

# CURRENT ISSUES

## Bible Study

LEADER'S GUIDE

# Reaching Out: Adopt God's Mission

*All believers are missionaries; all places are mission fields.*

Though the word *missional* has been in use for more than a century, church leaders have recently begun spending more time thinking and talking about what it means. The sending and support of missionaries to the unreached people outside one's national borders remains part of the idea, but only a part. At the heart of the modern redefinition of missionality lies a focus on the mission of *God* throughout history, rather than just the mission of the *church* and her missionaries.

How do we understand the mission of God, and what does this mean for the local church? What does it mean for our families? What is the biblical support for this seemingly new missional emphasis? This study will examine these questions in light of Scripture and the provocative examples of believers who have truly embraced a missional lifestyle.

### Lesson #1

#### Scripture:

Matthew 22:36–40; 28:18–20; John 20:19–23; Ephesians 1:3–23; Philippians 2:5–11

#### Based on:

"New Ownership," by Eric Reed, LEADERSHIP JOURNAL (Winter 2007, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, Page 19)



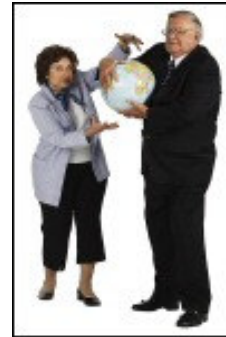
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**PART 1**

**Identify the Current Issue**

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the article "New Ownership" from LEADERSHIP JOURNAL, included at the end of this study.*



Some theologians and church historians have suggested that Christianity as we know it today, especially in America, reflects the DNA inherited from hundreds of years of European Christendom. When church and state became one in key European states, all the citizenry were thought to be "Christian," regardless of any proclamation of faith or obedience. One became a Christian by virtue of merely living in a Christian empire ruled by State leaders blessed, anointed and ordained by the church. This unified church/state culture led to a view of missions as something the church did for unbelievers living *outside* of Christendom. Thus, in order to fulfill the Great Commission, the church appointed, funded, and sent missionaries beyond its borders to the far reaches of the globe. In contrast to the biblical model of the Great Commission (where the good news spread in waves from a central starting point) missions leapfrogged "Jerusalem and Judea" entirely, aiming straight for the "uttermost parts of the Earth." Missions became a global enterprise, ignoring the local need. Rather than sending its members as missionaries into the community, the local church instead became a "magnet" where believers came for edification, and seekers, if any, came to be evangelized.

In recent years, however, a shift has been taking place. While denominations still send missionaries beyond national borders, we now see "home missions" and stateside missionary support structures. Further, parachurch ministries have begun to fill the gaps not addressed by denominational agencies, enabling greater cooperation between disparate sending groups, often addressing needs locally as well as globally.

Lately, the missional movement has begun influencing the local church's view of missions so that individual churches are now funding and sending missionaries themselves, sometimes forming cooperative networks with nearby churches—even across denominational lines.

Finally, the new missional approach to faith has compelled families and individual believers to embrace a missionary worldview and lifestyle within their own communities. Rather than seeing missions as a program to give money to, these missional believers are seeing missions as something every believer is commissioned to do at work, at home, and in their neighborhood.

**Discussion starters:**

- [Q]** What do you think is the primary difference between "doing missions" versus "being missional"?
- [Q]** The author notes that missions is now coming full-circle: "Individual Christians in local congregations are taking new ownership of the mission. We are becoming missional." What do you think?
  - Does simply "taking ownership of the mission" truly bring the church's responsibility full circle? If not, what might be missing from truly going "full circle"?



➤ How would you describe the early church's view of missions and the believer's responsibility for missions work?

**[Q]** What do you think is the proper relationship between the "Great Commandment" (Matthew 22:36–40) and the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:18–20)? How should the Great Commandment color our view of the Great Commission?

**[Q]** As you read this article and saw the example of believers fully embracing a missional lifestyle, how were you challenged?

**[Q]** Do you think living a missional lifestyle is realistic for everybody in your church? Why, or why not?

## PART 2

### Discover the Eternal Principles

#### Teaching point one: To be missional starts with knowing God's mission from the very beginning.

The words *missions* and *missional* share a common ancestor: *mission*, which comes to us from a Latin word meaning "to send off." When Jesus gave us the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), he sent his followers off on a specific mission with four essential tasks: "Go ... make disciples ... baptizing them ... and teaching them to obey."

