenges with the dispersal of the English-speaking community across the city, together with transport and security challenges.
12. Getting our current members to reach out to those in their spheres of influence
13. The greatest challenge for us is the size and complexity of the city in which we are located. Traffic is terrible at all times and getting together in the same place (especially during the week) is nearly impossible.
14. Commitment to regular participation and locations to meet other than on Sundays
15. Outreach Challenges—our demographic has a lot of folks that embrace new age/eastern world views. And we are a small community where there is social "risk" in showing up at church. Discipling Challenges—we have a very transient population. And we have a very denominational diverse church population. People are in and out of town a lot from week to week... which makes it difficult to teach courses/content longer than 4-6 week periods.
16. Size, diversity, and the transitional nature of the church. A large number of our believers are first generational believers
17. The size of the city 25 million

18. Apathy, and Lack of Vision are our greatest challenges at this time. It is not laziness or lethargy on behalf of the members, many are doing quite a lot, and we are always busy. Rather, I would say that it is a lack of Holy Spirit empowered commitment to reaching the lost in the context of our church.
19. Internationals are very busy, often working long hours and traveling with work. Home groups need better promotion and leadership.
20. Leadership transition
21. The number of hours of work commitment in both cultures. For the Anglophones, the bucket list and hardship pay which means that they will be traveling and hesitate to get stuck in weekly responsibilities. Further, people today are less apt to come to meetings at church so there is a need to offer more flexibility with appointments and delivery of content as well as opportunities to develop community.
22. They are many: finding ways to reach out and connect with new people, getting the European part of the congregation (limited good cultural value) to buy into the importance of advertising and warmly greeting newcomers, maintaining commitment to peaceful existence and cooperation as a church body, and just maintaining a healthy means of communication and decision making.
23. The transience of the expat community.

Question 10 (Q 10) was the final question on the questionnaire. Perhaps it does not fit succinctly with any of the three research questions, but the researcher still believed it to be an important question. Therefore, he included the question and results in this category. Here is the question along with the responses.

**Q10 - If money and resources were not an issue, what one thing related to the ministry of your church would you do? (Ex. Renovate current facility, hire new staff, relocate to a new location, spend more money on advertising.)**

1. Start 2 more English speaking congregations around the metro area
2. Hire new staff
3. Hire a youth pastor, invest more in outreach/advertising
4. Construct new worship center, hire new staff, purchase adjoining property, expand current facilities
5. Buy/build a central location for church building during the week
6. Due to leadership challenges the more staff we can have to lead (along with volunteers) the more we can do well
7. Relocate
8. Relocate at a different time
9. Combination of renovation of our facilities and hiring pastors which specific skills in outreach and counseling
10. Start a Christian school that would allow us to have a greater impact on the next generation here in Jaco.
11. We would probably look to hire the vacant property immediately across the street from our Church as an additional facility to enable us to connect with the English-speaking community.
12. Have more staff doing administration so that those who primarily have to minister to people, can do so more effectively
13. Renovating or rebuilding in our current location.



14. Buy our own building and have an endowment for its upkeep
15. Maybe hire an admin assistant/building manager so I could be freed up to focus more on teaching/discipleship development.
16. We are in desperate need of leadership development. We have just launched a new initiative of succession planning for ministry and lay leadership
17. Renovate and advertise
18. Hire new staff - Minister of Music, Minister of Discipleship
19. Bring on additional staff that could focus on training for discipleship and home groups.
20. Hire youth minister
21. Develop technological delivery methods for connecting new people to the church, to ministries and small groups and to each other, getting everyone in a pathway to maturity and developing leaders. I would prioritize bringing on staff that is committed to adult education principles and "just in time" learning.
22. To Germans money is always an issue, and a significant part of our church is German (40%). Their cultural values of "limited good" and "low power distance" and the desire for and need for open discussions, these values are so strong within them that there is simply no way around them. The main issues are always how to "herd cats," or how to lead them by the Holy Spirit to take steps to think beyond themselves—which they are capable of doing. Frankly, I cannot imagine a scenario where money and resources were not an issue in this church. If we were only reaching expatriates, namely Americans, then a new facility with adequate parking would be key.

23. Hire staff; build a comfortable and serviceable facility for the expat community. The local government requires us to meet in the building of an existing Vietnamese church.

There were a number of questions asked during the focus group that were designed to determine the effectiveness of the practices of English-speaking international churches. Below are the questions along with summaries of the responses. The focus group consisted of four pastors of English-speaking international churches in four different countries. All came from Latin America. Two of the participants were U.S. citizens, while the other two were British and South African.

**Question 1 – What has been the most effective thing you have done to reach new people?**

**Werner-** The church has not had a culture reaching out historically. They are trying to change this by modeling outreach. They are going to expats where they hang out. (Gave some examples.) He and his wife have started to do this. The result has been that it has influenced some in the church to follow their example. The other way they have had success in reaching out is through social media. Emphasized the importance of this. Finally, said they have utilized various outreach events.

**Nate-** The primary and most effective way of reaching out has been the Sunday morning service. Additionally, they get a lot of traffic through social media. Next would be outreach events. They have found that doing something to serve the community is a great way to invite others to participate.

**Kris-** “By far the most effective way has been our people inviting others.” They also are trying to foster their people to make a covenant commitment. Indicated that often if a person just came to their service they already feel a connection. Some of their small groups have been an

effective way to reach new people. Specifically mentioned the small group his wife does and how it has attracted new people to their church.

**Mark-** The Alpha course (alpha.org) has been one of the primary ways they have reached new people. They have reached new people, connected them, and even developed their leadership through this course.

Question 6 addressed the issue of how effective is each church in ministering to their congregation. Below are the questions and the various responses.

**What are some ways that have been effective in ministering to people in your congregation?**

**Werner-** They try to make the service a time where we minister to our people. Not every service, but for example, when they have communion they use this as a special time to pray for their people who are in need.

