



*Christ For The City:
Designing A Strategy of Evangelism for Your Church*

George T. Russ

Christ for The City

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Preface

The biblical assignment to make disciples must address the challenge of evangelism. You have to reach them before you can disciple them. That challenge seems so overwhelming in an urban context, especially in a place like New York City.

We live in a day of quick fixes and one-size-fits-all approaches that pay little attention to the context and culture of a city that is necessary if implementation is going to be successful. So many things come across my desk that are of little value in reaching the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural world around us, that I usually dread reviewing another approach to evangelism. However when I read Christ For The City, I knew that this was something special.

George T. Russ has done a phenomenal job of addressing both the burdens and blessings that exist for churches trying to minister in an urban context. This workbook will assist you in the formation of an intentional urban evangelism strategy. It is with eager expectation and great excitement that we make this resource available.

This workbook will also help you to warm up your vocal cords to let out the shout of your life, "The Lord has given us this city!"

*Richard Taylor
Baptist Convention of New York, July 2008*

Introduction

Something unique has happened right before our very eyes. For the first time in history, the majority of the world's population now lives in cities. The number of cities, and the speed of their growth, is unprecedented. The world now has cities with a population approaching 40 million people! Urbanization and globalization are here to stay.

The question, “*What are the largest cities in the world?*” is difficult to answer. It depends on one's definition of a city, and how that definition is applied. Three definitions are typically used¹:

1. **Administrative**: ranks the size of a city based on municipal units, or the city proper (For New York City, this would be its five boroughs).
2. **Functional**: defines the city in terms of metropolitan area or labor market area. A metropolitan area is defined as the employment core (an area with a high density of available jobs) plus the surrounding areas that have strong commuting ties to that core (typically called “commuting belts” or “zones of influence”).
3. **Morphological**: defines the city by its urban area, the continuous build up of high population density from a city center without regard to political boundaries.

Using these definitions, the largest cities in the world are as follows:

Administrative

Mumbai (Bombay)	13,662,000	Istanbul	11,174,000
Karachi, Pakistan	12,130,000	Moscow	10,452,000
Delhi	11,954,000	Seoul	10,356,000

New York City ranks 13th at 8,214,000.

Functional

Tokyo	32,454,000	New York	19,750,000
Seoul	20,500,000	Mumbai	19,200,000
Mexico City	20,450,000	Jakarta	18,900,000

Morphological

Tokyo	34,500,000	Mumbai	19,380,000
New York	20,420,000	Jakarta	19,300,000
Seoul	20,000,000	Delhi	18,500,000

¹ See www.wikipedia.com. Statistics are based on 2006 United Nations figures.

In the United States, 80.6% of the population lives in cities. There are 259 cities of over 100,000 people.² Using any of the three definitions above, New York City is the largest. The most densely populated state is New Jersey. Union City, West New York, Hoboken, and Paterson rank #1, 2, 3, and 6 in population density of US Cities. New York City ranks 4th.³

Those who take Jesus' command seriously "to make disciples of all nations (or people groups)" know where all the nations are—they are in the city. World evangelization is no longer about crossing the ocean; it is crossing the street of your city.

In the midst of this explosive growth, the urban church is struggling to make an impact. There are now over 175 million functionally undisciplined people aged 14 and older in this country. According to George Barna, the nonchurched population in the United States would be equivalent to the 5th largest *nation* in the world.⁴ No wonder that John Dawson, in *Taking Our Cities for God*, observed, "When I look at the cities of the United States, I see Christians as a group of bewildered survivors going about their daily business with little sense of a unifying purpose."⁵

Christ For The City will help any urban church, regardless of size. It is not a program, but a series of interdependent activities that will assist urban church leaders to design a strategy of evangelism for their church. The workbook can be used in a number of ways: Pastors may choose to preach the ideas in the workbook. Leaders can use the workbook over the course of several months. Planning teams can implement what they discover as God's direction for their church. The workbook is a catalyst for effective evangelism in an urban church.

The workbook consists of three parts. The first part, "Discovering God's Vision for Your City," will help you get a vision (and a heart) for your city. You will be challenged to see the city the God *does* and the way God *desires*.

"Determining Where Your City is Now" will help you know your city better. Worksheets will help you to identify the kind of city you live in, understand your church neighborhood, and determine the spiritual readiness of your church field.

The final section, "Designing a Way to Get There" brings together what you have learned in the first two sections and helps you to put together some specific steps to reach your city.

Three appendices are included to provide more commentary on various aspects of the urban church. Biblical teaching, and examples from church history and the modern

² The definition of "city" used here, an "incorporated municipality," corresponds to the administrative definition used above. The figures are based on US Census Projections of July 1, 2006. These figures do not include 7 additional cities in Puerto Rico.

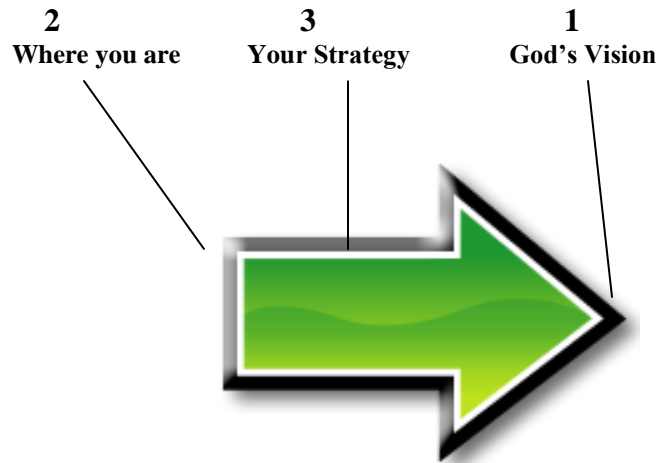
³ This includes all five boroughs of New York City. If Manhattan was ranked by itself, it would be #1 with a population density of 66,000 people per square mile.

⁴ *Evangelism That Works*, (Regal Books, 1995), 22.

⁵ *Taking Our Cities for God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds*, (Creation House, 2001), 47f.

church amplify what is in the workbook and offer additional teaching material for pastors and church leadership teams.

In *Christ for the City*, I have kept in my mind the diagram below. At the tip of the arrow (1) is God's vision for your city, his ultimate, overarching purpose in Christ for your city. The urban church will only be as effective as its understanding of God's will for the city. The second marker (2) is where your city is right now in relation to that vision. The final marker (3), the body of the arrow, is your strategy to see your city come to Christ.



Feel free to use the workbook in whatever way fits your church and its ministry. Work through it at a pace that suits you and your needs.

As you work through this, my prayer for you is threefold:

- That you will have a deep and abiding sense of God's vision for your city;
- That you will sense the urgency of reaching your city for Christ; and
- That you will know the encouraging and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit every step of the way.

As you begin, remember these words to God's people:

Shout, for the Lord has given you this city!

(Joshua 6:15, NKJV)

George T. Russ
Urban Evangelism Strategist
Baptist Convention of New York

1 *Discovering God's Vision for Your City*

"Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it"
(Luke 19:41)

When you look at your city, what do you see? There is more to your city than people and traffic and noise. Better yet, when God looks at your city, what does He see? What does He want to happen? What is He doing right now?

Jesus claimed to see the things that God wanted for His city. When he looked at Jerusalem, He knew the purpose of the Father for that place. He knew that God desired to bless the city with forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. However, Jesus also knew that the people were lost and would reject this offer of salvation. He wept because of it.

In order to build an evangelism strategy for your church, it is essential for you to see the city the way God does. What is His vision for your city? Here are some ways you can find out:

First, find a quiet place that overlooks your city.

Perhaps it will be a mountain, a park, or even a restaurant. With the city in view, read the following passages in the Bible. If possible, do so with your leadership team. As you read, ask yourself, *What is God saying to me about this place?* Take your time. Record your impressions in the space provided.

- Genesis 18:16-33 _____
- Isaiah 61:1-7 _____
- Isaiah 65:17-25 _____
- Jonah 4:10-11 _____
- Luke 13:31-34 _____
- Luke 19:41-44 _____
- Luke 24:45-49 _____

Ask yourselves: *What is God saying to us about our city? Where is He at work? What does He want to do here?* Record your thoughts. Share them with your team. Pray over them, asking the Father for His heart for the city.

Next, travel through your city with “open eyes.”

Take some time off from your normal activities and travel through your city. Use public transportation if necessary, but whenever possible, walk. Try this a few times at different moments of the day. As you go, take it all in. Use all your senses—sight, sounds, and smells. Do not be in a hurry.

Look at the people. Like the crowds in Jerusalem, many are lost. Pray for them. Ask God to give you the heart of Christ for your city. Ask Him to help you love your city as Jesus does. Then write down your thoughts to these questions:

What kinds of people live here?

What does God see in my city?

What does God want to do here?

What would the kingdom of God look like in my city?

“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper...For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

The Prophet Jeremiah
Chapter 29:7-11

Finally, locate your church on a map of your city.

Your church is right where God wants it to be. He wants to accomplish His purpose for the city through you. Overwhelming? Perhaps. Read the promise of God He first gave to the exiles in Babylon through Jeremiah. Can you, will you claim it for your church, too?

These are just three activities that you can do to get God’s heart for your city. Use your imagination and the leading of the Holy Spirit to develop others. As an urban church leader, a part of your calling is to develop in you and your people a heart for the city. Ask the Father how you can do that.

2 *Determining Where Your City is Now*

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?"
(Jesus, Luke 14:28 NIV)

What is your city like? What attracts people to live and work there? Your city plays an important role. Do you know what it is? How can you get to know your city? Below are some suggestions. You can record your impressions on the City Personality Worksheet:

Identify Your City's Personality

Your city has a unique personality, a way of expressing itself that is shaped by its people and its past. Urban church pastors need to spend 20% of their time, one day a week, networking with other community leaders. A city pastor should be the most knowledgeable and informed person about his community.

- Visit your local Chamber of Commerce. How does your city advertise itself? What is distinct about your city? What is your city's nickname? New York proudly calls itself "The Big Apple." New Orleans is called "The Big Easy." Can you sense the difference just in their nicknames?
- Talk with your City Government, Planning Office, Board of Education and Police and Fire Departments. They can help you know what is happening in your city. These relationships will help your ministry in the future.
- Visit with teachers at local colleges and universities. They have a sense of the history and events that have shaped your city. Often, they have research projects on some aspect of your city that can be invaluable to you.

If the pastor does not understand the larger urban picture, his daily experiences and local situation can overwhelm him

Ray Bakke
The Urban Christian

City Personality Worksheet

In the space provided below, record what you learned from the following people. Include names and other contact information for future reference.

Chamber of Commerce:

City Government:

City Planning Office:

Board of Education:

Police/Fire Departments:

University/College:

What did you learn about your city's personality?

What does "seeking the peace of the city" mean for you now? For your city?

What is planned for your city that might effect your church's ministry?

What might this mean for evangelism in your city?

What aspect of the gospel might be of particular interest for your city?

Interpret Your Church's Neighborhood

Regardless of the particular situation a person is in, God loves him, and we must be agents of that love...The world is teaching us what the Holy Spirit should have been able to teach us long ago, namely, that we are living in one world-God's world. No one of us can be completely whole so long as anyone about us is broken.

Findley B. Edge
The Greening of the Church

If you were to walk down Broadway in New York City from one end to the other, you would begin at a former monastery and end up in Battery Park, looking out on the harbor and the Statue of Liberty. In between, you would walk from Harlem, through the trendy Upper West Side, Times Square, Greenwich Village and Wall Street. Each of these places could not be more different!

Up until now, you and your leaders have tried to get the big picture of your city-its past, its people, its role. You also need to know your church field, your church neighborhood. However

large your city might be, it is actually a series of distinct and unique neighborhoods.

To interpret your church's neighborhood, you can do the same kinds of things you previously did to understand your city. Resources are available to help you determine the demographic and lifestyle patterns in your church field.⁶

Networking with local pastors and social agencies is crucial. Befriend these leaders. Meet with them as a learner and ask them to help you to know how to pastor your neighborhood. Learn from their experience and wisdom.

