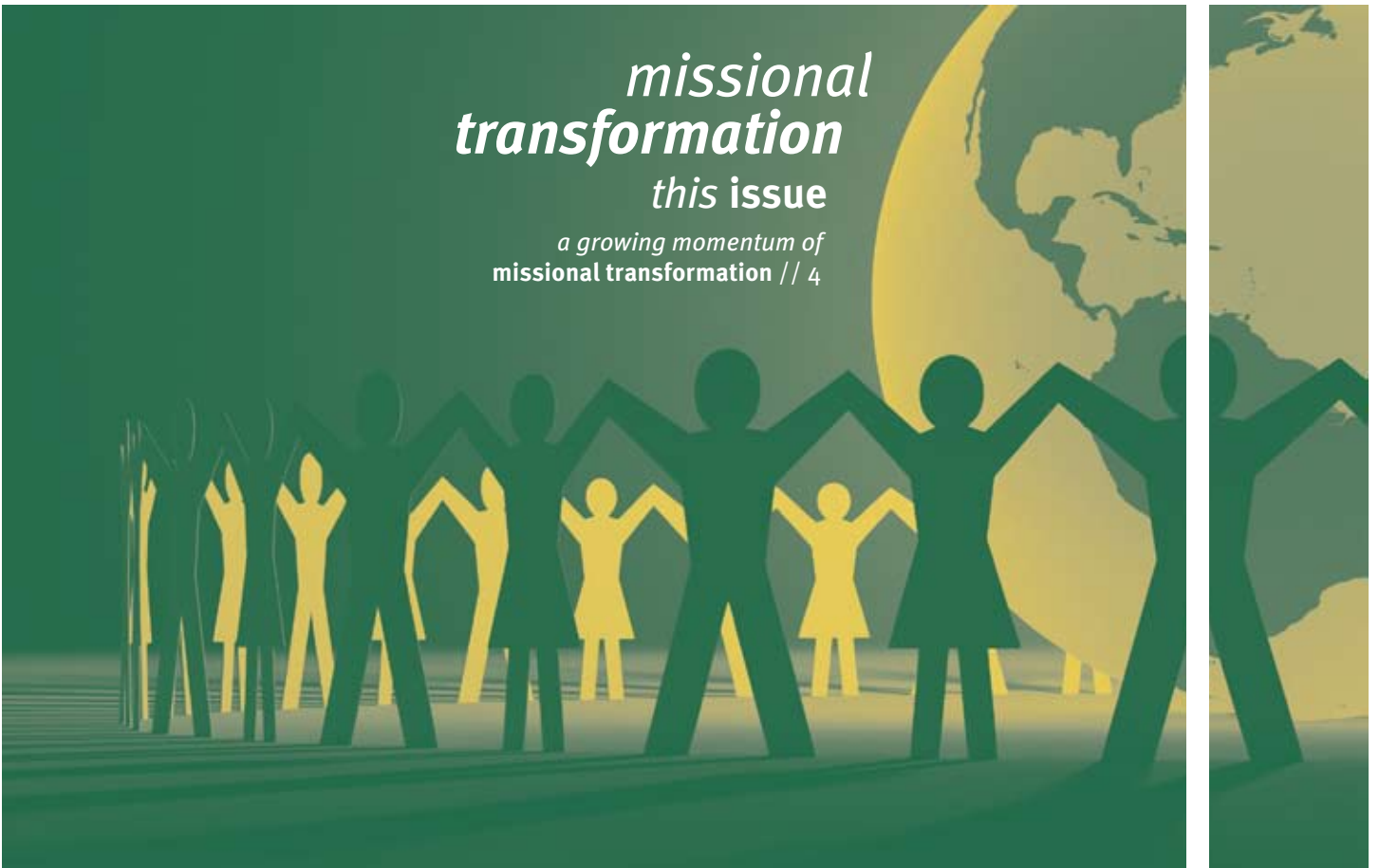


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our mission

...is to mobilize leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

PFR at General Assembly

Friday, June 20th, 8pm - 10:30pm

Presbyterians for Renewal Welcome Reception, The Fairmont Hotel

www.GA2008.com

Saturday, June 21st, 7am - 9am

Presbyterians for Renewal GA Overview, San Jose Convention Center - Room B

Wednesday, June 25th, 6:30am - 8:30am

Presbyterians for Renewal "Gospel Hope" Breakfast, The Fairmont Hotel

PFR is excited to welcome Dr. Mark D. Roberts, author, pastor, and theologian, as our GA Breakfast speaker (markdroberts.com), introduce the 2008 NPWL Lydia Scholar, Heidi Smith from Dubuque Theological Seminary, and honor Bill and Lois (posthumously) Anderson, our 2008 Bell-Mackay Award winners, who by their life of faith and personal ministry have advanced the unity and mission of our denomination in obedience to Christ.

