

YOUR LINK TO GOD'S EXPANDING MISSION

CHAPTER 5

GOD'S DESIRE AND COMPASSION compel us to emphasize that participation in his global mission is not optional but essential! The Bible shows that God longs for all nations to know him. The first Christians carried Christ's story to the world.

God provided the power through the Holy Spirit as they became Christ's witnesses in an expanding pattern in "Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."¹ In the book of Acts, we can see the ever widening wildfire spread of the news of Jesus: Philip baptizes an Ethiopian,² Peter is led to the Gentile home of Cornelius, a Roman army officer,³ and Barnabas and Saul (later named Paul) are sent forth on the first missionary journey in history.⁴

Just as Christians and churches in the ancient world brought the gospel message into new settings with differing cultures and ethnic groups, God continues to lead Christians into new endeavors to reach people who come from different cultures, ethnicity, and religious heritages. In cooperation with God's promptings, the Global Ministries Community has grown to incorporate numerous avenues of ministry throughout the world by empowering national churches, facilitating mission workers, and engaging the church in the Great Commission.

Empowering National Churches

DUE IN PART TO THE ENCOURAGEMENT shown by the members of the E.C. Church (USA), we have witnessed explosive growth in many of our international ministry fields. God has blessed us by raising up tens of thousands E.C. believers who speak a language other than English! Currently more than seventy thousand Christians worship in hundreds of churches spread across several nations. All of our international churches are facilitated by indigenous leaders, and the Global Ministries Community is working diligently to see these churches flourish within their own cultural contexts and foster ministry from those nations to the people of the world.

INDIA

As the second most populated nation on earth, India prides itself on maintaining unity while celebrating diversity. Consisting unofficially of over 6,000 distinct people groups as defined by ethnicity, religion, language, and caste, India is a culturally complex nation.

Hindi is the official national language of India, but English actually dominates the business, governmental, and legal arenas. Most educated Indians speak English as their first language, but across India there are at least 400 different languages spoken. Illiteracy is a huge

1 Acts 1:8
2 Acts 8:26-40
3 Acts 10:1-48
4 Acts 13:1-3

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problem in India, especially among the female population. In fact, only one in every three adult Indian women is functionally literate. More than 80% of the Indians practice Hinduism and close to 13% are Muslim. Although full religious freedom is protected officially by the Indian constitution, religious extremism is present in India, creating religious strife and fueling a dangerous climate of persecution, especially toward Christians. Still, India has the most (and largest) unreached people groups of any other country on the planet.

Sensitive to the fact that each region of the diverse nation of India has its own unique culture and needs, the E.C. work in India exists primarily in the state of Manipur, located in the hills of Northeast India. Ministering to the local tribal groups whose traditions closely related to the Burmese (Myanmar) culture, the E.C. Church has had a presence in India since 1910.

Committed to reaching the world for Christ, the Evangelical Congregational Church of India (ECCI) has seven annual conferences, with a total of about 60,000 members.⁵ It is served by the Evangelical College of Theology, a Bible college and seminary in India. It also has its own department of missions and evangelism, which ministers in the neighboring countries of Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Thailand. They are also active in many other states in India.⁶

JAPAN

Ranked as the most expensive country in which to live, Japan has grown over the last decades to be one of the chief economic powerhouses in the world. Known as “The Land of the Rising Sun,” from the literal meaning of the kanji characters that make up its name, Japan is comprised of over 3,000 mountainous islands. Japan’s capital city of Tokyo currently ranks as the one of the largest metropolitan area in the world with over 30 million inhabitants living in greater Tokyo.

Japanese culture is driven by a quest for success. Almost all children continue beyond the compulsory middle school level of education and more than 75% of all high school graduates persist through university.

Though rich economically, Japan is one of the most spiritually bankrupt areas of the world. About 84% of Japan’s population follow the rules of Buddhism or Shintoism; however, close to 80% of the total population claim no personal connection to their religious practices at all. More than 67% of the 2,568 towns in Japan with a population of between 15,000 and 30,000 people do not have a single church in their town, and even in this highly developed nation, there are still rural areas that have never been introduced to the gospel.