This might appear to be a lot of unnecessary work. Don't be fooled! As a pastor, you are the chaplain of a community. Overlooking this step can seriously impede your ministry.

A Neighborhood Worksheet is provided to help you get started.

⁶ The Baptist Convention of New York and the North American Mission Board can provide you with the most recent demographic and psychographic information about your church field.

Church Neighborhood Worksheet

Demographics: What demographic information about your church field do you consider crucial for evangelism?

Lifestyle Patterns: What are the major lifestyle patterns of your church field. Do they suggest any approaches to evangelism?

Networking Pastors and Churches: What lessons about ministry have you learned and how can these impact your ministry?

Social Agencies (public/private/voluntary): What have you learned about your community from others who serve it? How can you work together?

Networking Schools, Service Agencies and Businesses: What perspective do these leaders have of your community? What does this tell you about reaching others? Do they suggest any avenues of cooperation?

State Convention and Mission Board Contacts:

Understand the People

According to John, "Jesus knew what was in man" (2:25, NKJV). He knew their hearts. He knew their sins and their fears and their dreams.

We also must know people in order to share the good news of Jesus with them in an appropriate way. We are called to follow His example of meeting people where they are.

In fact, Jesus himself said, "As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (John 20:21, NKJV). How was Jesus "sent"? He identified with us, becoming flesh like us. He "dwelt among us" (John 1:14). He was among the people at weddings, funerals, dinner parties, and other community events. He was equally at home with the religious and with those who never attended the synagogue, with "sinners" and "those who were sick and needed a physician."

Urban ministry is following Jesus like this. Here are some ways you can "dwell among your people":

- Discover ways to talk with the residents of your community. Find out about their experiences, what they value most about the city. Ask them what the church can do to contribute to their community.
- Encourage your people to be a part of the life of your community. Civic groups and block associations share a common concern for the well being of people. Affirm this as a vital ministry, and give them opportunities to share their experiences with the church.
- Lead your people on prayer walks or prayer drives through your neighborhood. Vary the day and time you do this. You will begin to see your community as never before. Help your people to develop Jesus' eyes and ears and heart.⁷
- Become a part of organizations like Concerts of Prayer and Church and Community Development Association (CCDA). These are dedicated to addressing the issues that urban churches face across the country. You can network with others who have concerns similar to yours.

⁷ There are numerous materials to help you with prayer walking. Contact your local association or state convention if you need assistance.

Understanding People Worksheet

Church and Community Leaders: Recall what you learned from other community leaders. How has your understanding changed or grown?

Residents: What are some experiences of the people you spoke with that help you understand the evangelistic challenge of your church? How does the gospel address these?

Church Members: What are your church members doing to be an active part of their community? What are they learning about their neighbors? What is God saying to them about how they can be a minister of the gospel?

Prayer Insights: As you have prayed for people in your community, what new insights has the Spirit of God taught you? How would Jesus share the gospel here? How can you keep prayer before your people?

What else is the Spirit saying to you and your church? What else can you do to equip your church?

Gauge the Spiritual Climate

If you have worked through this resource, much of what you have already done will help you to know the spiritual climate of your community. You will have a sense of the following:

How open are the residents to the gospel? How open are they to you, and the church? Is trust an issue?

What is their opinion of or experience with the church?

What do they think or know about Jesus?

Are there any specific obstacles you must overcome?

Here are a few activities to help you gauge the spiritual climate of your community:

- Take time to ask guests (both to your worship services and ministries) about their experience in your church. Find out what they noticed first. Ask them what they liked the most and the least. Find out what motivated them to come. You can do this through email, a phone call, or a post card.
- Become familiar with the religious history of your community. Talk with pastors. What events shaped your neighborhood? What are the churches known for? How have they contributed to the community in the past? Who are they reaching?
- Remind your people that virtually all people are seekers at some point in their life. Life changes, transitions and crisis have a way of softening people's hearts to the gospel. Equip your people to be marketplace ministers. Teach them how to draw close to the hurting and the searching. Remember the words of Jesus: "Look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35, NIV).

Spiritual Climate Worksheet

What percentage of the total population in your community attends church?
Who attends church?

What is the religious history of your community? What events have influenced the spiritual openness of people? Does your church have a reputation? If so, how does that contribute to your evangelistic potential? If not, consider how you can create one.

Are there growing churches in your community? What are they doing to reach people and how can you learn from them?

Are there other religious communities that are growing in your area? What does this tell you about the spiritual climate you are in?

Why do people visit your services and ministries? What is their impression of your church? What have you learned about them and what approaches to evangelism would be effective in reaching them?

What can you do to equip your people to be on mission where they live and work?

3 *Designing a Way to Get There*

"...who understood the times and knew what Israel should do"
(1 Chronicles 12:32, NIV)

So far, you have tried to get the big picture of what God envisions for your city. You have also tried to know your community and the people around you. Now it is time to bring it all together.

In this final section, you will look at four components of an evangelism strategy to reach your city. Each one is essential. You will draw on what you have learned, and explore ways you can implement these in your church.

Pray For the City

Jim Cymbala, pastor of the well-known Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York City, once said that this impression from God has made all the difference in his ministry: "*Lead my people to pray and call upon my name.*"⁸ This incredible book relates the exciting story of how prayer is the basis and the power for this growing church.

The church is one of the few remaining institutions of trust in many urban neighborhoods.

Robert Carle
Signs of Hope in the City

Urban churches with God's vision on their hearts know the following: the greatness of God's kingdom plan for their city and the immense needs of the people around them, and their weakness and smallness to reach people. As a result they cry out to God for His power. The church in the New Testament knew the link between intercessory prayer and evangelism effectiveness. The Upper Room of prayer is the key to entering every living room in your city.

The following prayer worksheet contains guides, resources and examples to mobilize your church for sustained prayer.

⁸ *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* (Zondervan, 1997), 27.

City Prayer Worksheet

- Lead your church to pray regularly and biblically for your city. Read Psalm 126:6-9; Jeremiah 29:1-7; Isaiah 58:6-9; Colossians 4:2-4; Ephesians 6; and I Timothy 2:1-3. Then pray for your city using the following outline:

Pray for the **well-being** of your city, the unity, prosperity and fulfillment of all the people in the city.

Pray for the **leaders** of your city. Prayer for those in authority results in peace and godliness. Paul indicates this will facilitate the spread of the gospel and the "salvation of all men."

Pray against **the spiritual forces** that influence your city. Urban evangelism is spiritual warfare. In the book *Loving Your City into the Kingdom*, Jack Hayford teaches how to pray against the disease, the depression, the dissolution, the disappointment and the deception in cities that ruin people's lives. Pray like this for your city, too.

Pray for the **witness and ministry** of your church. Paul urges the church to prayer so that it might be ready to walk through the open doors for evangelism in that city.

Pray for **lost people** by name. *Praying Your Friends to Christ* and *Houses of Prayer Everywhere*⁹ are two useful tools to help you do this. Remember what you learned about prayerwalking, too!

- Join with others in praying for your city. *Concerts of Prayer Greater New York*¹⁰ sponsors an annual prayer walk across every zip code in New York City. Mobilize your people to take advantage of these ministries that unite the church in the city for strategic prayer.¹¹

⁹ See the web sites www.namb.net and www.hopeministries.org for more information on these resources.

¹⁰ See their web site, www.copgny.org for prayer resources and events in New York City. Mac Pier, in his great book, *The Power of a City at Prayer: What Happens when Churches Unite for Renewal* (IVP, 2002), devotes an entire section on "Leading Prayer For the City" that is very helpful.

¹¹ Ed Silvano, in the book, *That None Should Perish*, tells the thrilling story of the churches in Resistencia, Argentina and their united prayer efforts for that city. He believes that prayer, in the context of spiritual warfare, is a central part of what the Spirit is saying to the churches today (Regal, 1996).

Care for People

Several years ago, Steve Sjogren and his family moved to Cincinnati to start a new church. A successful church planter in two other cities, Steve thought he knew how to begin a new church. After two years of preparation, 37 people came to the first Sunday worship.

There is no future for a [merely] talking Christianity.

Alan Walker

Quoted in

How To Reach Secular People

By George Hunter

Steve then led his church in an approach to evangelism he called "servant evangelism." Servant evangelism is a demonstration of the kindness of God through some humble act of service with no strings attached. Today, over 2,000 people attend worship services at Vineyard Christian Fellowship. They

have begun more than a dozen new churches in the Cincinnati-Dayton area.¹² Says Steve, "It seems people don't necessarily remember what they are *told* of God's love, but they never forget what they have *experienced* of God's love."¹³

Just as churches are rediscovering the link between prayer and evangelism, they are also finding out how caring for people is indispensable to reaching urban people. Ministering to people follows the pattern of Christ, who both spoke the words and did the works of the Father. Gospel words and gospel deeds belong together; the words interpret the deeds and the deeds embody the words.

Three urban realities make caring for people a requirement for any strategy to reach people in the city. First, urban people have significant needs that influence the way they hear the gospel. Loneliness, competition, substance abuse and other urban realities require a compassionate Christian response that overcomes these obstacles to hearing and receiving the good news.

¹² See the web site www.servantevangelism.com. You can order a DVD that explains this approach, as well as other servant evangelism ideas for the entire year.

¹³ *Conspiracy of Kindness* (Servant Publications, 1993), 29 .

Because the sense of alienation in the city is acute, distrust is a major impediment to effective evangelism. Many city dwellers have been burned, manipulated and exploited by the systems of power in the city. Their guard is up. Humble service in the name of Christ can lower this distrust and soften a person's heart to consider the claims of Jesus.

Third, unchurched, pre-Christian people often experience the church as closed to outsiders and judgmental of others who are different from them. Moralism, criticism and rejection are the body language of many congregations, preventing people with multiple body piercings and soap opera values from seriously considering the Christian faith. Sincere, humble ministry can help to re-establish the credibility of the church in the city and communicate the right message: the loving, accepting, and saving grace of God in Christ for all people.

The Ministry Worksheet that follows suggests some ways your church can minister in the city.¹⁴ The worksheet draws on what you have learned about your community and your church.

¹⁴ See Appendix B: Effective Urban Ministry for more examples and suggestions. *Meeting Needs, Sharing Christ* from the North American Mission Board also contains many resources to assist here, too.

Ministry Worksheet

- Working through this guidebook, you have learned much about your city and your people-their lives, struggles, values, beliefs, and worldview. Provide a regular forum where church members can share their concerns for the city. Keep these questions before them: *What is God saying to us? What is He leading us to do? To start? To change?*
- Plan worship celebrations that communicate the love and care of God. Choose music that is culturally understandable. Preach messages that address the doubts, questions and life concerns of pre-Christians. For a good resource about worship for today, see Robert Webber's book, *Ancient-Future Faith (Baker, 1999)*.
- Provide opportunities for the unchurched to investigate the Christian faith in a safe manner. Open, honest dialogue with caring, non-judgmental believers is essential in the city. *How To Reach Secular People* by George Hunter (Abingdon, 1992) is an excellent resource.
- Help your people discover and use their spiritual gifts in ministry outside the church. Help them to see community involvement as an important part of the church's strategy to care for others.
- From your networking with community leaders, you are more aware of the needs all around you. Ask your people, *How can we serve our community? How can we say to others, 'God loves you and we care'?* Steve Sjogren's book, *Conspiracy of Kindness* lists numerous servant evangelism projects that any size church can do all year long. Have your leaders read this and pray about what your next step might be.

The crucial issue is, *Where does God's agenda and the needs around us intersect?* Urban ministry that is faithful to God and relevant to people will reach many for Christ.

Proclaim the Gospel

Proclaiming the gospel is the central focus of the church's mission. The church's identity is rooted in joining God in finding and loving lost people into a relationship with Him.

Knowing your audience is essential to effective evangelism.¹⁵ Many different worldviews exist in sufficient strength in your city. While the Christian faith is relevant at all times and in every culture, to ignore the manifold differences in outlook and circumstance which crowd in on urban people is fatal to evangelistic impact.

