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GREAT COMMISSION NEWS

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To some, the ethnic churches are stepping-stones to assimilation. To others, they are like enclaves for those slow in adapting to the mainstream culture or a peculiar enigma. Yet, tuned to the Great Commission, they can serve as specialized instruments for making disciples. Furthermore, calibrated with the kingdom focus, they can offer many unique functions in our diverse and globalized world. Here are some of them¹:

1. To reach newcomers

Easier travel has accelerated global change and the migration of people. From other parts of the world came immigrants and international students. Many were sent here by their company or governments on business or be trained. Some came just to visit their relatives and some even

against their will. These people are called “the world at our front yard,” or “the world at our door-step.”

Newcomers can benefit from attending mainstream American churches. They may like to meet friends or to experience the “American way of life.” Yet, churches that offer services in their heart languages can help them understand the gospel.²

Before becoming a full-time minister, I used to coordinate Bible studies at work places. They were conducted in English. One successful Chinese professional there, even though she spoke almost flawless English, she preferred to discuss spiritual matters in her heart language. I have since met many people like her.

Through ministries in three languages (Can-

tonese, Mandarin, English), churches like ours have been reaching large numbers of students and young professionals. In recent years, we were pleasantly surprised to reap the harvest among parents who came here to visit their children. They usually like to be baptized here before returning to China.

How did people find us? While a few checked phone directories, many came through networking of relatives and friends. Still more came after checking the internet. They need only to type the word “church,” the location, and the language.

A few came in their quest for spiritual answers. Most came for pragmatic needs: looking for friends, for housing, for moral education for children, for cultural affinity, for their Chinese-speaking parents, to learn English, to fulfill community service, etc. Whether they came for legitimate needs or unrealistic expectations, some found faith in Jesus.

It was through the Chinese church that my great-grandfather became a Christian in San Francisco in 1860. As a child, he was kidnapped from Southern China and later taken to San Francisco. I am indebted to mission-minded American Presbyterian ministers and their labor of love in that Chinese church. Besides defending the rights of this despised racial minority, these ministers offered shelter to those who were exploited by their own people. They even learned Cantonese in order to reach the new arrivals.³

2. To build up disciples

Thanks to the ministry of loving Americans, motivated in part by the notion of “win them here and send them back as missionaries,” many Chinese students became Christians. But as they stayed in American churches, some of them could not articulate their faith nor even pray in their mother tongue. When they go back like that, they are often limited in the verbal expression of their witness. Worse, they reinforce the negative stereotype of Christianity as a “foreigner’s religion,” previously called the “foreign devil’s religion.”

Ethnic churches can train them well to serve

in their home countries. We have seen quite a few become leaders of their local church or sponsors of fellowship groups on campuses in the Far East. As the American economy and job prospects decline, more Chinese are moving back to China and other Asian countries. So, nurturing faith in their heart language becomes increasingly critical.

3. To look out for related unreached people groups

Ethnic churches may be keener in noticing “hidden” related unreached people groups. These people groups are geographically located in so-called evangelized countries. They are often ignored because they are separated culturally, linguistically and socially from the mainstream society, yet usually counted with people of similar ethnicity. As a result, they are not listed as distinct unreached people groups. And, due to their difficult living conditions or long working hours, outreach to them is limited. Here are some examples:

Garment factory workers Located inside USA, they enable factories to mark their product with the appealing label “Made in USA.” Two decades ago, there were over 500 garment factories in New York City, employing 25,000 Chinese women.⁴ A decade ago, there were estimates of over 30,000 such workers on the island of Saipan, more than the native population. Most of them were women, often worked over-time, and were less open to outreach.⁵

Inmates from China Some may be in jail for committing crime, others for non-violent offenses, such as violating immigration laws, etc. A few may be incarcerated due to lack of legal counsel, such as misunderstanding warrants, etc. Since the number is quite small, they are often unnoticed. Furthermore, due to limited fluency in English, they are outside the reach of a traditional prison ministry. We are thankful to see positive responses through the distribution of Chinese Christian literature.

Chinese restaurant workers This may be one of the largest and mostly widely scattered unreached people groups. It was estimated that

half of the millions of overseas Chinese have relatives in this trade. In Europe, it was estimated to be about 80%. In many major cities around the world, there are thousands of Chinese restaurants. Even though there are so many of them, the number of ministries reaching them is relatively small.⁶

4. To address culture-specific issues

Most Bible-believing Christians claim to uphold the Bible as their highest authority. Yet, they may be surprised on how committed Christians in other cultures approach biblical commands with different applications and emphases.