Monday, June 23rd - Friday, June 27th, during the lunch break

PFR Mid-day Briefings, San Jose Convention Center - Plaza 1, A&B

Visit our dedicated GA website, www.GA2008.com, for all of the business, full commentary, and real time reporting from San Jose.

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"As Christ followers, we have a purpose—to love God passionately and to enjoy to the fullest the life God has given us."

Purpose is everything.

Purpose is everything. If we understand the purpose, we can usually make sense out of almost anything in life. Without purpose, nothing makes sense. A watch is a wonderful tool for telling time. But even the best wrist watch will only cause frustration if you try and use it to drive a nail.

As Christ followers, we have a purpose—to love God passionately and to enjoy to the fullest the life God has given us. Anything else, no matter how clever or enticing, will ultimately be like trying to drive the nail with the watch: frustrating and pointless, pointless, and destructive.

If Christ followers are created to love and enjoy God, then congregations of Christ followers are created to be places where the love of God and the joy in obeying and following him are like an irresistible magnetic force—attracting people of all ages, races, types, and conditions, into a community that embodies, to the best of our limited ability, God's Kingdom on earth; a place of safety and love, joy and laughter, music and dance, encouragement and hope. And these places would have one purpose only—to reach out into the world with reckless abandon to share everything they have and everything they are with as many people as they can reach.

That's the missional church—Christ followers loving God so much that we give God's love away like there was nothing to lose. It's happening, and this issue of ReNEWS will give just a teasing taste of how and where. This kind of radical obedience to the call and the purpose of God has always been the purpose of Christ's Church, and it is our only hope for a faithful future.


Helping pastors and elders, deacons and small group leaders become the leaders of congregations who own this mission and live like this—that's the purpose of PFR! So what is PFR doing at the 218th General Assembly, and what message do we have for the denomination?

A large PFR team will be in San Jose to pray for, encourage, and equip commissioners to be biblically faithful and missionally minded. Many overtures coming to this Assembly would "tinker" with the denomination just at a time when new Christ-honoring, Shalom-building, efforts are beginning to take root. We are recommending that many of these overtures be voted down, not because we are negative about our denomination—quite the opposite! We want to see the superb work of earlier assemblies, denomination-wide affirmations, and emerging initiatives stand. We want to see what potential there might be in a more missional form of government. But most of all, we want to help commissioners discern, protect, and promote the places where God is very much at work in and through the PC(USA). We ask you to join us in hope-filled prayer: eager anticipation to see what God will do next. See our special GA insert for more detailed information, and visit our dedicated GA website www.GA2008.com for all the business, full commentary, and real-time reporting from San Jose.

Glorifying, loving, serving, and enjoying God forever. What a purpose! That is everything.

Your colleague in ministry,

Paul Detterman
 Executive Director
 Presbyterians For Renewal



*a growing momentum
of missional
transformation*

— by *E. Stanley Ott*
— illustration by *Todd Goehner*

The God we serve makes dry bones live again. Breathing new vitality into his people is what God loves to do. Because of this, I continue to be motivated by the idea of a “turnaround” denomination. While many concerns with the denomination draw a great deal of attention, I see more signs of hope than ever in my 30 years of ministry. In my work with presbyteries and observing ministries across the country, I am encouraged to see those of a variety of theological perspectives and approaches to ministry eager for a new fruitfulness in congregational transformation and missional endeavor.

I see pastors, executive presbyters, and synod executives asking astute questions about what generates such fruitfulness. I see an exciting new staff forming in Louisville with a clear passion to see our denomination have a fresh vitality among us and a major new impact on the world around us.

Our denomination is doing many things that matter and everywhere we hear the people in our church are ready for a new and transformational chapter in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

I do not accept the notion that the mainline has no future — there are too many signs of hope!

Throughout my ministry I have served with a sense of a split “call” with one focus on serving a local congregation and the other encouraging the vitality of the wider church through the Vital Churches Institute (VCI), with my primary call as an installed pastor. Five years ago we realized that the most effective way to encourage congregations was to work with presbyteries in a multi-year sequence known as the Acts 16:5 Initiative that typically involves a quarter to a third of the congregations of a presbytery. So many doors opened with presbyteries since then that we knew that it was time to shift the majority of my time into specialized ministry with VCI. Clearly our Lord is doing a new thing. The training and coaching that encourages congregational leaders in their ministries of missional transformation is exciting work.