Too many churches view the world through rose-colored glasses. They mistake the masks people wear for their real faces.

George Hunter
How To Reach Secular People

Helping others to become Christian usually takes place in stages over time. It is not unusual for a person to take two years to consider the claims of Jesus before responding to His call to follow Him. Fruitful evangelism is the result of a process, the culmination of many influences and conversations that precede a decision for Christ. From his research over 25 years, George Hunter concludes that there are six stages a person goes through in becoming a Christian: awareness of Christianity, perceived relevance to their personal life, an active interest in which they ask questions and explore understandings, a trial period, a public adoption of the faith, and finally reinforcement after some initial uncertainty or ambiguity.

The Proclamation Worksheet on the following page recommends several actions to help with personal, congregational and pastoral evangelism.

¹⁵ For more on urban worldviews and the process of conversion, see Appendix C: Effective Urban Evangelism.

Proclaim the Gospel Worksheet

Personal Evangelism

- Teach your people how to communicate with urban, secular, people. George Hunter outlines 10 approaches in *How to Reach Secular People*.¹⁶ Teach these! Model these, too. Another attraction of this book is Hunter's profile of the kinds of Christians that reach people.
- Train your people in personal evangelism in a way that fits their social realities. Help them identify the four worlds of relationships they have: biological (family), geographical (neighbors), recreational, and vocational. Group people together to discuss how to evangelize in these contexts and for support and prayer.
- Orient your people to the various worldviews prevalent around them. Prepare them to answer the questions they will most likely encounter, such as: *Who will I trust? Why do I hurt? Why is there so much hatred and violence? How can Christians say they love people but reject who they are? Are believers really happier? If a religion works and feels real to a person, then isn't it true for them?*
- Urban people typically define themselves by what they do. Since your people spend the majority of their time at work, you must train them to be marketplace ministers for evangelism to make an impact in the city. Equip your people with a biblical view of their work.

¹⁶ Abingdon Press, 1992.

Congregational Evangelism

People today are looking for communities in which faith is lived out and spiritual experiences are tangible and real. They want authenticity. They are looking for safe places to work out their sense of identity and self.

- Today, experience precedes explanation. Worship that includes sincere praise, confession of sin (to God and to one another), and heart-felt prayer is magnetic to pre-Christian people! Review and evaluate your worship services. Take an honest look. Ask your guests for their impressions and opinions. Keep asking, *What does our worship service say to pre-Christian people?*
- Biblical community is equally attractive to those seeking God. The lack of pretense and the presence of acceptance and honesty are indispensable for evangelism today. Be transparent about personal struggles, and magnify even small victories over sin, reconciled relationships and changed lives. We are communicating the gospel to a generation that hears with their eyes and thinks with their feelings.
- Provide opportunities for pre-Christian people to ask questions about Christianity in a safe place. NEVER INVALIDATE THE EXPERIENCE OR THE QUESTION OF ANYONE! Be patient.
- Take advantage of special times of the year to present the gospel. These are safe opportunities for your people to bring others.

In our world, a biblically authentic, worshipping and fellowshiping community is the most powerful apologetic we have. Remember that an overemphasis on individualism loses the larger message of the gospel--the cost of discipleship, the absolute claim of God over our entire life, and our belonging to an alternative culture shaped by the kingdom of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

¹⁷ Robert Webber offers some needed corrections to this overemphasis on individualism in his discussions on “Evangelism as Process” in his wonderful book, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Baker Books, 1999), 141-152.

Pastoral Evangelism

The pastor has the unique role of proclaiming the gospel every week in his preaching. The suggestions that follow are aimed at increasing your worship leadership and your preaching's evangelistic impact.

On Planning and Leading Worship

- Aim for artistic quality, richness and excellence. Urban people are often educated and skilled. Sloppy planning and poor leadership will not be appealing to them.
- Take great pains to be open and honest. Avoid "we-them" language. City people are suspicious of authority and religious institutions.
- Find ways to communicate through images, metaphors, experience. Our culture is suspicious of a message that is only verbal. The visual and the narrative presentation of truth are preferred over the propositional and the rational.
- Explain the service as you go along. Show how what is done in worship is grounded in history. Our culture is rootless and homeless; some describe this generation as "Nowhereians". Linking what is done today to the ancient church is attractive to people today.
- Address directly those who might be seeking or unconvinced.

On Preaching (In General)

- Avoid "we-them" language. Do not invalidate anyone's experience.
- Be honest about how faith and religion can be used to oppress people. Admit to the mistakes the church has made.
- Be diligent to show that the gospel is not "religion." Religion motivates through fear and pride; the gospel motivates through grace and joy. If you do not make this distinction between the gospel and religion, new people will automatically think you are simply calling them to be good and nice.
- Be Christ-centric. Keep the focus on Jesus, who He is and what He has done. Everything in the Bible is about Jesus (Luke 24:44-45), so every sermon should be about him, too.
- Preach experientially. Make the truth *real* as well as *clear*.

- Use the vernacular. Show that you understand their world and their thought process. Be up to date on what is in the news, journals, etc.
- Include both believers and non-Christians in your message. Talk as if non-believing people are present. For example, you can say such things as, "If you are not a Christian, or not sure what you believe, you may think that this is narrow-minded. But I hope you will consider..."
- People today "try on" Christianity through dozens of mini-decisions. They want to see how it works. Give them that opportunity.¹⁸

On Preaching the Gospel (Specifics)

- Preach the whole narrative of the Bible: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.
- Preach Christ's atonement as victory over sin and evil in addition to satisfaction and substitution. The King of Glory has appeared in flesh and his rulership extends over all of life. He inaugurated the kingdom of God! Christ has bound, dethroned and will defeat all evil.
- Show how Christ restores one's identity and true community. Religion and moralism build identity on things other than God (idolatry). They lead to an unstable identity and a sense of superiority towards and exclusion of others. Only in the gospel do we find a stable identity and the motivation and power to love others.
- Emphasize the cost of discipleship. Christians are called to flee personal sins (immorality, greed, lying and the like) and to forsake the gods of culture (such as racism, injustice, violence).
- Speak to all aspects of life. City people are living in their career. They do not have much in terms of a private life. Vocation dominates their life and their time. Speak to this in your preaching.
- Preach on the social dimensions of the gospel. City people are deeply concerned for justice and for the poor.

¹⁸ Webber, *op. cit.* 147-149, outlines the process of conversion in the early church that included stages of growth and rites of passage associated with each one. What he describes is applicable to today.

Partner With Others

The enormity of the call of God to reach your city can overwhelm you. But, take heart! Other churches sense this call, too.

There are signs all over America that the urban church is coming together. The urban church is hearing again the biblical call to oneness. This is dismantling the barriers of racial and denominational prejudice. Here are some examples

- Partnerships among churches, parachurch ministries and denominations are having significant impact in Colorado Springs.
- Several years ago, key churches in Minneapolis-St. Paul adopted this mission statement:

We see our city transformed by a biblically unified church which radically impacts society and presents every person with life changing opportunities to know and follow Christ.

- Concerts of Prayer Greater New York is leading the call to partnership in New York City. For the last eleven years, COPGNY has sponsored The Pastor's Prayer Summit, a 2.5 day event with one agenda: to meet with God. COPGNY also unites the churches to pray across every zip code of the city one day a year.
- The Latino Pastoral Action Center (LPAC), modeled on Isaiah 61, combines evangelism and social concern. In the South Bronx, LPAC reaches out to all churches to provide after school programs, urban ministry training, housing projects and mercy ministries.

Paul Cedar of *Mission America* has said, "Without a doubt, these are days in which God is calling us to partner under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in sharing his love and grace with others."

The Partnership Worksheet on the next page suggests several ways you can partner with churches to impact your city for Christ.

Partnership Worksheet

Earlier in this workbook, we recommended that 20% of your ministry should be given to networking your community, befriending local pastors, and learning about the needs of your people. *Based on what you have learned, what are some ways you can partner with other churches to reach your city? What can you start doing right now?*

Read *Prayer Summits* by Joseph Aldrich and *The Power of A City at Prayer* by Mac Pier with your leaders. Answer this question (and others you might think of!), *What is God saying to us about cooperating with others to pray for and minister to our city?*

Find out who in your city is leading the call to partnership and prayer. Seek them out. Participate whenever possible in prayer breakfasts, pastor's conferences, and leadership training events. *What new potential for ministry is this revealing to you?*

Contact your local or regional office of *Concerts of Prayer International* to see what is offered in prayer events, leadership training, and ministry opportunities. Consider taking the lead in bringing churches together for a cooperative ministry effort. Record your findings below.

Conclusion

By the year 2050, the population of America will surpass 400 million, an increase of 100 million from 2008. Most of these will live in cities, and most of these will not have a relationship with Jesus Christ. The challenge to reach our cities for Christ intensifies every day.

The purpose of this workbook has been to help your church build a strategy for evangelism. As you have moved through the suggested activities, you have sensed God's vision for your city and how your church can be a part of the accomplishment of that vision.

The building process continues after you have completed this workbook! Vision, Action, Evaluation, and Re-Vision never end for the people of God. The Spirit, who is the mind of God, will continue to lead you and reveal to you where God is working and where God is leading. You can stand on the promise of Jesus for you: *I will build My church* (Matthew 16:18, NKJV).

When churches get their vision from God, take stock of themselves and their city, and receive anew the power of the Holy Spirit to move in evangelistic power in the city, the day will arrive when these words of Scripture will be true:

*And the name of the city from that day shall be
The LORD is there.
(Ezekiel 48:35)*

Appendix A: A Biblical Theology for Urban Mission

More than one half of the world's population lives in cities. There are now over 300 world class cities. By any standard of measurement, New York City is the most influential world class city today. Its combined impact in the areas of finance, media and telecommunications, banking, commerce, trade, and cultural attraction circles the globe.

Because of its world-wide impact, New York City is also the most strategic city in the world for Christian mission. The success of evangelism, church planting, ministry, leadership development and missionary deployment in New York City literally touches all the peoples of the earth.

This Appendix offers a brief theology for urban mission in three parts. The first part gives an overview of some demographic trends in New York City and examines statistical markers of the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association with regard to evangelism and church membership. The second part explores the meaning of the city from a biblical perspective. The last part of the module offers several biblical examples and practical suggestions for urban ministry.

New York City and the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association

Total Population

There are many ways to look at a city: density, diversity, and demographics, to name a few. Tables 1 and 2 give a snapshot of the population trends for New York City from 2000 to 2030. According to the 2000 United States Census and recent updates, the population of New York City was 8.0 million in 2000, and 8.1 million in 2005. By 2030, that figure is expected to rise to 9.1 million, an increase of 1.1 million people, nearly 14%.¹⁹

Table 1: Total Population

Projected NYC Population 2000-2030	
Year	Population
2000	8.0 million
2005	8.1 million
2006	8.25 million
2010	8.4 million
2020	8.7 million
2030	9.1 million
	13.9% increase

¹⁹ City of New York, Department of City Planning, "New York City Population Projections by Age/Sex and Borough 2000-2030," December 2006.

Brooklyn will continue to be the most populated borough, with nearly 30% of the city's population. Queens will be a close second. Staten Island will experience the most dramatic percentage increase, growing from 2 to 6% of the city's population.

Table 2: NYC Population by Borough

NYC Population by Borough 2000-2030 (in millions)	2000	2006	2030
Bronx	1.3	1.4	1.4
Brooklyn	2.5	2.5	2.7
Queens	2.2	2.3	2.6
Manhattan	1.6	1.6	1.8
Staten Island	.46	.48	.60
Total	8.0	8.25	9.1

While the city's projected population will reach a new high, only two boroughs, Staten Island and Queens, will reach a new population peak in 2030, growing 24.4% and 15.1% respectively.

Children

The school age population (ages 5 to 17) will experience a net drop of .2% due to decline in fertility, migration, and a decrease in the number of child bearing women. The decline will occur mainly in the Bronx and Brooklyn, but these declines will be largely offset by gains in Staten Island (7.4%), Manhattan (4.4%) and Queens (3.5%).

