

CONTEXTUAL CHURCH PLANTING
AMONG THE PEOPLES OF NORTH
AMERICA

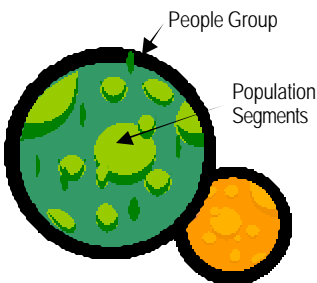
CULTURE CATALOG

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People groups and population segments overlap each other.

PEOPLE-FOCUSED
CHURCH PLANTING:

- Identifies specific people groups and population segments
- Understands cultures and worldviews of each people group and segment
- Contextualizes church planting approaches for each group and segment
- Disciples indigenous leadership for church growth and church multiplication

PEOPLE-FOCUSED CHURCH PLANTING

When the hour arrived for Jesus' glorification, He told His disciples, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much grain." (Jn 12:24) Jesus, the Incarnate Word, planted the Gospel in the world through His life, death and resurrection. The book of Acts describes the outcome: rapid multiplication of the Word in others. Luke writes in Acts: "the word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly" (6:7); "the word of God grew and multiplied" (12:24); "the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region" (13:49); "The word of the Lord grew mightily and multiplied" (19:20).

Approximately 226 million people are lost or unchurched in North America. This lost population is increasing and diversifying. Immigration of numerous people groups raised in non-biblical worldviews is one contributor. Another contributor is the growing numbers who embrace aspects of the emerging Postmodern worldview and combine these with other non-biblical beliefs. Planting the gospel in the mission field of North America, with its diversity of peoples, beliefs and cultures, is most effective with people focused church planting approaches. Just as farmers understand their soil before planting seeds, so too must church planters understand the people group or population segment within which they are planting the gospel. People focused church planting learns the culture and worldview of the unreached people in order to start churches with methods relevant to that specific group of people. The people-focused approach is based on the use of the word *ethnos* in Matthew 28:18-20 and

other NT verses. In Matthew 28, Jesus commands His disciples to "make disciples of all nations." The Greek word *ethne* is the word from which we derive our English word "ethnic." Most English Bibles translate the Greek word *ethne* as "nations" which has a geographical focus (e.g. Mexico, India) rather than a people focus. However, the use of *ethne* in Matthew 28 and other NT verses emphasizes ethnic groupings of people.

The Church Planting Group uses two terms to apply the people-focused meaning of the NT word *ethne* to church planting methods. The first term is "*people group*" which refers to a group of people who are distinguished because of their common ethnicity and language. (Han Chinese, French Canadian). A people group is the largest grouping of people through which the gospel can spread without encountering significant barriers of understanding and acceptance. The second term is "*population segment*." It refers to a smaller grouping of people whose self-identify is based on socio-economic factors such as a common lifestyle (cowboys) or a common occupation (migrant workers). Other contributing factors may include generational boundaries (boomers), religion (new age), or common interests (bikers). Population segments are strategic groupings of people within whom the gospel can move freely without encountering significant cultural resistance. People-focused church planting guards against starting new churches with the cultural baggage of the church planter. This approach seeks to plant the gospel among a specific group of people with culturally appropriate communication forms. Just as

Jesus, in the Incarnation, clothed Himself with Jewish culture to communicate the gospel, people focused church planters clothe themselves and their church planting methods in the culture and worldview of the unreached people. People-focused church planters seek, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish the following missiological functions:

- Identify the people group or population segment to which God is calling to start a church
- Understand the culture and worldview of the specific group
- Contextualize a biblical church planting approach to the specific group
- Disciple indigenous leadership for church growth and multiplication into other unreached groups

The CPG's Implementation Team addresses these functions, with its field partners, in order to find and implement missional solutions for church planting among unreached and under-reached people groups and population segments. The Bible reveals a missionary God redeeming a people for His name from all the world's *ethne*. God's mandate to the Church to plant the gospel in every context among all peoples is *God's Mission for His Glory*. The CPG envisions a day when every people group and population segment in every community has contextual, rapidly reproducing, missional churches. Missiological and missional thinking rooted in the Incarnation of Christ and saturated in prayer are key ingredients for realizing this vision. This Catalog discusses these issues to foster further discovery and implementation of missional solutions for planting the gospel among the unreached.