Reach - Grow - Send

Acts 16:5 expresses a clear vision, “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.” We see that vision fulfilled in the Acts story by means of a basic ministry cycle: Reach-Grow-Send. They reached into their communities with the good news, compassion, and justice of Jesus, they grew with those they reached as followers of Jesus, and they sent one another to serve Jesus in the home and in the marketplace. Such a ministry cycle is deeply doxological, communal, and missional as it connects people to our Lord, to one another, and to the work of service.

Those of us engaged in the leadership of the church have typically served with a missional motivation, the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God.

Words such as these have always motivated us: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed

go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
— Luke 4:18-19

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”
— Matthew 28:19a

However, our congregations have tended to be focused more on the doxological, the worship of God, and the communal, the vitality of the fellowship, than on the missional.

Missional does not simply mean a program or two aimed at the community or a Missions Committee that gives money away. It is first of all a lifestyle for all of God’s people, and it is a way of shaping every ministry in the congregation to practice Reach-Grow-Send.

Change = Risk

A great challenge leaders face in moving toward a missional approach is the hard work that is required. Our pastors and executive presbyters are under tremendous pressure to cope with “the pressure of present demand” which by and large is not connected to missional thinking. Handling those demands appropriately while also making shifts in the practice of pastoral leadership is no easy task.

A second challenge is that a new missional approach takes courage. Not everyone is thrilled with new vision. There is risk and it takes a brave pastor and leadership team to move forward.

Third, we have to give people a missional vision. To ask typical church program leaders in what specific ways do their ministries actually engage those in the community with the good news, compassion, and justice of Jesus and draw them into the fellowship of the church is to receive a blank stare.

A number of discoveries and surprises have surfaced in this work.

Pastors who want to lead their congregations into new forms of ministry while finding ways to affirm those who are long time participants in the life of the church walk a high wire. Books such as *Deep Change* by Robert Quinn are clear about the personal price a leader faces who would bring transformation to his or her own leadership patterns and to the life of the organization being led.

We have discovered that when a presbytery legitimizes transformational and missional change to its congregations, it affirms and backs its pastors and leaders who have the courage to lead in a new direction. This happens when a presbytery engages in a process of transformation such as the Acts 16:5 Initiative and as the executive presbyter and presbytery council are vocal in their encouragement

of congregational leadership that moves toward a new future.

Obstacles, to missional change

One of the biggest surprises I have had is the discovery of how little formal planning happens today. I have asked people in several hundred congregations if their congregation has minimally an annual planning process in which every ministry makes plans around a few goals for the coming year. Less than two percent say “yes!” This means in our crazy busy culture that congregations are like sailing ships with no rudder, simply driven by the wind of activity rather than the direction of the helm. Planning, per se, will not turn the church around.

A vision without a plan is only a wish.

There are of course many other challenges to effective missional transformation of both presbyteries and congregations as they are complex family systems. Many in leadership are deeply rooted in their current practices and are not all that interested in the personal transformation that organizational transformation will require.

No simple checklist of strategies or programs will bring about genuine changes in every setting. One of our greatest challenges in missional transformation is to “bless and add,” to show honor and dignity to the traditional elements of our ministries that have

served people for a long time and for which people have an ongoing appreciation while at the same time moving forward with new approaches and practices.

I have been pleasantly surprised that, in spite of disagreements, we hunger for transformation within the church and a new level of missional endeavor. Genuine movements of missional transformation require leaders who can draw teams around them, who have the imagination to lead in new ways while having the pastoral grace to be present to those who are nervous and who have the courage to bear with those who are not supportive. God is raising up a great many such leaders.

It’s an exciting time to be in ministry. And an exciting time to be a Presbyterian. ■

E. Stanley Ott is president of the Vital Churches Institute, specializing in congregational transformation with presbyteries and Teaching Pastor of the Vienna Presbyterian Church. estanleyott@VitalChurchesInstitute.com
www.VitalChurchesInstitute.com



The Reason for Our Connectionalism: Mission

Imprinted in our Presbyterian DNA is a need to be connected with others. So it was natural when pastors of smaller member churches began meeting monthly for fellowship and mutual support.

That was 15 years ago. Today the Laurens County Cluster of Smaller Member Congregations models how the partnering or clustering of smaller membership congregations can provide fellowship, support, opportunities, and resources that are not always available for individual congregations that size.