Recognizing the need to reach out to a hurting culture, the E.C. Church of Japan strives to be the face of Christ in a place where 99% of the population is non-Christian. Utilizing traditional church models, non-traditional church plants, marriage and parenting courses, cooking classes, children’s ministries and other methods of outreach, the congregations in Japan are impacting individuals and communities for Christ.

Japanese culture is driven by a quest for status and success.



5 For most recent information about the ECC of India, visit www.ecchurchindia.com

6 As compared to a median U.S. household income of \$44,389 in 2004; from a report of the U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

LIBERIA

Plagued by fourteen years of civil war, the Republic of Liberia, regarded by the original settlers as the “promised land,” currently stands as one of the world’s most impoverished nations. Located on the western coast of Africa, the country whose name literally means “Land of the Free” was established in 1822 (with the support of the American government) as a colony for free-born and formerly enslaved African Americans. From its inception, ethnic issues divided the population of Liberia and fueled hostility between people groups. Though Liberia is a country that boasts natural resources including iron, diamonds, rubber, and timber, the recent decades of war and political corruption have left Liberia poor and destitute. Road systems and buildings are in shambles. Rich farmland is now covered by brush and unkempt forest. Worst of all, the people are left traumatized and scarred by a nation in constant conflict.

Currently over 65% of the population have been refugees, without a home to call their own. The atrocities of hate are rampant in Liberia, with almost every person in the country having been a victim or perpetrator of indescribable acts of violence. An estimated 200,000 people were killed during the wartime that spanned from 1989 to 2003. Children were robbed of their youth and forced to act as soldiers, trained to carry guns and kill on demand. In fact, over 50,000 children under the age of 17 have been killed in direct combat. Every Liberian child has been affected. Many are orphaned. Some suffer from hunger, homelessness, and uncontrollable violent tendencies—they live in constant fear.

This picture of tragedy need not be a perpetual state for Liberia. The end of the fighting in 2003, a new governmental leadership team elected in 2005, and the awareness, efforts, and prayers of people around the world have brought hope for recovery in Liberia. The global EC Church sent resources to equip three response teams comprised of our Liberian EC members who ministered to those being impacted by the Ebola outbreak.

The E.C. Church is directly involved with such restoration efforts. In fact, the Global Ministries Community has had works in Liberia since the 1950s. Thirty-nine E.C. churches have remained resolute, even through the destruction of the war-torn years. Currently the E.C. Church of Liberia is working in a variety of ways to minister the love of Christ physically, spiritually and emotionally. Ministries and initiatives include evangelism and church planting, literacy campaigns, clothing distribution, micro-enterprise opportunities, hygiene and health education, orphan care and other needed services.

MEXICO

Rich in history, landscape, culture and tradition, Mexico is one of Latin America’s most diverse countries. The land and the people of Mexico represent a colorful tapestry of uniqueness. Labeled constitutionally as a “pluricultural” nation, the majority of the population is Mestizo (of mixed European and Indigenous descent). Though Spanish is the primary language in Mexico, there remain over 60 indigenous languages spoken, each of which is nationally recognized. Historically, Catholicism has been an element that connects the many peoples and traditions of the Mexican culture. With over 90% of the population declaring themselves to be Catholic, Mexico has the second largest population of Catholics in the world.

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Reaching out to help needy children birthed the E.C. work in Mexico.



The Mexican economy has been bolstered over the past decades through oil and agricultural exports, growing industrialization, and a rapidly expanding tourism industry. And although there has been a significant decrease in poverty rates in Mexico, income disparity remains a monumental problem in the country. At least one quarter of the population is under-employed, and those living in poverty have little or no opportunity for advancement.

The EC Church of Latin America desires to impact every sector of their nation with the Good News of the gospel. Their focus involves church planting, evangelism, concentrated prayer efforts, children's ministries, marriage ministries and both local and cross-cultural mission work.

