



# GC2 equipper

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The monthly ministry development newsletter of Grace Communion International



Dear minister on mission with Jesus:

Last month, we discussed two ways that a congregation may participate actively in the ministry that the Father, Son and Spirit are doing within the local community:

- **Connect** with a *focus group* of unchurched people residing nearby the congregation's place of meeting.
- **Assimilate** into the congregation's life, those in the focus group whom the Spirit calls to follow Jesus.

This month we examine two topics related to connecting and assimilating within urban (city) settings:

- Embracing **a theology as big as the city** (see p. 2).
- Joining with Jesus in **reaching across boundaries** (see p. 3).

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For those wanting more on these topics, we recommend the books by Ray Bakke referenced in this issue. What is covered here builds on some of Bakke's insights, and summarizes the content of a new GCI-USA MinDev workshop: *Participating with Jesus in Urban, Cross-Cultural Ministry*.

In Jesus' service,  
Ted Johnston

GCI Church Multiplication Ministries announces new videos posted on the CMM website (<http://cmm.wcg.org/>):

- **Church Multiplication in GCI.** Randy Bloom describes the GCI-USA vision and related resources for church starting new churches.
- **You Might be a Church Planter If...** An interview with Greg Pugh, district director of church multiplication for the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA), and guest speaker at the 2009 regional conference in Denver.
- **The Trinitarian Basis for Church Planting.** Randy Bloom's presentation at the 2009 regional conference in Dallas.
- **The Importance of Church Planting for GCI.** A presentation from Rod Koop, National Director of Church Multiplication for the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, and guest speaker at the 2009 regional conference in Dallas.
- **How Churches Can Participate in Church Multiplication.** Randy Bloom's presentation at the 2009 regional conference in Dallas.
- **Church Planting Questions and Answers.** Randy Bloom and Rod Koop dialogue at the 2009 regional conference in Dallas.

Equipping for participation with Jesus in his Great Commandment – Great Commission (GC2) ministry.

## A theology as big as the city

We often think about encountering God in a church service, or in the beauty of nature. But may God be encountered in the streets, subways, shops, clubs, office buildings, schools and homes of a densely populated city?

The answer is **yes!** God, who is revealed to us in Jesus, is fully present within our cities—relating to them as *living entities*. The Bible tells us that through his continuing incarnation, Jesus includes in God’s love and life *all* people—wherever they may reside. And most live and work in cities.

A challenge we face is to join with Jesus as he, in the Spirit, relates to people within our cities. There are several erroneous ideas that stand in the way:

- The erroneous idea that mission always necessitates travel to far-off places. In *A Theology as Big as the City*, Ray Bakke writes that “mission is no longer about crossing oceans, jungles or deserts, but about crossing the streets of the world’s cities” (p. 13). **The world has come to the neighborhoods of U.S. cities!** Our challenge is to join Jesus as he reaches the world—both globally and right outside our door.



- The erroneous idea that God is repulsed by city life. In *The Urban Christian, Effective Ministry in Today’s Urban World*, Bakke shows from Scripture how God loves cities and is not defiled by contact with what some consider as merely “physical” (and even toxic). In creation and redemption, Jesus **has his hands in the mud!** Do we hear the Spirit’s call to join Jesus in the challenges of urban life?

You might be thinking: “But what about the Biblical account concerning fleeing Sodom?” Some read it as God’s repudiation of city life. However, note what Ezekiel says: “This was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy” (Ezek. 16:49). God’s primary concern was that Sodom’s privileged class was mistreating the city’s poor. We need to relate to cities the way God does—with loving concern for all people.

