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In 2014 there is no shortage of resources for the growing urban mission movement. However, key workers need to be trained particularly in the rising movements based in the Global South.

If we do not train the urban worker in the field, we risk slowing down the urban mission movement. If this statement is true, then training leadership in the field should take on a new priority. This issue of *New Urban World* seeks to draw attention to the importance of addressing the urban challenges to mission education. Randy White and Michael Crane, in particular, focus our attention on some of the issues that must be addressed if we want to move the urban mission movement forward.

According to even the most conservative of estimates of urban population growth, the need will continue to be greater than the ability of the traditional forms of education to provide educational opportunities. Given that the greatest growth and need in the next 50 years will be among the poor—this need is great and will become greater in years to come.

If our general educational objective is to take the individual from where she is to where she needs to be in order to be most effective and operate at the optimum level of effectiveness, then our strategies must cover a wide range of delivery systems all tailored to meeting the educational needs of the urban worker in the field. While it may not be possible in all cases, our goal should entail taking the educational opportunities as close to the frontlines as possible. This will require that we seek new ways of educating workers in the field that extend beyond the walls of the educational institution.

It will also require that schools catch the vision of what can be done, and then to tailor tuition and other costs to fit the economy of those on the frontlines. This will likely involve a mix of formal, non-formal, and informal educational delivery systems. Additionally, we will need to think through what essential credentials the urban worker
needs in order to achieve maximum effectiveness. We will need to find schools that have caught the vision of what can be done and are willing to work side-by-side to address the urban challenges to learning that are real. The truth is urban practitioners/activists have been poorly served by traditional academic institutions, even those who claim that at least part of their purpose is to develop leaders for cutting-edge ministries.

Some key questions that we need to seriously address includes:

1. How do we strengthen the bond between education and work? We do not have to look very far to find tragic examples of taking bright individuals who, when placed in another culture, have lost their usefulness for urban mission. We cannot encourage “brain drain” and hope to meet the coming demands in urban mission.

2. What kinds of tools and methodologies are especially effective in transferring knowledge and skills across cultural, linguistic, and class boundaries? Additional research in this area is clearly needed. Creativity should be applied to this essential area. It is becoming clear that new curriculum is necessary to address the real needs in the field among urban workers.

3. What kinds of knowledge are required in order to meet the educational needs of the urban worker? What is the goal of education in an urban setting?

4. Do new organizations, cross-cultural and global in scope, need to be created in order to fulfill the various objectives so vital to urban mission? History has shown that we must rely on the multiplicity of organizations and training institutions to meet the objectives so vital to urban mission. The task is immense. Therefore, the need for us to work together is all the more significant.

The urban mission movement cannot afford to bypass its most mature and gifted workers because those individuals cannot get to a residential school. Creative solutions to the issues raised in this edition of New Urban World are needed immediately.

Stephen Burris is a pastor, teacher, and author. He currently serves as Research Missiologist with CMF International and Pastor of the Golden Valley Christian Church in San Bernardino, California. He has done mission service in Zimbabwe. He has edited or co-edited several books, including River of God: An Introduction to World Mission. He is a founding member of the International Society for Urban Mission (ISUM), he is the editor-in-chief of ISUM publication—including the New Urban World journal—and is an ISUM executive committee member.
Aaron rose up early one morning with a purpose: today he was going to seek asylum with the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR). He lined up with two hundred strangers from countries all over the world. The people in the room vividly portray the heavy human cost of war, ethnic hatred, and totalitarian states. Aaron is from a Middle Eastern country where totalitarian rule has made life extremely difficult for its citizens. He was hesitant to claim asylum, but he does not have other options to legally reside in another country. The UNHCR representative gave him an appointment to seek refugee status. That interview was scheduled for two years and one month later. In the meantime, he works long hours at meagre wages in a country that simultaneously tolerates and exploits these asylum seekers. There are a number of large cities here in Southeast Asia that have become transit points for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers. Millions of these transient peoples are eking out a living in big, economically prosperous cities like Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, and Bangkok. Many of them leave their home countries either to find some kind of work or to escape oppressive circumstances. It is becoming normal in these cities to be foreign.1

Although their presence is normal, migrant workers and refugees live on the edge. Their legal status in the host country is tenuous at best. Employers exploit them at every turn. Their living conditions are often slum-like. In the midst of such difficulties, many come to embrace the hope they can experience in Jesus Christ.

A ray of hope for those who are Christians living in such vulnerability is their church community. But there is a problem. There aren’t enough people who are equipped to

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start churches or lead them. Paul Pierson recognizes this to be a global problem, and yet he notes that “they constitute the cutting edge of the church in many areas and are responsible for much of the growth.”² The traditional answer to this has been to send potential pastors off to a formal academic seminary for three to four years. This is hardly an option for most migrant workers and refugees. In this article we will explore some of the obstacles and opportunities in equipping the transient for fruitful ministry while they are living in a global city.

**Obstacles**

My friend Aaron became a Christian a couple of years ago. He came to faith in Christ here in this Southeast Asian global city and now has a passion for his people to know Christ. He is young, friendly, and hardworking, and shows a lot of promise as a leader. Through him and the labor of others, a small church fellowship of refugees has begun. Even though he is in a transient situation, he wants to be equipped to minister to his people more effectively. But there are many obstacles in effectively equipping Aaron and others like him.

**Transience**

Most often, the traditional seminary model will not work as a solution to pastor development. Life in the city requires money, and these transient urban dwellers have little of it. They must work long hours at very low wages in order to make ends meet. Many have to change jobs or move every few months. One refugee friend has had to change jobs four times during the last year and a half.

An added difficulty that often comes with transience is the susceptibility to falling into destructive lifestyle patterns. Many of those who move away from their closely-knit social structures begin to make lifestyle choices they would never have made in their home countries. Often these choices lead to long-term consequences like addictions, abusive behaviors, and disease.

It is already a challenge to train leaders when they are susceptible to moving at any time. If they are refugees, they could be sent to their next country at a moment’s notice.

And part of the reality of working with the transient is dealing with all kinds of sin.

The challenge is not only helping potential leaders address these problems in their own lives, but also learning how to shepherd churches with many people who are dealing with these struggles. We need programs designed for equipping those lacking a solid educational background where they develop the necessary skills and knowledge without adding the weight of heavy academic rigour.

**Weak Educational Background**

Migrant workers and refugees are coming from developing nations where they often lack access to quality education or opportunities for self-education (i.e. libraries, technology, or the Internet). One of my students struggling in a master’s level seminary course said that he felt robbed by his home country’s education, even at the university level. Another student interested in taking seminary courses had never used a computer in his life. Both of these men have a heart to serve God and show tremendous leadership potential. However, the current methods of equipping pastors exclude them by starting at a level that is too demanding and that requires computer efficiency. An educational system that requires only rote memorization on exams also does little to prepare Christian leaders to interpret and explain the Scriptures for their context.

Models of theological education are needed that are easily understood and that are transferable in churches of migrant workers and refugees. Paul demonstrated an ability to equip leaders who could equip more leaders (2 Tim 2:2). Theological education that is not transferable or reproducible is likely to do more to puff up the individual with pride than to prepare pastors for the flock.

**Mindset of Churches**

Despite the educational disadvantages of the transient poor, there is pressure from their traditional churches to obtain master’s degrees and sometimes even doctorates. Those from people groups with an established Christian population bring the demands and expectations of traditional/institutionalized churches. One student from Myanmar told me that in their culture pastoral ordination would only happen after obtaining a Master of Divinity degree. This leaves them with the impression that their ability
to shepherd, lead, or teach is not that important; it matters only that they have the academic prerequisite. This leads many to go to institutions that will give away master’s degrees like candy. I met one man who held a high position in his denomination who went to such a seminary in another country but had never written one essay formulating his own thoughts on a topic. He was taught only to copy and paste from books. The fallout from these practices is not merely the issue of plagiarism or lack of academic integrity. This man was not equipped as a Christian leader. Even when he faces simple problems in his ministry he does not have the skills or thought processes he needs to address them.

Traditional churches also bring expectations of having full-time pastors who can see to every need in a congregation (of which there are many in this kind of context). Here in this city, migrant workers earn meagre wages and must send much of it back to support families at home, and refugees are not allowed to work. This means that churches of the transient poor cannot afford to pay the salary of a full-time pastor. Yet often they will not accept bi-vocational pastors. Indian scholar J. N. Manokaran has observed the need for bi-vocational pastors in our growing cities: “There is a need for a paradigm shift from ‘full-time’ or ‘career missionary’ or ‘professional clergy’ to ‘priesthood of all believers’ in India today.”3 His observation certainly holds true for churches composed of migrant workers and refugees.

Opportunities

Stan came from a nearby impoverished nation about 15 years ago to earn a living. As a minority from his nation, he had few economic opportunities available to him. Stan took a job as a bartender and served in a small church of other migrant workers like himself. As Stan learned more English he was able to work at higher paying, more official jobs, such as working as a butler for a foreign diplomat. During his 15 years the situation in his home country went from bad to worse, and he saw the number of migrant workers arriving from his home country grow to hundreds of thousands. Even though Stan had a nice stable job, he had a heart to minister to this influx of migrant workers.

workers. So he quit his job in order to be equipped to start churches among his people in his host city.

Opportunities abound for the developing and equipping of pastors and leaders among the transient poor. Just as the Apostle Paul’s approach to developing leaders was multi-dimensional,4 we need a multi-dimensional approach to the development of Christian leaders among transient urban dwellers. Below are three ways in which we can improve the development of leaders to minister to the transient poor.

**Transient Types of Training and Educating**

It has been established that the current academic institutions are not adequate for equipping leaders for diaspora churches. The seminary model presumes the student has accomplished the prerequisite education needed and is fully competent in the language of the host country. Nimble and innovative models need to be developed that will provide training in the languages of the transient and at more basic levels of education.

In my city, there are a large number of refugees from the same nation as Stan. Many of these refugees have a desire to serve in Christian ministry but do not have the opportunity to be equipped to serve. An American woman recognized this need and established a training school at a certificate level. Refugees spend four hours each week learning about the Bible and how to minister through evangelism, discipleship, and even basic counselling skills. But they also work in pairs to lead new small groups all over the city. Migrant workers have very little control over their schedule, making it difficult to consistently worship as a big church every Sunday. By having small group gatherings all over the city, they have opportunities for worship, Bible study, and community that they would not have had. And those in the certificate course have hands-on training on how to lead these groups well. This training school has been an integral part of the growth and flourishing of disciples while they are refugees.

An essential skill for those in ministry is interpreting and explaining God’s Word in the church. In our postmodern milieu, hermeneutics has grown into a highly

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intricate discipline. To follow the nuances of different hermeneutical methods, one must be highly attuned to abstract thinking and epistemological self-awareness. This is a valuable discipline in certain contexts, but we must prioritize methods that those with less formal education can learn in order to effectively preach the Word to their congregations. Larry Caldwell has done excellent work in distinguishing different levels of hermeneutics depending on the context.5

Transformational for All of Life

In my seminary days I was required to take a class on church administration. The textbook for the class had a chapter on how to run a church kitchen. Needless to say, a lot of the material covered in seminaries presumes a middle-class ministry context. Ministers and leaders among the transient urban poor need to be equipped to handle the struggles and issues of their people.6 People living in the margins of society face crises perpetually and have very little safety net to help break the fall. We need to equip pastors and other leaders who can provide healthy and biblical responses to these many complex issues. While some of this can be taught in classes, there is a need for hands-on learning with wise mentors alongside them. This means we need seminary lecturers and pastors who routinely minister in these often neglected contexts.

Seminaries have remained aloof for too long. Ronald Peters has observed that seminaries and middle-class churches have created a closed system in which they are no longer engaged with the realities of our growing cities.7 In order to provide a different kind of education, we need educators that will get their hands dirty. Academic educators often have their hands full teaching, grading, and writing. Our new citified world needs educators who can balance academics with experiential types of education and mentorship. If we want ministers who can thrive in the urban context and lead


churches in global cities, we need those who teach them to know the urban context.\textsuperscript{8} Since seminary professors have many demands on their time, this will entail making urban exegesis a priority.

_Transcultural Involvement for Greater Impact_

Arnold is a citizen of the country to which Aaron and Stan both came in search of employment and opportunity. Arnold recognized the hundreds of thousands of people coming from surrounding nations as migrant workers or refugees. The working and living conditions for many of these people broke Arnold’s heart. He also noted that these migrant workers and refugees come from nations where there has been little or no access to the good news of Jesus. Arnold was struck by the reality that he had a great opportunity to minister to these vulnerable people right in his own city. He started up a ministry that could minister to these masses from neighbouring nations. Ten years later, his ministry is actively working with migrant workers and refugees from eight different nations. Arnold’s ministry kept him so busy that he has been unable to get the education he feels he should have to thrive in his ministry.

Ministering to the urban transient poor will require collaborative efforts from many different cultures. A key to equipping the transient for ministry is equipping others in the host country to equip the transient for ministry. Arnold lacked this kind of training. He needed an integrated curriculum that could combine the important skills in biblical interpretation and theology with the ability to understand urban poverty, migration dynamics, and cross-cultural leadership development. Programs are needed that proactively train ministers to be effective across cultures and socio-economic strata.

Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz describe the need for a multicultural leadership team for city impact.\textsuperscript{9} Some of the migrant workers and refugees come from a Christian heritage which increases the likelihood of developing indigenous leaders from within. Many others come from nations where there is little or no access to the gospel. In


\textsuperscript{9} Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, _Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City, & the People of God_ (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 384.
these cases, cross-cultural missionaries, like Arnold, are needed to initiate the work among each ethnic group. Now Arnold is actively equipping other Christian leaders from this host country to learn how to minister to those arriving from many different surrounding countries.

Conclusion

Millions of people have come to global cities with the hope of a better life. Too few encounter Christian hope because of a lack of leaders who are equipped to minister to them. These mobile masses have the potential to spread the hope found in Christ all over the world. In fact, the poor and marginalized might just be “the greatest resource for God’s mission in the multi-cultural context of Asia.”10 We can conclude then, that equipping these transient poor should be among our highest priorities.

We must raise our awareness of the obstacles preventing potential pastors and Christian leaders from being equipped to serve the Body of Christ. Given the transience of migrant workers and refugees, we must be fleet and nimble in our efforts to equip them for their ministry. We must adapt our methods of teaching so that they may be able to grasp and pass on these vital, life-giving truths of the gospel. And it is imperative that we assist the church to shift its priorities away from formal titles and diplomas and return to the New Testament pattern of recognizing Christ-like character as the raw material from which a pastor is moulded.

As we recognize the tremendous potential of these diaspora peoples, we will need to develop models of theological education and leadership development designed with the transient in mind. This means we need structures that are adaptable and require minimal resources. The contents of our training should be transformational in scope. We are equipping leaders for a messy world; therefore they need to be equipped theologically and practically to engage real world issues so that we see a multiplication of Jesus disciples. And, finally, we need to equip those who are not among the transient poor to understand, assist, and equip leaders among the transient poor. The task of equipping the transient for flourishing ministries in our cities is one for the whole

church. Only in our collective and unified effort can we maximize the full complement of the gifts given to the Body of Christ. It could be that these churches of the transient show us what it truly means to be strangers and aliens in the city of humankind (1 Pet 2:11), and yet thrive as a fellowship of citizens in the city of God (Eph 2:19).

Dr. Michael Crane has lived in global cities in Southeast Asia for most of his life. He is currently teaching urban missiology at a seminary and working with Christian leaders who desire to bring transformative change to their cities. Michael and his family also spend time helping refugees who come through their city.
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Michael Crane sees the real, growing needs of those swirling on the urban margins and brings these needs to our attention with practical insight and hope. So many stimulating challenges and ideas for all urban Christians to wrestle with are raised here. As I began this article, I imagined the city as a lake where many rivers and tributaries bring in diverse people within its banks. With nationalist trading barriers falling, workers from everywhere can flow to employment in cities offering opportunity. Organizations, businesses, and churches seek to draw the best (and cheapest) workers from wherever they can find them, too. In this broader global context we naturally find diverse and steady streams of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers running from poverty and persecution—and naturally gravitating to the calmer waters of free-er cities. The plight of transient and vulnerable people then is a growing and characteristic feature of today’s global cities.

As I read further, however, the city seems a far more complex reality. Less like a lake that steadily rises from new streams of people and more like rapid, swirling tidal waters circling a “delta.” A delta is “an area of low, flat land, sometimes shaped like a triangle, where a river divides into several smaller rivers before flowing into the sea.”1 Like a delta, the city sees people flow in, out, and around the city before they reach their final destinations. Sometimes people’s lives swirl around one city, but more often now people flow down streams to other cities, back up to rural homelands for a while and then on again to another city. To push the analogy, we know all humans eventually need to drift into death before their final eternal destinations. What does it mean to share Christian faith and community among such a swirling tidal delta of people? How can we make our neighbourhood deltas as healthy and hospitable as possible for those who may not stay?

1 Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “delta.”
As Crane makes clear, with moving personal examples, this transience in cities undermines so many traditional modernist models of Christian leadership development and local churches. Imagined and perfected in more stable, dormant and mostly rural periods of human history, they have no answers to the chronic lack of time, stability, and trust undermining the building of life together and belonging needed by churches and leaders. Isolation, loneliness, and lack of connections can be deadly for any urban resident, but, as we saw, are especially brutal on those fleeing poverty or persecution. Surely this kind of transience becomes one of the greatest challenges to Christian faith and mission today.