One common example is related to the command of honoring parents, one of the Ten Commandments and also the “first commandment with a promise.” (Eph 6:2) Yet, this command is often not taken seriously in this society. Ministers sometimes counsel new couples to get away from their parents as far as possible. Yet, for couples from cultures that treasure filial piety, they need counsel in caring for their parents and support in wrestling with unreasonable expectations. So, in ten hours of pre-marital counseling in our church, we dedicate one hour to this topic.

We may also need to help believers deal with life issues that may seem irrelevant in Western churches. They need help to find biblical and yet acceptable functional substitutes for certain cultural practices. For example in the following areas:

religious practices: idol and ancestor worship, etc.

weddings: gift for the bride’s parents (“bride price?”), who pays for what at weddings, etc.

families: children whose parents practiced polygamy, extra demands on the son compared to the daughter, linguistic gap between children and parents, etc.

5. To help train bicultural believers

For believers fluent in English and acculturated to America, ethnic churches can be a good training ground to be bilingual and bicultural. These qualities are not only valuable for missions, but for international commerce and interaction with neighbors in our globalized world.

Some, including non-Chinese, came to our church to improve their Chinese language skill acquired in college courses or from overseas service. Prior to my career change into full-time ministry, I was an engineer. My fluency in Chinese, acquired through serving in the Chinese church, facilitated my engineering practice in East Asia.

Some came to our church as preparation for cross-cultural ministry. Besides being much cheaper than overseas visits, ethnic churches in the USA offer a place to learn culture with the help of friends, and make mistakes without devastating consequences.

We value equally those born and raised in America, and are especially grateful for those who empathize with our vision, join as partners and even serve on our leadership team. For that reason, English is the primary operational language for our combined coworkers meetings. They also serve as strategic role-models for our next generation in spiritual maturity and service. Without them, young people growing up in ethnic churches may think that they eventually have to leave for other churches or even drop out.





6. To enrich spiritual diversity in our society

Ethnic churches are often invited to represent their cultures in our increasingly multicultural society. In these contexts, ethnic churches can assert a voice in the sea of diversity, but with an evangelical note.

As our culture becomes more post-modern, many people are looking for alternative spiritual answers in the Eastern religious practices. Ethnic churches with Eastern roots have unique opportunities to offer answers to the reason for our hope.

Miriam Adeney said it well, “ethnic churches have great value. Like a mosaic, the whole spectrum of cultures – and ethnic churches—enriches God’s world. . . .When ethnicity is treasured as a gift but not worshiped as an idol, God’s world is blessed.”⁷

7. To promote Kingdom mentality

Of course, we need to watch out for the dangers of being ethno-centric or even culturally imperialistic that plague some mainstream culture churches as well. Even multi-cultural churches may be dominated by one or two cultures. All churches need to calibrate their Great Commission focus with God’s Kingdom mentality, such as intentional effort to support ministries to other ethnic groups and missionaries of other ethnicities.⁸ A church should demonstrate that other ethnic groups are welcome. Along that line, we treasure an Afro-American church joining us for the recent National Day of Prayers.

In the Kingdom, ethnic churches exist for unique purposes. Taking advantage of our cultures and languages, churches like ours do offer

more services and specific ministries targeting the Chinese. To avoid any misunderstanding of us as being ethnocentric, we included the following words in our core-value booklet:

Hopefully, our specialized Chinese ministries do not convey an ethnocentric image. After all, the Bible teaches that God’s Kingdom includes disciples “from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (Rev. 5:9-10) We welcome all believers who share our belief and vision. Since the beginning of our church, we treasure non-Chinese members and attendees in our midst. Besides serving as valuable coworkers, they help to reflect our Kingdom mentality.

End note:

1. I am using the Chinese church to illustrate these functions. Not all ethnic groups are the same. They differ in many ways, such as linguistic diversity, educational training, gospel receptivity, religious freedom in their ancestral land, etc.
2. In this sense, the gambling industry has shown a greater understanding and love for my kinsman. 40 years ago, when the Chinese population was much smaller, some casinos had a table operated in the Cantonese language. They never said, “They are in America, they should understand English” or “Chinese should understand Mandarin.” On some Thanksgiving Days, 90% of those on the boardwalk in Atlantic City were Chinese.
3. Samuel To, *The Doctor Comes Home*, Peacock Enterprises, 1993.
4. Our church appreciates the opportunities to support missionaries in this field. At times, they even work inside those factories by reading Christian stories through the sound system. While not technically crossing cultures and geographical boundaries, they reach a dire group of people not considered by traditional mission agencies.
5. The number has since declined after Saipan lost the custom tax preference in 2004.
6. Samuel To, “Chinese Restaurant Workers: unresponsive or neglected?” *Challenger*, January 1999, pp7-8.
7. Miriam Adeney, “Is God Colorblind or Colorful – the Gospel, Globalization & Ethnicity,” *Missions Frontier*, May 2010, p15.
8. Besides supporting non-Chinese missionaries, we support missionaries to non-Chinese groups, including one to Japan, a country known for atrocities to other Asians during World War II.