On the local level, the cluster offers programs for all ages. There are fellowship gatherings, prayer expeditions to different churches, and leadership training events. Each summer the cluster sponsors a youth camp. Along with Bible

study and recreation, participants serve in projects like cemetery clean up, repair and re-roofing of homes of the elderly, and visitation in nursing homes. Now the cluster is developing an older adult ministry.

The cluster has always embraced college students. Through a unique relationship with Presbyterian College, students join church members in local and global service projects. Furthermore, the cluster works with Christmas International House, through which church members extend hospitality to international college students during the Christmas and New Year’s holidays.

Christ has charged all of us to respond to the Great Commission, regardless of the number of

people on the church roll. Working together, the cluster has answered the call to go “into all the world” through yearly mission trips to Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Ours is a God who has promised to be “where two or three are gathered together.” He has also demonstrated in stories like the feeding of the five thousand how he can feed many through the offering of one. Great is his faithfulness in the lives of individuals and congregations in the Greater Laurens County Cluster of Smaller Member Churches. ■

Contributors: Herb Codington, Hampton Hunter, Sadie Hunter Goldsmith, Lawrence Peebles, Ann Felten, Lucie Barron Eggleston

Becoming Missionaries in Our Own Land

— by Rev. Dr. Clark D. Cowden

Two decades ago, Lesslie Newbigin asked the question, “Can we have a genuine missionary encounter with our own culture?” This question began a conversation which launched what we call the missional movement.

Presbyterians effectively ministered to the Christendom culture of North America 50 years ago. But today, now that the sands have shifted, we find ourselves struggling to relate to a post-Christian culture.

Change that used to happen slowly and predictably, now takes place rapidly, discontinuously, and haphazardly. Stuck in the old mold, we still train pastors on what to do with people when they come to church, even though most people won’t come to us anymore. But our

pastors can no longer be chaplains to a Christian culture. We must be a missionary people in our own land. We must move from a mindset that the church is a provider of religious goods and services for Christian consumers to the shaper of an apostolic people on a mission to a fallen world.

So, how will this begin to happen?

It will not happen top-down. It will not come from a pronouncement from a hierarchy. It will begin with people on the edges of a flattened, networked world. It will be “edgy”. It will begin in congregations.

It flows out of the spiritual disciplines practiced in the church for ages. We need to develop habits and practices of dwelling in the Word and allowing God to speak to us through it.

It will take a long time. It will not happen quickly. We don’t begin the process with answers, the answers emerge as we walk the missional path together.

Changing our mindset to connect with a changed culture

It happens through dialogue and conversation in community. Our “rugged American individualism” will never discover it. We need each other. We need to be humble enough to say “I don’t know” and “What can I learn from you?” The dialogue is created from the question “What is God already doing in our community and where is God calling us to join that work?”

When we have some ideas on what God is up to in our communities, then we begin to create experiments in mission as we seek to move back into our neighborhoods. We give ourselves the freedom to fail. We learn from every attempt we make.

It will probably not happen without the assistance of an outside change agent to guide the process. Those of us inside the system have too many biases and blind spots to guide it effectively. We need training and coaching from groups like Allelon (see www.allelon.org) who are on the cutting edge of missional change processes.

Scripture gives us stories of God showing up in the most God-forsaken places. Scripture describes a God who surprises us, who calls people we would never call, who works in communities we would never enter, with a mission that we would never guess.

God is up to some mischief in our denomination. Over the next 20 years, it will be exciting to see what this is. ■

Clark Cowden, former Executive Presbyter of San Joaquin Presbytery, is now Executive Presbyter of San Diego Presbytery. His writings have helped shape the missional movement in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).



Some presbyteries are restructuring to support a missional focus

These people are excited. Ask any of these presbytery and synod executives to talk about their involvement in the missional movement and their voices rise with enthusiasm.

“It was as though I had a song running through my head for 20 years, and finally I knew what it was,” exclaims Bruce Stevens, executive for the Synod of the Trinity.

The word missional is still new in many parts of the church, but those who are promoting the ideas insist this is basically a restoration of classic Christianity.

“The missional church is nothing new,” maintains David Dawson, executive of Shenango Presbytery. “The Bible is a missionary document.”

And yet it is new for many, since American churches have been accustomed to a culture where Christian faith was widely accepted and participation in church was common. The steady decline in attendance and membership in many churches across denominational lines reflects the cultural shift — a decline that finger-pointing and blaming has done nothing to reverse.

