

Pursuing Christ's Mission at HOME



QUARTERLY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF Church Growth & Evangelism

Caring about EVERYONE

With dramatic growth in ethnic churches, the Covenant Church is becoming as diverse as the world it serves.

BY GARY WALTER

The Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) is wildly diverse. Some congregations mine all of the richness of tradition and liturgy, while others are flat out rock and roll. Some meet in architecturally stunning stained-glass sanctuaries. Others meet in converted warehouses with nary a window of any kind. Some are in great urban centers. Others are in sprawling metropolitan regions or countryside settings. English is spoken. And so are Spanish, Korean, Nuer, Vietnamese, Lao, and Creole.

Perhaps nowhere is the diversity of the ECC more evident than in the growth of ethnic churches. One of the clear elements driving the overall momentum of the Covenant is the acceleration in ministry among popu-



The confirmation class of Boston's Covenant Congregational Church with Pastor Judy McCullough (right)

lations of color. Eighteen percent of all ECC congregations are now either ethnic or multiethnic in makeup.

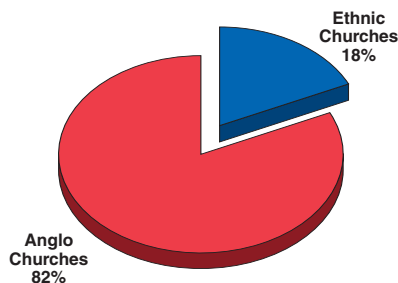
How dramatic is this dynamic? The ECC is very near the top of fastest growing denominations in the United States, having grown by 44 percent in the last decade based on actual aggregate average attendance in all of our congregations. By comparison, our ethnic ministries have grown by a stunning 102 percent. Ethnic ministries are growing more than twice as fast as the church as a whole, which itself is experiencing its most rapid

growth in history.

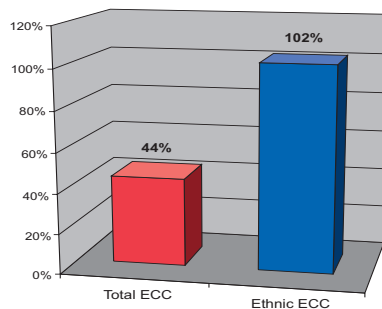
Commenting on this trend, Ed Carey, African-American pastor of Palmetto Covenant Church in Miami, Florida, says, "What encourages me about the ECC is that we are serious about diversity, and not just black and white, but also all nationalities."

The ECC now has African-American, Hispanic, Native Alaskan, Korean, Asian-American, Laotian, Sudanese, Vietnamese, and Haitian congregations. In addition, thirty congregations are multiethnic, defined by sociologists as congregations in which no single population exceeds 80 percent.

The ECC's own immigrant history is perhaps one factor in this commitment. Ed Delgado, professor at Centro Hispano de Estudios Teológicos (CHET), the ECC's school for training Spanish-language pastors and lay leaders, says, "My impression is that the founders and their children have generally not forgotten their immigrant roots and trials faced by those



Ethnic churches now account for 18 percent of all Covenant churches.



Attendance growth 1992-2002

that have to leave their motherland due to economic or political crisis.”

There are two additional factors. The first is a missional one. If the church is serious about reaching the very mission field in which it is situated, then it must be serious about recognizing the population trends. When we reach into more ethnic communities, we are more responsive to the opportunities right here at home. Nearly 50 percent of new congregations have been among populations of color.

Kong Sitthi, who is planting a Laotian congregation in Fresno, California, agrees. “What encourages me about the Covenant is the willingness to change and adopt other minority groups into its family of faith.”

Noel Castellanos, who is planting a multiethnic church in Chicago, adds, “The influx of young and innovative urban church planters is of great encouragement to me. The openness and intentionality of the leadership is also very encouraging.”

The second factor is the ECC’s commitment to live out the values of the kingdom of God here on earth. The world is fractured along the lines of ethnicity, culture, language, gender, and class. Christ has broken down the dividing walls. We find unity in him. Likewise, the coming kingdom will transcend all that divides. We believe we are richer and stronger as we live in light of that future reality.

Henry Greenidge, chairperson of the African-American Ministers’ Association, puts it this way, “This shows a growing thirst for a more biblical model of what church life should look like.”

What lies ahead? Challenges. Other denominations and organizations have made similar initial strides only to see those advances stall or diminish.

It is like breaking the sound barrier. Before Chuck Yeager, test pilots had approached the sound barrier, but as the plane would begin to shake and shudder, those pilots pulled back on the throttle fearing a catastrophic breakup. Yeager, however, pushed down even harder, crashed through the sound barrier, and found smooth sky on the other side. The ECC is committed to pushing down on the throttle, not pulling back.