Urban asylum seekers and refugees provide an unprecedented challenge for the people of God, but also an amazing opportunity. In addition to this transience, the very obvious needs for housing, food, legal help, and jobs that can easily overwhelm even the most compassionate churches. I know a church in Bangkok, for example, that has grown rapidly because of the number of asylum seekers and refugees joining the church, but has also lost many existing members because they couldn't cope with being ambushed each week by folks in desperate need who had become almost a third of the church. Few existing church members had the resources or experience to continue to respond each week with an increasing number of people who had fled persecution, suffering mental and physical health, and in a desperate survival mode. To its credit the church leadership has tried to organize and respond to the needs of the newcomers and equip existing members, but it has not been without cost.

The Body of Christ also has an amazing opportunity to stand up for compassion and justice in ways few others in society are motivated to do. We love not because our churches or colleges will grow bigger, but because we can become channels of God's grace and love, meeting Jesus in the face of the ones we love. This will require God to help us find the most flexible, compassionate, and innovative response for developing churches and training—God has a habit of doing this with his people who go out to the edges of society's power. Indeed, transformation so often comes to the whole from those on the edges. Dare we miss out on what God is doing?

Dr. Ash Barker is the founding director of Urban Neighbours of Hope, which began in Springvale (Melbourne) in 1993 and now has chapters of workers loving God and neighbours in some of the neediest urban neighbourhoods in Melbourne, Sydney, and Bangkok. He is the author of several books including *Slum Life Rising*. He is the founding member of the International Society for Urban Mission (ISUM) and serves as its International Director.
That the world experienced by the earliest Christians was one markedly different than our own is an obvious statement bordering on the self-evident. Yet, despite the barriers of language, culture, and the two millennia which separate us, unstated assumptions of similarity may still guide our study and application of the New Testament texts. One such silent assumption is that ancient Christians approached and appreciated texts just as we do today. Standing on this side of Gutenberg and the printing press, it is easy to assume that our reading practices—silently scanning a printed page produced for mass consumption—are the same as those practices cultivated in the first century. Similarly, too often missionaries and ministers have assumed that the most contextually-appropriate way to share the Bible is to disseminate it only as a printed text. Yet if the gospel is to be understood in its historical context and faithfully shared across cultures, surely notions of literacy, orality, and the media-cultural reality of the ancient and modern worlds ought to be considered in our studies and ministry.

In recent years, biblical scholars have begun to appreciate the New Testament documents as orally derived and circulated texts. In his seminal article, James D.G. Dunn argues convincingly that the time has come to “alter the default setting” of biblical studies from a textual to an oral hermeneutic. I believe the time has come for missionaries at work in urban, largely oral contexts to alter the default setting as well. An appreciation of the limits of literacy in ancient and modern urban settings should amount to a paradigm shift in how we understand the New Testament and apply it in ministry. In this article I will sketch the primarily oral culture of earliest Christianity and argue that the missionary methods of the early evangelists reflected the oral cultures within which their audiences were embedded. I will then compare the residually-oral cultures of contemporary American urban settings to those of earliest

Christianity and suggest that the adoption of similar oral methods for contextualizing the gospel should be pursued in those urban settings where literacy is limited and orality flourishes.

Ancient Literacy and Orality

That the first-century Roman-occupied world was largely comprised of oral cultures is not seriously disputed among scholars. William Harris suggests literacy was limited in even the most affluent cities, such as Attica or Pompeii, to roughly 10 percent of the population. In her study of Roman Palestine, Catherine Hezser calculates literacy to be limited in Israelite cultures to only about two to three percent of the people. Clearly the writing and reading of texts was not a democratic activity in the ancient world. Rather, the majority of people in Greco-Roman antiquity had little or no access to training in letters. The ancient economy simply did not demand widespread literacy; thus, it was not pursued.

The Oral Media Culture & Missionary Methods of Early Urban Christianity

Against the backdrop of such low literacy rates, it may at first seem that the New Testament texts were written and appreciated only by a literate cultural minority. Yet the gospel, and the New Testament documents which bore witness to it, flourished among the largely-illiterate populations as Christianity rapidly took root in urban settings. How can we explain this phenomenon? The answer lies in the convergence of culture and missionary method.

It is clear that oral performance was the primary medium for the cultivation and spread of both literary and religious traditions among the oral cultures of Greco-Roman antiquity. Indeed, written texts were usually considered secondary and supplemental

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4 Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 18–19.


to oral traditions. The preference for oral delivery is evident in an oft-quoted section of Eusebius in which Papias (c. 130 CE) makes clear his preference for the “utterance of a voice” that is “living and abiding” over the written text (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.4). Similarly, Galen, a prominent Roman physician and philosopher of the latter second and early third century, echoes Papias in suggesting that “reading out of a book is not the same as, or even comparable to, learning from the living voice.” Storytelling and oral performance were common fare at festivals and public theaters in Greco-Roman antiquity. In a very real way, *performance*—rather than printing—was how a literary text, like Curiiatus Maternus’ *Cato* or the Gospel of Mark, were published. Thus the low literacy rates of antiquity, coupled with the clear preference for the “living word,” and the ubiquity of oral performance throughout Greco-Roman culture, suggest a rethinking of the “missionary methods” of Jesus, the evangelists, and Paul as they spread the gospel throughout the Roman empire.

**Jesus & the Gospels**

At no point do any of our ancient sources about Jesus, canonical or otherwise, indicate that his ministry included the dissemination of printed copies of the Greek Septuagint or Hebrew Bible. Jesus never miraculously supplied 5,000 Torahs from just five papyri and two scrolls. Rather, the ministry of Jesus was one of the spoken and embodied word delivered to a listening audience. He came preaching (Matt 5:1–7:29; Luke 6:17–49; Eph 2:17) and storytelling (Mark 4:1–32; Luke 15:11–32; 16:19–31), not handing out texts. Similarly, even though the canonical Gospels at some point became textual traditions, they were likely born of oral storytelling traditions. Mark bears the most telltale signs

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of oral cultivation and was likely an oral performance tradition in its earliest form.\textsuperscript{12} In any case, the Gospels were all composed for public readings and oral performance before live listening audiences. It now seems likely that the Gospels were written down to support a continued oral performance tradition which continued into the second, third, and fourth centuries.\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, the entire New Testament corpus would have been composed for and spread throughout an audience embedded in a primarily oral media culture.

**Paul & Oral Performance**

While Paul was clearly literate and wrote at least portions of some of his letters with his own hand,\textsuperscript{14} it is apparent that the Apostle did so with an oral audience in mind. His writings were not passed from one individual Christian to another to be read silently at home. Rather, his letters to mostly-illiterate communities were read publicly in a form of oral performance in which the letter-bearing public reader assumed the very presence and authority of the Apostle before the gathered community.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, the letter to the Galatians itself seems quite like a deliberative speech—a form of oratory in which the speaker attempts to persuade his audience with powerful rhetoric.\textsuperscript{16}

While Paul laments his physical absence with the Galatians, he assumes that the harsh tone of his speech will be carried through by the letter-bearer-performer (Gal 4:18–20). For Paul, physical presence and personal, oral delivery of his message is preferred. But when circumstances prevent such presence and delivery, he is present to his audience ‘in spirit’ via the public reader-performer of his letter (1 Cor 5:3–4). In either case—whether Paul is present with his congregations or absent—it is clear that Paul adapted his missionary methods to meet the needs of his oral audience. When he


\textsuperscript{15} Botha, *Orality and Literacy*, 208.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 210.
could not physically attend to the concerns of a given community, he sent an emissary to publicly perform his response to a pressing community concern. All of this suggests that, for Paul, the physical text was secondary to the *performance and public hearing of his message* among his oral audience.

Thus, whether by Jesus, Paul, or the evangelists, the gospel message spread orally from public gathering to public gathering, while the written copies *supported* rather than supplanted the continuing oral performance traditions. Such tendencies suggest that Christian performance traditions may be the earliest example of contextualization in the spread of the good news. As such, the oral performance of the New Testament documents constitutes a paradigm for critical contextualization which has yet to be fully realized in contemporary practice.

**Limited Literacy in American Urban Contexts and the Possibility of Performance**

In James A. Maxey’s *From Orality to Orality*, the author suggests that oral performance has been marginalized by “[a] prejudicial focus on literacy” among Bible translators working in primarily oral cultural contexts.\(^{17}\) Despite this marginalization, however, Maxey marshals significant evidence to suggest that oral performance may be a more contextually-appropriate form of Bible translation where orality is the cultural norm. While Maxey’s project is keenly interested in the adoption of oral performance for ministry among the people of central Africa, I suggest that his paradigm is widely applicable wherever literacy is limited and oral culture flourishes. Furthermore, it is particularly suggestive for ministry in contemporary urban settings in America where literacy is limited and the possibility of performance has gone largely unnoticed.

In our highly technological modern world, literacy is a difficult figure to calculate. Many Americans in urban settings may be functionally-literate—able to navigate social networking sites and read road signs, addresses, labels, product packaging, and other day-to-day texts—but are either unable or otherwise unlikely to read a printed book (such as the Bible). Much of this has to do with the state of public education in American urban settings. In cities where educational resources are often limited, it is clear that literacy is similarly limited. To illustrate this, we may turn to a recent study

\(^{17}\) James A. Maxey, *From Orality to Orality: A New Paradigm for Contextual Translation of the Bible* (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), 77.
published by the Central Connecticut State University. Culling data from U.S. cities which boasted populations of 250,000 or greater in the 2010 census, this study ranked 75 major U.S. cities from most literate to least. In 2011, Washington, D.C. was ranked highest, while Bakersfield, California, was ranked lowest.18

When one compares the level of educational attainment in Washington, D.C., to that of Bakersfield, a related disparity emerges. According to the 2010 United States Census, Washington, D.C. boasts a relatively high level of educational attainment in which 87 percent of its adult population have graduated high school or beyond, while the percentage of adult Bakersfield residents who have achieved similar levels is only 72 percent.19 Compared to the suburbs surrounding these two cities, where educational attainment rises about 10 percent, it is clear that even a “highly literate” city such as Washington, D.C. may lack for educational resources compared to their surrounding suburban neighbors. In Bakersfield, the disparity between urban and suburban educational attainment is similar. As such figures suggest, where educational resources are limited, literacy is likely limited as well.

Such low levels of educational attainment in American cities have been recognized as a crisis in modern education. From the Bush administration’s “No Child Left Behind” initiative to the contemporary “Common Core” teaching standards, many resources have been deployed in recent efforts to promote literacy and fix the inequality in American education. Yet this crisis is not without its moment of opportunity: where literacy is limited, it may be assumed that oral communication still flourishes. Where orality is the dominant mode of communication, the Bible may be contextualized and translated as a living oral performance experienced by a gathered community, rather than only as a bounded text for individual readers who would otherwise be unlikely to experience it.

Thus, while the Bible can (and should) still be treasured and used as text, where hearing and speaking are more common than reading and writing, the Bible may be

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18 John W. Miller, America’s Most Literate Cities (New Britain: Central Connecticut State University, 2011), accessed January 8, 2014, http://www.ccsu.edu/page.cfm?p=11096. Unfortunately, the specific literacy rates for these cities were not included in the report. The only data available to the public are the rankings.

contextualized as oral performance in any form of ministry in which it is typically presented only as printed text. In urban settings in which educational attainment and literacy levels are low, we may follow the pattern for contextualization laid down by some of the earliest Christians. The early followers of Jesus left an enduring legacy of oral performance which is ripe with possibility for modern urban missioners and audiences. Just as Paul and other New Testament authors were sensitive to the media-cultural needs of their urban audiences, so should we minister-scholars and scholarly ministers alter our missionary methods to better fit the residually-oral cultural contexts of our urban ministries.

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Daniel Yencich makes the persuasive argument that the gospel was communicated primarily as local performance rather than through the reading of the printed word. Surely the majority of people to this day are oral learners. The Bible must be translated so that oral learners can hear it in their own language, and obviously some must be literate enough to read the Bible and absorb its message so that it can be shared with others. But we should not assume that to apprehend the Bible one must be literate.

Yencich points out that as readers who learn primarily through reading—and hence place a high value on the written word—we can easily assume that all learn as do we. His statistics about Washington, DC, and Bakersfield, California, belie this assumption and lead us to wonder if we have tailored our teaching to be suitable for an oral learning audience.

Laudable efforts have been made to reach oral learners. In my ten years with the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania I saw (and even participated in some) numerous gospel communication forms that were not dependent upon reading: scriptural passages provided by Gospel Recordings, communication of Bible stories through a series of pictures, hand-cranked tape-recordings of Bible passages and Bible messages, radio broadcasts, and more recently dramatic presentations such as the *Jesus Film*, *The Bible*, and chronological Bible storying. With the rise of the Internet and wireless communication, even more efforts are underway to reach this and other peoples through new technologies.

But the Maasai among whom I lived and ministered were (and are) primarily a rural people. Yencich boldly encourages us to think of using oral performance in the cities of
our world, even in countries with a high rate of literacy. His call is important and must not fall on deaf ears.

Some may be tempted to think that dependence upon memory rather than the written word will naturally lead to more errors in transmission. The same argument was made by historians (those who incidentally depend upon written documents for their livelihood) against oral tradition decades ago. However, scholars of oral tradition like Vansina,¹ Ong,² Gabel and Bennett,³ and Miller,⁴ have shown that fear is misplaced. Indeed, the resurgence of storytelling in our day,⁵ much of which takes place in urban settings, is proving to be a new (old) method of communication that captures the audience’s attention. So too does open-mike rap and poetry presentation. The city provides space for innovation, space that can become sacred space. We can move, as Yencich suggests, “from a textual to an oral hermeneutic.”

With the rising tide of urbanization throughout the world, and with the strong desire to appropriately communicate the gospel in context, going forward we shall have many opportunities for telling the never-ending story—the greatest story of all time.

Doug Priest, the son of missionary parents, grew up in Ethiopia and then later served for 17 years as a missionary in Kenya, Tanzania, and Singapore. He earned his PhD in Intercultural Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary and has been the executive director of CMF International for nearly two decades. Doug is a founding member of the International Society for Urban Missions (ISUM) and serves on its executive committee.

² Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy (London: Routledge, 1982).
⁵ For more information on storytelling, visit the National Storytelling Network. http://www.storynet.org
I remember awaking slowly to a dingy Calcutta (Kolkata) dawn. The dim smudge of sunlight was doing its best to work its way through a gray/brown layer of smoke suffocating the horizon. The exhausted slum I was visiting tried to rouse itself. I have had the same experience in a squatter settlement in Manila. Columns of acrid smoke from burning tires rose like straight black pillars, as if they were desperately trying to hold up the soot-laden sky for just one more day. My prayer in both settings went immediately to the kingdom influencers that many universities, mission agencies, and ministries are developing from inside and outside these dramatic contexts. The question that burned itself into my core: How can we prepare urban influencers to become people with the skillsets and spirituality to believe in transformation—their own, and that of the cities they serve? How will they come to pursue this transformation, though, like the sun, it is often obscured? Can we do the pedagogical work necessary for innovation, to educate for shalom,¹ as we have been charged to do?

As the landscape of education shifts almost daily under our feet, where are the horizons of greatest promise that are shaping the next generation of leaders with a transformational skillset? How can institutions training those influencers avoid the tendency to protect the status quo in our systems, which, in Thomas Bandy’s words, so many of which end up fostering the “body of Christ in residence, rather than the body of Christ in motion.”²

Many of us who seek transformation in cities—practitioners working in neighborhoods of neglect like mine, academics utilizing the classroom or urban

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immersions/urban semesters to equip emerging leaders with a shalom vision, *campus ministry workers* in short-term mission projects—have embraced the premise that the first and sometimes simultaneous step in catalyzing change is to experience transformation or “deep change” ourselves. We embrace Gandhi’s oft-quoted aphorism that we must become the change we want to see in the world. The marriage of this concept with the educational goals of universities, NGOs, and campus ministries in the last two decades represents the horizon of greatest promise in the fast-changing landscape of leadership development, and is leading to some bright new approaches to the way education and training are done. At the highest leadership levels, these institutions must ensure they are pointing toward this sunrise.

Linking personal transformation with social transformation prevents us from defaulting to a transactional approach to leadership, which tends to be one-way—“I know something, I tell you, now you know something.” That paradigm is fast-fading in urban education, as it is only marginally effective. Transformational influence, by contrast, is based on the premise that the leader herself is changed by the act of involvement with people and their environment, as well as seeking the transformation of that context. This mirrors Dr. King’s assertion that transformed people can transform a society. And it underscores the reciprocal understanding of transformation embodied in aboriginal artist and social activist Lilla Watson’s dictum that urban mission practitioners so often quote: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” Do Christian universities, urban poor ministries, and campus ministries invest in and leverage this mutual transformation? Can we expand more traditional pedagogies to do this better?

I will spend most of our time here focused on this question: How does change happen in the lives of the indigenous and external kingdom influencers we are trying to train—whether young staff in our NGOs, or emerging leaders graduating from Christian colleges, or passionate activists fresh from campus ministry involvement who feel called to the world’s vulnerable? How will understanding the change process, both in themselves and others, help them better embrace a transformational posture in the world’s hardest places?