The church, throughout history, has done well in focusing on these tasks. We volunteer and are appointed to go as missionaries. We teach well, often setting up translation programs and Bible colleges to train converts. We baptize, teach, and mentor, and have done it so effectively that our mission fields now send missionaries back to America to evangelize us.

Focusing on the task, however, produces missionaries sent to a mission field. However, in John 20:19–23, Jesus welded the heart of missions with the heart of God when he said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Christ the Lord is telling his followers—you and me included—that he is sending us to others for exactly the same reason and purpose as he was sent.

Focusing on God's mission produces believers who are being sent *wherever they are* and *wherever they go*. This is missionality at its core: God has a purpose; God sent Jesus to fulfill that purpose and the Holy Spirit to empower that purpose. Christ has placed that mantle of mission on every believer who follows him. Every believer individually and the church collectively embodies the presence of Jesus in this world—we are his hands and feet.

We are called to do more than the work of missions: we are called to do God's work, commissioned by Jesus, empowered by the Spirit.

**[Q]** Read Ephesians 1:3–23. What does Paul have to say in this passage about God's mission, goal, or purpose?

**Leader's Note:** Key phrases to look for in this discussion include verse 4, "to be holy and blameless in his sight," verse 10, "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together"



*under one head, even Christ," verse 12, "in order that we ... might be for the praise of his glory."*

- [Q]** How does a family moving out of their suburban home into a cramped apartment space help fulfill these goals?
- How does tutoring, feeding the hungry, or going overseas to do missions work fulfill these goals?

**Leader's Note:** *God's mission is not to make Christians or missionaries, but to bring all of Creation into his kingdom. As Christ was sent to realize and announce the arrival of God's kingdom (Luke 4:43; Matthew 4:17,23; Luke 17:20b-21), we are to carry on that work (Luke 10:8-9).*

*Thus, you might discuss how true godliness involves obeying the command to love your neighbor as yourself, or that true godliness involves caring for widows and orphans, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. Discuss how certain lifestyles help bring "all things in heaven and on earth" under Christ's lordship. For example, as Adam was given responsibility to care for the earth and its creatures, our responsibility to do the same remains. You could further discuss how our humility and selflessness, our integrity, generosity, and hospitality all reflect Christ in ways that bring glory to God.*

One pillar of missional thought points to the nature of God as Trinity. Before the world existed, before man was created, even before time began, God existed as a loving, giving, relating member of a community. Being truly missional, therefore, means we must reflect these eternal qualities of God: we must love. First, we love God as a natural response to the Creator who moved heaven and earth to bring us into his kingdom. And we must love others because he also loves them, and they are made in his image.

- [Q]** What is love, and how is this part of God's mission?
- [Q]** What are some practical ways your church could actively express love in your community?
- [Q]** Looking back on the Ephesians passage, how does love and fellowship God's way help fulfill God's purposes?
- [Q]** Perhaps you have heard this expression: "Show me your checkbook, and I'll show you where your heart is." How is giving money for missions different than being personally involved in missions?
- If God's purpose is to bring all things under the authority of Jesus Christ, what does this mean for your finances and spending?
  - If God's purpose is to bring all things under the authority of Jesus Christ, what does this mean for your free time and leisure time?

### **Teaching point two: Being missional requires unity.**

In his article, Eric Reed noted that many missional churches work with other churches across institutional and denominational boundaries. These missional churches don't focus on whether they align on every point of doctrine and practice. Instead, they focus on forming a community



that is active in their local neighborhood. It is worth noting that in Acts 1:1–9, Jesus spent his last few days on earth getting everybody on the same page: “He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” This message must have been utterly important for his followers and disciples for it’s the only major topic Luke records for that time. The apostle Paul also pleads frequently in his epistles for believers to be of one mind, to be unified, to work together, not to argue, not to be divisive.

Perhaps you’ve never heard terms from the article before like “shared parish,” or “supra-denominational,” but as Eric Reed notes, anyone who’s ever seen a Billy Graham crusade has already seen this kind of unity in action. When the core shared goal is the manifestation, revelation, and expression of the love, kingdom, and lordship of Christ, secondary issues dim in importance.