Older Adults

In contrast to the decline in school age population, New York City will see dramatic increases in its elderly by 2030. The number of persons aged 65+ will total 1.35 million, an increase of 44.2% from 2000. These increases will be most evident in Staten Island (100.2%) and Manhattan (57.9%). Brooklyn will have the largest number of elderly with 410,000. The aging of the baby boomers and increased life expectancy will overcome migration losses to the suburbs and the south.

Median Age

The median age (the age where one half of the population is over and one half under) of the City will grow from 34 in 2000 to 37.5 in 2030. Both Staten Island and Manhattan will be above that at nearly 40, with Brooklyn and the Bronx below. The Bronx will continue to have the youngest median age at 33.2.

These figures suggest some interesting and challenging ministry opportunities. Staten Island will undergo the most profound changes in the next decade. Its overall population will increase over 24%, with most of these increases in school age children and persons 65+ years of age. Ministries to the elderly across the city will rise in importance. Youth ministries in the Bronx could address the younger city population of that borough. The growing diversity in Queens will call for new churches among varied people groups.

The Metropolitan New York Baptist Association consists of 285 churches²⁰ across the vast geographical territory of Northern New Jersey, the five boroughs of New York City, the lower Hudson Valley, Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island, and southeast Fairfield County in Connecticut. This territory has over 20 million people. This means that the Association has one church for every 70,000+ people. A look at the make-up of the Association by borough and by Fellowship Group is contained in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Association Churches by Borough

Borough	# Churches	# Reports	Baptisms	Res Members	Ratio
Manhattan	26	15	294	2521	8.5
Queens	52	25	171	2438	14.25
Bronx	17	7	46	1460	31.74
Brooklyn	33	17	153	2758	17.79
Staten Island	5	2	24	420	17.5
TOTALS	133	66	688	9567	13.94

In 2006, 211 of the 285 churches reported 18,763 resident members and 1,250 baptisms. Thus the average church has 89 members and baptized 6 people. Of these 285 churches, 133 are located in the five boroughs of New York City.

Queens and Brooklyn have the most number of churches. These are also the two most populated boroughs in the city (see Table 2). However, the most populated borough, Brooklyn, has nearly 40% less churches than Queens, the second highest borough in population. Their average membership is slightly higher than the association average (110+), and they baptize roughly the same number per church, 6.

Churches in Manhattan had a higher degree of evangelistic effectiveness, as indicated by its low baptism ratio.

Table 4: Association Churches by Fellowship Group

²⁰ Accurate information about the number of churches, members, and so on depends on the annual reports from member churches called the Annual Church Profile (ACP). Due to the size, complexity and diversity of the Association, these figures represent the best information to date.

Fellowship Group²¹	# Churches	# Reports	Baptisms	Res. Members	Ratio
African American	46	26	159	3297	20.7
Chinese	9	7	35	728	20.8
Filipino	23	22	111	1682	15.1
Haitian	38	17	47	2752	58.5
Hispanic ²²	29	22	105	2142	20.4
Korean	36	28	180	2002	11.1
MultiEthnic	23	18	234	1671	7.1
TOTALS²³	204	140	871	14274	16.4

A baptism ratio is one way to measure evangelism effectiveness. The ratio is the number of members it takes to baptize one person. The smaller the number means the greater the effectiveness. The MultiEthnic Fellowship Group, with some of the faster growing churches in the association, leads in evangelism effectiveness. The Korean and Filipino churches are also showing good results.

The Haitian churches of MNYBA are the largest, on average. However they exhibit the lowest baptism ratio. Efforts to obtain accurate information as well as attempts to strengthen their evangelism effectiveness will yield positive growth.

The Meaning of the City from a Biblical Perspective

Cities as God’s Invention

The Bible begins in a garden, and ends in a city. The apex of God’s redemption is a city, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). The thrust of God’s redemptive activity is to build that city, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21). In the midst of this city is a crystal river, and on each side of the river is the Tree of Life, bearing fruit and leaves which heal the nations of their wounds and the effects of the divine curse from the Fall. The New Jerusalem is the Garden of Eden remade, the fulfillment of the purposes of God. God’s ultimate purpose for humanity is urban!

The city is not a human idea nor or a sociological phenomenon nor the evil invention of fallen man ; it is the design of God. God designed cities to take the resources of creation in the natural order and the human soul and build civilization(s) that honor Him. The cultural mandate “have dominion” and “fill the earth” (Genesis 1) was, in essence, a mandate to build the city. Through science, art, engineering and the like, mankind is to develop the riches that God put into creation into a culture that honors God. City building

²¹ Churches in a Fellowship Group are not limited to New York City.

²² The Association has more than 29 Hispanic churches. However, not all of them are a part of the Hispanic Fellowship.

²³ The Association also divides its territory into three regions (New Jersey, Central, and Eastern). The totals included here do not include these additional churches.

is an ordinance of God just like work and marriage. Cities draw together human talent and resources and tap the human potential for cultural development as nothing else can.

Even after the fall of man in Genesis 3, the city remains a benefit to human beings. Cities serve as a refuge for the human race, exiled and driven from paradise into the wilderness (Psalm 107:4-9). By developing the resources inherent in creation, the city becomes the place where the needs of human beings are met. They become places of refuge and safety. Seen in this light, urban ministry is both a fulfillment of the cultural mandate and the extension of God's redemptive purposes.

Cities as Centers of Culture

The description of Babylon in eighteenth chapter of the Revelation illustrates the power of the city to the resources of creation to build human communities. Although the context of this passage is the wicked nature of human civilization organized against God,²⁴ nevertheless its components demonstrate how cities are the center for the creation of culture. The city is the place of music and the arts (v. 22a). The city is where craft making and manufacturing take place (v. 22b). Cities bring together trade, retailing, and technological advance (v. 23). Family building is integral to the city (v. 23b). This is what God designed the city to do.²⁵

Urban ministry, then, is cooperating with God to provide all of these. Health care, housing, safety, education, recreation, job training and employment are all legitimate components of urban churches (Genesis 4:17; Isaiah 58:12).

If cities are the engines for cultural production, then reaching the city for Christ is what ultimately changes the culture.²⁶ Reach the city and you reach your entire region and eventually the world.²⁷

Cities as the Place to Meet God

Ancient cities were primarily religious institutions. They were built around a 'ziggurat', the original skyscraper, a temple where a particular god was believed to come down. Cities were viewed as the royal residences of the god(s), the place to which one came to honor and serve ones god.

²⁴ My point here is that it is wrong to see the city as intrinsically evil. City-building is intrinsic to creation. However, since the Fall, sin has effected all human societies and endeavors. The city is also the place of deadly pride, evil and death.

²⁵ It is interesting to note that God's instructions to the exile in Babylon (Jeremiah 29) were to build houses, plant gardens, enjoy the fruit of the land, and to see the overall welfare (*shalom*) of the city. In addition, God's people were to see the city as a place of mission; He has sent them there (29:7).

²⁶ Since Evangelical Christians are the least urban religious group, it is no surprise that they have the least cultural impact.

²⁷ Globalization and the creation of world-class cities have made the world even more connected. Great metropolitan regions, and not nation-states, are emerging as the world's most influential players. The cities of the world are now linked more to one another than to their own states and countries. The focus of this paper prohibits a deeper exploration of this emerging reality. Suffice it to say here that reaching a city has world-wide implications.

In the Scripture, the city of God is his dwelling place. After Eden was lost to us (temporarily) through sin, God brings a new people into existence. Through which He will bless and save the world (Genesis 12:1-4). Upon their are redemption from Egypt, the first thing God does is to create a mobile city in the desert, dwelling among his people in the tabernacle.

When Israel eventually moved into the Promised Land, one of the first things it did was build cities of refuge. Built under God's direction, these cities provided asylum for accused persons and the chance for civil justice (Numbers 35). God invented cities to be a sign of divine protection, where accused people could find safety, come in contact with God's people, and find God himself.²⁸

After God chooses Jerusalem as the place for his Name, the earthly city of Jerusalem becomes a symbol and a sign of the future city of God. In this earthly city, the Temple stands as its central, integrating point. As a result, Jerusalem is “the joy of the whole earth” (Psalm 48:2). Now in Christ, all believers now have as their mother “the Jerusalem that is above” (Galatians 4:26).

Cities are religious hotbeds where people are spiritually seeking and restless. Because of the diversity of the city, urban people are more open to radically new ideas, including the gospel! Because they are surrounded by so many people unlike themselves, urbanites are more open to change and conversion.²⁹

The implication for urban mission is clear! Cities are the key to evangelism in any area and evangelism is the centerpiece of urban mission. A casual glance at the example of Jesus and the strategy of the Apostle Paul shows their understanding of the cruciality of cities as the place of evangelism, church planting and ministry. Jesus described himself as being sent “to the cities” (Matthew 4:24-25; Mark 1:38). He wept over cities as lost, ignorant, and blind (Luke 19:41-42). Paul's missionary journeys essentially ignored the countryside. Whenever he entered a new region, he planted churches in the biggest city. The result was that entire provinces heard the good news (Acts 19). It is no coincidence that the church is called “a city on a hill” (Matthew 5).

Cities as Places of Evil

Since the Fall, the city brings out the best and the worst in the human heart. Therefore, sin profoundly impacts the city. It breaks it.

Unredeemed cities are places of racism, exploitation and violence. Human pride makes cities places of constant strife and class warfare. One result is confusion (see Genesis 11

²⁸ It is revealing to note that the homeless, the immigrant, the poor and even the deviant find the city to be more hospitable and merciful than small towns. The refuge the city provides actually gives them the possibility of discovering the one true God.

²⁹ By the year AD 300, 50% of the urban populations of the Roman Empire were Christian. Over 90% of the countryside remained pagan (Some believe that the word ‘pagan’, from the Greek *paganus*, meant a farmer or man of the country). Because Christianity captured the cities, it eventually captured society (see Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, Yale University Press).

and the Tower of Babel). People in cities have trouble communicating. Defiance of God results in fragmentation and disunity. Cities built to “make a name” for its human builders create strife and violence.

The power of the city under sin also creates pride, arrogance, over-work, and exhaustion. The city presses in on you and challenges you to compete with its pace, its excellence and its drive.

Cities are inveterately religious. Spiritual restlessness in the city makes the city a hotbed for cults and deviant belief systems. Human idolatries are enhanced in the city. Urban mission is desperately needed to resist this dark side of the city and its corruption as God’s gift.

Some Biblical Models and Practical Suggestions for Urban Ministry

In every earthly city, there are two cities vying for control and dominance: the City of Satan (or, the god of this world) and the City of God. The city of Satan defies God and uses art and technology and business and culture as ends in themselves. The city of God is marked by “God’s shalom” (Jeru-shalom), his peace, where the stewardship of creation and righteousness results in family building, and cultural development and harmony under God.

Christians are to love the city and seek its shalom.

Biblical Models for Urban Ministry

The Bible is replete with models for urban ministry. Nehemiah engaged in **community, or deed ministry**. He received a government grant and a leave of absence to create the first Model Cities Program by rebuilding Jerusalem after the captivity. He made the city safe and functional. He combined mercy and justice in holistic balance. Nehemiah shows us that creating safe streets, good jobs, decent housing and proper schools are vital to urban mission.

A second model for urban ministry centers around **work**. Thirteen chapters of our sacred book are given to the career of a Hebrew/Egyptian economist named Joseph. Joseph saved the country (and God’s people) by moving people into cities and carefully budgeting for surplus and deficit. He served in the government of a pagan Pharaoh and used the instruments of the state to feed the entire Middle East.

Esther also rose high in a pagan society and used her position at great personal risk to work for justice for society and for her people.

Daniel held on to his faith commitment in spite of working as a dream interpreter for the king of Babylon. He works within the structures of government to make it more just for its citizens and more responsive to God.³⁰

A third model for urban ministry is **community building**. Jeremiah's letter to the exiles (Jeremiah 29) instructed them neither to assimilate into the culture nor to separate from it, but rather to live out their lives as a community seeking the peace (*shalom*) of the city. The exiles were told to be witnesses to the city through the beauty and magnetism of their lives as God's people. Their simplicity, generosity and purity would offer their city an attractive alternative to the competitiveness, injustice and greed of the surrounding culture.