NEPAL

The kingdom of Nepal is the world's only Hindu kingdom; however, the constitution guarantees some religious freedom. People can choose their faith, but it is illegal to covert others. An isolated mountainous land, containing eight of the ten highest mountains in the world. Nepal is just slightly larger than Pennsylvania and New Jersey combined. The 27 million people represent approximately 95 different people groups. The capital city, Katmandu has about 1.5 million people.⁷

The main livelihood of the people is from agriculture, but the chief foreign exchange is earned through tourism. While 75% of the population is Hindu, Buddhists are also well represented at 16%. An estimated 2% are Christians. The first group of Christians was formed in 1959. At the climax of persecution in 1990, Christians numbered about 200,000.

The E.C. Church of India began the outreach to eastern Nepal, resulting in the planting of eight churches. We officially inaugurated the E.C. Church of Nepal in June 2003. Now a mission conference of the Global Ministries Community, the EC Church of Nepal is growing rapidly. Intentional training of pastors, evangelists and lay leaders is allowing the church to minister through Vacation Bible School programs, Youth Conference, church planting and other effective ways in communities and village that do not have a gospel witness.

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⁷ Based on 2006 statistical data.

Facilitating Mission Workers

WE CURRENTLY FACILITATE nearly 50 workers ministering in 8 different nations. The E.C. Church is unique in that it loans nearly all of its mission workers to other mission agencies. The approach of releasing workers increases the level of specialization with which our workers can operate and also recognizes the role of partnerships in the furthering of the gospel.

The sending of missionaries is a cooperative venture. Missionary candidates visit local churches for deputation. They share their plans and aspirations about the field in which they are called to serve. The Global Ministries office sets up personal accounts, publishes information about them, and handles their support. After pledges of support provide enough for their particular needs, the Global Ministries Community conducts a commissioning service to send the missionary into the field.

Once on the field, missionaries communicate needs for prayer and financial support through the Global Ministries office. They are also able to stay in regular contact with supporters within our American churches through prayer letters and other correspondences.⁹ Between field assignments missionaries return home to visit their families, friends, and supporting churches, where they can personally share the blessings and challenges of their work upon the field.

While some missionary roles may be more specialized, many functions are vital for fulfilling the Great Commission. Obviously many missionary roles focus directly on sharing the gospel with people. However the need for extending relief, support, and acts of mercy provides opportunities for people of various professions to serve on the field. A small sampling of responsibilities reveals areas that include translation, literacy, airplane repair, medicine, nursing, evangelism, teaching, printing, church planting, counseling, and administration.

In Spain, a field director oversees the training and forming of church planting teams in 20 European countries. On the street corner, in the subways, and on the urban playgrounds of Philadelphia, a street evangelist attracts crowds by using stories, magic, balloon figures, and puppets.

In a U.S. airplane hangar, and in the classroom an aviation missionary trains pilots at the world headquarters for an aviation mission agency.

8 Based on 2006 statistical data.

9 The Global Ministries Community provides connection for missionaries and churches through the Missionary Prayer Partners ministry. Sponsoring churches commit to pray for the missionary on the field during a particular month. Individuals within the church voluntarily select different days from the month to commit to pray for the missionary. Each day on the field, missionaries receive a note of encouragement from different participants and are able to pray for their prayer supporters.

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In Kenya, teachers instruct and mentor children at a missionary boarding school, while another teaches theology at a Bible college in the Ukraine. In New York City, counselors assist those who have experienced sexual abuse and are trapped in the homosexual lifestyles and sexual addictions. A translation team in Papua New Guinea has developed an alphabet for a tribal language that has allowed God's Word to come and transform an entire culture. Each year, young men and women are receiving training to be sent onto the field in various settings such as engineering, college campus ministry, and church planting.