- [Q]** What do you think are the greatest barriers to church unity?
- Why is it so difficult for churches to work across denominational boundaries?
- [Q]** What are the greatest barriers to unity within just one church community? Many churches have split or are threatening to split over matters of policy, practice, or philosophy. What do you think are the primary causes of this intra-church disunity, and how do you think it should be addressed?
- [Q]** Even if your church or community doesn’t have an outreach partnership or a “shared parish,” what are some ways you could unite with other believers missionally?
- [Q]** What are the most visible needs in your church’s community that only could be addressed by uniting churches together?
- [Q]** What would a truly missional church look or feel like?
- Would you feel comfortable attending a missional church?

### Teaching point three: To become missional be generous and hospitable.

In 1991, when Faith Popcorn wrote, *The Popcorn Report: The Future of Your Company, Your World, Your Life*, she described a new trend she called “cocooning” where individuals were becoming increasingly more insulated from society via their homes, cars, and cubicles. In an already individualistic society, wired Americans have only become more and more socially remote from each other. Food can be delivered to your door, entertainment piped onto your screen, calls made and e-mails exchanged, all without leaving the comfort of one’s cozy den.

But the Scriptures teach us to do anything but cocoon ourselves away from society. Jesus prayed for our protection while we live “in the world,” even without being “of it” (John 17:1–26). Throughout the Scriptures, we are encouraged to lay hands on one another, to greet each other, to fellowship, to gather together, to exercise hospitality, to be generous, and to share.

The families featured in Eric Reed’s article are anything but cocooned. They attend “churches without borders” and enjoy families without walls. Doors are opened, time is freely spent, and lifetime friendships are formed.



- [Q] Thinking about the “Great Commandment” (Matthew 22:36–40) and the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18–20), how does America’s trend toward more and more “cocooning” interfere with these commands?
- [Q] What do you think motivates people to live isolated and insulated lives? For example, how do you account for the following behaviors?
- 1) Some will spend half an hour composing an e-mail when a five-minute phone call or a walk down the hall might accomplish more in less time.
  - 2) Some choose to “tune out” of church and “tune in” to televangelists, instead.
  - 3) Few people in the church actually confess their sins to each other.
  - 4) The moment the car leaves the church parking lot, Christian drivers are indistinguishable from other drivers, save for their bumper stickers.
- [Q] What are some simple and practical ways families could exercise more generosity and hospitality in their neighborhood?
- [Q] Dallas Willard has defined a spiritual discipline as, “any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.” Like the physical disciplines of lifting weights to gradually increase our strength, spiritual disciplines are activities that increase our spiritual strength. What activities would you recommend to help believers strengthen their ability to exercise generosity and hospitality?
- [Q] Many might be generous or hospitable when given the opportunity to do so, but because they have been “cocooned,” they rarely get the opportunity to exercise these muscles. What would you do differently at your church to make it easier for members to practice generosity and hospitality?

**Optional Activity:**

*Break your group into twos or threes to discuss one or both of the following scenarios.*

*Sometimes we run into problems being hospitable or generous when we begin exploring the frontiers of our own uncharted territories. How would you handle the following scenarios?*

- *Imagine you’re a black business leader, and a fellow church member asks you to lunch. When you meet, your fellow churchgoer confesses that he’s struggling with racist attitudes. He tells you of specific things he’s done, or tolerated and wants to make things right. How do you, as the minority who has been wronged, handle this? How can you exercise generosity and hospitality so that you can both grow together in Christ?*

*(Edward Gilbreath, the black minister who related this story, suggested this: “I need to get to know you, and you need to get to know me ... come over to my house. ... Bring your wife and meet my wife, and we’ll just sit and talk and get to know each other. I’ll barbecue some steaks, and let’s start there. ... Friendship is not cheap. It takes time and commitment.” See: [“Racial Reconciliation: Moving Beyond Words”](#) from [PreachingToday.com](#).)*



- *Imagine you save money for a monthly dinner at your favorite restaurant when you feel the strong impression to share your faith with the waitress. You don't know much about her life; she's quiet and seems happy enough, but you feel strongly that you need to demonstrate the love of Jesus for her. What are some practical things you could do to share love and generosity?*