(Samuel To is the Senior Pastor of Chinese Bible Church of College Park, near the University of Maryland.)



"Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly, summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and CRY OUT to the Lord." (Joel 1:14)

On September 11, 2001, America was shaken to its foundation by a series of surprise terrorist attacks. She is awakened to the new reality of global terrorism. 10 years later the nation needs to be awakened again, not just to the threats of terrorism, but to her critical spiritual condition.

America is now in desperate need of a fresh Christ Awakening. The economy has been deeply shaken. Overall church attendance continues to decline across the nation. America is now the third largest mission field in the world and an entire generation is growing up with little understanding of the absolute truth. Yet, in what appears to be a very trying time for the Church in this nation, it is believed that America is on the verge of a sweeping move of God's Spirit that will touch every state, every county and every

heart. Americans are now in desperate need of a fresh Christ Awakening.

The historical patterns of America's Great Awakenings indicate that it is in precisely this type of seemingly hopeless national environment that God chooses to move in response to the cries of His people. Historically, when the people of God have set aside their differences to come together across this nation in extraordinary, united prayer, God always hears from heaven and responds with great outpourings of His Spirit.

In response to the nation's need and God's Biblical and historical pattern for bringing awakening to America, the Awakening America Alliance has issued a call for extraordinary, united prayer. Churches across the nation are organizing prayer events on Sunday, September 11, 2011.

Rev. Thomas Wang, President Emeritus of GCCI, has been invited to be the Prayer Rally Coordinator of Santa Clara County, California. There will be a prayer event at 4-6 pm, September 11, 2011 at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in San Jose, a joint endeavor of both ethnic and white churches. For details, please see the poster.

Awakening America Alliance is also urging churches across our nation to partner in a special 10-week prayer initiative themed, "Praying through the Heart of the Year for the Soul of Our Nation." This prayer emphasis is built around twenty indicators of spiritual awakening in the Church and the Culture as developed by the Awakening America Alliance.

Beginning on July 3, the Sunday prior to our nation's Independence Day, this prayer emphasis will continue through Sunday, September 11, the 10-year anniversary of 9/11 of 2001. They



have prepared two Prayer Guides for each week, one focused on the church, the other focused on our culture. Also included are PowerPoint slides for each of the Prayer Guides...excellent to use in weekly prayer groups, or as sermon support.

Interested churches and individuals can go on the AwakeningAmerica.us website to sign up as participating churches or county coordinators. They will receive a wealth of Awakening America

resources as well as access to conference calls with other coordinator teams across your state and the nation.

The website will also provide information on the hours and locations of Cry Out America Prayer Rallies.





China: 17 top unregistered church leaders have taken a bold step to petition the Chinese Parliament urging them to protect religious freedom in the country. They are not asking for new freedom or rights, but what are promised in the constitution. It is a risky move, as anyone standing up publicly to the authorities can be subjected to persecution, arrest and their churches closed down. Yet the outcome of this action will not affect the Chinese Church. Christians will continue to serve and the Church will grow.

<Voice of the Martyrs, www.persecution.com, 5/16/11>

Malawi: Working with children has been seen culturally as a punishment. Typically, leaders get sent to that task after doing something wrong. Missionaries have seen rewarding change of this attitude as their children ministry has brought both children and parents to Christ. In recent years, this helps several churches being planted plus 20 preaching points that will evolve into churches. A training center has been setup to strengthen the effort.

<Grace Ministries International, www.gracemi.org, 5/9/11>

Mideast: An underground church in Saudi Arabia nurtured by the gospel broadcast sent US\$2,000 to the agency after hearing about the matching fund project, several weeks in prayer and sacrificial giving. The check came in after the deadline. But a board member of the agency “double-matched” it by adding \$4,000 more. During the tumult the broadcast still receives audience responses.