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The role of experience in urban education

People working in hard places learn quickly that a huge portion of our ministry must be focused on the development of people (both workers and indigenous disciples) as kingdom influencers—their knowledge and skillsets, their reflective abilities, spiritual disciplines, as well as a host of relational and character issues. What might be harder for leaders in those contexts, as well as for those in the academy tasked with preparing leaders, is to discern the presence of the holy grail of pedagogical tools in their midst: *Disorientation and Leveraged Experience*. These create a transformational learning environment that is unparalleled. Training institutions must increasingly master the use of this pedagogy.

The key role that disorientation and leveraged experience play in the transformational process, as well as in the creation of an onramp to civic and justice oriented engagement, is being acknowledged across the world. In the social sciences, this field is called various things, including *Experiential Learning, Transformational Learning, Action Learning*, etc. In its most basic expression, according to a task force led by Scott Bessenecker of InterVarsity, transformational learning can be summarized as *the orchestration or leveraging of a cycle of action, reflection and whole life application toward the establishment of Shalom*.4

The pedagogy most universally used to employ this cycle of action and reflection is direct service. Whether on a short-term project (universities and campus ministries utilize this format most widely) or long-term incarnational ministries such as Word Made Flesh, InnerChange, Servant Partners, and others, direct service to individual members of a community often has a powerful impact on the one serving—an education unavailable in a more formal setting. But practitioners know that all service is not alike in its power to transform the one serving. Timothy Stanton examined the use of service as a crucial component in the creation of more effective learning environments,5 concluding that the importance of reflection, guided interaction, and ultimate ownership of the learning process on the part of the participant in the

4 IVCF Experiential Discipleship Taskforce, Scott Bessenecker, director (Unpublished report).

process of service in order to help the one serving maximize the benefit in their life was paramount. Stanton demonstrated the need for reciprocity between those who serve and those who are served, and showed the importance of helping the participant reflect on the significance of the actions taken in terms of the long-term, positive contribution to the community that was made. Without this intentionality, much of the impact of the service experience is diminished. Worse yet, as Bob Lupton challenges, a toxic form of charity can result, a reality which is recognized by urban workers globally. There is not space here to explore this unwanted outcome.

Perhaps the most important decision educators and trainers have to make in designing learning environments for current and future leaders has to do with their posture toward the people they mentor. In educational philosopher David Kolb’s perspective we must realize that learning is best described as a social journey, accompanied by a committed companion or guide. But this guide does not merely walk with the traveler. The guide designs features of the journey that best help the traveler acquire the necessary skillset. InterVarsity’s Fresno Institute for Urban Leadership (FIFUL) has college students live in an urban neighborhood under one roof for a year in a program called The Pink House (PH), experientially serving among local urban ministries and studying basic community development concepts. In that kind of ministry environment, mirrored in dozens of cities around the world, the guide (what a good term for an educator!) walks alongside the learner, injecting insight and cultivating perspective where necessary. According to Kolb, they engage mentees in the activities of feeling (concrete experience—perhaps feeling fear as they walk in a slum), watching (reflective observation—perhaps the wrenching image of a child working in a brothel), thinking (abstract conceptualization—perhaps examining the macro forces shaping life in a city—corruption, unemployment, violence), and finally, doing (active experimentation—for example, playing a role in an entrepreneurial social business). Those of us working with emerging leaders must invest in and even systematize these activities.

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For 20 years now this approach has combined features of formal, non-formal and informal education, the distinctions of which we will discuss later. In that environment, FIFUL staff intuitively gravitate toward creating an environment that includes conflict or tension which, according to David Kolb, has the effect of providing a new dissonance between one’s prior experience or unexamined assumptions. Fresno Pacific University and Seminary grant credits for students spending a year there because of the rich learning outcomes it generates. A huge percent of PH graduates continue to serve urban poor communities after their year there. One of the more than 200 students who have been through the PH, a white, middle-class student from Seattle named Beth, in the space of one year, saw her views utterly transformed from a traditional, need-and charity-based approach to ministry to an asset-based approach after meeting and coming to appreciate the innate skills and knowledge sets of residents in a vulnerable neighborhood. All her paradigms were upended. So significant was her transformation and so remarkable was the new skillset she acquired in response, she was eventually asked to lead the program.

**Challenge and Support in the Unfamiliar**

Educational practitioner Laurent Daloz introduces another angle on this posture. He encourages us to develop a compassionate understanding of the range of ways in which adult learners make meaning in their lives. One size does not fit all for the students and staff in our schools and organizations. The challenge in the urban education of current and future leaders who enter a transformational journey themselves is to connect that journey to the possibility of new options and choices. This necessitates making meaning based on their starting points. Since education is not a mere transfer of information, but rather a posture toward the current or potential leaders we work with, we must be closely enough aligned to the specifics of their journey to know what will compel them along that pathway. Daloz has shown that this, at minimum, involves the balancing of challenge and support in the learning environment. If there’s low challenge and low support in that environment, we get stasis. Nothing changes. There is no growth for the learner. When we have high challenge toward a worker or leader (always in their face,

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always pushing them, always challenging assumptions, always critiquing) without also offering high support, what often happens is the learner withdraws from us, like you withdraw your hand from a hot surface. On the other hand, if we are always supporting someone (affirming, encouraging, being with, helping) but never challenging them, what often happens according to Daloz is worse than stasis. Daloz calls this outcome confirmation. Now, what they already thought about themselves, their abilities, their capacities, their future call, is in cement. It is even harder to change. Only with high challenge and high support do we get the transformation or growth in the learner that will provide the necessary foundation for the transformational ministry impact we are hoping for in the context where they serve.

The environments that Christian colleges and campus ministries are preparing students for service in are themselves rich with transformational possibilities. When Azuza Pacific and other colleges send students to live in a slum for a semester working with a local ministry, they know that these semesters are worth years of more traditional pedagogies. The reason? These environments represent a host of unfamiliar problems in unfamiliar settings, which has been proven to be the mother lode of transformational contexts. When we walk alongside younger leaders who are tasked with unfamiliar problems in unfamiliar settings, the possibility for transformation goes up dramatically.

Even in NGOs that work with indigenous leaders who elect to stay in the slum rather than finding pathways out, mentoring by an intentional guide becomes essential. They walk with the leader as they sort through what they might have once thought of as familiar problems in a familiar setting (violence, corruption, lack of opportunity, education, sanitation, water, shelter, etc). They help them look at each of those realities at broader, more political or systemic levels. They engage them in long-term organizing (an unfamiliar problem) with an eye going beyond relief toward development among leadership echelons and hidden power corridors in the city (an unfamiliar setting) that are foreign to them.

Disorientation and Dissonance: Dizzy by Design

A colleague of mine used to love to say, “Universities can do distance education all they want, but WE do dissonance education.” What happens most often in an unfamiliar setting is what Jack Mezirow calls a disorienting dilemma, the dissonance of which has been shown to start a transformational spiral in the life of a learner. A disorienting dilemma calls into question prior assumptions, and is often followed by feelings of guilt and shame. InterVarsity routinely finds this to be true when placing students in the slums of Kolkata or Bangkok or Mexico City, often launching the student into years of soul-searching as they return to deal with images that won’t leave their dreams as they try to resume their lives back home. Interns with the Center for Transforming Mission working in the La Limonada slum in Guatemala City must face the stark presence of evil and exploitation among the forgotten children of that violent place, contrasted with the ease and comfort of their middle-class world that they will shortly return to. And it is not just interns and students dealing with these dilemmas. Servants of Asia’s Poor seeks to help its long-term staff deal with dilemmas and situations that seem to have no solution—a scenario so common that they routinely pull their staff out of those contexts for times of debriefing and corporate reflection.

The dilemmas and spiritual vertigo created by dramatic experience are familiar to students of Scripture. The rich young man who in Matthew 19 came to Jesus with the question about eternal life is told by Jesus to give away the very thing his culture considered the mark of God’s blessing, namely, his wealth and possessions, and to give them to the poor. This is a disorienting dilemma to someone who all his life thought wealth was the obvious mark of divine affirmation. Does he take a chance on the person Jesus, potentially losing his money and position, or does he sink back to the false and unsatisfying comfort of his wealth?

Or, take for example, the apostle Paul’s disorienting dilemma on his way to the city of Damascus (Acts 9) on what he thought was a morally right quest to arrest Christians. He was blinded by the light of Christ and told by Jesus to completely reverse himself.

10 Scott Bessenecker, Personal comments, IVCF Urban and Global Project Training, Casa de los Amigos, Mexico City, 2003.

What is his dilemma? Should he obey this new command, reject everything he knew, and give up his position? Or will he fall back to the familiar where he had prestige and authority, but ignore the very real encounter with Jesus on the road?

Or take for example Nehemiah, who in chapter one of his book is confronted with the report of the suffering of his people and his growing conviction that he should leave his comfortable position in the court of the king of Persia to lead an impossible effort at the building of Jerusalem. What’s his disorienting dilemma? If he stays where he is, his conscience condemns him. But if the King rejects his plan to go and rebuild Jerusalem, he could compromise his position and possibly lose his life. This dilemma leads his anguished and tearful confession to God: “I and my father’s house have sinned.”

A disorienting dilemma means that our beliefs or assumptions are called the question or turned on their head, and it is often than dramatic activity of God breaking into our normal existence that accomplishes the turning. And for educators and supervisors, here is where the posture of the one walking with the learner in her dilemma becomes crucial. Mezirow discovered that the extent to which this is in place opens up the possibility of the learner acquiring the new skillsets they will need, the courage to try them out, to succeed or fail in moving into new roles and levels of leadership, and to integrate this new identity into whatever future God is preparing for them.

**Hot Leaps and Slow Thoughts**

A hundred years ago, John Dewey said, “every experience is a moving force, and its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into.” The challenge of urban education today is to learn how to leverage experience within our course frameworks, our training systems, and our projects to move participants into a journey of personal and community transformation. Jesus underscored the principle of leveraged experience when he referred to a dramatic urban tragedy, a tower falling on the residents of the city of Siloam (Luke 13). The dramatic experience itself was not necessarily enough to bring fruit in the lives of people. It was undoubtedly regarded by residents as just one of those unfortunate things that happens in the city—a normal urban headline: “Eighteen People Killed by Falling Tower. Unsafe Materials Blamed.”

But Jesus leveraged it, engaged in reflection on it, and then emphasized a whole-life response.

Similarly the apostle James emphasized that hearing truth was not enough, but that the (experiential) act of doing the truth would bear a blessing (James 1:22–25). David Bosch has called this “doing theology, a hermeneutic of the deed.”

As we think about the leadership development structures we influence, our challenge is to intentionally capture the experience of leaders in our midst and leverage it for all its worth. This commitment acknowledges that their journey of transformation is tied to their calling to be transformational agents. When orchestrated well, that transformation can come in what might be called “hot leaps.” God has designed us to learn; that is our default mode. For example, the experience of burning our hands on a hot stove or a fire as children got implanted deeply in a way that prevents us from touching a hot stove on purpose again. We have truly learned about hot stoves—it’s not like we have some vague memory that we have to call up to remind ourselves that fire is hot. The truth about the stove was learned in an instant, what Laurent Daloz calls a “distinct and recognizable leap.”

I think this leap resembles the development that took place in Peter’s life when he first met Jesus. When Jesus was standing in Peter’s boat speaking to those on the shore, Peter “knew” Jesus primarily as a teacher. But what Peter “knew” about Jesus instantly changed, when Jesus’ instructions led to a miraculous catch. He took a hot leap in his knowledge. But it is not just information. Peter didn’t just know more about Jesus after the catch. Daloz points out that “a 10-year-old does not simply know more than four-year-old; she thinks differently.” Peter now thought differently, and this is what can happen to the learners—the disciples we influence.

Notice in that passage that Jesus makes a point of reflecting openly with Peter on the experience. That reflection rolls right into the invitation to action. He invites Peter to follow him. This is par for the course for Jesus. In Luke 9, Jesus is ready to send his

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14 Daloz.

15 Daloz.
disciples out on their first short-term mission. He prepares them with the skills they will need (the authority to heal, 9:1), he defines their mission (proclamation and healing, 9:2), he sets the parameters for the experience they are about to have (no provisions whatsoever, total dependence on their hosts, and a rejection strategy, 9:3-5), and upon their return he invites them to withdraw together, notably to a city. In many ways, this passage emphasizes four key aspects of experiential discipleship: the inculcation of a new calling and new skills, minimal guidelines and instructions, the testing of those skills (9:6), and a chance to debrief them (9:10). Then, when they were discovered by the crowd, Jesus healed those who were sick, modeling the very thing he had sent his disciples to do.

Action, reflection, action. Experience, when coupled with the slow thought of reflection and the action of application, has the power to help us think differently. This can happen as universities design courses that create disorienting experiences, or as ministries design debriefing experiences that unpack the disorientation that comes inherent in the ministry context.

No Pain, No Grain

When a person is faced with a challenge to their way of seeing, one which has caused a measure of disorientation, and their response is a form of remorse leading to an assessment of who they are or what they think or stand for, something remarkable happens. There is often an awakening of sorts when we realize that the turbulence that we have just gone through is having a positive outcome. It is the recognition that “one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared.”16 We realize the significance of suffering and look for the good that can come from it, knowing it has the potential for God's fruit to emerge. Nelson Mandela’s 27 years in the Robbin Island prison, and his amazing journey following, has become a powerful example.

Consider Joseph who had been abandoned by his brothers in a pit, then trafficked to slave traders who carried him off to Egypt. His world was turned upside down as he went from being his father's favorite son to being a prisoner in a strange land—from “first to
worst” as they say. After a time in jail and a lot more suffering he found himself placed by Pharaoh himself as a high government official in charge of the nation’s agricultural policy, which he excelled at, storing silos of grain that fed the nation during a famine. God drew Joseph’s brothers to Egypt via that famine, and they stood before Joseph. In allaying their fear that he would exact revenge for their treachery all those years ago, Joseph extended his famous olive branch by saying, “you intended it for evil, but God intended it for good.” In this reference we see Joseph’s acknowledgment that his own difficulties and discontent, and the process of transformation—his own transformation into a sub-pharaoh, and Egypt’s transformation into a state of preparedness—were linked. The difficulty and discontent led to the birth of something new. This is part of the necessary skillset of leaders doing transformational work in the city. For Ivan, a former gang member in Fresno, California, now turned urban worker/mentor/activist/seminary student, waking one day to the realization of how God transformed his pain into a powerful kingdom influence was one of the greatest epiphanies of his life. He has become an engine of transformation in one of the highest poverty, highest crime neighborhoods of the city.

Leadership Education

Perhaps the greatest challenge in urban education today is the act of fitting the pedagogy to the leader being trained. To accomplish this, universities, agencies, and ministries must consider the breadth of options—Formal, Informal and Non-formal—available for adaptation with various constituencies. I was grateful to be part of a taskforce at the Lausanne World Congress on Cities in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2004 working on this very question.17 We concluded we had seen effective examples of each form throughout the scriptures and the world, and that leaders involved in equipping next generation kingdom influencers must innovate in all three. Over several years I led versions of each in Ghana, Manila, Jamaica, Mexico, China, and elsewhere.

Formal: The Apostle Paul conducted this form of indigenous leadership training among the elite of cities, andragogies that appealed to formal structures and accepted

understandings of education. In the city of Athens he used lecture and debate among
the academy on the Aereopagus. In Tyrranus he conducted forums at an established
school. He wrote complex letters to leaders in other cities, which were essentially
“formalized instruction and contextualized theology.”18 Obviously this approach fits
the traditional forms that seminaries and Christian universities engage in routinely.
And while the delivery systems for this level of formal education are changing (online,
interactive, more attention being paid to adult learning dynamics), there is still need for
the levels of rigor often required in that format.

Non-formal: Our Lausanne team concluded that non-formal education is
characterized by “immersing an apprentice in direct ministry experience, and
correspondingly by seizing the serendipitous, teachable moments that arise in the
context of ministry by a mentor or leader with more experience. Unlike the informal
approach, these are very organic, not programmatic. Paul’s andragogy included this
tool. For example, he conducted non-formal training when he took urban disciples
with him on his mission trips, sometimes as individuals and sometimes as small, multi-
ethnic teams, or, no doubt, for example, as he exercised individual influence with key
disciples during his imprisonment in the city of Rome.”19 This form of education is often
utilized by long-term missionaries working with indigenous leadership, though some
incarnational mission organizations, such as the Center for Transforming Mission,
have found ways to adapt formal learning pedagogies to absorb leaders who began their
journeys in non-formal settings—leaders in the Kibera slum in Nairobi, for instance.

Informal: Our Lausanne team observed that informal training in the city “uses
orchestrated, experiential learning pedagogies that combine hands-on ministry in
the city with reflection, debriefing, and interactive instruction. Jesus often used this
method as he sent his disciples out, and debriefed their experiences upon their return.
He used urban experiences as teaching tools (Mark 13:1–2, Luke 13:4–5).”20 Unlike
non-formal approaches, these are highly structured, short-term experiences. These are

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
the chief characteristics utilized in urban and global projects and semesters sponsored by campus ministries and universities.