**Nate-** Began by asking for a clarification of what the question meant. Was the researcher asking how their church ministers to the community or to their own congregation. The researcher clarified by saying he was poking for ways the church ministers to their own. After clarification, Nate said that the church tries to help people adjust to living in a new country. Basic things like paying bills and where to go for basic services is something they try to offer. They do have two couples who are missionaries and are trained in caring for other missionaries. These couples offer their services to people in the church.

**Werner-** Came back to say that they have a care team and they use WhatsApp to have people charge prayer requests and needs. This has been helpful in people doing lay ministry to one another.

**Kris-** The most effective way has been being available and listening. This is especially effective for expats in their area. They really need someone to hear them and to know they are loved. It can be exhausting but it is critically important. They have a few people in their church who are naturally good at this. They are trying to train their elders to be more engaged in this.

**Mark-** They have a care/prayer WhatsApp group where people can share their concerns. They do have some elderly people in their congregation who have been long term members and who now need to be cared for. They are trying to get some of their newer people involved in ministering to these elderly members.

The interviews had two questions that came under the effectiveness of practices. Below are the questions along with the responses.

**What is the single most effective outreach strategy your church has used in the last 3 years?**

**Dave-** Sunday morning service is probably the biggest attraction. Relationships are critical. They do not do much in advertising. Indicated they really do not have the space at the moment to reach new people but are hoping to start a building project soon. The primary way people learn about their church is word of mouth. Also, outreach events like a Christmas concert have attracted a lot of new people to the church though not certain about how many of these people they have retained.

**Tim-** The most effective strategy they have used that is small groups. Particularly teaching their people how to be effective small group leaders. They try to offer training to all their small group leaders, and they believe this can be done by any international church.

**Mark-** The Alpha course and their Sunday worship. Mentions how the Anglican liturgy has actually been helpful in reaching people from a catholic background. It is not so different and helps bridge the gap for people who come from a more liturgical background.

**Jimmy-** The church has used the Alpha course and Christianity Explored. These have been very effective in reaching out to others.

**Nate and Jendi-** Providing activities outside of church for people to invite their friends. For example, every 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the month they have a brunch. People invited their friends, and they consistently saw new people come to this. They have had a running group, hiking, etc. Calls these low commitment activities that people can invite their friends to.

**Sara\*-** The most effective outreach they have done has been their annual Christmas presentation called, Merry Christmas Da Nang. They rent a large venue that seats 1200 and they have 3 presentations. They have an international choir. Many who participate are Vietnamese, but everything is done in English. They have to get permission from the government every year

to do it, but so far permission has been granted. They make sure a clear Gospel presentation is made. This by far has been their most effective outreach event and also includes almost all of their church.

**Lyle-** The most effective outreach is their people reaching out to others through relationships. Says it is part of their DNA. Also, some of the programs they have offered, particularly targeting couples and parents.

I followed the same procedure in determining themes and patterns for my second question. Here are the results.

**Which ministry is most effective in reaching new people? (Q5 on questionnaire)**

1. Sunday/Worship service – 9
2. Groups – 5
3. Outreach events – 4

**On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. How would you rank each category in importance for your church when it comes to reaching, discipling and ministering your target audience? (Q7 on Questionnaire) Ranking the top 3 from Table 4.1**

1. Preaching – 4.4
2. Small group/Bible studies – 3.96
3. Style of worship services – 3.68

**What are the greatest challenges your church faces in reaching, discipling, and ministering to your target audience? (Q9 on Questionnaire)**

1. High turnover/transient nature – 6
2. Space limitations/location – 5
3. People's busy schedule – 4

**If money and resources were not an issue, what one thing related to the ministry of your church would you do?** (Ex. Renovate current facility, hire new staff, relocate to a new location, spend more money on advertising) (Q10 on questionnaire)

1. Building expansion/relocation – 11
2. Hire staff – 9
3. Advertise – 3

In both the FG and interview I had questions that touched on effectiveness of practice. However, I found no good way to categorize these. The responses are already included in my results.

### **Summary**

On effectiveness of practices, several methods emerged. Again, the worship service was mentioned as the best way to reach new people. The questionnaire asked people to rank different areas of effectiveness. Preaching was ranked a 4.4 on a scale of 1–5 with 5 being the highest. Then style of worship service was ranked as third most important with a score of 3.68. Two questions determined the obstacles churches face in being effective. One question was worded to allow them to answer what they perceived to be their greatest challenge in reaching their target audience where the other question had a more positive tone. That question was, “If they had the money and the resources, what would they do?” It is not surprising based on other responses that the transient nature of the church was the greatest challenge in being effective. Not only did their answers reflect this, but even the tone of their voices and the way they responded indicated this is a huge challenge. Secondly, people mentioned space limitations and their need to build was another challenge. A number of pastors spoke about the current space limitations they were facing. For example, Mark said the primary reason they do not advertise right now is because they really do not have space. They are looking to resolve this with an upcoming construction

project. Sara\* said they cannot offer any more classes on Sunday because of space. Relocating for her church was imminent. In other conversations, the researcher has had with pastors, space was a recurring theme.

### **Research Question #3: Description of Evidence**

#### **RQ #3 Which of these best practices can be transferable to English-speaking, international churches in non-English speaking countries?**

There was not a question in the questionnaire that was specific about transferability of practices. However, in both the focus group and the interview, the researcher included questions that asked about what could be transferable to other international churches. Below are the questions and the responses.

The final question, question 7, was a question asked to determine the transferability of practices. Here is the question followed by the responses.

#### **Q7 - What would be the top 3 things an English-speaking international church could do to reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience?**

**Mark-** 1. Preaching and teaching the Gospel. 2. Praying for the sick. 3. Seeing God move in supernatural ways.

**Werner-** 1. A contemporary service that speaks to the lives of expats. 2. A very caring community that is ministering to their people. 3. A feeling that the church/faith is adding value to their lives.

