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Introduction

Alan McMahan

Biola University, alan.mcmahan@biola.edu

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Introduction

Alan McMahan, Guest Editor

Upon Donald McGavran's publication of the *Bridges of God* in 1955, and with the founding of The School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1965, the church growth movement was launched. In the 1970s and 1980s through the writings of Donald McGavran, Peter Wagner, Win Arn, and others, principles were identified and strategies developed in dozens of books and articles that became the growing body of knowledge of how churches grow. By the late 1980s and early 1990s this intensity of activity at the epicenter of the movement in Southern California had spawned a wave of innovations and applications that impacted much of the evangelical world in the U.S. and abroad.

One of the products of this movement was the effort given to church growth consulting as practitioners struggled with the successful implementation of church growth insights in local congregations. In no other way did the theories of the movement get so thoroughly tested or produce such tangible results as in their application to local churches, many of which were struggling with non-growth. Here theory and practice participated in a dialectic in which both were enhanced by the exchange.

By the late 1980s the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth in Pasadena, California had embarked on an effort to train consultants in the tools and techniques of the trade with the intention of bringing high-leveraged interventions to bear on some of church growth's most difficult challenges. The Institute's program, "Diagnosis with Impact," may have been the first systematic effort to train consultants though since then a number of such programs have been implemented across the nation.

As the discipline has matured and evolved over the last

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three decades, modifications have been made in the focus and the execution of consulting practice in an effort to improve outcomes. This edition of the *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* features the writings of four church growth consultants who reflect on the lessons learned and the changes that have taken place in the field.

—Guest Editor