Many denominational leaders recognize that working harder will not in itself reverse the trend either. As they introduce missional concepts to their churches, these leaders are calling for a basic reorientation.

“It’s not a different way of doing church,” Stevens explains, “It’s a different way of thinking about church.”

Because the changes in society are so pronounced, churches have to discover profoundly different ways to reach people with the gospel. This is often referred to as the adaptive challenge. Church people often look for a technical fix, such as a new program, when what is needed is for the church to adapt to the new circumstances.

“The toughest part for these churches is to discover the adaptive challenge,” Dawson says. The

missional approach requires learning how to interact with a culture that is less familiar with Christian perspectives and in many respects more resistant.

While missional concepts are being applied across the country, Pennsylvania is a hot spot. The Synod of the Trinity has more than 60 churches engaged in some form of missional pursuit. Some are using a program developed by the Center for Parish Development. Others are participating in the Acts 16:5 Initiative, developed by Presbyterian minister Stan Ott. (See Ott’s article on page 4.) Five presbyteries in western Pennsylvania are using the Partnership for Missional Church, provided by Church Innovations.

“We’re trying to change the culture of the synod,” Stevens says. With a commitment of staff, program, and budget, that may very well occur.

New culture, new focus

Presbyteries are redefining themselves as well, and one of the major markers of the changes is the new focus: congregations. Alan Adams, presbytery executive of Beaver-Butler Presbytery, says his presbytery has been asking the basic question, “What do presbyteries do?”

“Presbyteries need to stop acting like they’re large churches,” he says. “The old idea was that presbyteries receive money and do mission.” But now the support is being turned toward congregations. “When churches do mission, they grow. So, we have reorganized our presbytery units, focusing on how we can help our churches carry out their mission.”

In the Partnership for Missional Church, leaders in the participating churches meet three times a year over a three-year period. In the full first year, the churches are guided into a biblical exploration of God’s missional purpose, and each church is urged to spend much time in prayerful discernment of who they are and where God has placed them. Once

“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.” — Acts 16:5 (NIV)

this groundwork is done, the second year launches a time of experiment in outreach. The third phase consolidates the findings and prepares the churches to make more substantive decisions about their transformation into missional bodies.

“This is not a three-year program and then your membership doubles,” cautions Dawson. Nevertheless he and the other executives see the missional paradigm not as a fad, but as one of the most helpful movements to come along in a long time.

“I see God bringing so many pieces together at one time,” Stevens says. “We’re seeing more engaged churches.”

“It’s part of a bigger transformation,” Adams says, “for the churches to get the focus off themselves and onto God’s work in the world.”

Converting the converted to a missional mind

While the missional approach is close to the heart of these leaders, they recognize that not everyone has warmed up to the idea yet. For some members, it doesn’t make sense that the church has to reinvent itself.

“We have to be careful not to say that the last 200 years have been a mistake,” Stevens says.

Adoption of missional principles in Pittsburgh Presbytery has been furthered by the participation of 30 churches in the Acts 16:5 Initiative. Judith Slater, Associate Pastor for Small-size Churches in Pittsburgh Presbytery, not only oversees the Acts 16:5 Initiative, but is a pastor herself.

“My church has participated. It has made a world of difference,” Slater says, noting that smaller churches have to translate some of the concepts, but when they find a way to apply the principles, the missional seeds begin to sprout.

Each of these presbytery leaders speaks about the importance of grounding the whole process in prayer.

“It really is about following God, not change for the sake of change,” Slater insists. Her congregation adopted the practice every Sunday of praying, “God, show us what you want us to do in this place, at this time.”

Betty Meadows, General Presbyter of Mid-Kentucky Presbytery, echoes the centrality of prayer. An early player in promoting missional concepts in

presbyteries, Meadows sees the hand of God in the learning process in her presbytery that has brought them to its current missional focus. Like most presbyteries, hers had supported congregational redevelopment work, “but we were never satisfied with the result. Then, when we discovered the word missional, we tested the waters.” The presbytery invited sessions to create “mission dream teams” of five to seven members to meet regularly with their pastors for Bible study, prayer, and discernment. “Their own faith developed but without change in the church.”

But when the presbytery introduced the Acts 16:5 Initiative, “The Spirit of God just blew through the presbytery.” Twenty churches participated — large, small, urban, rural, suburban, liberal, conservative. What has made this approach so promising of good results? A year of prayer before the transformation process began.

“The whole thing has been bathed in prayer,” Meadows says. “We held each church up in prayer weekly. Part of what we are experiencing is the Spirit’s leading.”