Research has continued to show the importance of combining contextually appropriate curricula and practical experience in the development of leaders to help them understand and accomplish effective ministry in urban contexts. Using case studies of nontraditional urban leadership training programs, Elliston and Kauffman\(^{21}\) established essential pillars of urban theological and experiential preparation, including spiritual formation, practical ministry skills, and basic information about the urban context. They showed that unlike traditional theological institutions that often focus on information, the urban context dictates that leadership development focus as much on character, competencies, and the commitment of the leader, utilizing delivery systems that make sense in the context.

**Eyes on the Horizon**

As universities, ministries, and NGOs working among the urban poor consider their educational strategies and training systems for students and staff, we must invest heavily in the rhythms and resources that will take experiential learning seriously, that recognize the fruitful role of disorientation, and inculcate the fertile cycle of action and reflection in the learning process. When this happens, it inaugurates a whole new set of possibilities in the lives of the learners we walk alongside—new skillsets leading to potential new roles. There may be new choices, new lifestyles, new commitments, or new relationships. There will certainly be new spheres of influence.

The challenge of urban education today must be facilitated by guides who understand the kind of environment that best leads to the transformation of the learner/leader—one characterized by a warm and supportive learning community that leverages experience, extracts meaning from dissonance, provides reflective discourse, and opportunities for committed action.\(^{22}\) This is transformation that leads to a transforming influence. For a few years now, this changing paradigm has been the early light of a new dawn in education. It must now mature to a bright new day.

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Dr. Randy White’s article, “Facing the Urban Sunrise—Educating for Transformation,” has the capacity to nourish those hungry for providing richer, deeper, more meaningful, and effective transformational urban learning for a new generation of students and emerging urban leaders.

White asks, “How can we prepare urban influencers to become people with the skillsets and spirituality to believe in transformation—their own and that of the cities they serve?” This is a question with urgent relevance rooted in the fact that cities are becoming the dominant social reality of the twenty-first century. White’s articulate unpacking of pedagogical and educational principles is a valuable gift and can inspire a new wave of kingdom leaders committed to transforming cities.

The article rings true for me as someone whose life was changed by transformational urban learning experiences as a 19-year-old both in Los Angeles and in Mississippi. But it also rings true for me as one who has led transformational urban learning experiences for the last 40 years, either as a ministry team member, in a challenging urban context, or now as a professor of doctoral students using global cities as classrooms.

A core assumption White makes is that transformational urban educational experiences at their best are rooted in an authentic relationship between those serving and living in urban contexts as educators. He assumes a committed partnership between indigenous leaders and urban ministry practitioners in harsh urban environments, on one hand, and educators, pastors, youth leaders, or others committed to introducing students and emerging leaders to the city, on the other.

Because I’ve known Dr. White and his good work for many years, it is important to note that his thinking in this article, and practitioners like him, espouse a generative
urban theology and pedagogy that can be contrasted with “toxic pedagogy,” which he does not mention.

White’s article is research rich, scanning a variety of theologians, educational philosophers, and urban practitioners. It is theologically rich, with biblical reflections from both Old and New Testaments. And it is practically rich, drawing on specific examples of individuals and settings where transformational urban learning has and is taking place.

University, NGO, and ministry leaders who are crafting transformational learning experiences are the target audience for White’s useful, visionary, and timely framework for transformational urban learning. But, perhaps, this piece would find even better use in the hands of students and emerging leaders themselves. Through the eyes of my former 19-year-old self who, as a privileged, middleclass Southern Californian processing the harsh realities of race, poverty, injustice, and violence in urban L.A., and a recently un-segregated Mississippi in the early 1970s, I think I would have found these thoughts and principles a useful roadmap for interpreting, understanding, and actually finding a shortcut on the journey to my own transformation.

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Introduction

Between October 2011 and June 2013, the Center for the Study of Global Christianity conducted the Survey on Global Theological Education in a partnership sponsored by the World Council of Churches and the Institute for Cross-Cultural Theological Education at McCormick Theological Seminary (Chicago, Illinois). The survey was designed to obtain information on the current and future state of theological education from individuals and institutions. Respondents included theological educators, administrators, students, and pastors.

A summary of the main findings (in both Microsoft Word and PDF formats) can be found online at http://www.globethics.net/web/gtl/research/global-survey. Embedded links in the summary documents enable readers to access more detailed information on the findings, including some of the data by continent and United Nations region. This is especially helpful given that the “main findings” document depicts most results on a global, rather than a continental or regional, basis.

Although the survey did not ask questions specifically about either theological education provided in an urban setting or theological education for ministry in an urban context, the findings nevertheless can inform those seeking to provide such theological education. The following article seeks to show how some of the key results of the survey differed between respondents from the Global North¹ and those from the Global South. The implications for theological education in an urban setting, particularly in the Global South, are then summarized.

¹ In this article, “Global North” includes those respondents identifying their area of ministry as Europe or Northern America (comprising, in practical terms, the United States and Canada) or the United Nations region of Australia/New Zealand. The “Global South” includes respondents identifying their ministry area as Africa, Asia, Latin America (including Mexico and the Caribbean), or one of the other three regions of Oceania. Respondents indicating the scope of their ministry as “global” were not included.
Capacity for Theological Education

Overall, the largest share of respondents (39%) felt that the number of theological schools in their region is well matched to the need (Question 5). Another 36 percent felt that there are too few or far too few theological schools in their region, while 24 percent said that there are either too many or far too many theological schools in their region.

Breaking down the responses by area of ministry, a majority (54%) of respondents in the Global North say that the number of theological schools is well matched to the need in their region. Only 30 percent of respondents from the Global South felt the same way. Conversely, respondents from the Global South were far more likely to say that their region was home to too few or far too few theological schools (47%) than were those from the Global North (20%). Responses from Africa and Latin America were similar to those for the Global South as a whole. The pattern for Asia was much flatter, however, with respondents saying there are too few, enough, and too many theological schools in about equal proportions.

In addition, respondents from the Global South were most likely to report that enrollments of both men and women in theological schools are increasing (Question 10). Those from the Global North were most likely to say that women’s enrollments are increasing (although not to the degree that respondents from the Global South did) while men’s enrollments are staying the same. This correlates well with opinions expressed on the number of theological schools.

Effectiveness of Theological Education

Among all respondents, 69 percent said that theological education in their region is either very effective or moderately effective (Question 6). Another 27 percent said theological education is slightly effective, while 4 percent deemed it not at all effective. Respondents from the Global North were more likely than those from the Global South to consider theological education in their region very or moderately effective, while those in the South were more likely to call it slightly or not at all effective.

Respondents from Asia were more likely than those from Africa or Latin American & the Caribbean to categorize theological education in their region as effective. Those
in Latin American & the Caribbean were most likely to consider theological education in their region to be not at all effective.

Additionally, 63 percent of all respondents said they were either extremely satisfied or moderately satisfied with the leadership and administration of theological education in their region (Question 7); another 20 percent were either extremely dissatisfied or moderately dissatisfied, while 17 percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. As with Question 6 concerning the effectiveness of theological education, respondents from the Global North were more likely than those from the Global South to have a generally favorable opinion.

Unlike the previous question, however, respondents from Africa and Asia were equally likely to be either satisfied or dissatisfied with leadership and administration in their region, while those from Latin America and the Caribbean were less likely to be satisfied and more likely to be dissatisfied (especially moderately dissatisfied). Interestingly, the percentage reporting that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied was remarkably consistent across geographic areas.

Concerning the integrity of leadership, 97 percent of all respondents said that the integrity of senior leaders is either “most important” (80%) or “somewhat important” (17%) in determining the quality of theological education (Question 15); responses were similar between the Global North and Global South (respondents were allowed to choose from 25 different factors and could select more than one as “most important”). It is noteworthy that respondents from the Global South were more likely than those from the Global North (75% versus 64%) to say that integrity of leadership was one of the most important factors for the future of theological education (Question 21), although the percentages of respondents from the areas within the Global South varied greatly (Africa 85%, Asia 72%, and Latin America & the Caribbean 64%).

**Format of Theological Education**

Overall, participants reported that people in their geographic areas are showing increasing interest (Question 8) in theological education provided through theological colleges & seminaries (47%) and online programs (46%). Respondents in the Global North were far more likely to report increasing interest in online programs (61%) than
in theological colleges & seminaries (37%). In the Global South, the situation was the opposite (33% and 52%, respectively)—except, interestingly, in Latin America & the Caribbean, where more than twice as many respondents reported increasing interest in online programs (62%) as theological colleges & seminaries (30%). In fact, theological colleges & seminaries ranked only fifth in that continental area. That fewer Africans reported increasing interest in online programs than did respondents from Latin America and from the Global North is probably not surprising, given that residents of Africa are less likely to have access to the Internet; that the percentage was similar for Asians (27%) and Africans (25%) is perhaps more unexpected.

Several other modes of training showed a large North-South gap as well. Those from the Global South, for example, were twice as likely to say interest in Bible schools was increasing (32% versus 17%), with interest being highest in Africa (41%) and lowest in Latin America & the Caribbean (12%, lower even than for the Global North). Interest in extension programs was also higher in the South (40%) than the North (27%). In this case, however, Latin American & the Caribbean had the most interest (50%).

Respondents from all regions were least likely to say that interest in correspondence programs was increasing, with respondents from the Global North (11%) being somewhat less likely than those from the Global South (16%) to report increasing interest. Even here there was large regional variation, however. Those from Africa were much more likely (22%) to report increasing interest than the average, while those from Latin America & the Caribbean were much less likely to do so (7%).

Interestingly, respondents’ perceptions of the most appropriate formats for theological education (Question 13) did not always match their perceptions of where interest was increasing. For example, participants from all areas were more likely to say that a residential theological college or seminary is an appropriate format for theological education than to report that people in their areas are showing increased interest in that format (by up to 24 percentage points). This was true to a lesser extent for residential university training and for extension degree programs—although respondents from Latin America & the Caribbean were far more likely to note increasing interest in the latter than to consider it an appropriate format.
On the other hand, respondents were much less likely to consider missions or discipleship courses to be appropriate than to note increasing interest in them (particularly discipleship training). With the exception of those in Africa, respondents were also less likely to say that online programs are appropriate; this was especially true of participants from the Global North.

Respondents generally, as well as those from Asia, Latin America & the Caribbean, and the Global South generally, were least likely to favor non-degree programs. Those from Africa gave the lowest support to parish-based programs. Although direct comparison with the responses to Question 8 are not possible due to differences in wording of the choices, it does appear that, in general, participants were less likely to approve of mission or discipleship courses, non-degree programs, and parish-based programs than they were to report increasing interest in mission training courses and local non-ordination training.

Despite the apparent mismatch between respondents’ perceptions of appropriateness of and increasing interest in various formats for theological education, however, a noteworthy pattern emerges. For respondents as a whole, as well as for those from the Global South and each geographic area within it, the delivery format cited as having the most interest corresponded with the format respondents felt was most appropriate (theological colleges and seminaries, except for Latin America & the Caribbean, where it was online programs). This is an encouraging sign, as it seems to indicate that the needs perceived by the two groups correspond well. In contrast, the method of delivering theological education that most respondents in the Global North indicated as having increasing interest was online programs, whereas the method most appropriate for delivering theological education was residential theological colleges and seminaries. Each outscored the next-highest-ranking method by large margins (22 percentage points for most interest and 33 percentage points for most appropriate). This indicates that there is a significant mismatch in the Global North between what potential students appear to want and what theological educators are prepared to offer.

Desires for Theological Education
Perhaps not surprisingly, respondents from all areas indicated that, by far, the
greatest expectation (more than 90%) churches in their regions have for theological education institutions and programs (Question 11) is that they will prepare students for church ministry. Generally speaking, the next three answers—developing skills for communicating the gospel, increasing biblical knowledge, and spiritual formation—clustered fairly closely, with around 70 percent of respondents selecting each. It is noteworthy that each of these competencies can be seen as highly desirable for persons engaged in church-based ministries as well. A fifth answer (developing theological understanding) also was selected by at least half of all respondents from each geographic area, although the percentage choosing it varied more than for the other answers (69% of those in the Global North but only 58% in the Global South).

Preparation for non-church-based ministry was last among all respondents combined as well as among those from the Global South combined, Africa, and Asia. Among those from Latin America & the Caribbean and the Global North, preparation for inter-religious engagement ranked last. (These two responses ranked either last or next-to-last among participants from all geographic areas.) That preparation for non-church ministry might rank lowest is again not surprising, given that the question asked about the expectations of churches. The low ranking of inter-religious engagement is also not surprising for Latin America & the Caribbean and for the Global North, where adherents of non-Christian religions constitute smaller shares of the population than in Africa or Asia. That relatively few respondents from Africa and Asia also ranked it as an expectation of the churches is somewhat puzzling, however.

The following response patterns reflected the differing situations in the different geographic areas:

Fewer respondents in the Global South than in the Global North indicated that churches expect theological institutions and programs to develop students’ theological understanding, equip students for engagement with social issues, or provide students with a general increase in religious knowledge. The reasons for this are unclear, however. For example, do churches in the Global South expect candidates for theological education to possess these skills and
abilities before they begin study, or do they simply not expect them to be transmitted by theological education institutions and programs?

Respondents from Africa were much more likely to consider a general increase in students’ religious knowledge and equipping students for engagement with social issues important than were those from Asia or Latin America & the Caribbean. The latter is not as surprising, given especially Africa’s generally higher social needs than the other regions’.

Respondents from Asia were somewhat less likely to consider increasing students’ biblical knowledge to be important than were respondents from other areas, while respondents from Latin America & the Caribbean were somewhat less likely to consider spiritual formation important than respondents from other areas. This might be because churches in these areas expect students to begin theological studies with a generally higher level of competency in these disciplines than do churches in other areas; with more skill in growing in these disciplines; or with both.

Participants were also offered 17 different choices for programs or individual courses they would like to see added to or strengthened in the theological education institutions and programs in their regions (Question 12) and allowed to select as many as they desired. The largest number of respondents from most areas chose cross-cultural communication; for those from Latin America & the Caribbean, the most frequent choice was social ethics. Notably, the top answer for each area was chosen by more than 50 percent of respondents from that area.

Support for adding or strengthening an area was greater in the Global South than in the Global North for every choice except one (World Christianity, for which support in the Global South was markedly less than in the Global North—perhaps because “World Christianity” is often taken to mean “Christianity in the Global South”). In the cases of missiology, social ethics, preaching/homiletics, environmental studies, and gender studies, support for adding or strengthening instruction was much greater in
the Global South as a whole than in the Global North. In addition, support for both environmental studies and gender studies was notably higher in Africa than in other areas, and support for history & theology was noticeably higher in Latin America & the Caribbean than in other areas. The data are unable to provide an answer as to whether this indicates a lack of current instruction in those particular geographic areas, a lack of interest in the other areas, or a combination of the two. The choice receiving the least support, however, was inter-class dialog for every area (except Asia, where it ranked just ahead of offerings in different languages).

**Financing of Theological Education**

Overall, respondents were most likely to say that supporting churches were one of the primary sources of financial support for theological education in their region (Question 18), closely followed by students. Respondents from the Global South were more likely to say supporting churches (75%, versus 66% for students). Those from the Global North were slightly more likely to say Students (65%, versus 63% for supporting churches). In addition, those in the Global South were more likely to cite external partners as a funding source (57%, versus 27%), whereas those from the Global North were more likely to cite government as a source (30%, versus 7%). Government was by far the least-cited source (besides other) for all areas except the Global North (which listed external partners least frequently).

Those from Africa were more likely than others from the Global South to cite external partners as a source. Those from Asia were more likely to cite individual donors than others from the Global South; more in Asia received support via individual donors than via students as well. Those from Latin America & the Caribbean were less likely to cite supporting churches, individual donors, or external partners than others from the Global South.

Concerning responsibility for supporting theological education (Question 25), 64 percent of all respondents said that denominations are most responsible, with another 33 percent saying they have some responsibility (97% combined share). This was followed by local congregations (52% most, 42% some, 94% combined) and students (28% most, 56% some, 84% combined). “Other” was the only category besides denominations and
local congregations for which “most responsibility” was the leading response (43%). Respondents were least likely overall to say that government has the most responsibility (12%) or some responsibility (20%).

Generally, those from the Global South were more likely than their counterparts from the Global North (and often greatly so) to label a potential supporter as “most responsible.” The disparity was greatest for local congregations (62% from Global South versus just 38% from the Global North). For several categories (development agencies, ecumenical agencies; to a lesser degree mission agencies, alumni) this distinction remained even when “most responsibility” and “some responsibility” were combined.

Respondents from Latin America & the Caribbean were the most likely to say that government has no responsibility for supporting theological education. This was greater than the percentage of those from the Global North (42%) who shared that opinion.

A plurality of respondents (47%) said that theological education in their region was financially unstable (Question 19); 33 percent said it was more or less financially stable. A majority of respondents in the Global South (54%) said theological education was financially unstable in their region, whereas a plurality (48%) of those in the Global North said it was more or less financially stable. Those in the Global North were most likely to describe the situation as “financially stable”; that figure was only 4 percent, however. Only one out of Africa’s 205 respondents said the situation where they were is financially stable.