**Nate-** 1. Being present in people's lives. Just showing up and being there for them. Personal relationship with others. 2. Social media remains important but may not be as important in the foreseeable future. 3. Engaging people with their surrounding community through service projects.



**Kris-** 1. To love one another. 2. Preach the word- God promises to produce spiritual transformation if we will preach the word.3. Love the community and mobilize the community. This is particularly important in Latin America.

The interview had a very specific question about the transferability of practices to other international churches. Below is the question and responses.

**Are the methods you have used to reach, disciple, and minister to your target audience transferable to other international churches? Explain.**

**Dave-** Leverage social media. Just about any international church can do this. Also, the way they have tried to stay connected to those who have relocated. He follows up with them after they have left and does a little devotional for alumni of the church. This has been effective, and he believes is transferable.

**Tim-** Having a clear pathway to maturity and leadership that people can see and know. Having a clearly defined discipleship pathway is something all churches can do.

**Mark-** The Alpha course is very transferable. "It is such a simple program to follow and it is global tested." The family fun days which they have used as an outreach is something most churches can do. They have an internship program for young adults who want mission experience, and he feels this could be done by many churches.

**Jimmy-** Triads are very transferable. This does not require a leader if there is a plan. Also, the Alpha and Christianity Explored courses can be done by other churches. Says these are multicultural tools.

**Nate and Jendi-** The social media aspect is definitely one of the transferable things they are doing. Said, "You need to have an online presence." Making the Sunday morning worship

meaningful is important and transferable. People are craving community and anything a church can offer to help is important. This includes follow up of guests.

**Sara\*-** Says most of what they are doing is transferable because they are really not doing anything different. Says there is a commonality among international churches, so what one church does is often transferable to another international church.

**Lyle-** The Alpha course is great. Especially those marriage and parenting one. Any church can do a mission trip and highly recommends this. It can be local, but believes getting away is the best way to do a mission trip. Outreach events are also something just about any international church can do.

Once again, the researcher followed the same procedures as for research questions #1 and #2. Here are the results.

**What would be the top three things an international church can do to reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience? (Q7 in FG)**

1. Preaching/teaching/worship service – 4
2. Loving community – 3

**Are the methods you use transferable? Explain. (Q1 under transferability of practices in FG)**

1. Sunday morning worship – 3
2. Alpha course – 3
3. Social media/internet – 3

### **Summary**

This project did not have as many questions on the topic of transferability. But with the two questions that were asked the researcher was able to receive some valuable information. One person interviewed said that “really most of what we do is transferable to other international

churches.” Again, the Sunday morning worship experience was seen as something any church could and should do. All of those who were involved in the research had Sunday morning as the primary time for their corporate worship. Many indicated Sunday morning was the most ideal time because of traffic and culture. Again, social media and the idea of relationships and a loving community were considered something very transferable to other international churches.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

After analyzing all of the information here are my major findings.

1. The primary ways international churches reach out to their target audience is through word of mouth, social media, and the worship experience.
2. The primary ways international churches disciple their target audience is through small groups, Bible studies, and discipleship groups.
3. The primary ways international churches minister to their target audience is through small groups, caring relationships, and service.
4. The transient nature of the international church makes reaching, discipling, and ministering to the target audience an incredible challenge but also provides a unique opportunity.
5. Most of what is effective in one international church can be transferable to other international churches around the world.

## CHAPTER 5

### LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

Often a journey begins with a simple question. In his best-selling book, *Born to Run*, the author tries to determine if humans really are born to run. His journey began with a simple question. “How come my foot hurts?” (McDougall 8). That simple question led him on a journey of discovery that ultimately helped him find answers. Almost 18 years ago I began to ask the question: *how do English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience?* I may not have asked it exactly this way. But because I had decided to uproot my life along with my family, move to another country, and pastor a very different type of church, this question became forefront in my mind. Since then I have been on a journey to discover how these churches function. How do English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience and what are the best practices that can be transferable to other English-speaking churches?

This question was formalized as I began this project four years ago. Now it is time to share some of my discoveries. This chapter will list the five major findings resulting from the research. I will then explain how these findings correspond to personal observations, literature surveys, and the biblical and theological foundations for this project. Then I will present limitations of the research study, unexpected observations, and recommendations for further studies to be undertaken.

#### Major Findings

##### **First Finding: How to Reach Out**

When I became pastor of International Baptist Church (IBC), San Jose, Costa Rica, one of the questions I had was how did people find out about our church? The internet was becoming very popular, but our church did not have a web page. When I asked this question, they almost always mentioned either seeing our add in the local paper or they were invited. At that time, the primary paper serving the English-speaking community was the Tico Times. I concluded very early on the two primary ways people were finding our church was through word of mouth and advertising. I realized we needed to create a website as soon as possible; so, we did. Within 5 years, I asked people the same question, and this time the 2 primary answers were word of mouth and the internet.

Before I began this ministry transformation project, I was interacting with many different pastors of English-speaking churches. Inevitably, the topic of how their church reached people came up. Almost always, the response was through the internet or personal invitation. The response of personal invitation was not surprising. Author and researcher George Barna had already given results of research that indicated people in the U.S. would come to church if invited. He states:

The churchless we interviewed were most open to “a friend of yours inviting you to attend a local church,” with one-fifth expressing strong interest and nearly half willing to consider a church based on this factor. An invitation from a friend is the top-rated way churches can establish connections with the unchurched. (“Five Trends Among the Unchurched”)

I quickly concluded the power of a personal invitation was even more effective in an international setting. I also realized how interconnected our world had become because of the internet.

Another piece of information that came up frequently was a significant number of people just saw our church or heard about us indirectly and decided to come. Many times, it was this initial visit and the worship experience they had which made a strong impression, and they became regular attenders. Again, in informal conversations with other pastors, they would share similar experiences. Without really identifying it, in retrospect, I saw how the worship experience has played a major role in reaching our target audience.