A final model is **prophetic ministry**.³¹ The story of Jonah is not about a fish or even the prophet himself. It is about God, who struggles to get a man and a message to a city which happens to be the equivalent of the Nazi empire of its time. The book is about how to bring a message of judgment (and repentance!) with a broken heart to a sinful city and nation.

Practical Suggestions for Urban Ministry

The Bible teaches that the ultimate purpose of redemption is a completely restored creation. In that New Creation, the City of God is the restored Garden of Eden in urban form (Revelation 21-22). Christ's redemption ultimately removes the curse that brought mental, social, cultural and spiritual alienation and brokenness. Therefore, the urban church must be **committed to engage the city in every aspect**-spiritual, social, and economic, and on every level, both individual and corporate.

Urban churches must have a **long-term commitment** to the city. The goal of ministry must be to make the city godly, and not to relocate to a better neighborhood. This means that church leaders and church members live out their faith long-term in the city. If a far greater percentage of the people living long-term in the city were Christians, Christ's values would have a greater influence on the culture.

Urban churches must be **radically committed to the good of the city** as a whole. Using all of its resources of faith, churches sacrificially serve the good of the whole city. Churches must work for the peace, security, justice and prosperity of their neighbors, loving them in word and deed, whether they believe what we do or not.

³⁰ It might shock American Christians that five books of the Bible emerge from what is modern day Iraq and Iran: Jonah, Daniel, Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah.

³¹ This list is by no means exhaustive. Another model, based on Genesis 18-19 could be labeled rescue ministry, extricating the Lot's of the world from the grip of urban sin. There are others if you use your imagination.

Churches must help its members to **integrate their faith with their work**. Since most urban people define themselves by their work (or lack thereof!), churches must equip their people address the challenges of their workplace.³²

Urban ministry must **bring the message of God** to bear on all facets of city life. Churches that learn to say “Thus saith the Lord” out of a heart full of brokenness and humility will have the greatest impact on people and cities.

Churches must be a **dynamic counter-culture** in the city. The city of Satan is built on self-aggrandizement, on making a name for oneself (Genesis 11:4). God wants churches to be a city on a hill whose life and action show God’s glory to the world (Matthew 5:14). Urban churches are called to be an alternate culture that shows how money, sex and power can be used in non-destructive ways, how all kinds of people can be in harmony with one another.

The late Harvey Conn, in one of his lectures on urban ministry³³, once said, “Jesus is the kingdom developer, and the urban church is like a model home that He is building. Jesus is inviting the urban world into that model home to see how it is built and how the family inside of it lives. Through the church, He is saying to the city, ‘Come in and look around.’”

³² See Appendices B and C for more on work, worldviews, and ministry.

³³ See his book, *A Clarified Vision for Urban Mission*, Zondervan, 1987.

Appendix B: Effective Urban Ministry

In the Preface to his provocative book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach The West...Again*, George Hunter says,

The Church, in the Western world, faces populations who are increasingly “secular”—people with no Christian memory...increasingly “urban”—out of touch with God’s “natural revelation”...increasingly “post-modern”—more peer driven, feeling driven than their forebears...increasingly “neo-barbarian”—their lives are often out of control...and increasingly receptive—exploring worldview options to make sense of their lives and find their soul’s true home.³⁴

These secular, urban, post-modern, neo-barbarian, and receptive people are in the cities of the world.

However, cities are burgeoning at a time when many are convinced that the coming generations will have to settle for less than what their parents had or achieved. There is a broad consensus that there are limits to the earth’s resources and sustainability. This combination of high expectations and diminishing opportunities is a social time bomb.³⁵ Effective urban ministry is the bottom line to the success of the church in the 21st century.

Below we explore some challenges of urban ministry and suggest six key components to an urban ministry strategy.

The Delta Effect and Urban Ministry

The interplay between government, education, transportation, media, and commerce in any city generates enormous societal changes. These changes present a challenge to the urban church.

That challenge could be called the delta effect.³⁶ A delta is the product of a river meeting another body of water. As a river flows into an ocean, sea, or another river, its current slows and the sediment carried by the river creates small land masses. The river divides around these land masses into multiple, smaller streams. The delta effect is the splintering of the river into smaller ones.

Churches in the city often experience the delta effect, the splintering of its ministry over this question: *As a church, how do we relate to the city, to the culture? What is our*

³⁴ George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again*, (Abingdon Press, 2000), 9.

³⁵ For an excellent discussion on the effects of expectations and reality, see Crane Brinton, *Anatomy of a Revolution*, (Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 68. Brinton says, “Revolution occurs not when things are as bad as they can be, but when expectations that things are going to be better are outpaced by reality.”

³⁶ Richard Lovelace, in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (IV Press, 1979, p. 313-322) described the delta effect in relation to the splitting of Evangelical Christianity into small, shallow streams that highlight one aspect of the church. I have picked up on his metaphor and related it to the urban church encountering the city.

priority? There are those who say, “Let the church be the church. Our job is not to change the culture. The church is a sign of the kingdom.” Others say, “As a church, we must be aggressive and address the issues of the day through political action and advocacy for those in need.” Still others claim, “We must re-engineer the church so it fits into the culture.”³⁷

As a consequence, city churches tend to major on one aspect of ministry, namely evangelism, worship, deep Christian community, social ministry or cultural renewal. Rarely is a church equally committed to all of these.³⁸ The people who lead in evangelism and those who value deep and intimate fellowship rarely work together. Those who champion social justice often criticize those who call for cultural infiltration. “What are you doing hanging out with those business leaders?” they ask. “We need to be out on the streets for the poor!”

This is the delta effect in urban ministry. In both form and function, urban churches tend to focus on one aspect of ministry at the expense of the rest. It is rare to find a church that is evangelistically effective, relationally intimate, theologically rich, culturally relevant and deeply involved in justice issues at the same time. Only churches that are spiritually vital are doing all of these together.³⁹ The presence and power of the Holy Spirit must flow in and through urban churches!

A Framework for Urban Ministry

Tim Keller, commenting on urban ministry at a recent church conference, said, “We need more Christians living in cities, with a deeper grasp of the gospel, who are creating dynamic counter cultures within the city, integrating faith with work, pouring themselves out sacrificially for the common good of the whole city, and contextualizing the message of Jesus.”⁴⁰ This statement offers a powerful antidote to the delta effect in urban ministry and suggests a framework for urban ministry.

³⁷See H. Richard Niebuhr’s classic book, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951). Niebuhr offers three models: 1) Christ Against Culture, where the church takes an adversarial stance against culture, convinced that the church can (or should) do little or nothing to change the city; 2) Christ of Culture, where the church sees itself as one of many human institutions that lead humanity towards freedom and justice; and 3) Christ Above Culture, in which the church uses culture as an opportunity for self-improvement but gives little back to it.

³⁸ After a tour of churches in Buffalo that included one church that specialized in energetic worship and gospel proclamation and another church that majored on housing, job training, and social justice, I asked John Perkins, President of the Christian Community Development Association and noted urban church leader, “What did you think?” He replied, “If we could put those two churches together, that would be something!”

³⁹ Harvie Conn, in *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, The City and the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), has reworked Niebuhr’s models to highlight the way urban Christians relate to their city. The Christ against the City model creates a fortress mentality in the church and no cultural engagement. Christ of the City leads to uncritical acceptance of city culture and no transformational power. A Christian ghetto with minimal cultural impact is the outcome of the Christ Above the City model. Conn then offers a fourth alternative, the one adopted in this paper. He calls it Christ Transforming the City, where the church is marked by spiritual and social engagement with the city.

⁴⁰ Tim Keller, “Being the Church in Our Culture,” *Reform and Resurge* 2006, Seattle, Washington.

More Christians Living in Cities

That the church needs more Christians living in cities goes without saying! To be salt and light, to incarnate the gospel, to have the greatest cultural impact means that Christians and churches must live and minister in cities.

However, not only are Americans the most anti-urban people on earth, but American Christians are the most anti-urban Christians in the world. We have not seen the city as a place of mission (cf. Jeremiah 29:7), but as a place to escape, avoid and condemn. As a result, cities are underserved by American Christians and churches. Ray Bakke, in a chapel address at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, lamented the fact that most of Christian missionary force worldwide lives outside a city.⁴¹

This urban commitment was certainly evident in the first Christians. City reaching was the key strategy of the Apostle Paul. In order to reach Macedonia, he went to the largest city in Macedonia. Cities like Lystra, Derbe, Corinth, Thessalonica, Colosse, and Ephesus were the focus of his efforts. Paul knew that reaching a city was crucial to the spread of the gospel across an entire region and the transformation of Greco-Roman culture. Luke reports that as a result of his two year stay in Ephesus “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10).

This commitment to live in and reach the city continued in the early church.⁴² The first major missionary thrust into the Greco-Roman world was in cities. The Epistle to Diognetus, an early Church writing approximately 100 years after the resurrection, includes an entire section on Christians living in cities. It says, “For the Christian, every foreign land is their father land. . . They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens, but only as aliens. Christians are not known by their language, their dress or their manner of speech but by the conduct of their character. They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their room and board but not their marriage beds.”

After a litany of distinctive Christian behaviors in the city, the Epistle continues, “To put it simply, what the soul is to the body, that Christians are in the world [city]... As the soul is the conscience to the body, so the Christians are the conscience to the city. *It is to no less a post than this that God hath ordered them and they dare not try to evade it* (Italics added).”⁴³

⁴¹ Ray Bakke, “Urban Realities, Responses and Resources,” Chapel Address at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The date is unknown.

⁴² See Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, and Rodney Starks, *The Rise of Christianity* for excellent discussions of the urban ministry of the early church.

⁴³ *Early Christian Fathers*, Cyril Richardson, ed., (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 216-218. See also Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Volume I: The Early Church to the Reformation*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 52, 57.

Although the majority of the population then was rural, Christians transformed the culture because they won the city.⁴⁴ The church in Alexandria, Egypt is one example of this commitment to the city. In this church, the women went on baby hunts each morning, collecting the abandoned babies from the night before (Exposure was Roman practice of birth control). Sitting in the plaza under a statue of Zeus, Christian women became nursing mothers to save these discarded children. The men combed the city each morning, gathering the victims (both believers and non-believers alike) of fire and plague. They then bathed and buried these victims. Further, these Christians deliberately moved into buildings where the sick gathered, and intentionally exposed themselves to disease. In this way, they transformed instances of suffering and cruelty into expressions of grace.⁴⁵ No wonder the Church Father Tertullian, in his 37th and 51st Apology, could taunt local rulers by saying, “We [meaning *Christians*] have filled up every place belonging to you, islands, castles, caves, cities, markets, palaces, forums, and prisons. We leave you your temples only.”⁴⁶ Early Christians were deeply committed to the city.

Sadly, after centuries of growth and influence in North Africa, with a burgeoning seminary in Alexandria led by some of the greatest minds in the church, namely Augustine, the early church almost disappeared because an escapist theology emerged that severed the nerve of urban mission. This theology believed that if one wanted to be an average Christian, he could stay in the city, but if one aspired to be a super saint he had to live in the desert.

The theological principle undergirding this commitment to the city is the incarnation. Jesus’ incarnation is more than a motto or a message. It is a model. Jesus did not wire the universe and create a My Space.com page to sing the Hallelujah chorus or challenge us to repent. He did not rely on emails or blogs to get His message across. He dwelt among us. He experienced life as an Asian born baby, as an African refugee, as the working poor, as an oppressed man living in a place occupied and dominated by the super power of that time.

More Christians living in cities means that churches must be committed to urban neighborhoods for the long haul, to incarnation, and identification with city people. It means that churches must encourage its members to live in the city in far greater numbers than they are now, not out of guilt, but out of joy and opportunity, out of a sense of mission and calling (Jeremiah 29:7). It means that pastors see themselves as shepherds of the entire city, as chaplains of a community, and not just of their own people.

With a Deeper Grasp of the Gospel⁴⁷

A deeper grasp of the gospel is the secret to ministry power.