Globally, 16 percent of respondents described the situation in their region as one of financial crisis. That figure was highest in Africa and in Latin America & the Caribbean (29%); for the Global South generally it was 23 percent, and for Asia 15 percent. For the Global North it was 9 percent.

**Future of Theological Education**

The majority of respondents (57%) said that the present state of theological education in their region was somewhat stable (Question 20). The percentage was highest in Asia (63%) and lowest in Latin America & the Caribbean (48%). Those in Latin America & the Caribbean were more likely (34%) than respondents in other regions to say that theological education was losing stability in their region. They were also more
likely than those in other regions to say that theological education was in crisis (16%), followed by those in Africa (12%). Those in the Global North were more likely to say the status was completely stable (8%) and less likely to say it was in crisis (5%) than those in the Global South (5% and 8%, respectively).

Concerning the future of theological education (Question 21), respondents from the Global South generally were more likely to consider one of the 11 factors presented “most important” than were those from the Global North (respondents could select more than one “most important” factor). The largest margin of difference was for interdenominational cooperation (48% South versus 31% North). The exceptions were high quality faculty (tied at 67%) and accessibility and supply of students (42% North versus 38% South).

Vision, along with integrity of leadership (as was mentioned previously), was selected as important by the most respondents. For every area except Africa, vision was ranked first (in the Global North, vision tied with high quality faculty for first). Integrity of leadership, as chosen by Africans, received the largest share of any factor/region combination (85%). The largest gap between the first- and second-ranked choices was in Latin America & the Caribbean (vision 72%, integrity of leadership 63%).

Recognition by higher education was selected by the fewest respondents globally (33%), as well as the fewest from both the Global South and the Global North and from Africa and Asia. Among those from Latin America & the Caribbean, accessibility and supply of students was selected by the fewest as most important (32%, versus 42% for recognition by higher education).

Those from Africa were more likely to cite a particular factor as important than were those from other parts of the Global South (except high quality faculty, which a slightly higher percentage from Asia—69% versus 68%—cited as important). Respondents from Latin America & the Caribbean were generally less likely to cite a factor as important, with the exception of financial support (where they tied with Asia, 60%, versus 74% for Africa); mission mindedness (where they were only slightly below Africa and Asia); accessibility and supply of students (where they were roughly tied with Asia); and access to educational technology (which they chose much more frequently than Asia,
46% versus 33%, and about the same as Africa’s 50%).

Finally, more than 85 percent of respondents said theological education is “most important” to the future of world Christianity (Question 22). The proportion was higher in the Global South (88%) than in the Global North (74%) and was highest in Africa (95%). Another 15 percent said it was “somewhat important”; the figure was 24 percent in the Global North versus 12 percent in the Global South.

Among all respondents 0.2 percent said it was “not very important” and less than 0.1 percent said it was “not important”. In the Global South those figures were 0.2 percent and 0.0 percent (the 0.4% of Asian respondents who selected not very important were the only ones in the Global South who did not select most important or somewhat important), while in the Global North they were 1.3 percent and 0.9 percent, respectively.

**Implications for Urban Theological Education**

Broadly speaking, respondents from the Global South were more likely than their counterparts for the Global North to say that

- More providers of theological education are needed
- Theological education as currently provided is only somewhat effective or not at all effective
- They are either extremely dissatisfied or moderately dissatisfied with the leadership and administration of theological education in their regions
- Integrity of leadership is one of the most important factors for the future of theological education
- Institutions and programs should add or strengthen their offerings, across a wide variety of curriculum areas
- Supporting churches and external partners are significant sources of financial support for theological education
- A potential source (across a broad spectrum) is “most responsible” (and, in some cases, either most or “somewhat” responsible) for providing financial support
- Theological education is financially unstable or facing a financial crisis
• Any given factor (in a list presented) that might affect the future of theological education is “most important”

• Theological education is “most important” to the future of world Christianity

In addition, the perceptions of those in the Global South as to the most appropriate formats for theological education align more closely with the formats in which potential candidates are most interested than do the perceptions of those in the Global North (although providers from all regions tended to “over-favor” training at residential “brick-and-mortar” campuses and undervalue online training or other forms of distance education relative to perceived demand).

Finally, the Global South is not monolithic (and thus neither are the requirements for effective urban theological education there). Respondents from Latin America & the Caribbean, for example, tended to be more critical of the state of theological education (both financial and generally) than did those from Africa or Asia. They also tended to favor the use of technology and distance education more.

Respondents from Africa, for their part, tended to assign greater importance or significance to factors presented as potentially affecting theological education than did respondents from the other parts of the Global South. They also tended to assign a very high value to integrity in leadership and to indicate that outside sources (such as mission or development agencies) were a significant source of funding for theological education.

Finally, those from Asia were more likely to categorize theological education as effective and as stable. They were also more likely to identify individual donors as a source of funding. On the other hand, they were less likely to show a sharp divergence from the combined response for the Global South as a whole than were responses from the other two areas.

Albert (Bert) Hickman is a research associate in Global Christianity at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity and an associate editor of the *Atlas of Global Christianity*.
Bert Hickman has made a great deal of information available to those of us who think seriously about the theme for this issue of *New Urban World*, “Urban Challenges to Education.” As Bert acknowledges, this survey was not specifically aimed at the urban context; however, it does provide a goldmine of ideas and data that can and should inform the urban educator. We have known for some time, decades in fact, that there is a great disparity between the theological education that is packaged and delivered in the Global North as compared to the Global South. Stories abound of how missionaries, educators, and theologians have taken the curriculum, books, and other pieces of the academic machine off the shelf and given that very same program to those in Africa, Asia, and Latin America without first seeking to understand the local context and the needs of the local churches they have come to plant and serve. Unfortunately, the North giving to the South mentality is still with us.

Hickman also highlights some of the key areas in which this disparity is the greatest. Access to quality theological education is an important item that the urban educator must analyze carefully. What delivery system is used, where is education made available, on what schedule is it offered? Brick-and-mortar university and seminary buildings are just one approach. Online delivery, extension sites, seminars, and intensives are all tried and proven effective methods. The big question is creating access to the education that is being offered. The question of appropriate technology must also be considered. All of these must meet the needs in the local context. We need to hear clearly what this survey is saying. Hickman underscores a key problem when he writes, “This indicates that there is a significant mismatch in the Global North between what potential students
appear to want and what theological educators are prepared to offer."

Even more importantly, learner selection is critical. Often we have spent our educational time on the wrong people. These are the ones who can get to the residential university or seminary. They don’t have a job, they don’t have other responsibilities, and so they are available on our Western timetable of 9 to 5. The challenge is to structure the delivery system mix in such a way as the true leaders in an area can benefit from the education that we are very willing to offer. All the possible delivery systems need to be evaluated in the urban context in which it is offered.

Another critical area has to do with finance. So long as schools in the North continue to charge high tuition—even discounted from their “normal” tuition on campus in North America, Europe, Australia, or New Zealand—education will remain out of reach for many who would be benefit from our efforts. Whether we find donors who will fund scholarships or donors who will fund an education center being established out of which will flow the delivery of education in appropriate ways to the right people. We need to hear clearly what the survey participants are saying to those of us in the West who think we have all the answers on how education should be delivered and what the content needs to be.

Since 85 percent of the respondents to the survey believe that theological education is “most important” to the future of world Christianity, as urban mission educators, scholar-activists, and those sub-merged in difficult places on earth, we need to listen and learn what is best in the context where we serve. Bert Hickman has given us a great deal to think about and digest, and principles to apply in our urban ministry context.

As urban missiologists and practitioners/activists, we need to get the right curriculum, delivered in contextually and technologically appropriate ways, to the right people, at an affordable price, in the context where education is offered.

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“What is God’s design for our urban neighborhood? Where is he at work here?” The kingdom witnesses embedded within the cities throughout the world must constantly pose these questions as they each live out their gospel witness in their contexts. Every decision, every prayer, every time of gathering is animated by these questions, for the witnesses are called to walk with God in their particular locales. For their answer, they must return time and again to God’s revelation, and call on God’s Spirit to illumine their world in light of the Word.

Missional engagement with the world requires a biblical prophetic imagination that enables us to see our world anew. This prophetic imagination does not, however, simply descend upon us out of a transcendent, idealized realm when we open up the Scriptures in secluded, ivory tower studies. Rather, it is forged out of a dynamic discourse between our messy context and the text of God—an ongoing wrestling between our lived, concrete situations and the ancient words that reveal the God who created and rules over our world here and now. This process has been called the “hermeneutical spiral” (Osbourne 2006).

Because God’s people believe that the Spirit of God is at work in this world, we believe that his text speaks to our concrete contexts, on the one hand; on the other, we believe our contexts give us the eyes to see and the ears to hear the message of the text for us and our communities. This is equally true of marginalized urban communities about which we are tempted to ask, “Can the gospel really work here?” (Smith 2011)

A Return to the Beginning

It is instructive for us to go back to the beginning of the biblical narrative in order to perceive the narrative of God in our own urban contexts. Here, in the beginning, the trajectory of redemptive history to follow is set; it not only informs our past, it points
us to our future and thus shapes our present. This is how in Genesis 1 we are able to unearth the seeds of our (and our communities’) identity and purpose within the redemptive narrative of God for the sake of their flowering into eschatological glory. So while this article is not meant to be an in-depth treatment of Genesis 1, we will need to read the text closely to answer the question, “What news does it proclaim to our cities?”

Genesis 1 is a retelling of the creation stories in the ancient Near East, with a twist (Enns and Byas 2012). For example, in the Babylonian creation story of Enuma Elish, the god Marduk had a longstanding feud with his great-grandmother Tiamat. He got into such a violent fit of rage with her at one time that he cut her into two pieces and made the world with her corpse. Genesis 1 echoes this story when God separates water from water to make the sky on Day 2. In the Enuma Elish, Marduk uses half of Tiamat’s body to do this work of separating. But in Genesis 1, God simply uses his words. The original people reading Genesis 1 knew the Babylonian story and they would have understood its point: The God who created heaven and earth isn’t some silly, violent, super-powered being who made a mess out of making this world.

In contrast, the one and only true God is perfectly wise, almighty, and sovereign—he is in complete control. He made this world by the power of his word, and he made it perfectly. The reason it’s a mess is because we made a mess of it, not him. And if we’re going to have any hope in this life, God needs to save us and make things right again by defeating chaos and desolation once again.

Genesis 1 is also the account of a Creator who methodically takes on the forces of chaos and desolation (tōhû wêbôhû) in the course of six days and utterly triumphs over them. In course of the first three days, God brings to order chaos and disarray; this work results in organized, separated, and differentiated spaces or realms. During the next three days, God populates each of those spaces with living beings appropriate to each realm—sun, moon, and stars for night and day; fish for the sea; and so on. The end result is the complete defeat of chaos and emptiness, and a world that is beautifully and triumphantly ordered and teeming with life.1 Humankind is created on the last day in God’s image and placed in this world, as a sign of his victory and life-giving rule over

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1 For a much more detailed discussion on the motif of God’s conflict with tōhû wêbôhû which lies outside the scope of this article, see Tsumura 2005, 9-35.
creation, and the whole thing is declared to be “very good.”

Notice the structure, the order, of how the narrative is told. Day 1 is God creating light; Day 4 is God creating light-producing entities. Day 2 is God creating the sky and sea; Day 5 is God filling the sky and the sea; and so on. It’s absolutely parallel.

Thus the message of Genesis 1 is this: God designed all creation with absolute wisdom; he didn’t go about the work haphazardly or brutally like the other gods in the other creation stories; he made it all with great skill and care. Everything interlocks perfectly; everything works and lives together in perfect harmony. God has made a well-ordered, beautiful world teeming with life for us his creatures.

Often, neighbors in our communities feel as though their life and their world are a complete mess. Their picture of God might resemble that of Marduk more than the God of the Bible. They may believe that their life is up to them, and they can rely on only their own wits and strength to make it. Genesis 1 however says to them here that God is in complete control. He brings life out of death. He triumphs over chaos and desolation. There is no contest. It follows then that the God who made heaven and earth wants their complete trust, for he alone can defeat the chaos and death that threaten to overrun their world. What he has done before, he can do again.

In fact, he will do so again—that is the story of the rest of Scripture. (You might even say Genesis 1 is an anticipatory resurrection story.) This story was told to people on the other side of the fall; in other words, it was written for people suffering from all the curses of living outside of the garden. Nevertheless, what was once will be again. The creation story is told to let us know that one day all this will take place again. Once again, God will beat back chaos in our streets and bring about order; once again, God will fill up what used to be empty, desolate, and abandoned with abundant life so that life flourishes everywhere we look.

The Image and the Mandate

Urban dwellers are not only called to put their trust in the Creator and Savior God, they are also called to participate in his redemptive work of the city—we find the impetus in Genesis 1:28, which many have called the cultural mandate, and which “could just as easily be called an urban mandate” (Conn and Ortiz 2001, 87). Created originally
in God’s image and likeness, in other words, as his representatives on earth (Wenham 1987, 29–32), each urban dweller is called on to reclaim his or her rightful place in God’s kingdom, no matter how lowborn or marginalized their station in this world. They are to do so by coming under God’s kingship, and carrying out his original urban intention and design, forsaking life in the old urban regimes. Their mission is an echo of God’s original work of creation—bring order to chaos; fill up the world with life. So we build cities and neighborhoods marked by God’s *shalom*; we design and plan places to live and work which will bless the world; we govern, lead, and form societies and communities under the directives of God’s justice and righteousness in such a way that it encourages the whole creation to grow and flourish, just as God always intended. We are not to settle, and allow the forces of chaos and death rule the day. We are to fight against these forces as God has done and is doing, and seek life. In this way, we are redeemed and re-commissioned to image the God of creation and redemption in our urban contexts.

However, who is equal to such a task? Douglas J. Green has coined the term “Christotelic” to refer to a reading strategy of the Old Testament that has an eye towards the climax in the story of Jesus (Green 2010, 38). Genesis 1 is situated at the very beginning of the story of redemption, and at this early stage anticipates the *telos* in Christ. When we come to the New Testament, we discover what God has been up to. John says that the Word was with God in the beginning, at creation (John 1:1–2; 1 John 1:1–3). Paul says, “For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him” (Col 1:16). And this Son of God who created all things comes as one of us to give his body as the seed of new creation. He is sown into death, so he could be raised to new life, and with him the whole creation be raised to new life. In the end, when it’s all said and done, everything will be “very good” once again. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). What once was will be once again. He will replace our chaos with order and our desolation with abundance.
Jesus does this by fulfilling God’s command to be his image and likeness and by successfully carrying out the mandate. Where the first Adam failed to keep the covenant, the second Adam succeeded. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that Christ became the second Adam, the second image of God, for the second creation. And because Jesus was perfectly successful as God’s image, he brought in a new genesis, a new creation, where the glory, the joy, the good life in a good world that we lost is restored.

We are called to image God, and we must, with faith and courage, reclaiming our identity and destiny. But there is One who, unlike us, did not fail and carried out this mission to its fullest extent—even to death on the cross—and he did it on our behalf. Because of him, new creation and New Jerusalem is assured for us. Victory over chaos and death is assured. Therefore we do not lose hope even as we dedicate our lives to struggle against what appears to be overwhelming odds in our cities and sometimes get overwhelmed and wounded. Shalom is near. Christ has secured it, and his Spirit brings it to us and leads us in it.

Urban proclaimers of this good news must hold out this prophetic vision for their neighbors and friends in a way that can make sense out of their places and lives within them.

A Case Study of Urban Missional Reading of Genesis 1

I live and minister in the Germantown neighborhood in Philadelphia, where for more than 10 years I took part in a church-planting effort. Germantown used to be populated by children of German immigrants to North America, but like so many urban neighborhoods in America, experienced white flight and the resulting socioeconomic collapse in the latter part of the twentieth century. There are rumors of neighborhood renewal, but Germantown’s historic high school was recently shut down, a victim of the troubled Philadelphia School District’s deep financial hole. Many blocks have long been made up of Section 8 (government-subsidized) rental properties and abandoned structures, and many of their residents have lived for generations under the national poverty line.

For many years, I helped to run a summer street camp for the neighborhood kids. Along the way, I realized that many Bible study curriculums didn’t speak to our inner
city context—they usually assumed a middleclass suburban audience. So a friend who also ran his own camp in North Philly and I collaborated to produce our own Bible curriculums that had our neighborhood children in mind. The first Bible book we worked on was Genesis. For the lessons covering creation and fall, I produced two illustrations—one for the very good creation that God had always intended for his image-bearers, and another for the alienation that came upon every dimension of life and kind of relationships that we experience.

“The Fall” portrays chaos and desolation: Before God’s work of creation, and after the fall, the place is a war-zone, with crumbling, burned up shells of houses; trash and debris spilling out and filling up the spaces; graffiti and vandalism are everywhere; the church is shut up tight like a fortress; the corner store is abandoned; the only economic activity going on is a corner drug deal; a man is a shell of himself; a police helicopter is flying overhead—the place is a police state, where fear rules. The kids could identify with this because they’ve seen it and lived it in our neighborhood.
But they could also identify with the other picture that portrayed *shalom*, the state of the world when God is done with his work of creation, his good design for the world, which is fulfilled in Christ. The houses are in good condition for people to live in; they live in safety and in harmony with each other; there is no fear in the interactions, only neighborliness; kids are playing on the streets and thriving; the streets are clean and bright; the church is open to the community and there is neighboring (“missional engagement”) going on right on its doorsteps; the corner store is open for business and employment.