Asian-American pastor Peter Cha describes the key challenge this way: “I continue to feel welcomed and appreciated. The main challenge the denomination faces now is to shift from that of hospitality to that of embracing, relating to those who come from different backgrounds not as honored guests but as members of this household of God. This means going beyond the exchange of pleasantries and the sharing of heart-warming experiences. . . . To me it means that all members of this family of God—brought together by our deep love for Christ, his word, and his mission—shape together the identity and mission of the church so that the ECC might become even more effective as a witnessing community in today’s rapidly changing, multicultural, globalized world.”

Greenidge adds this: “We have grown in the last five years in cultural sensitivity and that is to be applauded. . . . However, there is a difference between cultural sensitivity and cultural competency—the ability to understand and translate that understanding into meaningful dialogue, decisions, and outcomes.”

Believing that intentionality is key to meeting these challenges and continuing opportunities, the Covenant Executive Board adopted a fivefold test, which has been endorsed by the Council of Superintendents, the Council of Administrators, and ethnic leaders. This test will become the basis of both evaluation and planning as it relates to pressing forward in ethnic ministry and diversity. The test addresses five areas as follows:

1) Population: Is the ECC reaching increasing numbers of people among increasing numbers of populations?

2) Participation: Are we finding ways to engage life together through denominational, conference, and local events, service, and fellowship?

3) Power: Are the positions and structures of influence (boards, committees, and positions at both the conference and denominational level) influenced by the perspective and gifts of a diverse population?

4) Pace-setting: With additional perspectives, burdens, and gifts in our midst, what new ministry opportunities is the ECC now better positioned to strengthen and initiate?

5) Purposeful narrative: How do the stories of new backgrounds get incorporated into our overarching history? How do all of these streams flow together into one story moving forward?

The Executive Board is convening a major round table in February to look at each of these five areas. A multidimensional approach like this is the key to multiethnic ministry. Groups stall out because they are only willing to address the first area, and maybe the second. But all five are critical. From President Glenn Palmberg to the Executive Board and others, the resolve is there. It is right for our mission. It is right for our witness to the power of Christ.

And just what might we expect down the road? Catherine Gilliard, chairperson of the Executive Board and a church planter in Atlanta, expresses it this way: “The diversity of our membership allows us to respond in demonstrating the powerful mission of the church in the kitchens, backyards, classrooms, villages, playgrounds, campuses, and corporate and political arenas.”

In other words, when we are everywhere, we can better reach everyone. But we can only be everywhere if we care about everyone, regardless of background. □

Gary Walter is executive minister of the Department of Church Growth and Evangelism.

A Tapestry of God's Love

Several years ago, Darryl and Lisa Hutcherson, a small group of residents of Tacoma, Washington, and Ted Yuen all had a vision from God of starting a multicultural church. God's timing and guidance helped bring that vision into being with Tapestry Covenant Church. Weekly worship began in May 2002 and presently, 150 to 160 people join for worship every Sunday morning. "We thank God for sending us good people who embrace the vision for multicultural ministry, and for holistic outreach to our community," says Darryl, who moved to Tacoma in 2001 to plant



Tapestry members gather outside their meeting place.

Tapestry. "We also thank God that many people who had given up on church or who had been burned by the church have found a safe community to grow and to heal."

People like Cara, who was befriended by a member of Tapestry at a critical period in her life. Encountering God at Tapestry, Cara placed her faith in Christ, experienced spiritual growth through the life groups, and is involved with various ministries of the church.

Both the congregation and the church staff at Tapestry are multicultural—the Hutchersons are African American, and Yuen, the worship pastor, is Asian American. Instead of "muddying the tapestry of colors into gray," as Hutcherson put it, the church's worship services include elements from many traditions. For instance, Anglo members are learning to "talk back" (saying "Amen!") during sermons; and one worship service may include a nineteenth-century hymn, a modern rock chorus, and a black gospel number.

The vision and name of the church are based on Colossians 2:2: "I want you woven

Darryl Hutcherson, senior pastor (left), and Ten Yuen, worship pastor at Tapestry



into a tapestry of love, in touch with everything there is to know of you" (The Message).

Tapestry Covenant Church is weaving a multicultural church for a multicultural generation in the twenty-first century. □

Purpose, Vision, and Nueva Esperanza (New Hope)

Centro Familiar Nueva Esperanza (New Hope Family Center) in Simi Valley, California, began as a project sponsored by the Department of Church Growth and Evangelism, the Pacific Southwest Conference, and the Evangelical Covenant Church of Simi Valley. Roberto Ghione and his wife, Renata, went through a Covenant-sponsored Assessment Center, and were subsequently sent to a training event for church planters.