INCARNATIONAL CHURCH PLANTING

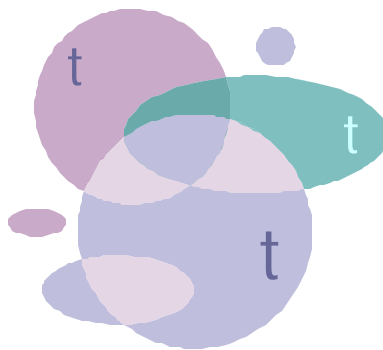
“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory” (Jn1:14) In the Incarnation, Jesus bridged the gap between God and lost humanity by living His life within Jewish culture and by communicating the truths of the Kingdom through relationships with the Hebrew people. Throughout the Bible, God’s revelation to people was always culture specific. The Incarnation, as the supreme revelation of God, was even more culture specific. Communicating God’s revelation always requires the use of specific cultural forms and mediums. The Incarnation demonstrates how best to explain God’s revelation and thus lays the theological foundation for contextual communication of the gospel in church planting. Practically, this means that church planters exegete God’s Word as well as the people and culture of the new church plant. But, church planting is more than exegeting God’s Word and the receptor audience/culture. The heart of church planting is proclaiming the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit so that lost people meet the risen Christ in the context of daily life. With such a goal in mind, the Incarnation provides church planters *the example and the mandate* for incarnating the gospel among the lost.

Jesus told his Father, “As You have sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” (Jn 17:18) After His resurrection, Jesus commanded the disciples, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” (Jn 20:21) These two verses highlight the missionary nature of the Incarnation. They also point out that following Christ in the *Missio Dei* (mission of God) calls for imitating Christ’s obedience as pictured in the Incarnation. ***Incarnational church planting then proclaims and demonstrates the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit through genuine relationships with lost people.***

The apostle Paul’s lifestyle and his missionary church planting teams illustrate incarnational church planting. Paul testified that his life was the risen Christ living in him (Gal 2:20) and that the obedience of the *ethne* (people groups) to Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum was Christ’s work through him, “in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.” (Rom 15:17-19) Paul said “I have made myself a servant to all,” “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” (1 Cor 9:19-23) Paul’s life, submitted to the Holy Spirit, carried on the missionary purpose of Christ in the Incarnation to redeem a people for His glory.

Paul taught the believers of the churches he started to live the same type of incarnational

life. He told the Corinthians, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” (1 Cor 11:1) Through the Spirit’s direction, Paul expected all believers to live incarnational lifestyles in the power of the Holy Spirit. John expected the same, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” (1 Jn 2:6) Like Christ and like Paul, these believers were to be characterized by a focus on others through attitudes of humility, servanthood, sacrifice and suffering.



The Gospel must be incarnated in every people group and population segment.

Groups of believers with such transformed lifestyles contributed to the rapid multiplication of the churches started by the early Church. The same type of believers and churches are needed today if we hope to significantly impact lostness in North America. The call for churches to *be missional* by more and more church leaders recognizes this reality. Terms like *house church* and *simple church* often refer to churches being incarnational and missional. Planting incarnational churches requires church planters with incarnational lifestyles. An incarnational lifestyle is willing to cross any cultural boundary necessary to proclaim the gospel in a contextual manner. Christ crossed cultures to clothe Himself with humanity in order to reveal the Gospel. Paul crossed Jewish and Gentile cultural boundaries to start churches. Church planters must do the same today to disciple all the unreached people groups and population segments of North America.

Paul’s church planting teams reveal missiological principles rooted in the Incarnation. These teams show the effectiveness of incarnational church planters who clothe themselves with culturally appropriate lifestyles and communication methods in order to tell the gospel clearly and in the power of the Spirit. Paul’s teams resembled Jesus’ team of disciples. As Jesus contextualized the Gospel for a particular people, the Hebrews, by living among them, so

Paul, with his missionary teams, lived among particular Jewish and Gentile peoples and contextualized his church planting methods accordingly. And as Jesus mentored His disciples to reproduce themselves among others after His departure, so Paul mentored his team members to reproduce themselves among other peoples. Incarnational church planting makes reproduction of disciples and churches the normal Christian experience. These missiological principles, as well as others not mentioned here, provide clear guidance for starting incarnational churches.

North America with its naturalistic worldview, needs churches that unashamedly demonstrate the supernatural truth of the Incarnation—Jesus in the flesh. There is no Christianity without the Incarnation. And without incarnational churches supernaturally proclaiming Jesus, the Church in North America will be ineffectual.

Incarnational church planting proclaims and demonstrates the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit through genuine relationships with lost people.

MISSIOLOGICAL AND MISSIONAL CHURCH PLANTING

Two words, missiological and missional, are often used today to discuss the most effective church planting methods for North America. The numerous insights associated with both these words provide church planting leaders conceptual and practical handles for starting churches among the peoples of North America with God's missionary perspective as exemplified in the Incarnation.