Kids took a look at this picture and they resonated with it too, because they know what a good community looks like. They have lived through episodes of this for themselves; besides, there is an indelible memory of eternity in each of us. The children’s hearts instinctively long for *shalom*.

The gospel of Jesus Christ tells our neighborhood kids that God has defeated the powers of chaos and death and brought in order and life because God’s own Son took on all the dark powers and utterly triumphed over them on the cross. One day, God’s people will have *shalom*, the “very good” creation, under God’s blessing. In the
meantime, we can experience that victory as we see people, families, communities, and cities be transformed from places where chaos and desolation reigns to places of life and order. We can have glimpses, not full, but real, substantial occurrences, of the kingdom of God that Jesus has secured for us. God’s good design for his creation will be realized fully one day; but we can taste and see it today in our inner-city community.

Conclusion

This kind of reading can, I believe, help us become better missional communities of Christ. The gospel that has transformed us is also at work transforming this fallen world into a redeemed world; fallen cities into redeemed cities. The church’s imagination will need to be captured by this biblical vision so that we might faithfully, courageously, and joyfully engage our hurting, chaotic, and desolate but also joyous, God’s-glory-reflecting, and groaning-for-redemption world.

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Kyuboem Lee has written a thoughtful piece that demonstrates the abiding relevance of Genesis 1 for urban mission today. He rightly notes that we live in a world filled with chaos and desolation. It is therefore good news that our God has power to bring order where there is mayhem and to fill the empty wastelands with good gifts. Lee has also done well to note that this divine work stands in contrast to the destructive work of ancient Near Eastern gods whose role in creation is to bring order to their own chaos and destructiveness.

In reading Genesis 1 in light of the theme of *chaoskampf*—the struggle against chaos—Lee stands on the shoulders of several Bible scholars. They draw upon Old Testament passages that depict creation in terms of divine victory over the primordial beasts of the tumultuous seas, including Psalms 74:13-14, 89:10, and Job 26:12. Though there is widespread agreement that creation is depicted as victory over chaos in these passages, scholars do not agree that the same is intended in Genesis 1. The primary evidence of chaos in Genesis 1 is the phrase *tôhû wĕbômûhû*, often translated as “chaos and desolation.” This phrase, in English, tends to communicate that some sort of riot, war, or catastrophe has produced a state of chaos that needs to be suppressed. Though the Hebrew words are elastic enough to carry this meaning, they may also simply mean “formless and empty” or “unformed and unfilled.”

Because there is no clear breakdown into chaos in Genesis 1 (contrary to the so-called gap theory which advocates an original fall in verse 2 from the original creation of verse 1) and because this verse is followed by three days of forming and three days of filling, as Lee observes, it seems likely that *tôhû wĕbômûhû* carries this more neutral connotation. This is supported by the fact that God is depicted as the creator and not the defeater of the sea monsters in verse 21. Indeed, Psalms 104:26 highlights that God
made the Leviathan to “sport in the sea.”

Genesis does not begin with original disarray that God needed to step in and straighten out; it simply describes an orderly process by which the forming of diverse domains must precede the filling of those domains. There is a natural wildness to the creeping critters, swarming creatures, and teeming waters that God tames by separating waters from waters, and then from land, but such wildness is not like the conflict between Babylonian or Canaanites gods, or the violence that fills city streets. It is more like the disorderly playfulness of a pile of newborn puppies. It is part of the goodness of creation. Genesis 1 conveys an original peace from which creation does not fall until Genesis 3. Only sin brings about the kind of conflictual chaos that God must overcome.

So I agree with Lee that Genesis 1 depicts God as one who wields power to bring order to creation. This is good news for the roughest neighborhood, and Lee has captured it so vividly in his artwork. Yet I prefer to put a bit more distance between Genesis 1:2 and the kind chaos that sin begets and that destroys neighborhoods. Though God's redemptive work in creation certainly entails triumph over chaos and desolation, and though a few other Bible passages convey God's creative work in similar terms, there may be value in preserving the small bit of original peace that we find in the first two chapters and verses of Scripture. For Old and New Testament prophets, it becomes a powerful vision of God's future restoration of creation. There may also be value in distinguishing between the kind of disorder that must be arranged and contained and the kind of chaos that must be overcome. The last thing we want to do, especially in the context of urban mission, is to triumph over that which only needed to find its proper place.

Dr. John C. Nugent is a Long Island native and Professor of Old Testament at his alma mater, Great Lakes Christian College in Lansing, Michigan. His publications include The Politics of Yahweh (Cascade Books, 2011), Radical Christian Discipleship (Herald Press, 2012), and Revolutionary Christian Citizenship (Herald Press, 2013). John and his family are committed members of Delta Community Christian Church.
URBAN CHALLENGES TO LEARNING: LATVIAN CONTEXT

By Dr. Vitali Petrenko

Have you heard of a country where 36.6 percent of the population is subjected to the risks of poverty and social deprivation? A country which occupies the second place in the decline of its population within the European Union (EU). The population declined by 21,000 people only in the year 2013. Between 2000 and 2011 only, the population fell by 13 percent and is still falling. Currently the population stands at around 2.1 million. This country also has the lowest expenditure on social protection in Europe? Yes, we are talking about Latvia! The country which entered the EU in 2004 and continues to struggle along, battling its way through the latest financial world crisis and some wider global issues. This scenario inevitably touch and affect this small and beautiful country.

Geographically, Latvia is on the eastern border of Eastern Europe and EU, sharing a common border with Estonia, Russia, Belorussia and Lithuania. This partially explains the presence of a huge segment of non-Latvian population, which complicates the ethnic structure and fabric of Latvian society producing tension between Latvian and non-Latvian population. About a quarter of the population is Russian-speaking and the rights of this section of society have been a thorny issue since independence. Sadly ethnic divisions along the fault-lines of Latvian versus non-Latvian didn't bypass the Christian world. The contemporary churches in Latvia to a large extent exist in the mode of ethnic segregation of Latvian-speaking churches versus Russian-speaking churches.

Additionally, history does play a major factor in Latvia. The Second World War

1 36.6% of Latvian population are on the poverty line or beyond (social exclusion) according to Eurostat in 2012. See http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database

2 Latvian 59.3%, Russian 27.8%, Belarussian 3.6%, Ukrainian 2.5%, Polish 2.4%, Lithuanian 1.3%, other 3.1% (2009). Source: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lg.html
represents an issue of contention. The two communities operate within a different historical discourse... Whilst Russian-speaking people gravitate towards Russia's perspective on victory over Nazism and celebrate the liberation of Riga and Latvia, Latvians tend to view the events of the Second World War from a different perspective, viewing Soviet troops as occupiers and the liberation of Riga and Latvia as the beginning of the occupation of Latvia.

This is the environment in which our Latvian and Russian-speaking students live and come from. Let me introduce ourselves. We are the Latvian Biblical Centre (LBC), which is located in the capital of Latvia, Riga. We are a non-denominational, theological training centre dedicated to the task of equipping and building bridges between different ethnic groups and denominations in order to equip them for work and ministry in and outside of the Church in Latvia and beyond. LBC has a main campus in Riga and extensions in different parts of Latvia, which is a part of our strategic vision of affecting Latvia.

One of the major challenges that our students come across is the general economic situation in Latvia. The educational programs at LBC are designed in such a way so that students could work during the day and study in the evening. This looks like a flexible and convenient approach, which suits everyone. However, life is a bit more complicated than that. The general situation is such that an average salary is very low, according to European standards, and therefore quite a few of our students have to work in two different, and in some cases even three different, jobs in order to sustain their families. Life in Latvia is generally perceived to be very challenging even if you are lucky to have a job. This creates a sense of fatigue and tiredness for students, who have worked during the day and sometimes on the weekends, and come to study at LBC during the week from Monday to Friday from 18:00-21:00. This in turn, creates some additional challenges for teachers, who are forced to do a “balancing act” as to how to design a particular course in order to accommodate the needs and circumstances of our students without sacrificing the quality of the material and maintaining the academic standards of LBC programs.

Yet, time and again, the staff at LBC is amazed to see the astonishing cases of zeal
and perseverance of our students in their desire to study God’s Word. In some cases, the students who were unemployed at the time, were either walking or riding their bicycles through the city of Riga around 5-8 km all year around. It was even more astonishing to see this happening in the middle of the winter when temperatures in Latvia could drop down to -30°C.³

It shows that our people during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods worked out a certain degree of resilience and ingenuity, and their creativity and zeal do not have any boundaries. It is a joy and privilege to serve and equip such people at LBC.

Dr. Vitali Petrenko was born in Gomel, Buelorussia, in 1965. He was involved in missionary, evangelistic, and church planting work in the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s to early 1990s. He received his education from The London School of Theology, Brunel University, and his PhD from Durham University in the U.K. He is currently the Director of the Latvian Biblical Centre and Associate Professor at the Norwegian School of Leadership and Theology, Oslo, Norway. He is the Senior lecturer of Church History and Research Fellow at Greenwich School of Theology, U.K., and North-West University, South Africa. Vitali is married to Ester, and they have one son, Lukas.

³ That especially happened in the midst of the world financial crisis in 2008-2011, when Latvia was one of the countries hit hardest within the EU.
The first fence that I ever hated
was the electric fence that I peed on as a child,
it was not a fun day.

There are after all only two types of people:
those who learn from others who have gone before them,
and those who just have to go and pee on the fence themselves.
I was the latter.

I've never liked fences

The second fence I ever hated
was of the corrugated iron variety.
It stood tall behind my hotel in Vanuatu.
The peek of a boy face over the top,
I wondered who he was,
walked from hotel room across lush green grass,
stood on tiptoes, my own teenage face glancing over the fence to see,
the boy and his sister,
standing knee-high in rubbish and the scrimmage of desperation.
I lent on the fence,
where lush green grass abruptly stopped
and the dirt of an ugly city began.
A separation of two worlds.
The grass is never greener on the other side, 
when we are the ones who keep 
all the water upon our own turf.

I've never liked fences. 
those things that divide us, 
stacked between us. 
Built high to hold them out, to hold us in, 
but holding is not really the right word, 
fences do not hold us, 
they scare us, into rigidity, into security, into a small space, 
to keep them out, to keep us in, the learned and the unlearned.

I have stood on the Palestinian side of the border, 
yelled blue murder at the Israelis, until I met one. 
I have walked, in Berlin, the wall that was torn down, 
25 years the separation of mother from daughter from child from son. 
Stood in Dachau prison camp, 
placed hands upon the barbed wire of genocide. 
I have stood in Belfast at the peace wall 
where bullets fired from Catholic guns into Protestant mouths 
and Protestant mouths spat them back into Catholic faces. 
I do not know why we would ever call it a peace wall. 
No wall has ever been. 
Have you ever been to Wall Street? 
Our fences are not always physical 
the economic fence between top floor management and beggars on the street,
between the haves and the have-nots,
where the money is and where it is not,
the white picket fence is not as innocent as we once thought.
Education is indoctrination of the some who have access.
It is subjugation of all the others.

I've never liked fences,
We build walls and I don't know where to stand,
Fences held up by the left and their refusal to listen,
Fences held up by the right and their refusal to be wrong.
Held up by the Christians, held up by the Atheists,
Held up by the pro-choice, held up by the pro-life,
This violence is getting us no where.
The children who need the most help
they have fallen, have been forgotten in the middle of our battlefields.
We do not hear their cries, deafened by our own guns.
What would occur if we refused to march on either side
until we have held in our arms the wounded between us,
taken bullets from their bodies,
realised these bullets have been fired from our own kind.

Bullets do not discriminate no matter our opinion,
In the end, it was Solzhenitsyn who said,
that the fence that separates the good from the evil never ever runs between us,
it runs down the centre of us all, cuts through the heart of every human,
and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?
I've never liked fences.
Between force and retaliation,
Between us and them and them and us,
Between the violence of our wars
Between the fences that demarcate what is mine from what is yours,
my land from yours, your land from theirs,
anywhere must be better than this.

They say that it is not good to sit on the fence
Yet I am wondering if
To sit on the fence,
is exactly where we should be.
Not just twiddling thumbs,
but with chisel in hand, with hammer and with axe
to swing till the wall is torn down.

And if I can't bring down the large ones out there,
then I can start by tearing down the one inside.

I have never liked fences.

Joel McKerrow is a performance poet, author, educator, and activist from Melbourne, Australia. He is the founder of The Centre for Poetics and Justice, a not-for-profit community arts organization focused on using poetics as a form of literary education, self-expression, and social engagement for marginalised teenagers.
About four years ago, Nigel and I began to consider a move into a struggling inner-city area for a number of reasons. As we looked together at the example set for us by Jesus himself, we saw that “though he was rich, yet for [our] sake he became poor, so that [we] through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). I felt that this was my key motivation: to become poorer so that others around me might become rich, in the words of Mother Teresa “to live simply so that others might simply live,” and as Gandhi put it, to become the change I wanted to see in the world. We wanted our Christian convictions to really touch those around us. We wanted to identify with the suffering of the marginalised so that we could more fully understand them in their desperate situations. We wanted also, where possible, to work together with them to discover some solutions to these situations.

Initially we were overcome by fears and questions, mostly about danger and sacrifice. Not surprisingly, many of my questions were concerning my children. I asked simple questions like:

- How would my children manage without their beautiful garden, without their swimming pool?
- How would they fit into a very congested neighbourhood where they were the only white kids?
- How would my then five children squeeze into one bedroom? What would their reactions be to all the challenges that lay ahead of them? And would we be accepted as a family into a community so different from us anyway?

As for our safety, I wondered whether any of us would experience real danger, like theft, physical assault, trafficking, murder, rape. I also wondered especially what the effects of all of the new experiences in Hillbrow would be on the development and education of my children collectively. And I questioned many times whether this huge
change in all of our lives was best for any of us.

Thankfully it was around this time that we listened to some very powerful and life-changing sermons by some inspiring individuals, one of which taught us about the short string versus the long string approach to life—that is, seeing our lives on earth as a very short yet effective time where every sacrifice made for Jesus counts toward the infinitely long time awaiting all of us, namely eternity. More recently we also read *Surprised by Hope* by N. T. Wright, and learned further that we were here on earth to rebuild and prepare the earth for the return and rule of a returning Lord and Saviour. All of our questions and fears were laid to rest under both of these foundational truths and so any sacrifices made or sufferings experienced were nothing in comparison with the amazing future that lay ahead of us. And Jesus was worth it all anyway!

What has happened in our lives as a result of our Hillbrow move over the last year and a half has been not only surprising, but also sustainable, life-giving, and nothing short of absolutely amazing! Many of our fears have been unfounded. Our questions have been answered by numerous acts of God’s grace and favour towards us.

The fear of bad things happening to us has become real and meaningful as we have learned how to sow love back into the places where violence and hatred sought to rob us of it. The fear of my children giving up a large and spacious place with a garden and a pool in order to squeeze into a small flat with bare concrete to play on has been surpassed by the richness of the friendships they now have in our vibrant community and their ability to relate to the issues experienced by these friends, while playing downstairs in a kids’ play area specially designed and secured for this purpose. The fears surrounding our acceptance as a family into our new community and our kids’ ability to fit into a completely different culture all around them have been alleviated by the many encouraging encounters with supportive and hospitable neighbours and their families. In answer to my question of how my children would respond to the many new challenges facing them in Hillbrow, I have seen a maturity developing in each of them as they experience difficulties and as they comment on the wide differences between their suburban friends compared to their city friends.

Where we have given up some privileges as rich, middleclass citizens, God has again
and again given back generously. I have seen this particularly in my recent search for schools for my oldest three children when it became impossible for me to manage the increased load and life changes associated with the birth of my sixth baby, John Francis, in July this year. Since 2009, I had homeschooled all of my children, but realized later this year that I would have to give up my high ideals of home education due to a much more busy lifestyle in the city—not the least of which were all the visits we were getting from various interested parties, among them the media. Amazingly, God opened doors: two schools for my two oldest daughters from October this year.

My greatest question was, of course, whether this life change was the best for any of us and to this I can honestly say that we have all come alive with what we now live for. We love Hillbrow and its incredibly resilient and multi-cultured people; we have experienced firsthand what it is to lay down our lives for Jesus only to find them again, and God continues to prove to us that his words are true, that he is forever faithful, and that he is with us in what we now do.

Trish Branken and her husband Nigel, together with their six children, have lived in the notoriously dangerous inner-city area of Hillbrow, Johannesburg, since May 2012. By living out their lives intentionally and in solidarity with their new neighbours, they seek to become the change they want to see in the world. Trish homeschools some of her children, runs a learning centre in the afternoons for their community, and volunteers at the Hillbrow Music School once a week.
When my wife and I moved into Hillbrow, Johannesburg, over a year and a half ago, the main concern expressed by many of our loving friends was for our children. People literally asked questions like “What if one of them is kidnapped, raped or murdered?” Hillbrow is just one of those communities which seem to invoke fear.

