EVERYDAY MEANS OF COMMUNICATION IN A CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT

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BY

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To Rachel - *mi media naranja*

In Australia there are two main methods for keeping cattle on the ranch. One is to build a fence around the perimeter. The other is to dig a well in the center of the property. Movements major in wells, not fences.

— Larry Walkemeyer, *Multiply Ministries*

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ABSTRACT

Whether Christianity is relatively unknown in the region or if it is simply that a particular group of Christians is small and insignificant, one issue faced by church planters is that of becoming known. This thesis will explore how everyday means of communication can help church planters become known and facilitate church planting movements. It will define everyday means of communication and consider how past Christians such as the Apostle Paul and Martin Luther used everyday means of communication in their ministries.   It will then look at current means of communication such as modern forms of social media, and study how Facebook can be used to identify and recruit potential church planters in Latin America.

ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM IN ITS SETTING

Introduction: Are You Mormons?

In December 2013 a group of seven Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) missionaries determined to take a new direction in their Latin American mission efforts. Two of the missionaries had unexpectedly been forced to flee their homes in Puebla, Mexico, three months earlier when violence there threatened their safety. This was the second time in less than four years that violence in Mexico had forced WELS missionaries living there to drastically alter plans without warning and leave the city where they resided.

Instability and uncertainty are par for the course in foreign mission efforts. However, the situation was such that this small group of missionaries felt a plan had to be developed that was not dependent on the physical location of the team members. I was one of the missionaries attending the meeting. We determined a ministry plan was necessary that allowed us to continue to move forward even if we had to move unexpectedly.

This group of Lutheran missionaries recognized an additional challenge: hardly anyone in Latin America was aware the Lutheran church exists. In August of the same year I gave a presentation to delegates at the WELS synod convention held at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, a small town in southern Minnesota that was settled in the 1800s by German immigrants. I began my presentation by asking the question, "What do New Ulm, Minnesota and Mexico have in common?" The similarity I wished to stress is this: both Mexico and New Ulm have a similar number of Lutherans. If you add all the different Lutheran groups together, both places have

between 6,000 and 10,000 Lutherans.[1] The difference? Mexico's population is more than 9,400 times larger than New Ulm's population.[2]

I continued my presentation by explaining the ultimate goal of our ministry effort is not to make as many Lutherans as possible. Our goal is to follow Jesus' commission to all Christians to go and make disciples of Him who is the way, the truth and the life. Those of us who are Confessional Lutherans are so for a reason.[3] But how do you impact a region or group of people if no one knows who you are?

The issue of being unknown extends outside of Mexico to include all Latin America. There are fewer Lutherans in Latin America than any other region in the world. Sources estimate there are between 66 to 80 million Lutherans in the world. Less than 2 percent of them live in Latin America, even though the region is home to 8.6 percent of the world's population.[4]

Dig a little further and you will quickly realize the number is far lower among Spanish speakers. The Lutheran World Federation reports nearly 85 percent of Lutherans in Latin America reside in Portuguese-speaking Brazil. That means there are fewer than 200,000

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[1] Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Información, *La Diversidad religiosa en México* (Aguascalientes: Edificio Sede, 2005), 16; http://www.asociacionesreligiosas.gob.mx/work/models/AsociacionesReligiosas/Resource/34/5/images/DiversidadReligiosa.pdf; "New Ulm, MN," City-Data.com, accessed August 30, 2016, http://www.city-data.com/city/New-Ulm-Minnesota.html; "New Ulm, MN," Bestplaces.com, accessed August 30, 2016, https://www.bestplaces.net/religion/city/minnesota/new_ulm.

[2] "Mexico: Total population from 2012 to 2022," Statista, accessed January 24, 2018, https://www.statista.com/statistics/263748/total-population-of-mexico/.

[3] A detailed explanation of Confessional Lutherans can be found in chapter two.

[4] "Lutheranism," ReligionFacts, accesses August 29, 2016, http://www.religionfacts.com/lutheranism; "Lutherans Worldwide," The Lutheran Church of Australia, accesses August 29, 2016, http://www.lca.org.au/lutherans-worldwide.html; "The Lutheran World Federation – 2013 Membership Figures," The Lutheran World Federation, accessed August 30, 2016, https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWI-Statistics-2013-EN.pdf; "Latin America and the Caribbean Population (Live)" Worldometers, accessed August 30, 2016, http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/latin-america-and-the-caribbean-population/; "Current World Population," Worldometers, accessed August 30, 2016, http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/.