In my formal research, the answers that included word of mouth and the internet were frequently mentioned. Word of mouth received 24 mentions, and the internet was mentioned 16 times. In measuring effectiveness of reaching the target audience, worship was mentioned most often. This certainly reinforced much of what I had already experienced, and it did not come as a major surprise. What did surprise me a little was how often the worship experience was mentioned as a primary way churches reached their target audience. The worship experience was seen as the most transferable strategy done by other international churches. I will elaborate more in the section entitled Unexpected Observations. As one pastor said unequivocally about how they reach others, “By far the most effective way has been our people inviting others.”

In reflecting about these top three ways international churches could reach their target audience I came across an article that accurately confirmed what I have discovered. The article was addressing churches in general. Here is what it said:

For decades, the metaphorical “front door” of your church—the gateway to participation—was through worship. Chances are, they learned about your church from something like a newspaper or phone book ad, or maybe they found your church because it is part of the denomination they have always belonged to. Literally, people also likely used the real front door to come into and become part of your congregation.

During the last few years, we have been encouraging people to think of the “new front door” of the church as being its website. After all, that’s where most people go “visit” your church before they ever step foot inside. Just like a church wants its physical appearance to look great and inviting, a contemporary church understands its web presence needs to be inviting, up-to-date, and engaging.

But even thinking of the website as your front door isn’t fully accurate. What both guests and marginally active people in your congregation want is not a church with the best technology, coolest design, and slick descriptions of all that it does. The real front door of your church is...

Relationships.

Relationships are at the core of your ministry, right? Relationships with friends, guests, people in need, ministry partners, and most of all with God are central to all you do. So, shouldn’t they be at the core of your website as well?” (Gossett)

In this brief article, the writer touches on all three primary methods revealed in the above research. The literature review in chapter 2 reinforced much of what this project discovered. Many writers spoke of the necessity of a clear vision. English-speaking churches usually have a clearly stated vision. The common component in this vision is that these churches have as their target audience people who speak English. Additionally, various authors emphasized the importance of the worship experience. In spite of many different styles of worship and the fact there are multiple ways people can listen to a sermon or worship music, corporate worship has always been primary for the local church. Much of the literature emphasized the need to have a quality worship experience that was culturally relevant to the target audience.

Two of the three primary ways that English-speaking churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience are firmly grounded in scripture. Jesus was relationally driven, and how he incorporated this in his ministry. Rather than constantly focusing on the masses, he chose to focus on 12 disciples and a few others. Even the calling of his disciples shows how it was done through relationships. The disciple Andrew, after becoming convinced Jesus was worth following, invited his brother Simon Peter to meet Jesus (John 1.41). The first churches recorded in Acts were churches reaching people through relationships, and they gathered regularly for worship. Worship served as a witness to those who came. The first church “devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship” (Acts 2.42a). As Rick Warren has made clear, “Worship is a powerful witness to unbelievers if God’s presence is felt and if the message is understandable” (Warren 241).

Obviously the one primary way not visible in scripture is the social media element. There was nothing comparable to social media during New Testament times. There is, however, compelling evidence that communication was much improved thanks in large part to the “pax romana” and the ability to travel. Dreessen and Marsh write:

By our standards, travel and communication was slow and arduous in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

However, the infrastructure in the Roman Empire made roads much more accessible, travel safer and far easier than what had previously been known. This allowed not only for greater ease of travel but also a better system of communication. (8)

The Gospel did spread at an amazing speed in spite of the limitations. One can only wonder how the early church would have used social media to their advantage.

### **Second Finding: How to Disciple**



On the issue of discipleship, I have had a deep conviction that the best way to disciple people is connecting through small groups in God's Word. This came from my own study of the Bible and from a plethora of writers who wrote on the subject of discipleship. I was influenced by writers like Josh Hunt who said, "There is no disciple-making without small groups. God's plan for forming spiritually mature disciples involves getting them in groups" (10). This was the strategy I was attempting to use when I was a pastor in the U.S., and it remained a strategy when I began to pastor an English-speaking international church. When I was visiting with pastors of other international churches, they were saying the same thing. Some form of small group Bible study was their primary way for helping their people grow as disciples.

My research powerfully reinforced the belief that small groups were the way international churches disciplined their target audience. This was also how most churches minister to their target audience, which I address in my third major finding. Small groups/life groups were mentioned 14 times as the most effective way to disciple the target audience. Triads/discipleship groups received 8 mentions. Small groups were also second on the questionnaire when it came to ranking what was most effective in reaching, discipling, and ministering to one's target audience. Clearly, almost every church leader felt discipleship happened best when a small group of people, usually between 3 and 15, gathered together to study the word of God and to encourage one another in their faith.

Gathering a small group together in order to study God's was reinforced in the literature review. Many books and articles on the subject of church health and growth speak of the necessity of getting people together in smaller groups in order to study God's word. The very first Christian church organized themselves in such a way as to have their people devoted to the Apostles teaching (Acts 2.42) and to meeting together in small groups (Acts 2.46). Today, many

writers still acknowledge the best way to disciple people is through small groups. Bill Hull says simply, “Today, disciples have discovered that a small group remains the best discipling tool” (25).

Those writing on the topic of ministering cross-culturally also emphasize the importance of discipleship through small groups. One of the methods mentioned by several pastors as a primary way to disciple others was through triads. Evetts writes:

A 3D Triad is an intentional relationship that takes place over a period of time in which three disciples walk alongside one another in order to encourage, equip and challenge each other in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping each other to disciple others as well. (133)

They mentioned this group would covenant to stay together for a certain time period, for example six months to a year, and then each one would try and form a new triad. Because it is such a basic approach and not dependent on any material, they believed it was very transferable to other churches.

Using small groups to disciple others is firmly grounded in scripture. Jesus modeled this through the calling of his disciples. Even from among the twelve he had a sort of triad by focusing on even more intense discipleship with three (Mark 9.2). Jesus, at times, preached to large crowds, but the focus of his three years of earthly ministry was on his disciples.