<SAT-7 Newsletter, www.sat7.org, May 2011>

Tibet: 95% of the 7 million Tibetans in the world remain unreached. An unique media aspect and familial approach of the Trel’wa (meaning “relate” in Tibetan) project is gaining entry into those in exile (more than 140,000 of them) in South Asia. Using print, web, audio and visual media, the project addresses a frequent concern of the people – “what to do with our young people” -- with biblical answers. Parents have hailed the program as “useful” and “deep.” As entire communities discuss the principles taught, those seeking to know more are connected with local workers guiding them to the gospel. Local camp leaders, who denied more than 80% of past development efforts, have engaged in person.

<Pioneers, www.pioneers.org, 5/12/11>

Iran: Persecution of Christians has become intensified and more public. At least 202 were arrested between June, 2010 and January, 2011, compared to a total of 80 in 2008 and 2009 combined. Arrests are announced to the public, and mullahs talk about them in their Friday sermons. The officials are concerned as more and more Muslims are becoming Christians estimated in the hundreds of thousands. House

churches are booming; large numbers of New Testaments are distributed and satellite TV beams in Christian messages constantly. People no longer trust the officials or the clerics as they see nothing but broken promises, war, international isolation and hatred. Tolerance is growing, and if anything, more persecution makes Christianity more attractive.

<Christianity Today, christianitytoday.com, June 11>

Specialists in Mission: 10 years ago, an agency created a team of specialists and professionals to support missionaries, local churches, and mission groups. They assist in health, business, water/sanitation, agriculture, etc. These efforts create outreach opportunities. As many as 40% of members in some churches in Paraguay could be directly related to the outreach of health/medical ministry. Even short-termers are useful and all kinds of skills are needed.

<The Mission Society, www.themissionsociety.org, 5/24/11>

Burkina Faso: In Africa, most people may not have internet access; cell phones are quite prevalent. 400 millions have them. The language of Kaanba tribe in the nation is musical, very complex and hard to learn. An agency has put Christian music in Kaansa language on cell phone memory cards, allowing them to listen to encouraging music in their own language wherever they go.

<Wycliffe Associates, www.wycliffe.org, 5/31/11>

Mission Connexion: 10 years ago, a pastor had a vision and started a conference for pastors, mission agencies, church leaders and mission-minded lay persons. This yearly event has since hosted over 100,000 attendees and 200 agencies. Hundreds of people have been sent out for short and long-term around the world. The 2-day event includes 125 workshops and dozens of ministries. The next conference will be held on January 20-21 in Portland, Oregon.

<Luis Palau Association, www.palau.org, 4/25/11>

Pakistan: The flood distressed 18 million people and displaced 12 million. In an area, some 100 families lived in a severely damaged church school in a semi-permanent military camp. An agency helped them back to their own home so 150 flood victim children now attend the school. When the army wanted to take back the camp, the agency answered call from the church to help. A team was sent to rebuild a 1,500-foot long wall around the church and school, and fix 3 of the damaged classrooms. The army was so impressed by the 70 workers working day and night to finish a few months’ job in a few days, they allow them to stay. The group’s witness and outreach led many to Christ.

<Operation Mobilization, www.omusa.org, 5/24/11>



America Return to God Prayer Movement

**2011 Prayer Rallies
October 8, 2011
San Francisco Bay Area**

America Return to God Prayer Movement is continuing to conduct prayer rallies in 2011. On October 8, 2011, instead of holding one central prayer rally in San Francisco, four regional prayer rallies are scheduled at various locations in the Bay Area. The fire of fervent prayer is burning and Christians across the region are responding to the call.

Four main themes will be emphasized in the Prayer Rallies:

1. Personal: spiritual renewal and commitment.
2. The repentance of sin and spiritual revival of the church.
3. Pray for the family which is now in crisis of disintegration.
4. Pray for the government and the spiritual restoration of America.

Locations and time of the Prayer Rallies are as follows:

Cantonese Prayer Rallies:

San Francisco: 10:00 a.m. to noon.

Sunset Church

3638 Lawton St., San Francisco, CA 94122

Peninsula: 10:00 a.m. to noon.

Peninsula Alliance Church

256 N. El Camino Real, San Mateo, CA 94401

Mandarin Prayer Rallies:

East Bay: 2:00p.m. to 4:00p.m.

Great Commission Christian Church

5327 Jacuzzi St. Ste., 3E2, Richmond CA 94804

South Bay: 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Chinese Church in Christ

1490 Saratoga Ave., San Jose, CA 95129

You are welcome to bring your whole church there to pray for our nation and our society, our churches and our families.