Engaging The Church In The Great Commission

WHEN WE LOOK AT THE BIBLE it is clear that we are called be engaged—to seek justice, love mercy, and care deeply about those things in society that undermine human dignity. God cares passionately for the whole of a person—body and soul. God not only desires to bring humans into a personal relationship with himself through the work of Christ on the cross, he also desires to right the wrongs that oppress, neglect, and harm human beings, who are made in God's image. When God delivered the enslaved Israelites from Egypt, he said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them."¹⁰ In the rest of the Old Testament when calling his people to compassion and justice, God frequently appealed to the Exodus, the rescue from bondage. Thus in Deuteronomy 10:18-19 we read, "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigners residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt." And the prophet Jeremiah, calling the people not to boast in their power for riches, says, "I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight."¹¹

The New Testament continues the theme Jesus, in calling the Pharisees hypocrites for their inconsistency, says, "You give a tenth of your spices—mint dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."¹² Paul calls the Corinthians to share in the needs of the poor on the basis of Christ's work in the incarnation and on the cross, "Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."¹³ And John even questions the salvation of one who is not moved to mercy and justice, "If anyone of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has not pity on them, how can the love of God be in you?"^{14,15}

10 Exodus 3:7-8a

11 Jeremiah 9:24

12 Matthew 23:23

13 2 Corinthians 8:9

14 1 John 3:17

15 These two opening paragraphs were taken from Dennis Hollinger, "Biblical Foundations for Social Justice." *Window on the World* (Spring 2007); 2, 7.

The Global EC Church is responding to the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of people everywhere. Looking to Jesus, we follow his example of compassionate care to the sick and the injured, the social outcasts and the demon-possessed, the grieving and the hopeless. These believers have fed the hungry, healed the diseased and injured, cared for orphans and outcasts, campaigned for justice, and aided the poor.

FROM ITS INCEPTION, the E.C. Church, USA sought to carry the gospel to people who were disregarded by the general population—ethnic Germans living in Pennsylvania.¹⁶ The passion of God that Jacob Albright used to inspire his circuit preachers has been passed along the generations throughout the Global E.C. Church.

Ultimately, the pathway engaging in the Great Commission starts with becoming aware of the many needs around the world, praying for them, and then making and implementing plans to address the needs that you can. The Global Ministries Community is here to help you and/or your church engage in the Great Commission in ways that maximize your resources, multiply your influence and match your congregation’s mission statement. Visit our website at www.eccenter.com or contact the GMC office for more information.

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16 See Your *Link to God's Movement*, page 7

Planting New Churches

There is no doubt
that the mission
field is at our
doorstep.



“WORLD CHRISTIANS” also see the needs in others close to home that only Christ can meet. A missional church, comprised of World Christians, shapes its ministry around God’s commands to share the Gospel and make disciples. In light of this understanding, we are always “on mission” to our own communities and families. Kingdom-minded congregations and believers learn to think and act like missionaries to unreached people nearby, as well as far away. As Christ’s followers, we need not cross an ocean to be a missionary. A trip to the other side of town or a walk across a room can place us on site in a new mission field. Missions and evangelism, two sides of the same coin, find a home in the ministries of church planting. Church planting, on the foreign field and in our local communities, has proven to be one of the most effective evangelistic strategies.¹⁷

The Purpose for the Kingdom Extension Community of the Evangelical Congregational Church is to know Christ and to make Him known. Church planting, as old as the New Testament, finds deep roots in the scriptures. From the earliest days of the Church, making disciples has also included gathering them into a community of faith for worship, fellowship and ministry. Paul used his apostolic gifting to plant churches where there were none.¹⁸

His pioneering efforts launched congregations in urban centers from which the gospel witness spread into the countryside like spokes from the hub of a wheel.¹⁹ The first believers did not expect pre-Christians to “come and see” what church was about. They “went out and lived like Christ” before their neighbors. This “viral” pattern of growth rapidly saturated and transformed the Roman Empire and enabled Christianity to have a global impact.

The mission of the Kingdom Extension Community of the Evangelical Congregational Church is to help churches plant healthy churches that proclaim Christ to a hurting world. Church planting, a significant element of our denominational “DNA,” originated in the itinerant preaching ministry of Jacob Albright who “planted” a series of Class Meetings (discipleship groups or house churches). These early church plants became the initial Evangelical Association congregations. Other frontier evangelists like John Seibert continued this biblical pattern of “making churches” out of new converts. New believers were nurtured in the faith and equipped for ministry in these fellowship groups. The goal was to send them out to make more disciples and plant more churches. The obvious must never be forgotten—every existing E.C. Church was once a church plant, birthed by another congregation, church planter, or church planting team. You are reading the *Link* today because of church planting!