However, we were convinced that God had spoken to us about moving into the neighbourhood, about downward mobility, and about standing in solidarity with our urban poor neighbours. Trish and I had long discussions about the call of God on our lives, and in fact the potential suffering that following Jesus may cost any believer, and therefore also us. The question we had to answer was whose voice would be louder…the voice of God or the voice of fear.

We searched the Scriptures and were convinced that if Jesus were alive today, he would be spending his life not in comfort and convenience, but rather in places like Hillbrow as friends of prostitutes, drug dealers, and the homeless. The more I studied Scripture, the more I became aware of the dangers of greed, individualism, and consumerism.

We drew courage from reframing the question as this: what is more dangerous for our children, given the realities of eternity—to grow up in a society and culture which teaches you to worship the unholy trinity of “me, myself, and I” or to be in a potentially physically dangerous place where you can learn Jesus’ values of justice, compassion, and love? Jesus said, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” (Matt16:26). An important reflection.

We started to dream of a new world, the kind of world where we would want to leave to our children. We dreamed:
We want to see a world in which the rich do not tolerate extreme poverty and inequality. We want to see many people actually laying down their lives of comfort and convenience for the sake of bettering the lives of others. Seeing people freed from poverty, inequality, racism, and exploitation is more important than fulfilling our lust for more things! We want to be part of a society in which people are valued more than things. We want to see the god of consumerism in South Africa bowing its knee to a love-motivated revolution that results in freedom from oppression and exploitation. We want to see this for all people, regardless of class, citizenship, race, or religion. We dream of equality in every sector of society. We believe that if the education system is not okay for a rich kid, it is not okay for a poor kid. The same goes with healthcare, housing, security. The same goes for rural kids and inner-city kids. The same for black kids and white kids. We are not more valuable than the least valued in our society. We are doing our lives in a new way. We are going to live our dream and see this reality briefly described above happening around us. We hope others will join us and this will happen around them too. Who knows, very soon, the world can be a different place!

As we weighed upon God’s Word, his call, and his promises, we finally came to the decision to move regardless of the cost. As a side reflection, I have subsequently found that the time God gives you grace to do something often coincides with the moment of your decision to obey his Word to you. Grace comes through faith and faith comes from putting the Word of God into practice in your life.

Fast-forward a few years from when we made this decision. Here we are living in what many describe as one of the most dangerous neighbourhoods in the world. As responsible parents, we do all we can to protect our children. They know the rules and the risks and we are always close by to protect them. What we have found is that rather than restrictions, we are now in the most spacious place in our lives and the move has, in my opinion, been the best thing we could have done for our children. So often we
think doing radical things for Jesus will harm our children, when in fact the opposite happens—they grow and develop.

I am so often overwhelmed by the things my children do in response to the poverty they now see in the lives of their friends whom they love. My son Jordan, age eight, has spent very little of his pocket money on himself since we have lived here. A little while after we moved in, he came to me with his savings and said, “Dad, you give me everything I need; I don’t need this money. Who do you think we should give it to?” Needless to say my chest swelled as I held back tears of gratitude at the work God was doing in my boy’s heart. He has since done this again and again. His little brother, Daniel, age six, also loves to give his pocket money away or to buy food for the homeless with it.

In our block of flats, one of our children’s friends is a little boy named Sipho. Sipho lives with his four-year-old brother, Thabo, and his two-year-old baby sister, Princess (not their real names), and their single mother in a single room they sublet as a family. The room is barely big enough to fit the double bed, which they all share. His father is legally not allowed to see him after he tried two years ago to poison the two little boys and himself in an attempted family suicide. Their mom works at night so the boys are often chased out of the flat during the day so she can sleep. They are often hungry, so our two older girls love making them food. Sipho recently turned eight years old. It was obvious that his mom was not going to throw him a birthday party or buy him any presents. Enter my children! All by themselves they conspired to bless this boy with a birthday party. They all pooled their pocket money together. Hannah, our 12-year-old and Rachel, our 10-year-old, baked the cake. Jordan bought the presents. It was an amazing event. Through these and other similar stories I have become convinced that you cannot teach your children how to love and show compassion through your words; you have to demonstrate it as a parent and create opportunities for them to take the initiative. Living among the urban poor and standing in solidarity with our neighbours constantly presents opportunities for acts of love.

I have so many more stories to tell, like how Hannah, our 12-year-old, has become a real advocate for the rights of the oppressed. Our children have had opportunities
to speak on radio and television and to many journalists about how society should be helping their friends. Hannah often comes to me and asks me to help a friend get back into school or to get some form of assistance for someone, whether adult or child. We often involve friends who are lawyers to help her friends and have even taken cases to the Constitutional Court (South Africa’s highest court) on behalf of Hannah’s friends. God is not only doing a work in their hearts; he is giving them a voice to the world.

Moving into Hillbrow has been the best thing we could have done for our children. When we put God first in our lives, he takes care of all the details of our lives. He really does love us and wants the best for us and we can trust him with our children as we pursue him and his call with all of our lives. We should never let our children set the agenda in our lives, as precious as they are. We believe they are more precious to God than to us and that he will work in their hearts and do things in them we could not even dream of if we allow him to be on the throne of our lives completely.

In conclusion, let me quote Jesus who said, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt 6:33). We have found this verse to be true in our new life in Hillbrow and know that Jesus can be trusted!

Nigel Branken lives with his wife Trish and their six children in the notorious inner-city suburb, Hillbrow, in Johannesburg, South Africa. As they stand in solidarity with those facing extreme poverty, Nigel says, “What we focus on is primarily becoming friends to our neighbours and then trying to become good neighbours to our friends.”
PREPARING FOR NOW

By Jared Looney

Despite the years of resounding voices for an urban vision for the church from leaders like Ray Bakke, Harvie Conn, Roger Greenway, and others, it still somehow seems that the jump from a rural world to one that is distinctly urban happened all of a sudden. Now the church is confronted with a world that may be characterized by an overwhelmingly urban existence, and this should have significant ramifications for how we train leaders for ministry in the church and mission.

Over the years I’ve been involved in supervising scores of missionary apprentices and college interns. I’ve watched a range of responses to a city that inevitably at some point catches each one off-guard. I also enjoy teaching as an adjunct instructor for various universities and seminaries, and among the courses I’ve taught, one of the more puzzling was an online graduate class on urban ministry. Don’t misunderstand me. I believe in online education, and I really enjoy teaching through online platforms. However, some of the students were taking the course from rural settings making it predominantly theoretical, and I’m just not sure how well we can prepare leaders for an urban world through merely conceptual experiences. Just as someone learning to surf doesn’t do so merely from reading a book on the subject, but rather from learning to sense the timing and motion of the waves. Training a generation of leaders for navigating the forces of urbanization will require a different kind of training—a more visceral approach to forming leaders.

Praxis-oriented Learning

In an urban world, a return to the apprenticeship model of learning is essential. One of the most common themes that I’ve encountered over the years is the number of new missionary workers who simply feel ill equipped. They have sharp minds and impressive libraries, but their formation as leaders has been overwhelmingly knowledge-based. The complexities confronting urban mission requires evangelists who are practiced at fleshing out the truths of the gospel in relational activity. If we are going to prepare
leaders for engaging a dynamic and ever-changing urban world, theological formation will need to be grounded in the practice of mission.

**Adaptation**

The new key skill for ministry in the twenty-first century is our ability to adapt. An urban world means constant change. Global economic forces, international migration, or city housing policies can spark the transformation of a neighborhood. In cities, new subcultures are born and new art forms are explored. Urbanization means constant change. Leadership training for an urban world should force trainees into situations where they must learn to adapt in real-time to situations on-the-ground.

**Pluralism**

Cities are mosaics of ethnicities, cultures, traditions, and worldviews. Urban missionaries interact with a range of cultures. Even when an urban evangelist focuses on a single people group within a city, he or she often encounters diversity. Diversity is in the nature of the city. Nevertheless, many Bible colleges and seminaries are largely homogeneous, and many were intentionally located in rural settings. Therefore, exposure to contrasting worldviews is extremely limited. Leadership development anticipating an urban world should equip new ministers for communicating the gospel in the midst of significant cultural pluralism.

**Learning to Listen**

If we are to be honest, it is nearly impossible to prepare missionary candidates for every issue that they are likely to encounter when they step into the city. Ministry preparation has been heavily focused on learning to speak, and without question, we should equip believers to articulate the gospel. However, if leaders are going to meet ministry challenges amidst myriad worldviews and if we are seeking to address systemic injustices entangled in layers of urban complexity, we will all need to learn to listen well. Ethnography is a key pastoral skill for our urban world. The city may be characterized as a cacophony of competing voices. Learning to discern among these voices, listen to the concerns of the city, and clearly articulate the gospel so that it cuts through the noise of the city are crucial skills.
In recent years, I’ve been involved in a one-year urban missions intensive training program in New York City equipping new missionaries for evangelism and church planting among diaspora communities in the city. As missionary trainees are gaining practical skills and missiological principles, we take a learning-by-doing approach while being surrounded by a framework of mentoring and coaching. We believe this missions training is a unique opportunity, but I would suggest that it shouldn’t be unique at all. Urban mission is no longer our future; it is our present reality. Transforming how we approach ministry preparation is our present challenge.

Dr. Jared Looney lives in New York City with his wife and daughter. He is the executive director of Global City Mission Initiative and also works with a missionary training program reaching out to unreached diaspora communities in the city.
BUILDING CHRIST-CENTERED, LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN POOR URBAN SETTINGS

By Steve Chalke

Oasis exists to build strong and safe Christ-centred, local communities in poor urban settings, where people can feel happy and proud to live, learn, and work alongside one another; where every person is valued and encouraged to reach their God-given potential.

Currently we work in 27 local neighbourhoods—which we call hubs—around the U.K., with another 25 being developed in other countries of the world. Each exists to create a rich and inclusive environment which builds a sense of shalom, where people thrive socially, spiritually, physically, emotionally, academically, vocationally, economically, and environmentally. Typically, this means that we work to develop housing, youth work, health care, family support and primary, secondary, and further education, training and employment opportunities, all centred around the work of a healthy church.

We know that in order to achieve this we need to stimulate a culture of enterprise and self-help by creating opportunities for local people to get involved in shaping the work and buying into delivering the change themselves. Our central incarnational principle is to work to do things ‘with’ people (which we believe liberates them)—not ‘to’ or even ‘for’ them (which patronises them and creates dependency). So every Oasis hub places a central emphasis on working to build and facilitate a web of new or deepened relationships, networks and partnerships between community leaders, residents, employers, schools, police, social services, existing churches, and other community groups.

At the heart of the work that we do in any community is education, which we see as a key to sustainability and wellbeing. For example, take the Oasis hub in Waterloo, in the centre of London, on the south bank of the River Thames, where I live and work.
Towards the end of the nineteenth century, sociologist Charles Booth mapped London poverty. He showed that, at that time, Waterloo was a very deprived area of “semi-criminals” filled with the “very poor” and “families in chronic need,” though flanked by the affluent areas of Westminster and Kennington.

There has been significant change since then. Today, the thin strip of land along the South Bank of the Thames has become an important and famous centre for the U.K.’s arts and media industry, for higher education, and a host for international businesses as well as global tourism. Yet, its wealth—both economic and cultural—bypasses the local community altogether. Excluding the South Bank, the grinding poverty and deprivation remains irremovable in the Waterloo area. For instance, local employers tell us that, while there are many opportunities for our young people to work and thrive locally, either they do not have the confidence to apply, or, when they do, they lack the requisite skills, qualities, and disciplines that would make them employable.

Our local population is ethnically diverse. At least 40 percent speak English as an additional language. Many families are first-generation immigrants. Their poor command of the English language—both written and spoken—prevents them from obtaining good employment, though they are often highly experienced and qualified in their field. At the same time, many White families living in the area have low aspirations, and do not see the many cultural and social opportunities that surround us as being “for them.” Their children come to us with very few social skills and poor concentration, vocabulary, and broken English.

On top of this, the people of Waterloo experience a greater number of health problems than other areas of London. For instance, there is a higher incidence of diabetes, coronary heart disease, chronic kidney disease, and severe mental health problems. Childhood obesity is also a problem with 25 percent of 10 to 11 year olds in the area classified as obese and another 21 percent overweight.

Thus, Oasis’s goal in Waterloo is to create a continuum of education from infancy to adulthood to focus, not just on academic achievement, but on breaking the cycle of social and aspirational poverty. Therefore, amongst the wider work of our hub, over the last six years, we have established a parent and toddlers initiative, a nursery, a primary
school, a secondary school, and now we are developing adult literacy and numeracy projects. These are also supported by the various advice services and coaching facilities we offer. Our aim is for families to enjoy the experience of “living” rather than being “trapped” here. Our work is not so much about lifting the child out of the slum, but lifting the slum out of the community by tapping into the wealth of the London that surrounds us and working to bring shalom to the local area.

Some years ago, as a church, we explored the theme of the “now and not yet nature” of the kingdom of God. We read the famous passage from Revelation 21:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’”

Then, together, we wrote the following poem as way of “translating” John’s vision into our context, helping us see our community with different eyes and setting goals for our work:

It was 8 o’clock on Monday morning.
I was standing by Lambeth North station.
And I saw a new London coming down from the heavens.
I saw a teenager leaping out of bed with joy, laughing with the freshness of the morning.
I saw elderly ladies skipping down Kennington Road.
I saw children paddling in the River Thames.
I saw a football match in Kennington Park and the teams were mixed people from every people group: asylum seekers and taxi drivers, policemen and prisoners, pensioners and politicians. People from every race and class playing and laughing in the sun.
I saw a street party where the people were eating and dancing because there was hope again.
And I looked across the community of South London; a community of hope, a community of grace, a community of warmth.

And, in the clearness of the morning, I looked down into the Elephant & Castle and there was no more asthma, no more unwanted pregnancies, no more debt, no more violence, no more overcrowding and nobody was too busy.

The River Thames was flowing with crystal-clear water.

There were no more needles and condoms in the park.

No more sorrow of family breakdown.

No more poverty.

No more need.

No more unemployment or mind-numbing jobs.

No more hopelessness.

No more sadness and tears, only joy and laughter.

No more discrimination.

No more drunken clubbing. No threats, no fears.

The dividing walls were gone.

Families and neighbours were restored.

There was no more rubbish, no dealers, no guns, no knives, no dangerous dogs.

There were no racial tensions, just one harmonious mix in Technicolour.

And I looked and I saw kids playing football in the streets, and neighbours cheering them on.

I saw homes without locks on the doors, where a welcome was always guaranteed.

I saw a playground with climbing frames that weren't rusty, where children threw themselves in the air without fear of harm, where the teenagers helped the little ones up to the highest climbs.

I saw a London where neighbours shared favours and returned them without pressure or obligation.

I saw a London where hearts were unbroken, partnerships are lasting, peaceful and happy.

I saw a London where families eat and play together.

I saw a London where tears were wiped away.
It is this vision that guides our all work in Waterloo and, often, sustains us when the going is overwhelming. If this is what God is doing, it’s what we want to join; education is not just about academic success, but about shalom, too.

Steve Chalke, MBE, author, speaker, TV, and radio presenter, businessman, social entrepreneur, husband, and father, began public life as a Baptist minister. In 1985 he founded the Oasis Charitable Trust with a vision to build inclusive communities where everyone has hope, feels that they matter, and is given the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Oasis pioneers life-transforming housing, healthcare, education, and church, youth, and community initiatives around the U.K. and across the world.
In Kuala Lumpur, postcolonial influences blend together alongside a fusion of Asian traditions and Malay inspirations. As Malaysia’s capital and center of finance, media, culture, and the arts, the city is a living, breathing blend of multiculturalism and diverse faith communities. Ethnic Malay, Chinese, and Indians live side-by-side in this multi-religious society. Due to Kuala Lumpur’s rapid development, a significant influx of foreign workers have poured into the city, from Indonesia, Nepal, Burma, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Vietnam—many of whom enter the country illegally or without proper permits. Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Hinduism make up the main religions in Malaysia, along with a six percent Christian population.

Despite Kuala Lumpur’s growing economic prosperity, there are concerns that call for specific prayer:

- Prayer against the effects of urban poverty—specifically for the elderly; single, female-headed households; unskilled workers; and migrant workers.
- Prayer for sustainable solutions to the challenges of caring for the urban poor, especially those struggling with drug-addictions, people infected by HIV, women and men in prostitution, and slum dwellers.
- Prayer for the 120,000 refugees and UNHCR estimated three million undocumented migrants in Malaysia, who have no legal rights to employment and education. These undocumented workers, recruited from Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam are incredibly at-risk, are often exploited, and live in severely overcrowded areas.
- Prayer that local churches would develop a greater consciousness and heart for urban mission.
Top: Malaysian Care “Bumblebee” Reading Program assists underprivileged children.
Bottom: Financial literacy class for the poor.
Top: Social entrepreneurship initiative.

Middle right: A moment of joy in the midst of difficulty and suffering, as this Chin Burmese refugee couple say their marital vows.

Bottom right: Filipino domestic workers flock to Malaysia, sadly often leaving their families behind in search of a better life and employment.

Bottom left: Dedicated elementary school teacher, who runs a local school in a slum community just on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.
Top: Signs of hope in the eyes of young boys at school. These children live in an Malaysian-Indian squatter community just on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur and receive their education at the local school in their slum.