*(Robert Morris, who described this scenario, relates his decision: He decided at that first meal to forego dinner, and left her the money he had set aside for the meal along with a tract, and he shared a few words with her about how much God cares for her. The next month, he had saved up more money and left an even more generous tip, along with a booklet. The third month, when he visited again, the waitress found him and told him that not only had she accepted Christ, but that her husband, who was in prison, had done the same. See: "[Extra-Generous Tip Leads to Server's Salvation](#)" from [PreachingToday.com](#))*

## PART 3

**Apply Your Findings**

It's far too easy to get caught up in "doing church" and assuming that the work of missions is done by special people called to a special ministry somewhere "out there." But what the specially appointed missionaries do is really no different than what you and I are called to do: We are called to be the presence of Jesus in the midst of people who do not know him. As Christ's representatives, we are ambassadors of the kingdom of God. Following Christ is less about being in the pew whenever the doors are open and more about carrying the life-changing power of the gospel outside the church walls.

Jesus got in a lot of hot water over the types of people he hung around. We would do well to follow his example by opening our own homes to our neighbors, performing acts of kindness and generosity, and being genuinely concerned when listening. We don't have to fix every problem, ease every struggle, and heal every wound—we just need to be sure that we are faithfully representing the ultimate healer, Jesus Christ, and making introductions.

**Action Points:**

- What are your strongest gifts and greatest strengths as a missional believer? Are you naturally generous? Are you naturally hospitable? Are you a natural teacher and mentor? Are you adept at giving comfort? Play to your strengths and try to identify one thing you could do in your church community or in your neighborhood to be more missional.
- Who in your church is missionally minded? If you can identify at least one other missional friend, consider approaching them to partner on a project.
- If you were thoroughly missional, fully embracing this lifestyle, how would your prayers change?
- There are people in your church right now going through struggles that you could help, even if it's just by offering a willing shoulder to lean on. Try to identify one need that you can personally make yourself available for over the next two months. If you don't know of any needs, find someone on staff who could alert you to needs you could help with.



—Study prepared by Rich Tatum, [blogger](#),  
freelancer and former online media managing editor for CTI.

## Additional Resources



[ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)

- [1 Thessalonians: Sharing the Faith](#)
- [Talking About God in the 21st Century Marketplace](#)
- [From Personal Faith to Social Action](#)



“[Missional Bricks and Mortar: Can a church be truly missional and own a building?](#)”  
David Fitch (*Out of Ur*, December 5, 2006 [Accessed: June 26, 2007])



“Teaching Theology from a Missional Perspective”, John R. Franke (ALLELON, June 15, 2007 [Accessed: June 25, 2007])



“[Missional Buzz: Will the real church please stand up?](#)” Tim Conder (*Out of Ur*, January 12, 2007 [Accessed: June 20, 1997])



“[Missional Possible: Steps to transform a consumer church into a missional church](#),”  
Chad Hall (LEADERSHIP, Winter 2007, [Accessed: July 01, 2007])



“[The kingdom made visible: a missional theology of church](#),” David P. Gushee  
(*Stimulus*, January 2005 [Accessed: June 25, 2007])



*Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of Gods Mission in the Bible*, Arthur F. Glasser  
(Baker, 2003; ISBN: 0801026261)



*The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Lesslie Newbigin  
(Eerdmans, 1995; ISBN: 0802808298)



*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, David Bosch,  
(Orbis, 1991; ISBN: 0883447193)



*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, David Jacobus  
Bosch (Orbis, 1991; ISBN: 0883447193)





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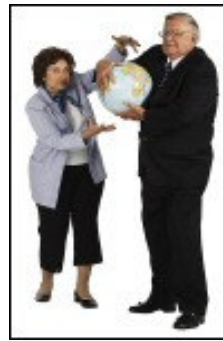
ARTICLE

### **New Ownership**

*Missional is more than a trend as today's Christians recover an old calling.*

By Eric Reed, for the study, "Reaching Out: Adopt God's Mission."

Talking with Connie Sabo in the living room of her north Atlanta home, you'd think from her poise and easy grace that she might have been a contender for Miss America. (She is first cousin to one.) But when I first meet Connie, her blond mane is pulled back in a ponytail, she's wearing jeans and sneakers and playing ball with a dozen Latino kids in the muddy parking lot of an aging apartment complex. "We don't speak a word of Spanish," she said, "but they know we care. We certainly were not equipped for this, but God has equipped us."