This pattern would continue as the early church emerged. As referenced earlier, small groups were formed at the inception of the first church. As Paul and others began their missionary efforts, the first churches formed would be a sort of small group. There is ample evidence the first churches met in homes (Acts 18.7; Philem. 1.2). Some of the homes may have been large enough to hold more than 20 or 30 people, but most of the homes would have had

limited space. So even the early church was a sort of small group. As these local churches grew, they continued to meet in homes.

### **Third Finding: How to Minister**

An incredible challenge for international churches is how to care for such a transient group of people. When people come from so many different backgrounds and are constantly on the move, how can the people of God adequately care for one another? One of my early frustrations as a pastor of an international church was when someone would go missing. I often did not know if they were traveling, relocated, or simply were no longer attending our church. One of the ways we have tried to offer better care for the people who attend our church is to get them plugged into small groups. Then we attempt to make sure the leaders of the groups are adequately trained and instructed in caring for those in the group. This has helped us to better minister to people in our church. As we have grown, it has taken some of the pressure off of me and the other pastors. We still have some people fall through the cracks, but having more and better functioning small groups has helped us to better minister to our people.

During my interviews and focus group I heard and sensed a similar frustration to what I just shared. Caring for a transient group of people can really be difficult. As I tabulated the responses of the questionnaire, interviews, and focus group, I discovered most English-speaking churches are utilizing small groups not only to disciple their people but to minister to them as well. Small groups/Life groups were listed the most as the way churches ministered to their target audience with nine mentions. This was followed by Bible studies/Sunday School classes as a close second with seven mentions. Based on my understanding of people's definitions of these groups and classes, the main difference between the two was where and when they met. Small

groups/Life groups typically met during the week in a home whereas Bible studies/Sunday School classes met on Sunday at the church facility.

As stated under the literature review section for using small groups as a way to disciple others, the same could be said of small groups being used to care for and minister to people who are a part of the church. Most literature in the field of church growth and missions emphasizes the need to get people into smaller groups for the purpose of caring for them. As Rick Warren states, “A church must grow larger and smaller at the same time. Larger through worship, smaller through small groups” (qtd. in Mason). Why? One reason is to care for one another.

Those who have written specifically on the international church indicate the best way most of these churches can care for one another is by getting people into small groups. Writers like Woo and Milne speak about the power of the smaller group within an international church to care for one another. In addition, they indicated when a multicultural church is caring for one another it serves as a great witness to others. Caring for one another in international churches is not easy. Getting people connected to a small group that is organized to care for one another is one of the best ways a church can minister to their people.

The church is compelled to care for one another. Yet, many English-speaking international churches are challenged to care for such a diverse and often scattered group. As one of the pastors stated in his interview, he often tells his people they are the most scattered flock of sheep he has ever pastored. The international church has found connecting people in small groups the way to care for them. Francis Chan states, “There are more than 50 ‘one another’ commands that call us to care for one another in a supernatural way. God wants meaningful interactions when we gather. For this reason, we keep our churches small (ten to twenty people), meeting in homes to create a family atmosphere” (177–78). Most English-speaking churches do

not follow the model of home churches, but they do often have the people of the church gathering in homes or other locations during the week in small groups. As already stated, this is the best way to disciple and care for one another.

A great scriptural example is when the church faced one of their first major internal crises. Acts 6 records a story of a crisis that revolved around providing adequate care for members in the church. The Hellenistic Jews were complaining their widows were not receiving the same sort of care as the Hebrew widows (Acts 6.1). This accusation had the potential to divide the church. The solution was the ordination of the first deacons. Seven men were selected to care for the needs of the widows and for other needs of the congregation. Though the text does not explicitly say the deacons used small groups as a way to care for one another, the inference is that by forming smaller groups the now very large first church could better care for one another.

The church meeting in homes and sharing life together is a mark of the early churches mentioned in the New Testament. Paul and other New Testament writers strongly emphasized the need to love one another. It was to be a love of another kind. This kind of love for one another would assure people were cared for, and it would cause those outside of the church to take notice that these Christians were different. Chan writes, “One thing the New Testament makes clear is that the Church is supposed to be known for its love. Jesus says our love for one another is the very thing that will attract the world” (73).

#### **Fourth Finding: Transient Nature**

One of the most jarring aspects for a new pastor of an international church experience is the high turnover that takes place. If the pastor is new to the country and if they are adjusting, they may not realize at first the toll the transient nature of these churches will have on them personally and how it will impact the ongoing ministry of their church. When the initial

excitement of being in a new country and ministry wears off, the strain of so many people coming and going begins to set in. The effect on the church is not in just one area but in almost all areas. The transient nature affects attendance, discipleship, giving, leadership development, and how the church ministers to one another and their community.

In the numerous conversations I have had through the years with pastors of international churches, trying to lead their church to accomplish their purpose while dealing with so much transition has been an incredible burden. This was reinforced in all three tools I used in my research. For example, when I asked in the interviews what the greatest challenge was in reaching, discipling, and ministering to their target audience, the largest response was the high turnover/transient nature being mentioned six times. On the questionnaire, this was often sighted as the greatest challenge pastors of international churches faced. In the focus group, this was a recurring theme throughout the conversation. To summarize what several pastors in the focus group said, “There is a mental shift that has to happen for a pastor of an international church. They have to realize that they aren’t just saying goodbye when a person leaves but they are sending them on to their next location.”

There is limited material written about making disciples of people who are constantly on the move. However, those who are thinking and writing on this subject clearly state how critical it is to have a “transient community consciousness”. Evetts states:

Churches desiring to make disciples in transient communities must maintain a “transient community consciousness”. Churches of transient communities need to be fully aware of and sensitive to the dynamics of transient people and contextualize their approach to disciple making accordingly. (7)

Jesus as the sent one recognized his time for laying the foundation to his worldwide movement was limited. He recognized his time with his disciples was short. “I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me” (John 7.33). He had only three years to prepare his disciples to continue his work after he was gone. He was able to do this in spite of the limited time he was given.