⁴⁴ Etymologists believe that the word “pagan”, from the Latin word *paganus*, originally meant farmer, or man of the country.

⁴⁵ See Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*.

⁴⁶ See Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Volume I*, 73-77, 88-89.

⁴⁷ My concern here is with the gospel and believers. In Appendix C, I look at how the church must communicate the true gospel in such a way that non-believers do not hear it as a message merely to be good and nice people.

Religion, no matter what kind, operates on the principle, “I obey, and therefore God accepts me.” Conversely, the gospel says, “I am accepted on the basis of what Jesus has done, therefore I obey.”

On the surface, those who live according to these two principles look very similar. Both obey the 10 Commandments. Both pray. Both try to conform to the pattern of Christ. A deeper look, however, reveals some startling differences. The motivational structures of their hearts are radically different. One obeys out of fear of rejection and condemnation; the other from a desire to know, to please, to resemble and to delight the One who at infinite cost to Himself brought him into his family. One leads to pride and a judgmental attitude; the other results in humility and sacrifice.

With religion, the tendency is to think of oneself as a good person, or better than most. The end result is looking down one’s nose at those deemed lazy or immoral. One’s self-image is based on performance. The Bible says this is the default mode of the human heart.

With the gospel, the believer knows that he is saved by grace. One’s self-image is based on the free and costly grace of God in Jesus. Feelings of superiority (and inferiority!) are eliminated. The believer has nothing to prove and nothing to hold on to.

A deeper grasp of the gospel will result in an explosion of sacrificial service in the name of the One who gave His all. The secret to urban ministry that serves out of gratitude and humility and boldness is a deeper grasp of the gospel.

Creating Dynamic Counter Cultures in the City

If urban ministry is going to have any impact on the culture, winning individuals to Christ is only the beginning. To effect the culture, the urban church must be an alternate city within the city, what Jesus called “a city on a hill” whose life and action display God’s glory to the world (Matthew 5:14-17).

The need for the church today to be a city on a hill cannot be more urgent. Ronald Sider points out that the research of respected pollsters like Gallup and Barna demonstrates that “evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered, and sexually immoral as the world in general. Divorce is more common among ‘born again’ Christians. Only six percent of evangelicals tithe. White evangelicals are the *most* likely people to object to neighbors of another race.”⁴⁸ The church has lost what religious distinctiveness it once had.

A few examples from church history clearly show how accurate Sider’s judgment is. Justin Martyr said of the early Christians, “Those who once delighted in fornication now embrace chastity alone...we who once took most pleasure in accumulating wealth and property now share with everyone in need; we who hated and killed one another and

⁴⁸ *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* (Baker Books, 2005), 13.

would not associate with men of different tribes because of their different customs now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them and pray for our enemies.”⁴⁹

Writing in about AD 125, the Christian Aristides described Christians with these words:

They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him, as it were their own brother... When one of their poor passes away they provide for his burial; and if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.⁵⁰

So striking was the countercultural character of the early Church that the pagan emperor, Julian the Apostate, was forced to admit to a friend, “The godless Galileans [Christians] feed not only their poor but ours also. Those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.”⁵¹

Michael Green captures the power of the counter cultural community of the first church when he writes:

They made the grace of God credible by a society of love and mutual care which astonished pagans and was recognized as something entirely new. It lent persuasiveness to the claim that the new age had dawned in those who were giving it flesh. The message of the kingdom became more than an idea. A new human community had sprung up. Here love was given daily expression; reconciliation was actually occurring; people no longer divided into Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, male and female. In this community the weak were protected, the stranger welcomed. People were healed and the poor and dispossessed were cared for and found justice. Almost everything was shared. Joy abounded and ordinary lives were filled with praise.⁵²

In order for the church today to recapture her lost glory and be this city within a city, the urban church holds two things in balance: radical identification and radical difference.

Radical Identification: Non-Christians need to see Christians so inhabit their neighborhoods, so inhabit their professions that by looking at them they have a picture of what they would be like if they were Christians. They need to see that we inhabit the same thought world, that we read the same material, and that we wrestle with the same

⁴⁹ First Apology, quoted in Peter Phan, *Social Thought*, vol. 20 of *Message of the Fathers of the Church*, ed. Thomas Halton, (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1984), 56.

⁵⁰ Martin Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 42-43.

⁵¹ Quoted from Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin, 1964), 37-38.

⁵² Michael Green, from *Evangelism in the Early Church*, quoted by Tom Sine, *Mustard Seed versus McWorld* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 205.

issues. They want to see people who are like them, yet different—joyful, more thoughtful, less stressed. They have to see themselves and yet not see themselves.

When a guest walks into a church and it does not look like and feel like their world, they conclude, “This is not for me.” When the church fails at radical identification, it loses its audience.

Radical Difference: At the same time urban Christians and urban churches must be radically different. Believers model for others what it means to follow Jesus. Urban churches show the city what the city would look like if Jesus was Lord. When this happens, the church will reflect the Father’s justice, the Son’s sacrificial love, and the Spirit’s life-giving power. When the church fails at being radically different, it loses its message.

The church as a dynamic, alternative counter culture within the city will be different in the following areas⁵³:

- How it treats the material world
- How individuals relate to the group and family
- Relationships between races and classes
- How to handle money, sex, and power
- How to make decisions, set priorities, and handle destructive emotions
- How to regard death

A look at one of these areas in light of radical identification and radical difference is helpful. The Christian ethic calls for a life of chastity outside of marriage, and exclusive commitment within marriage. How, given today’s society, can anyone do that? This is a challenge even for believers, but how is this possible for pre-Christian people? How does radical identification and radical difference look in an urban church? The church must find ways through preaching and small group ministry to communicate that it is sympathetic to the difficulties of maintaining sexual purity (identification). Opportunities to share one’s struggles, and failures, in a safe and accepting environment, must be provided.

In addition, the urban church must find ways of providing a caring community wherein one is deeply loved in a non-sexual manner (difference). Believers must be in community with one other in more profound ways than we are used to. Only in a church where people are deeply connected to one another and where genuine caring and encouragement are heartfelt, can one hope to live out the Christian ethic on sex. This means that urban believers will be a part of one another’s lives in ways the church is not used to! Our counter cultures will thrive only when we put community over everything else.⁵⁴

⁵³ The list is not exhaustive.

⁵⁴ Joseph Aldrich, in his book *Lifestyle Evangelism* (Multnomah Press, 1981, p. 65), illustrates radical identification and radical difference with the following diagram:

Integrating Faith and Work

Work and employment are crucial to any city. The role that these play in every city cannot be underestimated. Most people come to the city in search of a job, a career. Cities are the place where people seek their fortune, make their fortune, and spend their fortune. Effective urban churches equip believers to integrate their faith and work.

Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon said,

“Build houses and live in them, and plant gardens, and eat their fruit. Take wives and become fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. And see the peace of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its peace you will have peace” (29:5-7).

Christians are called to love the city and to work for its shalom—its economic, social, and spiritual flourishing. In order to do that, Christians are instructed to “build and plant and raise families.” Effective urban ministry equips believers to think out and live out the implications of their faith in the workplace.

Most Christians usually adopt one of two approaches to faith and work. Some seal off their faith from their work. They treat each as a separate entity. They simply work like everyone else around them. Their faith is a private matter.

Others use their jobs as a platform from which to spout Bible verses to get their faith across. Co-workers are targeted for conversion with no thought given to their culture or background. Their faith is militant and belligerent.

For both of these believers, faith does not relate to work. They do not know how to persuade people by showing how one's faith and work can be integrated into an attractive and comprehensive view of life. They need a belief system that integrates faith and work.

In Genesis 2, Adam and Eve are gardeners, not park rangers who watch things grow. Gardeners take raw materials and rearrange them so that their potential can emerge and

5 Radical Difference

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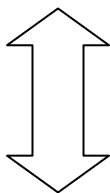
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5 Radical Identification



The danger of radical difference with no identification is isolation and a loss of your audience

The danger of radical identification with no difference is assimilation and a loss of your message

the human family can flourish. This is the biblical meaning of work, taking the resources of the physical universe and rearranging its materials into the image of God.

Mark Noll, in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, writes, “Who formed the world of nature which provides the basis of the physical sciences? Who formed the universe of human interaction, which is the raw material of politics, sociology, economics, history and art? Who is the source of all harmony, form and narrative pattern which is the raw material for all poetry and art? Who formed the human mind which is the source of philosophy and psychology? Who moment by moment maintains the connections between our minds and the world beyond our minds? God did and God does.”⁵⁵ All work is a form of gardening. No work is menial.

The purpose of redemption is a new heavens and a new earth. This world is not a temporary theater for the conversion of individual souls, who, after receiving that salvation, will then leave it. Our salvation is a means to an end. The end is a brand new material world where farming and music and art and all work is perfect!

Urban ministry must be shaped by the grand story line of the Bible,⁵⁶ namely, that God created a world of peace and life, but that world, including human beings, has not fallen into a state of brokenness and injustice. God has determined to redeem His world through the work of His Son and a redeemed humanity.

If urban ministry does not include that, believers will seal off their faith from their work. They will have no idea of the value of what they are doing.⁵⁷

Effective urban ministry will help believers with the following questions:

- What cultural practices that everyone is doing in my field are gifts of “common grace” and can be integrated in my work?
- What practices are antithetical to the gospel and must be rejected?
- What practices can be adapted, revised and used?
- How can I work excellently? And accountably?
- How can I work for the glory of God
- What are the peculiar ethical dilemmas and temptations in my field and how are other Christians dealing with them?

Helping believers to integrate their faith and work will not be easy for most churches. Churches know much about how to pull people out of their jobs and into the church so that they are having less and less cultural impact. Churches know little about how to

⁵⁵ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Eerdmans, 1994), 58.

⁵⁶ According to John 21, Jesus ate a fish after the resurrection. Why would he do that? Jesus is teaching us that the future world is a material world. The purpose of the new birth and the death and resurrection of Jesus is cultural perfection, where there is nothing broken any more!

⁵⁷ Noll’s book is a good place to begin thinking about integrating faith and work. Another good resource is *Two Cities, Two Loves* by James Boice (IVP, 1996).

equip workers so they are excellent at what they do so and remain in the culture for maximum impact.

Pouring Themselves Out Sacrificially for the Good of the Whole City

Jeremiah's letter to the exiles (chapter 29) is instructive here. The promise to Abraham was the creation of a people based on God's laws that would reveal God's glory to the world. The center of that activity would be Jerusalem.

However, Israel failed and fell to the Babylonian Empire. The Babylonians deported all their leading citizens. Their plan was simple: after two or three generations, these professionals and their grandchildren would be thoroughly assimilated in Babylonian culture and of great use to the Empire.

To resist assimilation, the prophet Hananiah called on the exiles to remain separate from the big city, to live outside the city. God would soon return them to Jerusalem. The first generation of exiles did just that, thinking that they would soon be back in the center of God's redemptive plan (Jeremiah 28:1-4).

God, however, had a third alternative. He sent a letter to the exiles through Jeremiah, commanding a different response altogether from the intention of Babylon or Hananiah. Rather than assimilate and become like the Babylonians, the exiles are told to keep their identity. Rather than stay out of the city, the exiles are told to go into the city. God told his people to go into the city to stay, and to keep their identity as his people. Babylon would be the center of his redemptive plan.

How would they do this? How would they retain their identity and become fully enmeshed in the city? God's answer was, *Pray for the city, and seek the peace of the city.*

You can imagine their reaction. *What? Babylon killed our friends; their hands are still red with the blood of our families. We're to go in there? God's answer was, "Yes, Babylon is now the center of my redemptive purposes. You will flourish if and only if you serve and pour yourselves out for the good of the entire city."*

Effective urban ministry helps believers to use all the resources of the faith to sacrificially serve the good of the whole city. Urban Christians must work for the peace, security, justice and prosperity of their neighbors, loving them in word and deed, whether they believe or not. This is what Jesus taught and what Jesus did.

