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MISSIOGRAPHICS 2.0 Visualizing the Great Commission  11
Jesus’ final instruction to His disciples was clear. They were to bring the gospel to every ethne. Twenty centuries later, the gospel has arrived in regions covering nearly all the world’s ethnic groups.

So, has the Gospel now reached the uttermost parts of the earth? Veteran mission writer Ruth Tucker says yes. In 1983 she determined that Irian Jaya (now Papua), Indonesia—the place that was geographically farthest from Jerusalem—was experiencing a surge of church planting and Bible translation. Today there are many churches, Bible schools, and several completed Bible translations in this “uttermost” region.

But it’s too early to declare “Mission Accomplished!” Yes, the gospel is firmly established in many distant parts of the earth. Overall, the two-thousand-year expansion of Christianity has produced more than two billion Christians. The gospel has arrived and is established in nearly every country.

But to what effect? Even as missionaries take the Christian faith to new locales, many contemporary believers remain reticent to mingle with various ethne.

Thankfully, some believers are working to overcome persistent ethnic barriers.

Research shows 86% of non-believers do not have a relationship with a Christian.
Transcending Your Tribe

Jewish believers weren’t excited about Jesus’ command to reach out to all ethnes. For Jews, this command meant having to mingle with unclean, uncivilized foreigners. It was not something most Jews were very keen about doing. They wouldn’t even mingle with the Samaritans who were half-Jews! It would take the Holy Spirit and the forced migration of Christians to kick-start the task.

Today, the Spirit is working in new ways to reach every people group.

When members of a small inner city church in south Seattle decided to get to know their neighbors, many of whom were Somali Muslim immigrants, they got their hands slapped by local megachurch leaders.

What brought on this ecclesiastical rebuke? The inner city church leaders had invited their Muslims neighbors to a dialogue at their church. The dialogue gathering was paused to allow the Muslims to recite their required afternoon prayers, then talks resumed again when their prayers were completed. Unfortunately, the megachurch critics thought this kind of accommodation was going too far in building relations with Muslims.

But members of the small church continued reaching out to Muslims, a major ethne of modern times, making friendships and building bridges to make the gospel known to people who may have never heard it unless they had migrated to the United States.

The fact is, most people live in places where their own religious faith is in the majority. In many cases, Christians who live in majority-Christian regions of the world don’t do much to transcend their tribe and reach out to others to share the gospel.

Outdated Images of Mission

The gospel continues to spread and reach new people, but challenges remain.

For one thing, many people in the West still think the Great Commission is the work of professional missionaries and theologians working in foreign countries.

“The missionary is pictured standing in the middle of a group of fancifully dressed dancing ‘natives’ with painted faces on some remote island of the ‘heathen world,’” writes mission professor Timothy Tennent in Theology in the Context of World Christianity. “The theologian is pictured sitting in a lofty ‘ivory tower’ bent over a desk quietly reading some large tome, while jotting down notes in Latin!”

The reality is much different from this musty stereotype. Today, it’s often the “natives” (regular believers living out their everyday lives among their non-believing neighbors) who are the most visible representatives of God’s grace and love in their communities. This is the defining image of mission in the twenty-first century.
The twenty-first century is shaping up as a century of immigration. Globally, the immigrant population has risen from 175 million in 2000 to 232 million in 2015. The number of migrants coming to the United States has doubled since 1990, and nearly tripled since 1980.

Migrants are vulnerable to economic and political problems.

Most immigrants are part of the 80% of the world’s population that holds only 5.5% of the world’s wealth.

This includes Christian immigrants who struggle to establish new lives in new places.

These fast-growing urban regions and slums are the mission fields of the twenty-first century. These are the places where committed Christians can easily reach out to a large number of people from various ethnes.

So many people from different religious backgrounds living together in urban settings creates opportunities for Christian mission, but such opportunities are not without challenges for the long-term Christians.

“The Latin Americans are a difficult challenge because they need economic help and solutions,” says mission strategist Samuel Escobar, author of *The New Global Mission*. “It’s not easy for old congregations to adapt to the presence of people who in some ways are culturally different.”

Escobar suggests that bringing the gospel to immigrants may require more than just telling them about the Good News, baptizing them, and then considering the work finished. It may require a more holistic strategy. Immigrants are chasing opportunities and hope.

The new global mission is about Christians helping people find hope in Christ coupled with opportunities to improve their lives.
You Can Participate in Today’s Global Mission

So many churches are filled with people who don’t or won’t invest time with non-believers. Many times we are surrounded by people just like us. What can your church do to change that stat?

Every time one of your congregants has lunch with a non-believing immigrant and builds a bond, ethnes are being reached and that number gets closer to changing.

Are you challenging believers to reach out in this way?

Are you raising the challenge to reach the diaspora in your community?

Are you engaging the cities you live in or that are nearby?

Are you seeking to influence those who are desperate to learn and develop skills in order to provide livelihoods for themselves and their families?

Ask God which people your church should reach and what things your church should be doing to reach them.

Taking Steps

Here are two simple things you can do.

Research

Start with some simple Google research. Find out who your immigrant neighbors are. One wealthy long-established church in Southern California discovered their immigrant neighbors were mostly educated, cultural Muslim people from Iran. So they decided to develop relationships through gatherings at neighborhood locations.

Outreach starts with friendship. This leads to trust. Opportunities for these ethne to experience the gospel upfront and personal abound.

Build Bridges

You can also build coalitions with Christian immigrants living in your area. Because cities and neighborhoods are more multicultural now, it takes a multicultural approach to sharing the gospel with non-Christians.
Personal Reflection

There are some important personal questions each one of must ask:

• How many non-believers are you personal friends with?
• Do you live in a place where you are part of the religious majority?
• Do you know an immigrant or are you one?
• Do you feel the strain of global economic inequality?
• Do you live in a city or do you know many who do?
• Do you have a college degree or know many seeking prosperity through education and knowledge?
• Think about the changing face of mission in light of your personal experience. What role do you have in the process of helping people come to Christ?

Organizational Application

What is your organization or agency doing to think creatively about these realities?

Have you made the strategic and intentional connection between your ministry outputs and the outcome of seeing the Kingdom expand?

So many times we focus on doing more work assuming that greater output will lead to better results. But activity does not necessarily breed impact. Spirit-led decision making that is based on an accurate understanding of our world and the various social forces at work can bring about the right kind of outcomes.
Prayer

Dear God, we want to see Your Kingdom grow and prosper in this world You made. We know You are on a mission of redemption. Thank You for allowing us to be a part of Your work. Give us eyes to see what is happening in the world as we live our daily lives. Give us obedient hearts to respond to the trends and directions of this world’s peoples so that we can appropriately share Your love with them. And we pray that as we do, You would use the work of our hands as part of Your plan to prepare their hearts and draw them to You. Amen.

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