



The Map of the Mission

In the first months of this column we are building a concise statement of the identity, character, and mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC). So far we have seen how we are missional Pietists (identity), in it together (character), to see more disciples.

This issue we add “among more populations” as we look at the dimensionality of mission.

In the great commission of Matthew 28 we remember we are called to make disciples of all nations. The Greek word for *nations* is *ethnos*, from which we get our word *ethnicity*. A deeper reading of that command is not just the geography of nations, but the mosaic of humanity.

Sometimes from our vantage point we are not always mindful of the complex cultural cross-currents Jesus navigated. He spent part of his childhood in Egypt, was raised in a Jewish home, lived in a Roman empire, ministered to a Syro-Phoenician woman, and his cross was carried by Simon of Cyrene from the continent of Africa. The incarnation is impossible without a woman, the cross is witnessed by women, and the resurrection is first announced by women, all in a culture where women were marginalized. He used a hated Samaritan as the star of his most famous story and an enemy soldier as an object lesson for faith. He moved among the poorest of the poor and the richest of the rich. He disappointed every political persuasion, from the radical Zealots to the conservative Herodians. The Romans didn’t know what to do with him and the religious leaders wanted to get rid of him. The people who hate Jesus the most hate him for not hating the things they hate. At every point Jesus moves among those who otherwise sneer at each other. He calls us to do the same in taking his unconditional love to all.

That’s the point of the Acts 1:8 map of the mission. Jesus says here that we are to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. We tend to think it is a simple geographic reference to take the gospel farther and farther away. His hearers, however, would have been jolted by the radical call to cross cultures. Judea is nearby same culture, Samaria is nearby cross culture, and the ends of the earth is far away all cultures.

From the beginning, the ECC has been com-

mitted to the whole map of the mission. Some of its earliest decisions were to send missionaries to the Alaska territory and to China. We jumped from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But we have looped back to reach into the whole map of the mission to be more reflective of the whole kingdom of God right here as well. One-half of the new churches we plant today are among populations of color or are intentionally multiethnic. As a result, one-quarter of all ECC congregations are among populations of color or intentionally multiethnic. This makes the ECC one of the most diverse denominations in the United States and Canada, and the lone known Euro-immigrant group to cross the 20 percent threshold in terms of number of congregations.

So we have the beginnings of a pretty good mosaic: ethnically diverse; stylistically diverse; linguistically diverse; new and established churches; small, medium, and large churches; town and country, metropolitan, and urban settings; led by women, led by men. Add to this the tapestry of partnerships in more than thirty countries. If you were to gather together the hundreds of thousands of people from around the world connected to the ECC, the most common person you would run into would be a Congolese woman who speaks Lingala. And so names like Carlson and Johnson now share the Lord’s Table with Galdamez and Herrera, Cha and Yee, Jemison and Davenport.

But in reality we have a long way to go. Realistically, when it comes to being reflective of the entire kingdom of God, we are probably at best consciously incompetent: quite aware of our shortcomings, but with a heart for moving forward. It will require resolve and intentionality, not sentimentality. But in moving forward, that mosaic will more and more form the very image and picture of a community that the world longs for but is afraid is not possible. We can show that in Christ, it is.

How is your congregation doing with *your* map of the mission? Can you identify the difference you are making in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth? ■

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