Missiology uses an interdisciplinary approach (systematic theology, current and past missions practice and history, anthropology and sociology for cultural analysis, etc.) to determine effective means for planting the Church among specific peoples and specific contexts. Missiology as an academic discipline resulted from recognition of the need to intentionally study cross-cultural missionary efforts to plant the Church among diverse people groups and cultures around the world.

Missional is a recently coined term that seeks to recapture the *Missio Dei* (mission of God) reality within the local church. Advocates of missional thinking focus on the truth that mission is the *nature of the church* not just a *function of the church*. *Missional* emphasizes that all Christians are God's called and sent people and that all churches are to be God's missionary community where the church is located, rather than only somewhere else. Missiological studies have influenced current meanings of the term *missional*. The term gained popularity in the 1980s as a result of a dia-

logue in Britain between The Gospel and Culture Network and Lesslie Newbigin, a former missionary to India. The focus of that discussion was the mission field nature of Western societies and what to do about them.

Some advocates of *missional thinking* overlook the value of *missiology* for forming missional communities in North America. This is due to the fact that some missiologists' have viewed mission as *one function* of the church rather than emphasizing mission as the *essential nature* of the church. Others discard missiology as too academic and not focused on the practical aspects of doing missions. While this critique is valid at points, it does not warrant disregarding missiological insights for church planting. Church planting leaders in North America cannot afford to separate the biblical emphases of missional thinking from the biblically-based missiological principles learned from decades of practical cross-cultural mission experience and analysis. Valid missional insights and valid missiological principles are both rooted in Scripture. When combined they provide contextual biblical perspective for starting reproducing churches in the mission fields of North America.

Missiological principles help church planters cross cultural barriers to start contextual missional churches among unreached people groups and population segments. Missional insights help churches live out the missionary calling of God in their own communities. Paul's

missionary teams pioneered missiological, church planting principles, while the churches started by these teams illustrated the necessity of being missional.

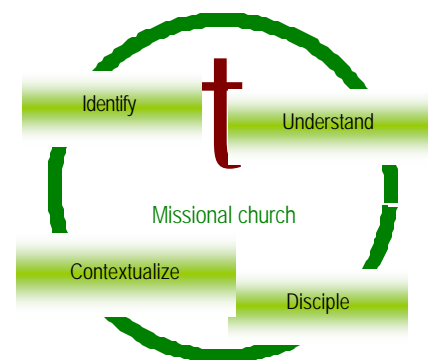
Missiological principles and missional lifestyles were not separated in the New Testament and neither should we today. Impacting the lost of North America calls for biblically sound missiological and missional thinking by church planting leaders rather than programmatic and institutional thinking.

God works today as He has always worked. Both the New and Old Testaments reveal processes God used among His people to get them on His people-focused, Kingdom agenda. God still use these processes today. Missional and missiological attitudes and practices are indicators of God's activity among us.

Church planting leaders today are tempted to substitute marketing techniques for incarnational mission. Marketing insights can be valuable tools for church planting. The problem occurs when a marketing mentality turns the focus of the gospel into a product to be marketed rather than a Person to be served. A marketing perspective of the gospel overlooks the fact that evangelizing unreached peoples in the United States, Canada or any other country is a process designed by God to transform both the Christian and the non-Christian.

Other issues such as pluralism, institutionalism, and traditional/non-missional church structures confront church planting leaders with

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Missional churches multiply locally and globally through the incarnational application of missiological functions.

numerous challenges for obeying the Great Commission in North America. Missiological and missional thinking help keep church planting leaders focused on Scripture to discern God's method for reaching all peoples with the Gospel.