As the church was birthed and then spread, the pattern of making disciples in a short amount of time coupled with the fact that many of the early believers were transient was critical to the early church’s strategy. There are many examples of this found in the book of Acts, but one example will suffice. On the day of Pentecost, many people from different regions were present. “It must suffice to observe that the list is clearly meant to be an indication that people from all over the known world were present, and perhaps that they would return to their own countries as witnesses to what was happening” (Marshall 75). After the great response to Peter’s message, these new disciples of Christ had to be disciplined and grounded in their faith. The text does not record how long they would have remained in Jerusalem, but it is safe to say they did not remain for too long. Perhaps a few months at most.

The Apostle Paul, as he went on his various missionary journeys, often had a brief window of time in which to establish new disciples and begin a church. Sometimes his time in an area was only three weeks and at other times it was three months or longer. He had a short time to make disciples, but he did. The point of all three examples in reaching, discipling, and ministering to people in a short time who are transient is found in the Bible.

#### **Fifth Finding: Transferable to Other Churches**

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 1.9 “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again, there is nothing new under the sun.” This is true in life and it is true of English-

speaking international churches. Though these churches may be spread out in different cities and regions around the world and separated by thousands of miles, some of the most basic strategies they incorporate to reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience are the same.

Ultimately our guide for how a local church functions is from scripture. Even though there are different interpretations and emphasis as to what a church should do or what their worship service should be like or how their Bible studies should be structured, there is agreement that scripture gives us clear guidelines of how a local church should function. As Rick Warren stated, “We believe there are many appropriate ways to express our love to God. These include praying, giving, testifying, trusting, obeying His Word, among many others” (240). Or as so eloquently stated in the Westminster Catechism, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

These international churches gather at least once a week for corporate worship. It is during this time that many pastors and leaders say they can disciple and minister to their people. It is the corporate worship experience that is most often the first place a person new to the church or someone exploring the faith will come. The key then is to offer a meaningful and understandable worship experience that can be a witness to someone unfamiliar to Christianity and yet can also encourage and equip the saints. This is not easy to do especially when you factor in the great diversity of an international church. Yet, it can be done. And it is something any international English-speaking church can do anywhere in the world.

Small groups as a way to disciple and care for others is also every transferable. By this time, the topic of small groups has become a bit redundant. However, it is worth noting over and over again that small groups were seen as the primary ways to disciple and minister to internationals. It is no surprise these two methods—corporate worship and small group



meetings—are so integral to the international church. They go all the way back to the churches beginning. “The central idea is that the early church had two kinds of meetings: large group/temple court/celebration-type meetings, and small group/in home/face-to-face meetings” (Hunt 52).

The use of the internet is something nearly every international church can do. The only limitation on this would be those churches located in areas closed or hostile to Christianity. These churches have to use caution as to whether they will use the internet as a way of reaching out to their target audience. Sometimes the risk of exposure is just too high. But for the many churches in areas without restrictions, having some sort of presence on the internet is vital. This remains one of the primary ways people will find an English-speaking international church.

So much of what is being written about churches in general and specifically about international churches say the basics of how a church should function is transferable regardless of size, shape, or location. Worship may be very different among different churches, but the fact a local church should gather for worship is considered a non-negotiable. The structure, location, and curriculum to be used in a small group may vary from region to region, but the reality that small groups are a critical way to disciple others is not questioned. The use of the internet is not only considered a great way to reach new people, but it is becoming one of the primary ways churches are trying to disciple their people. The International Baptist Convention has an agreement with **RightNow Media** that affiliated churches can access their website and use their resources. Many churches have taken advantage of this and have reported that it has become a good tool for discipleship.

As was stated in chapter 2 of this dissertation, our basis for everything we do should be biblical. When something is biblical then it is usually transferable. Worship as a way to reach,

disciple, and minister to others is biblical and transferable. Small groups as a way to disciple and minister to those in the church is biblical and transferable. Though the internet was not around when the New Testament was written, the method of using culturally relevant methods is very biblical. A great example of this would be how the Apostle Paul took time to observe and understand the Athenians and then used their poets and religious practices as a way of reaching out (Acts 17.16-34). The primary ways international English-speaking churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience are biblical and transferable.

### **Ministry Implications of the Findings**

The findings from this research can have a significant impact for international English-speaking churches. This information will serve as a source of encouragement to keep doing what they are already doing. There is always a tendency for pastors and leaders to look for the latest fad or strategy that will take their church to the next level. Yet, what was found in this research is the effective primary methods international churches use go all the way back to Bible times. The first churches gathered together, and they worshipped. Their worship experience served as a way to disciple and minister to their people and their worship was a witness to the people they were trying to reach.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several major limitations that emerged during my research. I believe I was aware of this as I began my work but as my research moved into full swing some of these limitations became rather glaring. I would like to put the limitations I encountered into several categories.

### **Geography and Time**

As has been stated several times previously, English-speaking international churches are all around the world. Even in a day where we are so connected through technology, there was still a major limitation because of how these churches were so geographically apart. I have been able to travel to a number of locations where English-speaking churches exist over the last 15 years. I found onsite visits to be very helpful. During the time of my research, my ability to travel was pretty minimal. Fortunately, today's technology helps immensely. Yet, trying to schedule interviews and coordinating a focus group with different time zones proved to be very problematic especially in regions with significant time zone differences. Pastors are busy people. As I would correspond with a pastor or leader to arrange for an interview in a different time zone, I found we were fighting two battles. One was personal time constraints coupled with an 8 or 10 hour time zone difference.

In relation to this would be the reality that most of my research took place with pastors in Latin America. The questionnaire did reflect a widespread geographical representation. The interviews did include a leader from Europe and a pastor in Asia. The focus group only included pastors from Latin America though I was pleased they represented four different countries. I would have loved to have had a wider group of pastors in my research. I was disappointed I did not get any response from pastors or leaders in the Middle East or Africa where there are a few international churches. A future researcher would hopefully be able to obtain information from a wider representation.