Her husband, Frank, is there, too. (He is greeted with shouts of "Mr. Frank! Mr. Frank!")

Soon daughter Taylor arrives with her high school classmates for an afternoon of tutoring, a Bible lesson, and games in the parking lot with the kids of Wyndham Creek apartments. For the past six years, this has been their Wednesday afternoon ritual.

"Definitely, it's a big, long-term commitment," Taylor said.

"Mostly we love kids," Frank said. "And they love us back."

The Sabos represent a shift taking place among believers and churches in North America. Frank and Connie lived in several cities during his career in corporate management with a major restaurant chain, and now, settled in Atlanta, they enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. As members of Perimeter Church, a megachurch in the Presbyterian Church in America, their family grew under the teaching of pastor Randy Pope and a wide variety of ministries for their girls. Then their older daughter, Chelsea, now in college, participated in a junior-high outreach to an apartment community of immigrants with lots of kids, few English language skills, and deep need. That in-town mission sparked a desire in the Sabos to move beyond their comfortable faith.

Theirs is part of the story of a church that awakened to the spiritual and physical need of their neighbors and the birth of a service ministry that now includes 90 churches of all denominations in the area.



It is a good picture of what happens when a church and a family go “missional.”

## More than Buzz

The word *missional* has been in the dictionary for 100 years, defined in the 1907 Oxford English dictionary as something that is of, or pertaining to, missionaries. But those who use the word today have broader applications, focusing on the church’s role in the culture.

It refers to a philosophy of ministry: that followers of Christ are counter-cultural, on a mission to change the culture. Missional refers to the specific activity of churches: to build the kingdom of God in all settings where church members are at work, rather than building up the local congregation, its programs, numbers, and facilities.

Many users of the term refer to a change of heart—that missions is not a distant program to which we send a check or boxes of used clothing—but instead something we’re personally involved in. The whole life of a believer is to be dedicated to faithful sharing, giving, and going—more than studying, hearing, and sending others.

Those steeped in a missions tradition would contend it is the recovery of an old ethic. If the number of websites and recent books using the word are any measure, missional is hot and spreading. Time will tell if it is the successor to “church growth” and the antidote to consumer-driven church.

## Nigh Society

A missionary returning from South America to teach at the seminary I attended predicted the demise of the monolithic agency that sent him and funded him for nearly 30 years. “The denominational mission structure has grown large and unwieldy. The churches are losing connection with the missionaries they fund,” he told our class. He spent a week teaching on the missions societies that grew up around the work of Adoniram Judson and other missions pioneers.

“The forces that led to these ad hoc groups of people from various church backgrounds and the passions that kept them together proved effective in spreading the gospel,” he said. “I think we’ll see the reemergence of the society method of missions sending in the next generation.” Not only as a funding and sending method, I would tell the professor today, but also as a congregational and personal ethic.

For congregations, the missional concept means:

1. Local churches (and the networks they form) replacing the denominational boards and parachurch organizations as missions senders.
2. The shared parish concept in local communities.
3. Personal ownership of missions responsibility.



From local congregations and missions societies supporting a few missionaries in the 1800s, the seat of Christian mission responsibility moved to denominations in the 1900s, to parachurch organizations in the latter half of the last century, to entrepreneurial megachurches in the past generation, and increasingly back to congregations and individuals in ad hoc groups that often want to do the work themselves.

Yes, professor, we are coming full circle. Individual Christians in local congregations are taking new ownership of the mission. We are becoming missional.

### **Going to People Afar**

Roberta Hestenes's account of a missions trip to East Africa is just as gripping for the audience who hears it today as it was eye-opening for the church that supported it in 2000. Rather than another short-term trip that makes do-gooders feel good and leaves the missionaries on the field to mop up afterward, this trip was the first venture in the adoption of a distant, unevangelized people by Hestenes's Southern California congregation. Solana Beach Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) chose the Afar in Ethiopia.

After extensive research and prayer, the church took these remote and little-known people to heart and began fundraising. Hestenes told the story of a woman named Vera, who waffled over going. Finally she joined the team.