17 C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Regal Books, 1990)

18 Romans 15:20

19 Acts 14:21-23; Acts 19:10

The vision of the Kingdom Extension Community is that the Evangelical Congregational Church becomes a Church Multiplication movement, realized when churches plant healthy churches that plant healthy churches. The future of the E.C. Church and the fulfillment of the goals of our missionary God depend on our commitment to intentionally and effectively plant new churches. We cannot obey the Great Commandment and Great Commission without doing so. The church, according to Jesus, Paul, and other biblical teachings, is God’s tool for drawing people into a relationship with Himself.²⁰ The newly “born again” need a spiritual home in which to “grow up.” The local church is the family God has designed for spiritual growth.

In the same way that we are not fully disciples until we are engaged in discipling someone else, a church hasn’t fully matured unless it is involved in parenting a new congregation or partnering with a planting initiative.²¹ Think of it this way: The fruit of an apple tree really isn’t an apple, but more apple trees. The apple is just a “seed package,” a means of delivering new life that will outlive it. So too, all of our churches need to dream of “motherhood” - bringing into this world the next generation of congregations who will reach the yet unreached.

Like literal childbirth, church planting is not without risk or pain. But it is the only means of perpetuating spiritual life and leaving a lasting spiritual legacy. Furthermore, new churches have the youthful adaptability to customize their outreach to connect with individuals existing churches have not reached by providing an atmosphere where new believers, seekers and visitors feel more accepted. And new churches are often more passionate and deliberate about evangelism because their very reason for existence and survival hinges on it. Church planting parallels the inherent design of God’s creation. Healthy, living things grow, not by forever getting larger but by reproducing themselves.

Through the Kingdom Extension Community, the E.C. Church empowers and resources local churches to multiply themselves. The community helps provide the funding, training, and prayer to make possible new churches. You can explore the community’s strategy for church planting and learn about our most recent church plants by clicking the KEC icon on the E.C. website: www.eccenter.com

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20 Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 3:10; 1 Timothy 3:15

21 3 John 5-8

Our Kingdom Extension Community has realized that denominations can't start enough new churches "by committee" to keep up with the rate of the general population growth and natural church attendance decline due to attrition (death, relocation, etc.). Most of your neighbors are unchurched. Spiritually speaking, the fastest growing group is the "nones" - those who claim no religious affiliation at all. There aren't nearly enough churches to reach or even house all the lost. Not even where you live. If the Church is to continue to grow, more local churches must be planted.

We invite you to envision the church you are thinking about linking with as a church planting church. Just as moms come in all sizes and shapes, readiness to daughter a church isn't based on the size of a congregation but its health. In fact, the most likely time for a church to "give birth" is during its first five years of existence, often when it has barely grown out of the church plant stage. Any time you see a "people group" not being touched by the good news of Jesus is time to start asking if God may be calling your church to plant a new church.

As a church planting denomination, we expect all of our people to link with the adventure of church planting on a personal level. The adventure begins with prayer. Ask God to share his "church-planting heart" with you. Ask God to give you eyes to see the fields white unto harvest (opportunities to engage people in relationships, to share Jesus, to birth a new church in your community or E.C. District). The adventure picks up speed when you begin to talk with God about recruiting and equipping additional church planters and raising the necessary funding to deploy them. Along the way, be sure to ask God to reveal to you his perfect place for you in this existing ministry. Are you a potential planter? A financial supporter? Perhaps he wants you to be his voice for church planting before your home church (inviting them to invest in parenting a church or releasing some of its leaders to form the nucleus of the next E.C. congregation). Maybe you and your family are meant to be part of the next "launch team." Disciple-making believers and churches planting churches is the vision we call you to embrace because it is Christ's vision for his people.

In one of his parables Jesus challenged us to use who we are and what we have in this world to "gain friends...so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."²² We are left to wonder: "Will there be someone in heaven 'because of you,' waiting to greet you when you arrive? Have you lived life for something greater than taking care of yourself?" You can ensure a "Yes" answer to both questions, by linking to God's expanding mission as fleshed out in church planting.

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22 Luke 16:9