### **Technology**

A glaring weakness I felt throughout my research was my utter technological ineptitude. I am a very slow typist. My computer knowledge is extremely limited. Before this research project, I had no experience in doing research over the internet. At the end of this project all of

these skills are only slightly improved. I still did some of my best research the old-fashioned way. I had access to a library with paper books, and I spent hours working on my research the same way I did 30 years ago when I was working on my master's degree. I did feel there was so much information available that I had trouble accessing because of my own limitations. Fortunately, I had some patient people around me who assisted me along the way. A great example would be my use of SurveyMonkey for my questionnaire. If I had not had a capable young man assisting me, I would have been sunk. This was true of recording my interviews and focus group. I needed help from someone younger and more computer savvy to make it work. I am certain future researchers on this subject will be able to use an abundance of technological tools to do better research.

### **Questions Utilized**

This was my first time to ever do any extensive research of people. I feel I received good advice and had a solid understanding of the types of questions I should ask in my questionnaire, interviews, and focus group. I do believe the questions asked served their purpose. In retrospect, I probably would have changed up some of my questions.

### **Participants**

I purposely chose pastors and leaders of English-speaking international churches and in so doing this limited the types of participants. Only one pastor was a lady. Three women answered my questionnaire. I did interview one couple who had together planted an international church. My research did not include the voices of too many women. Based on my perusal of international churches, very few have a woman as their pastor.

The other limitation was nationality. Most of the participants were U.S. citizens. Some participants did grow up overseas or possess more than one passport. All but three of my

participants in my research were from the U.S. I would have loved to have had a few more nationalities represented but many of the pastors were U.S. citizens.

### **Unexpected Observations**

I do not think there were any earth-shaking surprises that came from this four year journey. Much of the information gleaned from the research matched what I had been learning as a pastor of an international church and with my interaction with other pastors. Maybe the biggest surprise was how central the worship experience was in helping churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience. The corporate weekly gathering is something most churches around the world do. However, I think for the English-speaking international church, the worship service has greater significance. There are several reasons for this based on my research.

For many international churches, the weekly worship gathering is the only time people can connect. In the churches which are in large metropolitan areas, getting to the church facility during the week is nearly impossible. Many pastors and leaders realize the only time they can feed their people spiritually and care for them emotionally is before, during, and after the worship service.

Most of the pastors and leaders who participated were leading or connected to what seemed to be a healthy growing church. Some of these churches are facing major space issues. The facilities they are in, whether they own them or rent them, are not big enough to meet all of their needs. The words of one pastor said “they really don’t do much advertising because they are already so full” are rather haunting. Another pastor could not wait until they were able to move into a different facility so they would have more room and offer more classes on Sunday morning. When I asked the question, what would they do if they had no limitations, eleven said they would build, expand, or renovate their facilities. On another question, five responded that

space and location of their building is a big challenge. I think I felt two types of emotions concerning these answers. I am pleased to know many of these churches are growing and a result of this numerical growth is a lack of space. And yet I am a little saddened some of the churches do not have the resources to build, expand or relocate where they meet.

Another interesting observation for me was most of the pastors who participated had rather long tenures in their churches. I did not ask about the length of tenures. However, as I have thought about those who participated and because I know them personally, I would guess most have served as pastor on average at least three years and much longer. There are many who believe the length a pastor stays has a direct impact on the health and growth of the church. Tillapaugh states, “Today, in my opinion, it takes at least five years to build any kind of significant ministry in a local church. But few pastors are staying in a church that long” (12). Warren also says, “Churches that rotate pastors every few years will never experience consistent growth” (31). I believe this is heightened in an international church where many times the pastor remaining helps give stability in such a transient congregation.

### **Recommendations**

Overall, I believe this project has provided some valuable information for pastors and leaders of English-speaking international churches. However, there are a number of recommendations I would make for a future researcher who was trying to better understand English-speaking international churches.

1. Gather information from a wider pool of pastors and leaders. This would include participants from regions like Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. This would also include pastors from a broader theological perspective.

2. A closer examination of pastors of these churches could prove very insightful. What is the background, theological training, cross-cultural experience of those who choose to lead international churches? Asking questions about style of preaching, pastoring, and length of ministry would be helpful.
3. I believe further study on the tension between retaining one's English distinctive while trying to minister to nationals would be very helpful. This topic came up several times in my research and remains one of the great challenges in an international church.

### **Postscript**

After I had been the pastor of IBC, Costa Rica for just over a year I had an “Ah ha moment.” The dictionary defines this as “a moment of sudden realization, inspiration, insight, recognition, or comprehension” (“aha moment”).

There was a conference for pastors I attended in San Jose. The facilitators of this conference were pastors of U.S. Baptist churches. The participants in the conference were primarily local Costa Rican pastors. I had ample opportunity to interact with both sets of pastors. As I did, I had this growing realization that neither of these groups really understood the ministry context and the church I pastored. I had trouble relating to either group and had a feeling of being isolated and discouraged.

Shortly after this experience, I was contacted by one of my predecessors who was interested in organizing a gathering of pastors of English-speaking churches in Latin America, and he was asking if our church would be willing to host this conference and if I would help him plan it. I jumped at the opportunity. When the conference did take place and I had the opportunity to interact with other pastors of similar churches, I felt this incredible sense of

belonging. These pastors who, even though they were from other countries, really understood my ministry context. I had found a group who I could relate with, could glean from their conversations, and just enjoy being in fellowship with a like-minded community who understood.

Since that time, I have expanded immensely the number of pastors and leaders of English-speaking churches whom I know. I have had opportunities to visit their countries and churches. I consider them my brothers and sisters who understand the uniqueness of the international church. Each one of them have made incredible sacrifices to pastor these types of churches, and each has a desire that their church would be healthy and effective. As I have spent considerable time over the last four years trying to understand how these churches can reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience, it is my sincere hope and prayer the lessons I have learned would be helpful to them. For myself, I have been challenged anew to continue to lead the church God has called me to serve to be healthy and effective, and to reach the great number of English speakers who reside in our country and help them to become fully devoted followers of Christ.