After months of planning, and two days on cramped planes, the team was journeying several hours across the desert to find the Afar when one of their drivers swerved to avoid a collision. The van flipped. Three people were severely injured.

In the hours they waited for help to arrive, a group of boys came by. "Afar?" Roberta asked of the boys who were hours from the Afar village. "Afar!" the leader said, point to himself and several others. "Afar," he scowled, pointing to one boy and shaking his head. Apparently not Afar. Seeking some connection with the kids who knew no English, Roberta eventually led them in singing "Alleluia."

And undecided Vera found her purpose on this trip. Vera is a nurse. She tended the injured.

The group was led to the Afar town and met an entourage of 50 leaders, a door that had never been opened to Christians before. "We know you really care about us and our needs," Hestenes quoted the top official as saying, "because you came. Even though it was hard and even though your colleagues were hurt in the accident." This was the first trip in a multi-year relationship with the Afar.

Hestenes now urges other churches to personal involvement in mission work, not merely missions support. Our personal formation in the image of Christ demands hands-on ministry, she said. Everyone is important in the work, even those like Vera



who are at first unsure of their contribution. These are recurring themes in the missional conversation: hands-on, personal involvement, a purpose for everyone.

The monolithic sending agencies are admitting, “We can’t do it alone.” The Southern Baptist Convention’s International Mission Board, which has for decades prided itself for fielding the world’s largest team of missionaries, turned to local congregations for assistance in reaching “unreached people groups.” In SBC life this is a remarkable change from the decades in which *all* the churches supported *all* the missionaries in order to reach *all* the lost people—in the process losing close contact between missionaries and the people back home.

This is the supra-denominational approach to missions—local churches working above and beyond the reach of the sending agency, and often outside the denominational or even parachurch structure.

On the local level as well, the new watchword is *partnerships*. “In the ‘80s and ‘90s, the national agencies would come up with the ideas and fund them. On the local level, we participated in what they funded,” said Keith Draper, a church planting strategist who was recently named executive director of the Chicago Metro Baptist Association, an alliance of Southern Baptist congregations. “Now, the national leadership wants to know what is working on the local level. Then they join in and may support it financially.”

This, too, is a significant shift for a denomination with a top-down missions strategy. “Today our work is about creating partnerships on the local and regional levels,” Draper said.

“In some ways this is nothing new,” he pointed out. “There is historical precedence for local congregations leading regional, national, and international missions. Before denominations coalesced 150 years ago, local churches took responsibility for global missions. They were ‘glocal’ two centuries before the word was coined. We are getting back to that.”

## Shared Parish, Shared Purpose

What the Billy Graham organization pulled off in the cities where it crusaded—bringing churches of different stripes together for a common purpose—is beginning to happen organically and for ongoing ministry. Think of it as the church without borders.

In Columbia, South Carolina, they call it a “circle of accountability,” the responsibility shared by churches to reach the 600,000 unchurched people in their city. Jeff Shipman founded Columbia Crossroads Church six years ago with the intention of reaching every lost person. Realizing the enormity of the goal, Shipman enlisted fellow pastors to subdivide the region and tackle the task together. His church



has even supported the planting of 20 churches in five denominations, none of them his own. Today 70 churches partner.

In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 30 of the 80 evangelical churches are working together under the banner “Loving our Communities to Christ,” a project of Mission America. The alliance is one of nine in cities across the nation. In each city, the churches focus on issues specific to their location, including reconciliation, justice, and strengthening marriages and families.

A community-wide work in Little Rock, Arkansas, has become a model in more than 20 other cities. Started eight years ago when 31 pastors prayed for a way to demonstrate Christ’s love to their city, Sharefest annually brings together dozens of churches in Central Arkansas for repair work in rundown schools and neighborhoods. Fellowship Bible Church continues to spearhead the annual event.

These are a few examples of what may be called a “shared parish,” the desire to build the kingdom together with other congregations.

The church that inspired the Sabos to become a missional family is part of Unite!, 90 churches sharing a parish and resources in North Atlanta. The ministry centers around International Village, an area that has seen an influx of thousands of immigrants from more than 100 language groups.