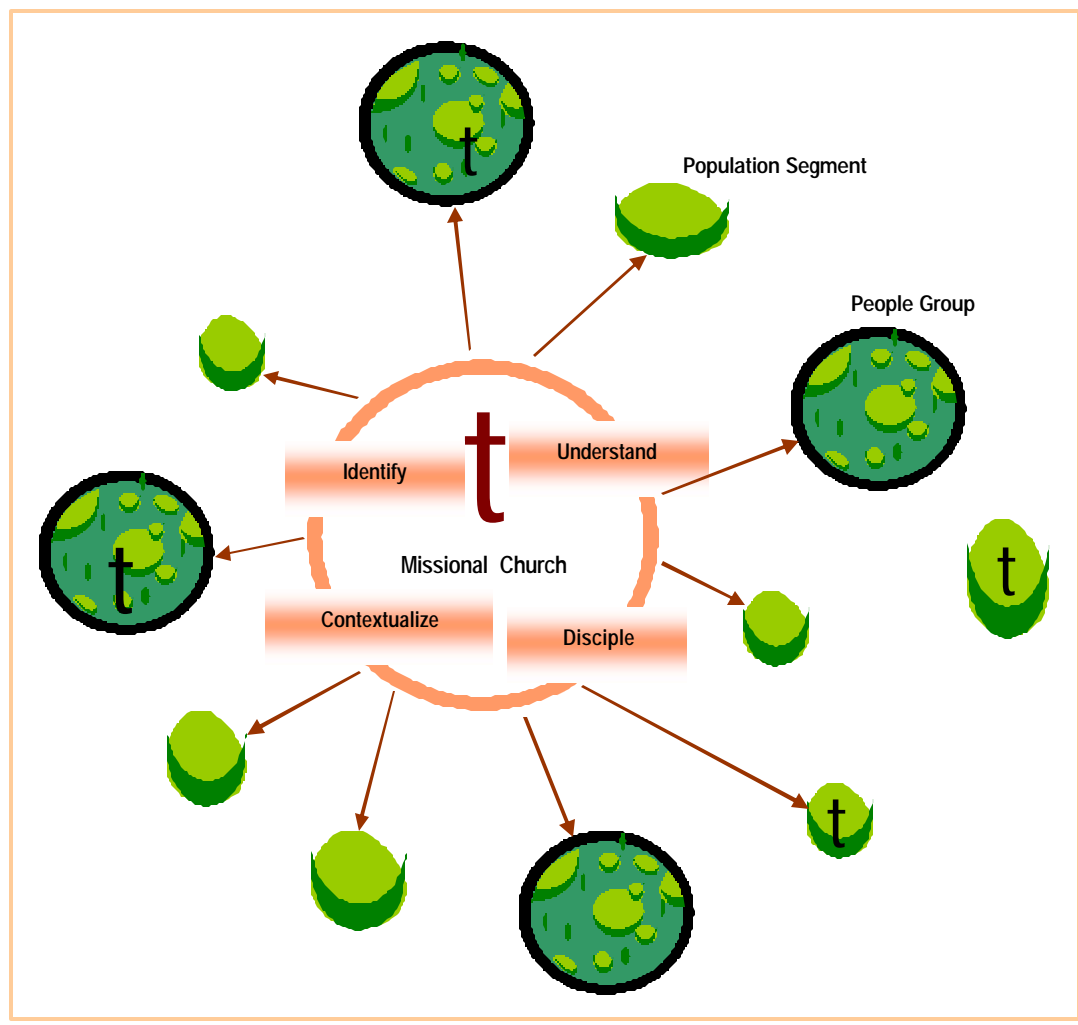


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The *Culture Catalog* is produced by the Church Planting Group of the North American Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia.

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Additional information may be obtained online at the Church Planting Village website: www.churchplantingvillage.net.



A contextual, reproducing-church perspective.

PRAYER SATURATED CHURCH PLANTING

The diagram above shows that people-focused church planting, using missiology and missional thinking reflective of the Incarnation, is a non-linear process. Prayer must saturate the entire process. The following prayer strategy for church planting developed by Kenny Moore of the Colorado State Convention has been edited due to space limitations. It seamlessly integrates prayer with people-focused, contextual church planting emphases of this Catalog.

Pray for Pockets of Lostness (Luke 10:1.) Pray as individuals, teams (2x2) and corporately as a church for God to reveal where He is already at work. As God answers this specific type of praying (by showing opportunities and needs), make a list of possible people groups, population segments, communities, neighborhoods, apartments, etc. to saturate with the gospel. Begin a simple process of research to develop a profile of the peoples and places for advocacy prayer and strategy development.

Pray for "harvesters." (Luke 10:2b.) Pray as individuals, teams (2x2) and corporately as a church for God to call out apostolically gifted harvesters to be the catalytic personnel to penetrate the God revealed pockets of lostness.

Pray for "persons of peace." (Luke 10:5-7) Pray as individuals, teams (2x2) and corporately as a church for God to provide persons of peace in all pockets of lostness where He has revealed that He is already at work.

Implement contextual church planting for gospel saturation. Plant all types of churches among the identified peoples and places (house churches, brick and mortar churches, multihousing churches, etc.) Plant all types of gospel saturation ministries (compassion ministries, ministry evangelism, etc.)

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you.
(2 Thess 3:1)