In 1998, they were introduced to Simi Valley's English-speaking congregation as church planters for a Spanish speaking congregation. The Ghiones shared the vision of a church plant in the community, met and prayed with other Hispanic believers, and formed the core of the new church. By June 1999, the group was ready to begin worship services. Little by little, the church began to establish its ministry, starting with a children's program, visiting new people, and a food distribution program. Their food program was noticed by the Children's Hunger Fund, which partnered with them.

Though the church has held evangelistic events and has a radio ministry, Ghione believes that the most effective tool for evangelism is one-on-one personal contact. A recent survey of the congregation found that most people have come because of a personal invitation. Lives have been changed because of these invitations. One couple was beginning divorce proceedings when the wife heard about Nueva Esperanza. She and her children have become believers, and as a result, she and her husband are no longer seeking divorce as the answer to their problems.

Nueva Esperanza has a daunting challenge. Their vision is that every member and regular attender of the church be part of a cell group and go through leadership training. They plan to form a network of women's, men's, and youth cell groups.

Learn more about Centro Familiar Nueva Esperanza at www.cfnuevaesperanza.org. □



The Ghione children join in prayer at the 2002 Covenant Annual Meeting as Nueva Esperanza is accepted into membership.



Roberto Ghione, pastor of Centro Familiar Nueva Esperanza

<p><i>Pray for those who are pursuing Christ's mission at home.</i></p>		<p>1</p> <p>Racial diversity and reconciliation within the Covenant</p>		<p>2</p> <p>Judy McCullough Pastor Covenant Congregational Church Boston, MA</p>		<p>3</p> <p>Joel Oyoumick Pastor Evangelical Covenant Church Unadkleet, AK</p>		<p>4</p> <p>Walter Contreras Assoc. Dir. of Church Planting Pacific Southwest Conference</p>		<p>5</p> <p>Pablo Anabalon Church Planter Iglesia del Pacto Eagle Rock Los Angeles, CA</p>			
		<p>6</p> <p>ECC Korean Ministries</p>		<p>7</p> <p>Roberto Ghione Church Planter Nueva Esperanza Cov. Church Simi Valley, CA</p>		<p>8</p> <p>Stanley Long Church Planter South Bay Community Church Fremont, CA</p>		<p>9</p> <p>Ed Delgado Dean & Vice President, CHET (Hispanic Theological Seminary) Bell Gardens, CA</p>		<p>10</p> <p>Greg Yee Director of Leadership & Congregational Development Pacific Southwest Conference</p>		<p>11</p> <p>David Gibbons Pastor NewSong Covenant Church Irvine, CA</p>	
<p>13</p> <p>ECC African-American Ministries</p>		<p>14</p> <p>Ed Carey Church Planter Palmetto Community Cov. Church Miami, FL</p>		<p>15</p> <p>Robert Owens Associate Superintendent Southeast Conference</p>		<p>16</p> <p>Catherine Gilliard Church Planter Commissioned Disciples Covenant Stone Mountain, GA</p>		<p>17</p> <p>Randy Furushima Church Planter Wellspring Covenant Church Honolulu, HI</p>		<p>18</p> <p>Don Davenport Assoc. Dir. of Church Planting & Congregational Development Chicago, IL</p>		<p>19</p> <p>ECC Hispanic Ministries</p>	
<p>20</p> <p>Yang Chung Pastor Hallidjiah Covenant Church Des Plaines, IL</p>		<p>21</p> <p>Jerome Nelson Dir. of Church & Society Ministries Central Conference</p>		<p>22</p> <p>Gary Walter Executive Minister Church Growth & Evangelism Chicago, IL</p>		<p>23</p> <p>Darrell Griffin Pastor Oakdale Covenant Church Chicago, IL</p>		<p>24</p> <p>Luis Retamal Pastor Iglesia del Pacto Grace Chicago, IL</p>		<p>25</p> <p>M. Randolph Thompson Pastor Community Covenant Church Cubamet Park, IL</p>		<p>26</p> <p>ECC Multiethnic Ministries</p>	
<p>27</p> <p>Harold Spooner Vice President Covenant Ministries of Benevolence Chicago, IL</p>		<p>28</p> <p>Debbie Blue Director of Adult Ministries Department of Christian Formation Chicago, IL</p>		<p>29</p> <p>Jae Koo President Korean Pastors Association Glenview, IL</p>		<p>30</p> <p>David Holder Church Planter New York Covenant Church New Rochelle, NY</p>		<p>31</p> <p>Henry Greenidge President African-American Ministers Assoc. Portland, OR</p>		<p><i>Please pray for each person on his or her date from January through March. Thank you for praying for those through whom you serve.</i></p>			