## When Churches Work Together

About the time the Sabos’ daughter was asking dad to drive the van for that junior high mission project, pastor Randy Pope was asking God for clarity for Perimeter Church’s next season. At their 25th anniversary, the church had quality teaching and strong faith (head and heart, as Jonathan Edwards put it), but what was missing was involvement in ministry to people in the area (the hand, as both Edwards and Pope point out).

“Our church is in an area where the spiritual need is great, but the physical need may not be so obvious,” said Chip Sweney, Perimeter’s Metro Outreach pastor. “We began looking in a larger ring around our community.” A demographic study showed that big changes were happening around them. Along Buford Highway the black-owned businesses and mom-and-pop shops were becoming ethnic stores: Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Latino from a dozen countries.

“There are 400 apartment complexes around here, and each nationality settles together in a few apartment complexes,” Tim Cummins of Whirlwind Ministries explains. “Every complex is like visiting a different country. In every one, people need help talking with the landlord or reading the letter from their kids’ school. A tremendous opportunity for the gospel here. Talk about going to the world? The world is coming to us!”



In that environment, leaders of a few churches said, “We are each doing some good things in the community, but what if we were to do it together?”

A core of eight churches formed with Sweney and Bryan White of Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church, a historic, black congregation, taking the point.

Now, almost four years later, Unite! involves more than 90 churches—black, white, and Hispanic—from a range of theological backgrounds. They lead prayer initiatives and adopt schools. The Unite! churches took in 1,000 families who fled to Atlanta after Hurricane Katrina. And they support a clinic for indigent people.

Sweney is still a church staff member, although much of his work is outside Perimeter. He is their gift to the community. “The churches with resources have responsibility to lead out,” Sweney said. “We just need to love on people, and let them know that we care.”

And much of their work centers on the people of International Village.

## Moving Into the Neighborhood

Like the Sabos, Ben and Julie Sawyer are members of Perimeter Church who heard a calling.

“It was just like a finger in the eye,” Julie said of the prodding they felt from their pastor’s teaching and from the Lord. “We had a strong family life. It kept coming to us that it’s natural to serve in an area where you’re already strong.” So when they heard of an opening at an apartment complex in the International Village, where one of the their children’s teachers had lived and led ministry to immigrant children, the Sawyers packed up, left their suburban home, and squeezed their family into a four-room apartment. The downstairs living area becomes a kids’ club a couple of afternoons a week.

A marker board in the window, with the Unite! logo, says “Homework Help, 4-6 p.m., Welcome!”

Ben comes home from work in time for the tutoring and games on the asphalt drive. “We felt it was important to move into the community itself because it lends credibility to what we’re doing here,” Ben said. “The problems and issues and struggles of the community are now our problems and issues and struggles.”

“It grabs me every time I drive into the complex,” Julie said in her makeshift dining room, surrounded by immigrant children struggling with simple math. “This is important. I need to live here because it’s important and it keeps my heart tender toward my neighbors. And I fear leaving, that my heart would harden again.”

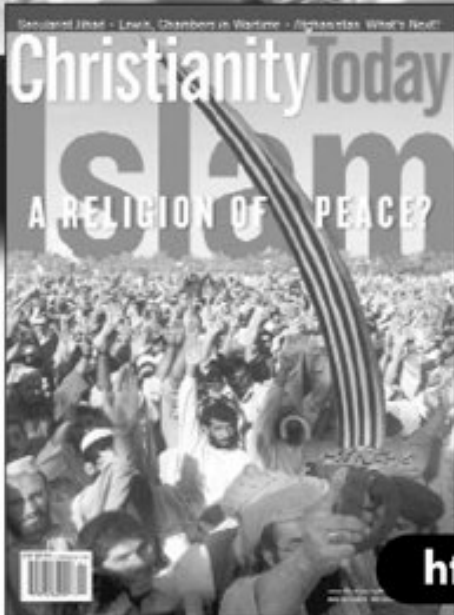
—Eric Reed is managing editor of *Leadership*.



"New Ownership," by Eric Reed, LEADERSHIP JOURNAL (Winter 2007, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, Page 19)  
The stories of the Sabos and the Sawyers are told in the video Intersect Culture, produced as part of The Christian Vision Project by LEADERSHIP and Christianity Today International. The video is a six-part series profiling people who are changing their communities. It includes a study guide for small groups. For information, visit [www.ChristianVisionProject.com](http://www.ChristianVisionProject.com).



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