

## LeaderLesson 21: Reaching the Nations in our Neighborhoods

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*[Jamie Bowen serves with Eastway Baptist Church in student ministry, specifically working with the Montagnard Oyadao Baptist Church, which Eastway hosts at their facilities. Jamie has learned much about reaching the nations in our neighborhoods, and we invited him to share some of those lessons with us in this edition.]*

It doesn't take long for one living within the context of our great city to realize the pervasive cultural diversity that exists here. We are increasingly becoming a center of many cultural representations and ethnic distinctions. School campuses, places of businesses, even our neighborhoods are considerably marked with an international flavor. I believe that what was said through the prophet Isaiah concerning the city of Jerusalem can in a very real way be applied to us here in Charlotte, that "...the nations will come to your light..." (Isaiah 60:3). The nations have indeed moved into our neighborhoods.

So if this is the case, then we can no longer view world evangelization and global missions from merely a distant perspective. We must realize that our greatest opportunity for engaging and reaching the nations could quite possibly be right where we are. But how do we do that? Considering that this is such uncharted territory for most of us, how can we most effectively and strategically seize this grand opportunity of serving and reaching the peoples right here in our midst? Well, one of the most intentional ways we can get at this, is through the channel of the local ethnic church.

I'm sure you're aware of the many ethnic congregations that exist within our city, churches representing so many people groups and nationalities in our area, such as the Montagnard tribal groups from Vietnam and Cambodia, or the Nepali-Hindi speaking people from Nepal, or even the Zomi speaking people from Burma. These people groups are not only in our neighborhoods; the churches of some of these groups are here as well. Metrolina Association has helped plant a number of these ethnic congregations. And I believe that they could use more of our help.

Many of these churches have legitimate needs, some of which are very culturally specific, and simply due to the fact of being planted in a new and somewhat unfamiliar context. As a liaison for one of our Montagnard church plants, I've had the privilege of building relationships with many lay members and church leaders that are refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia.

And out of those that I've met and continue to serve, I'm noticing that many of these are folks that once held very prominent and influential positions in their community back in their homeland, but due to the change in surroundings and culture, they are unable to thrive in the same way they once did now that they are here in Charlotte. These needs range from an individual to a collective level, hindering many avenues of church life and progress, causing breakdowns in the family structure, and even obstructing personal spiritual growth and success. And this is just to name a few.

So what is it that we as Christians from North America can do? How can we get behind our ethnic brothers and sisters, and become cultural brokers to them in such a way that helps them thrive in a new context but all the while allows them to retain their cultural identity?

I believe that one of the first steps is simply **creating awareness** concerning the particular people group we are attempting to serve.

This involves casting a specific vision to our congregations intended to cultivate an awareness of the need for partnerships between ethnic people and nationals both individually and collectively. It's also about educating folks not only about specific people groups in the area but as well as the opportunities for serving them. People should be put in place with the specific purpose of learning the language, needs, and cultural specifics. They should be sent out with the clear objective of lovingly invading a particular culture by various means such as getting a job where this people group is largely represented, moving into their neighborhood, or simply

frequenting where they shop or eat. Working with our own Metrolina Baptist Association to learn what partnerships with ethnic churches are available is crucial.

After awareness has been created and the vision has been carefully articulated and owned by a congregation, the next step would be that of **building relationships**.

Now this is more than just “getting to know people” as we often think of relationship building, but rather creating an atmosphere of relationship development and mentoring from a personal to a corporate level. Our churches have to be strategic in finding ways to develop and maintain intentional relationships with ethnic churches in a way that fits both churches’ contexts.

ESL (English as a Second Language) ministry is a foundational tool for this effort and could serve as a great breeding ground for these types of relationships to take place. It identifies one of the most common, basic human needs for many internationals who are here with us. Some churches already have existing partnerships with ethnic churches and even host ethnic church plants in their buildings. Where this is the case, I’ve found it most beneficial to have joint-worship services consistently.

Whatever avenue of networking one would take, the most pertinent question to ask continually is this: What is keeping this particular people group from thriving both individually and as a church?

In conclusion, if a church has first **created awareness** and learned about the specific culture and challenges of a certain people, and second, **created an atmosphere of loving and intentional relationships** with those people in a way that both honors the culture and shows concern for legitimate needs, there is now adequate leverage and relational capital to take the last step, that of **training and developing leaders**.

This obviously would look differently based on context, considering that every church is different, whether national or ethnic. In general this would simply mean putting the right people in the right place with the right strategy in training ethnic church leaders to successfully carry out the work of the ministry in a new and once-unfamiliar landscape, one in which they would never be able thrive otherwise.

I believe this is a wonderful opportunity that not only best exhibits faithful stewardship to the contexts in which we’re planted, but it is also very close to Jesus’ heart in advancing His kingdom and serving the least of these.

***If you want to learn more about how you or your church can build Great Commission relationships with ethnic churches and other people groups in our area, please contact our People Group Project Intern, Matt Lee, at [matt@metrolina.org](mailto:matt@metrolina.org) or call 704.375.1197. A number of our ethnic church plants need a place to meet right now – could your church be on mission with them in your community?***

LeaderLessons are a ministry of encouragement and equipping from Bob Lowman and Metrolina Baptist Association. You can find them at [www.metrolina.org](http://www.metrolina.org) or on the MBA Facebook page. If you would like to get a printed copy of these articles, please contact us by emailing [leaderlessons@metrolina.org](mailto:leaderlessons@metrolina.org) or calling 704.375.1197.

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