Ministry like this is a sign of the gospel. In the same way that Jesus' miracles were a sign of what His kingdom is like (a kingdom without blindness, sickness, inequality and death), churches that pour themselves out in ministry also show what the kingdom is like: a kingdom of justice, wholeness and redemption. The urban church sketches in pencil what Jesus will one day paint over in indelible ink.

When churches pour themselves out in sacrificial service (Phil. 2:15-18), the result will be cities like Samaria that “rejoiced” because of the preaching and healing ministry of Philip (Acts 8) and like Joppa that wept at the death of Dorcas because of all the kind deeds she had done among them (Acts 9).

Contextualizing the Message of Jesus

A church cannot do ministry in the city without contextualization. In fact, there is no “non-contextualized” Christianity. Jesus did not come to earth as a generic “human being”. Rather, He was male, Jewish, and working class. He was temporally, culturally, and socially situated.

Contextualization in ministry is inevitable. The moment we choose a language, a vocabulary, a musical style, a level of emotional expressiveness, we are moving toward the social context of some people and away from the social context of others. We are positioning ourselves.

This is not relativism! Although we cannot articulate any truth that is free of cultural influence, this does not mean that the truth we articulate does not transcend culture.

Examples of how Paul contextualized his message and ministry are many in The Acts and the Epistles. In Acts 13 Paul preaches the gospel in a synagogue to those who believed in the God revealed in the Bible. In Acts 14 he shares the gospel with a pagan, blue-collar crowd with little or no biblical familiarity. The differences and similarities are striking.

The content of his message is different. With the Jews and God-fearers, he quotes Scripture and begins his message with Jesus Christ. With pagans in the city square, he argues from the greatness of creation and the nature of God (see Acts 17 for another example).

In addition, his appeal is different. In Acts 13:39 Paul says to the religious audience, “You think you are good, but you are not good enough. You need Christ.” In Acts 14 he urges his pagan audience to turn from worthless idols to the living God, who is the source of real joy. He says, “You think you are free but you are not. You are enslaved to dead idols.”

In these two different approaches, there are some obvious similarities. Both audiences hear about a God who is powerful and good (13:16-22; 14:17). Both learn how they are trying to save themselves (by obeying the law or giving themselves to idols). Both hear about a God who has broken into history for their salvation.

This pattern in The Acts continues in Paul’s letters. In I Corinthians, Paul says that Christ crucified is weakness to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, but to those Jews and Greeks who are being saved Christ is the power and wisdom of God (1:18-31). Paul shows that Christ crucified is the completion of the cultural narratives of power and

wisdom for both Jews and Greeks. Through the gospel, says Paul, God confronts and completes the cultural motifs of both Jews and Greeks.⁵⁸

Contextualization does not mean that one person's interpretation of Scripture is equally as valid as another's. Contextualization is not giving people what they want. To contextualize one's message and ministry is to give God's answers to the questions they are asking in forms they can comprehend.

Contextualization consists of two parts. The first part is to be sure that you do not remove any of the offensive essentials of the gospel message such as its teaching on sin, repentance, and the uniqueness of Christ. The second part is to be sure to remove any non essential language or practice that will confuse or offend the sensibilities of the people you are trying to reach. The key to effective urban ministry is to know the difference between the essential and the non-essential.

Cities are strategic. It is where the cultural elites are, and where the poor and the immigrant come to get established. Effective urban ministry, with Christians and churches shaped by the gospel, creating attractive, appealing gospel communities, integrating faith and work, giving itself for the good of the city, is the key to the future of the church.

⁵⁸ In *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach The West...Again*, George Hunter offers a fascinating example of contextualization in church history in the example of Patrick. He shows how Celtic Christianity engaged the Irish people's love for heroism and completed their love of nature and belief in the closeness of the divine (p. 20). Hunter's book is a call for Christianity to contextualize the gospel today.

Appendix C: Effective Urban Evangelism

Our world-urban, secular, post-Christian and post-modern-presents a stiff challenge to effective evangelism. How can the church effectively present the gospel in this kind of world that results in genuine, authentic, life changing, culture transforming ways?

In 1959, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones presented a series of lectures on revival.⁵⁹ He based his first lecture on Mark 9, the familiar story of the desperate father and his demon-possessed boy. After Jesus exorcised the demon, the 12 apostles came to him and asked, “Why couldn’t we do that?” Jesus answered, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer” (Mark 9:29, NASB).

Jones equated the boy with the contemporary world and the disciples with the modern church. Jones said that the problem facing the contemporary church, what Jesus called “this kind,” is altogether more deeper and more desperate and more resistant to the gospel than that which has confronted the church for many centuries.⁶⁰

Jones was right! The western world, dominated by the influence of cities like New York, London, Los Angeles, and Paris, is now a mission field unlike any the church has ever faced.

Church attendance is one indication of this new reality. Pollsters like George Gallup and George Barna say that the percentage of people attending any church on an average Sunday is between 42% and 47%.⁶¹ Hunter Baker, in his article “Is Church Attendance Declining?” estimates that the percentage is closer to 25%.⁶² Bob Smietana points out that Americans have become quite adept at lying about church attendance. He cites other research that puts this figure even lower.⁶³ What is undeniable is that there are at least 175 million functionally undisciplined people aged 14 and older in this country, the majority of which live in cities. Our cities are the new mission field.

What makes this mission field unlike any in the past is this: for the first time in history, the church is seeking to evangelize a culture that *used to be Christian*.⁶⁴ George Hunter, in his excellent book, *How To Reach Secular People*, points out that whereas the church once defined the purposes of government, education, personal morality and community life, it no longer exerts much influence across the board.⁶⁵ No one even pretends that our culture still marches to the beat of Christianity’s drum.

⁵⁹ These lectures were eventually published in a book under the title *Revival* by Crossway Books in 1988.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.7-13.

⁶¹ See their respective web sites.

⁶² *Christianity Today*, November 2007 (web only), Vol. 51.

⁶³ “Statistical Illusions,” *Christianity Today*, April, 2006, Vol. 50, no. 4.

⁶⁴ I do not mean that US culture was, at any time, “Christian” in the fullest sense of the word. What I mean is that a basic Christian framework, or ethic, is now lost in the United States.

⁶⁵ *How To Reach Secular People* (Abingdon Press, 1992), 23-31.

Hunter further says that the church's evangelistic challenge today is further complicated by the fact that most people have been exposed to some distorted or diluted expression of Christianity that inoculates people against the real thing.

His phrase to describe this new reality, what Jesus called "this kind", is the "new apostolic age".⁶⁶

The end result is that our culture is more resistant, more recalcitrant, and more belligerent to the gospel than ever before. Our post-Christian culture is more difficult to reach than a pre-Christian one.⁶⁷

While the Christian faith is relevant in any circumstance and time, to ignore the manifold differences of outlook which urban people have is fatal for evangelism. How do you communicate the Christian gospel to people who have no church background, no "Christian memory", who possess no traditional Christian vocabulary, who, in short, do not know what we are talking about?

In this appendix, we examine the characteristics of three distinct worldviews prevalent in urban America and suggest ways to communicate the gospel. We offer two models of conversion that illustrate how many urban people come to faith in Christ. The final section will suggest some ingredients for effective personal evangelism.

I. Three Urban Worldviews

Three worldviews are predominant in the city: the traditional, the modern, and the post-modern. The task of evangelism in the city is to enter sympathetically into the worldview (or, story) of the culture, and to show how the gospel of Jesus speaks to that worldview.

The Traditional Worldview

In the traditionalist worldview, social obligations define who you are. Your identity is basically given to you. There is little talk of "finding yourself". Everyone already knows "who you are." You have a prescribed duty to your people and your family.

The most important relationships are those you are born with—family, clan and long-time neighbors. Loyalty and obedience are prized. One's challenge is to have the strength to be a good person and to overcome the feeling of guilt when one fails. Traditionalists often make idols out of one's family or tribe, believing that one can "save oneself" by being good or by following the ways provided for them by family, clan, or society. Religion within a traditional worldview can be an attempt at self-salvation.

⁶⁶ *Church for the Unchurched* (Abingdon Press, 1996), 23.

⁶⁷ See Lesslie Newbigin's two provocative books, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Eerdmans, 1986), and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans, 1989) for an excellent treatment of the difficulties of evangelizing a post-Christian culture. The web site, www.philcooke.com is one of many aimed at helping the church come to grips with culture today and the implications for evangelism and ministry.

The key to communicating the gospel to traditionalists is the gospel of grace. The gospel of grace says, “You know you should be good but you are not. You have fallen short of the glory of God. Only in Jesus can you be both forgiven and made righteous.”

The Modern Worldview

For moderns, feelings define “the real you” more than your social standing or obligations. You have the duty to discover your deepest feelings and dreams. Meaning comes from fulfilling them. The rights, freedom, and fulfillment of the individual are more important than the traditionalist commitment to family, tribe, or community.

In the modern worldview, happiness is the result of being free. The challenge is to find your true self and pursue your greatest passions. The most important relationships are with people who help you achieve your personal goals. Love is freeing others to be themselves.

Moderns tend to be rational thinkers. They are not at all open to the idea of the supernatural or the miraculous. They tend to see religion (of any kind) as primitive and as a barrier to freedom and to scientific and social progress.

The key to communicating the gospel to moderns is the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel of the kingdom says, “You know you should be free, but you are not. You have tied your identity to things and possessions (idols) rather than to God. You’re enslaved. Only in Jesus do you have a Lord that does not enslave you. He became a ransom to buy you out of slavery. God’s rule is your liberation.”

In spite of their rejection of traditional religion, secular, modern people are just as “religious” as traditionalists. They base their worth on one’s individual efforts. Ultimately they are just as enslaved and self-saving as the moralistic, religious, traditionalistic people they despise. Effective evangelism in this context is calling moderns to forsake their masters and come under the new administration of the kingdom based on grace and service.

The Post-Modern Worldview

For post-moderns, there is no true identity either to be accepted or discovered. One’s identity is pieced together and is constantly changing. There is no talk of finding oneself, but of creating oneself with others who are trying to do the same.

As far as meaning goes for the post-modernist, you must find it for yourself. There is no over-arching purpose, or truth, or morality. Your primary relationship is with friends, whom you love by not judging. One’s friends define reality, and no one from the outside can evaluate it or judge it.

Post-moderns have a deep-seated belief that virtually everyone is out to exploit them. Trust is difficult. Authoritarian pronouncements are deemed arrogant, narrow and outright rejected. At the same time, post-moderns have a deep hunger for justice.

Post-moderns are more pragmatic than rationalistic moderns. They are not as skeptical of the supernatural or of spirituality, but they see the church as a key broker of oppressive power.

The key way to communicate the gospel to post-moderns is the gospel of a redeemed community, the meaning and experience of the cross lived out through a community of believers. This message says, “You know you should love and embrace others who are deeply different from you, but you cannot help but feel superior to others. You do exclude people. Christianity is the only faith which has at its heart a man dying for his enemies, giving up power, becoming a servant, forgiving them and not destroying them. Belief in Christ means admitting there is truth—but it is the only kind of truth that will not oppress you. And believing in Christ makes you a part of the believing community that works for justice and healing across the world.”

In the city, *all* of these worldviews exist in significant strength. Effective evangelism takes into consideration the worldview of the listener.⁶⁸

Some Caution

In any approach to evangelism that seeks to be sensitive to worldview, the danger of accommodating the message to the listener (audience) is always present. The danger of accommodating to traditional people is to present the gospel *only* as a way to get one’s sins (or, failings) covered so one can go to heaven.

Accommodation to a modern worldview is sharing a gospel that is *only* a way to personal fulfillment, a way to solve your personal problems or to meet your needs.

The danger of accommodating the gospel to post-modernists means promoting the gospel *only* as a movement to bring peace and justice to the world with no little or no admission of personal sinfulness and the need for repentance.

II. Two Models for Conversion

Richard Fletcher’s book, *The Barbarian Conversion*,⁶⁹ is helpful to understand the dynamics of conversion and urban evangelism. Fletcher traces the conversion of many people groups across Europe from AD 500 to 1500. These people did not have any basic

⁶⁸ George Hunter has a concise description of these worldviews in *Church for the Unchurched* (Abingdon Press, 1996). See also Stan Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Eerdmans, 1996) and Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View* (Pimlico Books, 1996).