- The erroneous idea that God is solitary and disconnected from his creation (or at least the parts that make us uncomfortable). Our challenge is to know God as he is (in his triune inter-relationships) and to participate with our triune God as he lovingly relates with all his creation—cities included.
- The erroneous idea that Jesus is no longer human. It is common to miss the truth of Jesus’ continuing (permanent) incarnation. He remains with us, as one of us—wherever we are. And most of us reside in cities. The Spirit’s call to the church in our era is not to flee the city, but to share in the continuing incarnation of Jesus as it is expressed in his ongoing ministry in the Spirit within our cities.
- The erroneous idea that God advocates a *sacred/secular divide* (dualism) where some places are *sacred* (like church buildings or natural landscapes) and others are *secular* (like cityscapes). The truth is that, through the incarnation, the sacred/secular divide has been breached. Jesus includes *all* places and *all* people in God’s love and life. We are challenged to join with him. For ideas about doing so, see a helpful presentation from Michael Frost at [http://www.shapevine.com/pg/izap\\_videos/amicusdei/play/7580](http://www.shapevine.com/pg/izap_videos/amicusdei/play/7580).

### Urban Mission Training

Would you, other adults and older teens in your congregation like to receive “hands on” training in ministering to unchurched children in a U.S. inner-city setting? If so, consider participating this summer in **Word in the Street**, a Generations Ministries domestic mission camp held in Cincinnati. Participants are equipped to carry this ministry to their home city and there join with Jesus in urban discipling. To learn more, see <http://www.wordinthestreet.org/>.

## Reaching across boundaries

Participating with Jesus in his on-going urban ministry in the Spirit, means reaching across boundaries that divide and fragment people. Here are three boundary-breaking ideas to consider:

**Multi-culturalism.** Because the world has come to our cities, urban discipling in the U.S. necessarily is *cross-cultural*. Bakke notes that to effectively minister within cities, churches must “adapt to the pluralized and kaleidoscopic realities” of 21st century urban life (*A Theology as Big as the City*, p. 13). Of course, Jesus is the Master of cross-cultural ministry. Through the incarnation, he crossed the divide between heaven and earth, and then on earth (as a Jew), reached across ethnic, racial and cultural divides to non-Jews. He is still reaching, and invites us to relate across cultural divides with him.



**Post-Christendom.** Most of us grew up in “Christendom”—a society where institutional Christianity played a dominant social/cultural role. Christendom emerged within the Roman Empire in the fourth century, spread across Europe, and eventually on to North America (and elsewhere). Christendom had a long run, but our cities are now primarily “post-Christian.” As a result, joining Jesus in reaching unchurched people within cities will typically mean relating to those who know little about (and have little regard for) the Christian church, the Bible, biblical ethics and the like. Are we willing to join with Jesus in reaching out to them? If so, we will need to adapt our attitudes and structures to meet them where they are. They are not likely to come to us.

**Post-modernity.** Christendom arose in the “pre-modern” world. But with the enlightenment of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Western world entered the “modern” era of rationalism, reliance on scientific inquiry, linear thinking and the like. As with Christendom, modernity is waning—particularly in urban areas where many (though not all) sub-cultures exhibit post-modern characteristics, including being...

- **Pluralistic:** favoring *diversity* over *uniformity* (reflecting multi-culturalism).
- **Relativistic:** whereas modernity valued scientifically provable *facts*, post-modernity tends to value multiple “stories” and ascribes to each story equal validity.
- **Experiential:** what is deemed “true” in post-modernity is not what has been factually “proven,” but what has been personally *experienced* as “real.”
- **Relational:** to relate well in post-modern community is more valuable than being “right”—tolerance and unity-in-diversity are highly valued.
- **Spiritual:** in modernity/Christendom, many went to church (as a social-cultural expectation) but few talked about it. Now few post-moderns go to church, but most value and talk openly about spirituality.



**What are we to do with this information?** Let’s allow it to open our hearts and minds to life as it is within our cities, and to what Jesus is doing there in the Spirit. Let’s also prayerfully seek the Spirit’s help in letting go of unhelpful presuppositions and ineffective structures that may stand in the way of our participation with Jesus in his urban ministry. In Grace Communion International, doing so is part of our journey with Jesus to **GC Next**. **Let’s continue forward together!**