Bottom: Nepali construction workers staying in a container room that is situated near their worksite. Many come to work also as security guards and restaurant workers.
Top: Scenes from a squatter community home.
Bottom: Young Kuala Lumpur residents gather in the evening at outdoor stalls where “Teh tarik” (Malaysia’s local tea) flows plentifully.
Top: One of the oldest mosques in Kuala Lumpur, Jamek Mosque is located at the confluence of the Klang and Gombak River.

Bottom: Woman receives affordable dialysis treatment at the Charis/NKF Dialysis Centre
Top: In theory, low income, high-rise flat apartments are said to have replaced squatter communities in Kuala Lumpur. However, often 10+ people squeeze into these crowded, cramped small rooms. Hygiene conditions are dismal and crime runs rampant in these sky-slums.

Bottom: A message of hope and truth in downtown Kuala Lumpur.
**Michael Moey** has been married to Grace Lee for 28 years. Together they have three lovely daughters and two dogs. Moey loves badminton and trekking, and has a keen interest in urban mission. In addition to teaching law and theology, Moey pastors a small local urban church that runs a refugee education centre for Myanmar youths ages 16 to 20.

**Jodie MacCartney** has lived in Klong Toey slum community in Bangkok for the past seven years with Urban Neighbours of Hope (unoh.org) together with her husband Chris and three young daughters. With a background in nursing, Jodie is passionate about walking alongside her neighbors, empowering local women and men through sustainable economic initiatives, such as a second-hand store (scbkk.org), handicrafts projects and a “recycled wears” enterprise.
Mick Duncan's book *Alongsiders* is a great addition to the recent body of literature produced concerning holistic ministry. This book fills a void by bringing the responsibility for sharing the love of Jesus down to the most basic level. By coming “alongside” the hurting, the lonely, and the unlovely, one truly has the opportunity of practicing incarnational ministry.

Duncan points out that true incarnational ministry involves being with people and truly listening to what they have to say and learning what they are about. It doesn’t matter whether people are rich, poor, or middleclass. There are people in all walks of life who need someone to simply BE with them. Being an Alongsider is more than being a friend or mentor. There are many socially isolated, struggling people everywhere who need someone to intentionally take the time to stand with them as they struggle to make sense of their world and the things that are happening to them. Alongside ministry will take time and commitment. It must be an intentional priority in our lives or it won't happen. We may be hurting, inept people ourselves but God calls us to serve out of our weakness.

There will be many hard issues encountered as we come alongside people. The book gives a very real encounter that the author had with a person practicing homosexuality. This person was in a leadership position in a church where he was serving. His detailed description of his journey and process of sorting through this controversial issues as an Alongsider is quite informative. While some may come to a different conclusion on the matter of the biblical view of homosexuality and church leadership, the thorough, biblical, thoughtful, and sensitive process of sorting the matter out is a great example of treating people with dignity and the respect they deserve as children of God.
Duncan takes the time to explain that becoming an Alongside is a part of the evangelistic process, but that one must not make the mistake of treating people as targets to be converted. Certainly wanting people to know the love of Jesus is important. But the author points out that we must allow the Holy Spirit to do his work in convicting and drawing people to Jesus. If people sense that our only motive in coming alongside them is for the purpose of getting them to convert, they will likely feel used. As our motives become suspect, those we are trying to come alongside will likely reject our efforts.

I enjoyed this book. Becoming an Alongside will take time and be messy. But loving those who are hurting is something that was modeled and commanded by Jesus.

As I got further into the book and excited about the content, I began to wonder what it would look like for the corporate body of Christ to be Alongsiders. Perhaps Duncan has already planned his next book describing what a church of Alongsiders would look like and the mechanics of how it would function.
Sean Benesh’s *Urbanity and the Bible* is an important contribution to the post-industrial era of urban mission studies. We need new pathways since the pioneering generation of Bakke, Conn, and Greenway broke through with their insights and books decades ago. Benesh delivers this in smart, passionate, and joyful ways.

At the heart of Benesh’s book is a hopeful view of cities. The city is not a place that is cursed and absented by God, but “the trajectory of creation and missio Dei… was, is, and continues to be urban in scope, focus, and nature.”¹ This assumption challenges much of the urban advocacy for the competitive nonprofit sector that often runs down cities in early industrial era, almost Dickensian terms, to get ahead. Benesh quotes McKnight’s proposition that, “God originally placed Adam and Eve in a garden-temple, but when God gets things wrapped up, the garden disappears. Instead of a garden in Revelation 21–22 we find a city. The garden, in other words, is not the ideal condition. The ideal condition is a flourishing, vibrant, culture-seeking, God-honoring, Jesus-centered city.” Glaeser echoes McKnight: “On a planet with vast amounts of space (all of humanity could fit in Texas—each with a personal townhouse), we choose cities.”² Rather than being a problem to fix, the city is part of God fulfilling creation’s promise.

Why is this promise of city so enticing? Benesh points to a foundation built on a trinitarian understanding of God and the biblical narrative as it informs today’s world. “In the beginning was the triune God who was in community with himself in the Godhead. As humans were created in the image of God, we were made relational beings to enjoy community with not only God, but with one another. This then is the

¹ This book will be published in the series Urban Mission in the Twenty-first Century through Wipf and Stock later this year. Page numbers were not available at the time of the printing of this issue of NUW.

foundation for the urban trajectory of humanity as well as Scripture. We were meant to live in cities.” The triune God intends and invites people—the created beings made to express the image of God—to take relationships with God, each other, and place seriously. This requires proximity of presence if healthy relationships are to emerge and thus the need for cities.

There is a pragmatic dimension to Benesh’s work. There is a wonderful chapter, for example, where he outlines how the city can be a practical blessing. He explores the following themes in especially exciting and hopeful ways:

- Cities as Places of Refuge
- Cities as Incubators of Commerce
- Cities as Catalysts for Creativity and Innovation
- Cities as Places of Equity and Care for the Marginalized
- Cities as Conduits of the Missio Dei.

With this on offer, who wouldn’t want to live in a city?!

Benesh also gives a sense of vision of what God intends cities to be like. “God most certainly has a template—a blueprint of sorts—of what urban life is to look like both here and in the future. The foundation of a vibrant and healthy urban life lies in God’s intimacy with humanity, compassion, and justice. Without those, cities fall into corruption and self-implosion. That does not negate the first (God’s love for us), but we know then when we wander, God simply lets us gravitate towards self-destruction. Benesh quotes Abraham Heschel, who writes, “What the prophets proclaim is God’s intimate relatedness to man [sic]. It is this fact that puts all of life in a divine perspective, in which the rights of man [sic], as it were, divine prerogatives. Man [sic] stands under God’s concern.” This diversity and vibrancy is a compelling vision among the competing contemporary visions for cities.

Ultimately, cities are no less than a key instrument, which God uses to save and see the kingdom of God established on earth as in heaven. This is a responsibility that has potential for both blessing and cursing God’s urban people. If the Missio Dei is about, as Huckins noted, God “re-gathering of all the cosmos into intimate relationship with himself,” then the city must play a central role in the re-gathering and redemption plan.
Yet we find the bulk of condemnations and discipline upon God’s people as they lived in cities as well as upon cities themselves. But, because of that reality it does not mean that God has given up on the city, in fact; quite the opposite.” In an interconnected, rapidly urbanizing world, will God’s people stand up, collaborate, and join with God in seeing the blessings of cities flourish? Or will we keep an old industrial era view of cities, reject God’s plan in cities, and long for a rural utopia never intended by God to exist? Benesh provides us with challenging, hopeful, and compassionate ways forward.
David Leong's book is a major step forward in understanding and applying a missional theology in an urban context. As Ray Bakke states in the forward, we need a “missiology for the city” (xi). Leong moves the conversation forward with this very carefully researched and thought out book.

This book, one of the American Society of Missiology Monograph Series, is organized around four parts. The first part examines urbanism and contextualization. The second part focuses on a missional theology of cultural engagement. Part three looks at an urban exegesis of the Rainier Valley (Seattle, Washington). Part four brings it all together in an urban contextual theology. Throughout the book there is a thread and understanding that the incarnation is the missional task, confrontation is the prophetic task, and imagination is the creative task.

Leung spends some time talking about the street signs, as the title of the book suggests. He states, “While taking these complexities of urbanism and contextualization into account, observing and interpreting the city is one of the primary tasks of both urban anthropology and urban missiology. At the intersection of these two disciplines, urban exegesis is an interpretive method at the ideological center” (15). Leong helps us to read the city as a text. He is correct in telling us that “… missional engagement always requires a confrontational encounter, one that enables the gospel to both incarnate and deconstruct the presuppositions of every cultural context” (54).

As part of the prophetic confrontation, Leung calls the Western Church to task as
well. “When economic disparity between North America and the two-thirds world (where, coincidentally two-thirds of the global Christian church resides) is shockingly disproportionate to what we know to be just in the eyes of God, is ‘making the best of it’ really the best that we can do in the face of such stark injustice?” (60). When talking about imagination Leong calls us to think more clearly about what we are doing: “If the people of God cannot discern life-giving alternatives from the death-dealing culture of narcissism, celebrity idolatry, corporate greed, and human exploitation, then we have lost our imagination” (83).

Finally, Leong gives three very helpful diagrams that focus our attention on the core message of this book. The first is an “Urban Exegesis of the Community” (149). This diagram focuses on dense places, diverse neighbors, and disparate communities. The second diagram he calls “Urban Semiotic Model of the City” (197). This diagram adds a dimension. He focuses on density (physical), diversity (social), and disparity (economic). This diagram shifts from the cultural text to an urban sign object as the basic unit of analysis. In this sense the regulatory code replaces the missional code in the first diagram. The third diagram is called “Urban Contextual Theology” (220). This diagram builds around the three categories of physical density, social diversity, and economic disparity. The shift in this third diagram is from regulatory codes to theological codes, which produces different kinds of meaning in the city. Each of the three diagrams provides a different lens for observing and interpreting the urban context.

Readers will find this book very helpful in understanding the urban context through theological and missional lenses. It is not an elementary book, but it is understandable by a wide range of readers. All will benefit from a missional theology in urban contexts that considers physical density, social diversity, and economic disparity.

1 Leong defines semiotic as “a diverse, interdisciplinary field that studies how signs and symbols create meaning in contexts ranging from linguistics and anthropology to biology and computer science,” on p. 170.
Dave Arnold works with immigrants from the Middle East in Dearborn, Michigan. He reflects on his experiences and shares three overlapping sets of stories in Pilgrims of the Alley.

The first set of stories is of the migrants and refugees Arnold counts it a privilege to have met. He introduces his readers to people from Iraq, Burma, and Liberia, and the Appalachian Indians and Jewish Holocaust survivors, offering insight into the terror they have come from and the difficulties they face in resettling. Arnold describes some of the ways he has sought to communicate and demonstrate the good news of a generous and hospitable God.

The second story, woven through the book, is the upper room narrative of the Last Supper (John 13-17). In the tradition of other biblical narratives of Abraham, Moses, David, and Esther, Arnold shows how Jesus and his followers experienced displacement and grief, and invites us on a similar path, into the same alley.

The third story is Arnold’s own experience in ministry. The book is as much a memoir of an urban missionary as anything. It offers down-to-earth reflections to encourage readers to welcome displacement, to seek God in the midst of difficulties, and to bless others out of our own brokenness and feeling pushed aside. Arnold points his finger at the temptation of workaholism and the performance trap, and explains how he reorients ministry around awareness and dependence on God. He urges opening our eyes and hearts to be conscious of where God is at work, and seek to join in. The best form of evangelism, he suggests, is letting people see you are close to God and that you care for people who are different.
My favourite chapter was Arnold’s account of Dr. Hensley, his literature teacher, who urged him to give his very best, and gave him “the gift of loving words.” God loves us and accepts us as we are, but also calls us towards character transformation and giving of our best to a hurting world. Sometimes a teacher or coach can cooperate with God in challenging us to be much better than we are currently.

The book is arranged in three sections of six or seven chapters each. Each chapter is a short devotional-length of five to seven pages with two thoughtful discussion questions and a brief prayer. So the book may be an inspiring narrative to sit and read in one sitting, or—even better—may be read devotionally as the reader follows and prays through Arnold’s pilgrimage. For example:

*Lord, help me to follow You each and every day. I know that true faith and wisdom is learning how to follow You no matter how hard life gets.*

*Lord, the truth is, I need your push. I get so comfortable sometimes and stop depending on You. Give me the wisdom to see where I need to grow and change. Help me to know Your presence more and more each day.*

*In Your name. Amen (57).*
Once every few years a book comes along that is a must-read for all involved in ministry. *Center Church* is one of those books. Tim Keller is a seasoned veteran of urban ministry, having pastored the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City for over 25 years. Redeemer has helped launch more than 200 churches in 35 global cities so far. Keller is someone we need to hear and learn from.

Keller gives a virtual how-to book that is grounded in a biblical and theological foundation. The reader is given insight into the how and why of what Redeemer is doing. In doing so, he structures the book around three main parts. The first is the gospel. Keller spends the first six chapters discussing the heart of the gospel and therefore what our preaching and teaching should be like. The second part is the city. Keller helps us to understand the issues that are unique to the city. This is where I found one of the best treatments of biblical contextualization. In addition, Keller helps us develop a city vision and how to have productive cultural engagement. The third part develops the idea of a movement that should result from best practices. It is in this section that the heart for helping others—those 200 new churches in 35 countries—become obvious. There is much gold to be mined here.

Keller makes the case that fruitfulness should be our criteria for success. He develops an answer to the question, “What makes gospel ministry faithful and fruitful?” (14). Keller also believes “ministry in the center of global cities is the highest priority for the
church in the twenty-first century” (21). This good news that we proclaim is summed up very simply: Jesus came to earth, lived a perfect life, was crucified, and was raised from the dead three days later as the first fruits offering. In spite of all other good things we may do or say, that is the gospel message. Whether we are binding the broken, feeding the hungry, or healing the sick, we do so from the basis that Jesus is our substitutionary offering. And that is good news.

This book is written by a scholar who got his hands dirty. He knows urban ministry, grounds it firmly in biblical teaching, and practices the principles that he has learned. It is an important book for anyone considering urban ministry.
It might come as a surprise that a book about archaeology is being reviewed for *New Urban World*. I began studying *Reading Romans in Pompeii* with the question of “What might archaeology have to do with urban mission?” Peter Oakes, in this imaginative yet academic work, pieces together a picture of the early church in Rome by looking at homes in ash-preserved Pompeii to give readers an idea of what social dynamics took place in ancient times.

In an increasingly urban world, we ponder the utility of house churches, the diversity of our neighborhoods, social stratification, cramped housing, the reality of human trafficking, and slum life. In light of rapid urbanization, globalization, and wealth disparity, we face the question of just how the Good News continues to be good news. Oakes provides *New Urban World* readers something of fierce relevance with creative archaeological engagement. Not surprisingly, the early Christians living in Pompeii experienced these realities themselves. As I was identifying with Oakes’s fictional characters experiencing the gospel for the first time, I thought of the parallels of the people whom we serve in today’s urban world.

Oakes purposes to do essentially two things in this creative work. First, in the opening three chapters, he provides evidence of social stratification among the first-century non-elite. This is to show that there are stratified layers of poverty among the poor. Much of this evidence is based on the technical literature of a well-documented Pompeian household archaeological dig. If Oakes is correct, this Pompeian household “offers a route to thinking about the nature of early house churches in a way that
ought to be helpful across the range of Graeco-Roman urban settings” (89). Second, in chapters four through seven, Oakes uses this evidence to explore what it might mean to read Scripture in relation to this social stratification (xi). In other words, Oakes makes a case for these socially stratified non-elite persons hearing Scripture differently from how we have traditionally thought of them hearing Scripture.

Oakes’s approach is refreshing and creative for both archaeology and biblical studies. His research “takes on flesh” with the utility of fictional characters who belong to the different levels of socially stratified Pompeii. Using these characters, Oakes shows us how hearers might have made sense of their salvation based on the book of Romans. In one brilliant chapter, Oakes goes through an imaginary listening of Romans 12. Sacrifices and cults (vv. 1-2); status, intellect, and values (v. 3), household boundaries, relationships, and hierarchies (vv. 4-8; 15-16); and retributive violence (vv. 17-21) are just some of the old patterns of life that the gospel challenges—which Oakes argues would have been read in a nuanced way from the vantage of the socially stratified lower classes. The urban implications of this study are numerous, including how we think about modern-day slavery, economics, and housing situations. It is Oakes’s hermeneutic that changes how we read Scripture—or at a minimum, the book of Romans—and invites us to read it in a new light in our urban communities. What might it look like for us to extend Oakes’s research to our engagement in urban ministries?
Join us in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, for the second International Society for Urban Mission (ISUM) Summit: Signs of Hope in the City. In partnership with Micah Network and the World Evangelical Alliance: Theological Commission, the ISUM Summit seeks to facilitate collaboration between a variety of urban Christians, including Ecumenicals and Evangelicals, Majority and Western world thinkers, activists and leaders, Church movements and development agencies. This interactive summit will include keynotes from Dr. John M. Perkins and Dr. Jayakumar Christian, in addition to hands-on immersion opportunities, working groups and panel discussions. Outcomes from the summit will include published recommendations and calls to action. Save the date: June 28-July 1st, 2014.