⁶⁹ *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity*, University of California Press, 1999.

understanding of the gospel. They did not know about God and holiness and sin and the 10 commandments. Evangelism was an arduous, drawn out process.

By AD 1500, things had changed. European culture was based on the Christian faith. People were born into and educated in a Christian worldview. All the major functions of society were grounded in Christian truth. Few doubted the Bible.

In this context, evangelism was more of a reminder, a program, or a campaign to remind people to do what they already knew they should do. They may have had a Christian conscience, but they did not have a Christian heart.

There are still pockets of people like this in cities today. They can be reached by preaching and meetings and programs. They have the gospel “furniture”; they need to dust it off and put it to proper use.

While there may be places and people like that today, their numbers are shrinking. In urban America right now, there are large numbers of people who are economically vibrant, morally relativist, urban oriented, culturally adventuresome, sexually adaptive, ethnically informed and theologically clueless about the claims of Christianity. The small town, nuclear family, white-dominated America is losing economic influence, cultural power, urban territory and Christian allegiance.⁷⁰

In a context like this, many, if not most, of the standardized approaches to evangelism are no longer effective. They no longer penetrate. Single, one time gospel presentations that ignore the worldview of the listener are met with an incredulous look or a resistant stare. Crusade evangelism, brought to its highest efficiency and effectiveness under Billy Graham, may produce some immediate results, but it has little long-lasting effects on culture. Even seeker services assume a traditional, white bread, middle class, suburban mindset. As Lloyd-Jones would say, the demon is in too deep!⁷¹

Two models of conversion suggest how many urban people come to faith in Christ.

Model 1: Worldview Evangelism

One model that is helpful for understanding the process of conversion begins with the worldview of the listener. It includes four stages: intelligibility, credibility, plausibility and intimacy.

⁷⁰ See Michael Wolff, “The Party Line,” *New York Magazine* (February 19, 2001).

⁷¹ What I am suggesting here is not the abandonment of any and all approaches to evangelism that have proven their worth in the past. I am saying that those kinds of methods are appealing to fewer and fewer people, and if they are not done with the listener in mind, will not penetrate the hearts of people. In addition, there must be more emphasis on process, on community, for these to truly be effective.

Intelligibility means that the presenter understands the worldview of the audience and the listener grasps what it is he is hearing. J. I. Packer points out that the gospel is a message of some complexity that “needs to be understood before it could be applied.”⁷²

Don Carson uses Paul as an example of how to get this message across by expressing it in the thought patterns of the listener.⁷³ He says that Paul was skilled in presenting the gospel along the contours of his audience’s understandings.⁷⁴ For Paul, this meant “engaging attention, capturing interest, setting out the facts, explaining their significance, solving difficulties, answering objections, and showing how the message bears on life.”⁷⁵

Credibility points to the need for some kind of apologetics in the presentation of the gospel. In previous generations, few people in the United States did not have a basic, Christian worldview. Today, that has changed. There is widespread distrust of authority. Most people believe that there cannot be one truth for everyone, one morality that is binding on all people. All religions are deemed equally valid and have at least a part of “the truth.” Credibility points to the evangelistic need to anticipate both questions of and objections to the gospel and to be skilled in defending the truth claims of the Christian faith.

Intelligibility and credibility focuses on the non-negotiables of the Christian faith, what people need to understand, believe, and act on. **Plausibility** appeals to the hopes, the aspirations, and the dreams of the listener. Plausibility connects gospel truth with the listener’s life. Another word for this is contextualization.

The word contextualization makes many Christians nervous, because it sounds like an adaptation (or change) of the gospel from what people need to hear to what they want to hear. However, if the witness has attempted to be both intelligible and credible, the witness will not “tickle someone’s ears.” Plausibility is an attempt to show where the lines of one’s life intersects with the gospel, and how one’s hopes and struggles can only be achieved or resolved in Jesus Christ. Plausibility is translating the gospel into a framework that meshes with the social reality and life patterns of the listener.⁷⁶

When intelligibility, credibility, and plausibility are done well, **intimacy**, or personal acceptance of and commitment to the gospel, becomes desirable. Using the words of the gospel, the Holy Spirit penetrates the heart. The listener senses that God is speaking, calling to him. He accepts the truth of Christ, receives Christ into his life, and begins to grasp the implication of these for the future.

Paul evangelistic efforts in Athens demonstrate this model of conversion:

⁷² J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 47.

⁷³ *Telling The Truth*, (Zondervan, 2000). The term “worldview evangelism” is his as well.

⁷⁴ *Telling the Truth* (Zondervan, 2000), 84ff.

⁷⁵ Packer, 48.

⁷⁶ Acts 8 and the witness of Stephen to the Ethiopian Minister of Finance using Isaiah 53 is a fascinating example.

- *Intelligibility*: Paul connects to and affirms the Athenian’s culture and uses their language and methods of communication. He speaks in the Areopagus as others do who want to discuss new ideas. He uses rhetorical patterns of communication and examples from the Athenians’ own history.
- *Credibility*: Paul discerns and identifies the Athenians’ spiritual interest and search. He proposes to answer a question they have already been asking: Who is the unknown god? He cites their own authorities to legitimize his message.
- *Plausibility*: Paul challenges their foolish way of trying to fulfill their search and satisfy the hunger of their souls.
- *Intimacy*: Paul gives them evidence to support his message and points to an unexpected way to fulfill their spiritual search—though Jesus.⁷⁷

Model 2: Adoption Evangelism

Using a behavioral science model on how people adopt new ideas and take on new lifestyles, George Hunter offers a second model for conversion which he calls “the adoption process.”⁷⁸ He delineates six stages people typically experience in adopting Christianity: awareness, relevance, interest, trial, adoption, and reinforcement.

First, Hunter says that people become aware of Christianity, not as an abstraction, but as a particular movement or truth claim. Next, they perceive the relevance of that for some unmet need or driving motive in their life, their group or their society. Third, they respond with active interest in which they ask questions and explore understandings. Fourth, they enter into a trial stage in which they consider the possibility of embracing Christianity for themselves. They imagine what life would be like if they became Christian. Next, they try it on for size. Then they consciously adopt the faith and publicly demonstrate that commitment. Finally, after a typical period of uncertainty or ambiguity about what has happened to them, and even failure to follow through in this commitment, they reinforce that decision and confirm their experience.

Both of these models confirm what Fletcher claims was normative for conversion when Christianity was not dominant in the prevailing culture. Conversion was a process, requiring a time of reflection and trial and error before it was wholeheartedly embraced.⁷⁹

III. Ingredients for Effective Personal Evangelism

What are the implications of these models of conversion for personal evangelism?

First, effective personal evangelism must communicate both biblical truth and biblical story. Most approaches to personal evangelism focus on the purpose of God, the

⁷⁷ See Rick Richardson, *Evangelism Outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News* (Intervarsity Press, 2000), 77.

⁷⁸ *How To Reach Secular People* (Abingdon Press, 1992), 76-79.

⁷⁹ For a detailed look at how the early church handled this process, see Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Post-Modern World* (Baker, 1999).

condition of man, the work of Christ, and the response of faith.⁸⁰ Such approaches cover the major truths of salvation.

However, “presentations” such as this can foster an individualistic, consumer-oriented response. *Jesus died for me and I believe in Him*. Crucial biblical themes such as the kingdom of God, the Lordship of Jesus and the believing community are commonly overlooked. The story line of the Bible—creation, fall, salvation, and restoration—is ignored.

On the other hand, an approach to personal evangelism that is emerging today appeals to the biblical story of the kingdom of God.⁸¹ With this approach, the listener is challenged to join the movement of Christ to bring peace and justice to the world. While this method retains a focus on the major theme of the Bible, it tends to overlook the essential biblical truths of personal lostness and rebellion, the substitutionary atonement and the uniqueness of Christ. The call to join Jesus and his kingdom movement to heal the world helps to recover the central biblical storyline, but often at the expense confessing one’s personal sinfulness and need for transformation and new birth.

Effective evangelism equips people to incarnate, demonstrate and communicate biblical truth and biblical story in a compelling way. What believers and churches need is an approach to personal evangelism that includes both the logical and systematic presentation on the essentials of how to become a Christian together with an emphasis on the major story arc of the Bible, how God is restoring his fallen creation through Jesus Christ and his church. Such an approach will appeal both to traditionalists, modernists and post-moderns, combining logical, systematic truth with the wonder and mystery of God’s kingdom story.⁸²

Second, effective personal evangelism addresses people in their spheres of influence and relationship. All of us function in four worlds—the world of family, the world of place (where we live), the world of recreation, and the world of work. Each of these spheres presents a unique challenge to believers. Churches must bring believers together who share experiences in these areas for support, prayer, and training. Discussing such things as family of origin, neighborhood dynamics, and work place challenges will go a long way in preparing believers for evangelism. Our efforts in personal evangelism need to be aware of the issues and questions that people in these contexts face every day.

Third, effective personal evangelism includes a balance between the role of the personal witness and the believing community in the process of coming to faith. Today people are looking for communities in which faith is lived out and spiritual experiences are tangible and real. They are hungry for authenticity. They are looking for a safe place to work out their sense of identity and self. Genuine worship and true, biblical community are especially magnetic to pre-Christian people. You could say that the norm today is experience before explanation, and belonging before believing. This is

⁸⁰ *The Four Spiritual Laws* is just one example among many.

⁸¹ I am thinking here of some trends in the emerging church.

⁸² See Rick Richardson’s “The Circle of Belonging” in *Evangelism Outside the Box*, *op. cit.*, 132-138.

how we will communicate gospel truth to a generation that hears with their eyes and thinks with their feelings.

This pattern is not without precedent in Christian history. Methodist class meetings welcomed into their fellowship those seeking God. Members shared their struggles and sins. After a few months, the seeker joined a Methodist Society, whether or not he or she had become a believer. At these class meetings, everyone received instruction in the Christian faith and was encouraged to seek God until they had received an assurance of their salvation. These classes taught people how to experience the power of Christ who transforms lives.⁸³

Genuine worship, confession of sin (to God and to one another), listening prayer, honesty about personal struggles, reconciled relationships and changed lives are indispensable today for effective evangelism. Rick Richardson goes so far as to say, “In a post-modern world, authentic, Spirit-filled community is the most powerful apologetic we have.”⁸⁴

Finally, effective evangelism does not invalidate but incorporates the experiences of the listener. Nothing short-circuits evangelism quicker than the disregard for one’s individual experience. The effective evangelist trusts the fact that people have a soul and spiritual interests and hunger. He helps them get in touch with their longing, with their emptiness. He shows how gospel truth is reflected in their life and in their culture.⁸⁵

A stirring example of this is described in *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, by George Hunter. Hunter says that Celtic Christians saw the religion of pagans as evidence of spiritual interest and their preparation for the gospel. For the Celts, Jesus was the fulfillment of pagan culture and religion more than its destroyer.⁸⁶

The effective evangelist today ties Jesus and the Bible to experiential truth moments in their own life. More than just sharing propositional truth from the Bible, the witness shows how that truth impacted them and changed them. In addition, the evangelist is always on the lookout for those transformational moments in others and takes advantage of the open doors the Holy Spirit inevitably provides for people who are relationally close enough with others to be let in. He prays knowing that the journey to faith can be long.

“This kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting,” said Jesus. Thank God He did not say, “This kind does not come out at all!” In order for evangelism to be effective today, the believer and the church must take seriously the competing worldviews and agendas of today, and become skilled at the new spiritual disciplines necessary to impact them.

⁸³ For a brief discussion of this process, see Rick Richardson, *Op. cit.*, 55.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 104.

⁸⁵ Lee Strobel demonstrates this approach in his books on *What Would Jesus Say to...* See also Chris Seay’s *The Gospel According to Tony Soprano* (Relevant Books, 2002) and Mark Pinsky’s *The Gospel According to The Simpson’s* (John Knox Press, 2002).

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