## APPENDIX A.1

### Questionnaire

Name:

Position:

Name of church or organization:

Location of church:

Nationality:

Size of average worship attendance:

1. Describe the ongoing ministries of your church?
2. Which ministry is most effective in reaching new people?
3. What is the primary way people get connected to your church?
4. What is your strategy for helping people in your church grow in their faith?
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rank each category in importance for your church when it comes to reaching, discipling, and ministering to your target audience?
  - a. Preaching
  - b. Style of worship service
  - c. Small groups/Bible Studies
  - d. Physical building of where the church meets
  - e. Advertising
  - f. Internet promotion, interaction, etc. (Ex. Website, Facebook, Instagram)
  - g. Ministry to the community
  - h. Retreats, camps, special events
  - i. Mission support and participation

j. Volunteer training

6. What are the greatest challenges your church faces in reaching, discipling and ministering to your target audience?
7. If money and resources was not an issue, what one thing related to the ministry of your church would you do? (Ex. Renovate current facility, hire a new staff, relocate to a new location, spend more money on advertising.)

## APPENDIX A.2

### Interview Guide

Name:

Role:

How long with the church?

Nationality:

Reaching your target audience

1. What are the primary strategies your church uses to reach your target audience?

Discipling your target audience

1. What is the primary way to disciple people in your church?
2. How does the transient nature of the church affect your discipleship?
3. How do you incorporate young people (18 and younger) in the discipleship process?

Ministering to your target audience

1. What are the biggest needs among those you are trying to reach?
2. What do you provide in the way of activities for young people? (18 and younger)

Effectiveness of your practices

1. What is the single most effective outreach strategy your church has used in the last 3 years?
2. What has been the most effective way to minister to the practical needs of your congregation?

Transferability of your practices

1. Are the methods you have used to reach, disciple, and minister to your target audience transferable to other international English-speaking churches? Explain.

Concluding interview questions

1. Is there anything you would like to add?
2. Is there a question I should have asked that I didn't?

### **APPENDIX A.3**

#### **Focus Group Guide**

Procedure: I will have recruited a group of pastors and leaders of international churches. The plan is to use two different LEAD teams. They will be invited via email ahead of time. When they arrive, I will have them sit in a circle. The very first thing to be done is to sign a consent form (Appendix D). When consent forms have been signed and everyone is ready I will begin recording. Most probably I will use a video recorder for recording. The focus group will last for two hours without a break. When we are 15 minutes from finishing, I will inform everyone and move to final questions. When the focus group is concluded, I will thank them for their time and let them know that they will eventually have access to the results of the focus group.

#### **Introductory Comments**

At the very beginning I will briefly share who I am and why I have assembled this focus group. I will explain that this is part of my Doctor of Ministry project. The purpose of my DMin project is to determine how international English-speaking churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience to discern best practices that are transferable to other similar churches. You have been selected because you are a pastor or leader of one of these churches.

The following questions will be used with both focus groups. The first question will be used for both groups. I plan to follow in sequential order the next questions. If time becomes an issue, I may have to eliminate a question or shorten the response time.

1. Please give your name, current ministry position, how long you have been in that position and location of your church or ministry? Please take 2 minutes or less.
2. What has been the most effective thing you have done to reach new people?

3. How have you retained new people when they have come? In other words, how have you gotten them connected?
4. What is your primary strategy for discipleship?
5. What are the challenges of reaching and discipling such a transient population?
6. What are some ways that have been effective in ministering to people in your congregation?
7. What would be the top three things an international church can do to reach, disciple and minister to their target audience?

**APPENDIX B****Letter of Informed Consent**

Dear

I am a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on the topic of how English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience. I would like for you to participate in an interview, fill out a questionnaire and/or be a part of a focus group with other pastors and leaders of English-speaking international churches. Because you are a leader or pastor of one of these churches, you have been selected to assist me in this study. I will attempt to complete all interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups within a four-month period. The questionnaire will be emailed to you and take 30 minutes or less to complete. The interview will be set up two weeks in advance and will not exceed one hour. The focus group will be arranged one month in advance and have an allotted time of two hours. The interviews and focus groups will be recorded and stored. Although confidentiality will be encouraged for the focus groups it cannot be guaranteed.

The potential for English-speaking churches reaching the nations is incredible. As a leader or pastor of one of these churches you are aware of the potential and challenges that come with this ministry. I want to assure you your responses will be kept confidential. I do not want to jeopardize your relationship with your church, convention, or colleagues. All the information will be attained in such a way as to assure confidentiality. Because this research is trying to determine how English-speaking international churches reach their target audience, there may be occasions when I will use the name of the participants or the church they represent. There is included on this form a separate line for you to sign granting that you agree you give your permission to share your name in the research. If you would not like your name, church, or ministry to be mentioned I will honor your request and use a pseudonym.

The benefit for participating in this study will be to have access to the results of the research obtained on how English-speaking international churches reach, disciple, and minister to their target audience.

All data collected will be stored electronically in a secured email and on a password protected Ipad and will be deleted by June 1, 2025.

Please know you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions in the survey. I realize your participation is entirely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need any more information. My number is 506-8344-7736 and my email address is [paul.dreessen@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:paul.dreessen@asburyseminary.edu)

If you are willing to assist me in this study, please sign and date this letter below to indicate your voluntary participation. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,  
Paul Dreessen

*I volunteer to participate in the study described above and so indicate by my signature below:*

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please print your name: \_\_\_\_\_

*I allow the researcher to use my name and/or ministry: please sign your name.*

\_\_\_\_\_

*I want the researcher to use a pseudonym in place of my name and/or ministry: please sign your name.*

\_\_\_\_\_



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