Meadows initiated the Missional Presbyteries Project, one of the incubators that has resulted in many of today’s presbyteries exploring the missional paradigm. She recruited Darrell Guder, pioneer in the missional movement and now Dean of Academic Affairs at Princeton Seminary, to conduct a five-year exploration with 10 participating presbyteries. Together they asked: What would a presbytery look like if it were missional?

Today, there are numerous living examples to answer that question, and the presbytery leaders who are pressing for missional alignment are convinced they are onto something of great significance.

“As the denomination keeps shrinking, maybe we’re more ready to look back at the church in Acts and ask, How can we be the church that God envisions?” Meadows suggested. “This is one of the most exciting times to be in God’s church.” As for the missional movement, “It’s a God thing.”

Richard Carter is pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church in Medford, NJ.



An Urban Presbytery Goes Missional

Detroit Presbytery is using urban-suburban partnerships to stimulate missional activity. Allen Timm, Executive Presbyter, is a champion of mission involvement by congregations, but he recognizes that many churches have limited resources. “The congregation is the center of activity” in the presbytery, Timm declares, and so the presbytery must resource the local church to carry out its mission.

In Detroit Presbytery, that has led to creation of a team that looks for creative ventures in Christ-centered service that churches can participate in together. The idea began in a conversation soon after Timm came to Detroit. “I hear you’re a mission guy,” an elder said to Timm. The elder described the positive effects that youth mission trips had in his own congregation, and he wanted the new Executive Presbyter to consider organizing the presbytery to foster adult mission trips. Four years later, a mission development team has formed and numerous mission trips launched, including 400 people heading south to help in Katrina recovery efforts.

An after school program at Calvin East Presbyterian Church in Detroit is a recent example of urban-suburban partnership. Mark Tippin, pastor of the multi-racial church, wanted to help his church “see” the desperation in the community.

“The only outreach was VBS,” Tippin says. “They were internally focused.”

Tippin hoped that by finding a way to serve the community, not only would many find practical and spiritual help, but the congregation would be re-energized as well.

Almost half of Detroit residents are to some degree illiterate. Responding to this need, 11 members of the small congregation signed up to be tutors for children in grades K-5. They were joined by members of a nearby suburban congregation,

Grosse Pointe Memorial. Soon after a Wednesday night dinner was offered to the children being tutored and their parents. Following dinner, all were invited to Bible study.

Will this outreach to neighboring families result in new disciples?

“It’s slow going,” Tippin says. “It’s about forming relationships.” In the meantime, this new mission venture “helps the congregation in their faith walk.” And for the children being assisted in reading, “We want these kids to have an experience of the Kingdom of God among us.” ■

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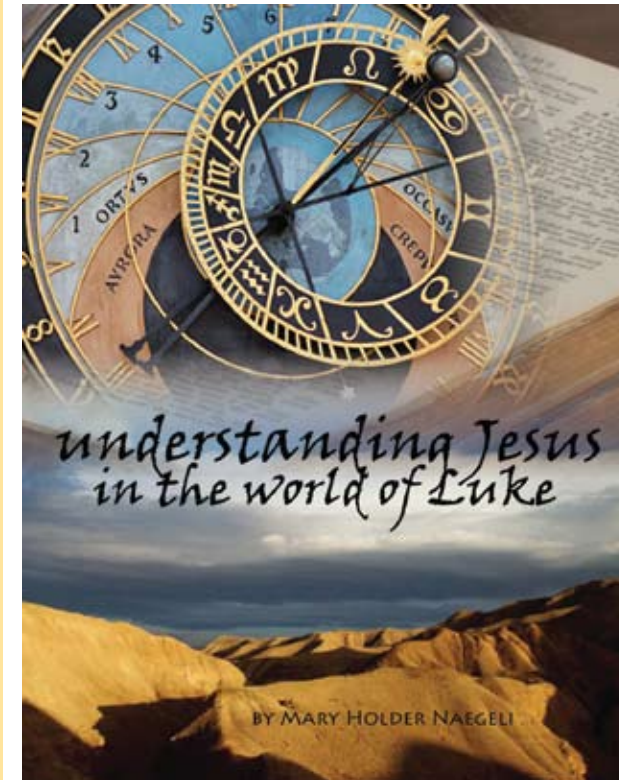
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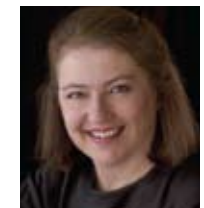


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Author: Mary Holder Naegeli



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