Spanish-speaking Lutherans in all Latin America.[5] When less than one in every 2,000 native

Spanish speakers living outside of the United States is a Lutheran, it is no wonder people in Latin

America typically respond, "Are you Mormon?" when they discover they are speaking to a

Lutheran missionary.

How can Confessional Lutheranism impact a region when there are such a tiny and

insignificant number of Confessional Lutherans there as to be irrelevant? This was the key

problem identified by the small WELS missionary team during the December 2013 meeting.

Why Become Known

Before further exploring ways of becoming known, it is worth considering why it is

important and valuable to be a known entity in Latin America. John Piper, a Reformed Baptist

chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis, writes, "Missions is not the

ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is

ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the

countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be

no more."[6]

The editors of *Christian Worship: Manual* would agree. They open with the following

explanation of worship:

> The gospel… does more than release us from death. It also enlivens a
> spontaneous outpouring of gratitude and praise, of love and respect for God. This

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[5] Lutheran World Federation, "The Lutheran World Federation – 2013 Membership Figures".
"The Number of Spanish Speakers in the World Exceeds 500 Million," Spanishlanguagedomains.com,
Accessed August 30, 2016, http://spanishlanguagedomains.com/the-numbers-of-spanish-speakers-in-the-world-exceeds-500-million/.
[6] John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), Introduction,
Kindle.

thankful response the Bible calls *worship*. The Apostle Paul wrote: 'Therefore, I urge you… in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship' (Romans 12:1). Since Christ himself stands as the centerpiece of God's mercy, the believer's thankful response is rightly called *Christian worship*. Every God-pleasing thought, word and action a Christian does from a heart of faith is worship.[7]

Martin Luther explains that God's greatest desire for us is worship when he describes the purpose of the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Luther calls these trees "Adam's church, altar, and pulpit. Here he was to yield to God the obedience he owed, give recognition to the Word and will of God, give thanks to God, and call upon God for aid against temptation."[8] Adam and Eve were worshiping God when they heard God's Word ("do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil") and lived according to God's command.

Listening to God's Word and responding to God are done individually. *Christian Worship: Manual* states, "They are also the heart and soul of the public worship of the Christian Church."[9] The reasons to plant more visible churches in Latin America are primarily theological, motivated by God's will for us. Thus, a deeper exploration of the topic of visible churches and the need to multiply them in Latin America will be included in Chapter Two, which focuses on theology. For the moment, let us leave it at this: if you are in missions, your ultimate goal is more people worshiping God. Multiplying churches that faithfully proclaim God's Word and teach people to live lives of gratitude and praise are essential to reach the goal of more people worshiping God.

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[7] Gary Baumler, *ed.*, *Christian Worship: Manual* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 3.
[8] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5,* ed. J.J. Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 95.
[9] Baumler, *Christian Worship: Manual,* 4.

A key obstacle to multiplying churches is being unknown. If hardly anyone knows who you are, how can you connect with, train and lead others to worship God?

An Initial Opportunity

Returning to December 2013, a detailed plan did not come out of that initial meeting. However, a key blessing was recognized. Earlier that year, Emmy-nominated Boettcher/Trinklein, Inc., a film production company, released the thirty-minute movie, *Come Follow Me*. The film tells the story of Peter and his relationship with Jesus. Boettcher/Trinklein had given permission to WELS World Missions[10] to use the non-English versions of the movie as they wished, even allowing us to give it away. Additionally, they were in the process of producing another Christian film, *My Son, My Savior*. This one would tell the story of Jesus from Mary's perspective. A Christian Mary movie! This was a potentially powerful resource for Latin America. The mission team determined to begin with the goal of getting one million people in Latin America to watch at least part of the already available *Come Follow Me* movie.

This relatively simple goal developed into a ministry now known as *Academia Cristo*. *Academia Cristo* exists to teach anyone, anywhere how to share Jesus with Spanish speakers. This is done with the goal of identifying and discipling leaders who participate in multiplying churches that faithfully preach and teach God's Word.

To obtain this goal, the little missionary team decided *Academia Cristo* and Confessional Lutheranism needed to become known entities in Latin America.

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[10] The group of seven missionaries from Latin America is a part of the WELS World Missions team.

Fortunately, history is filled with examples of God using tiny unknown groups of

Christians to significantly impact a region of the world. Typically, these groups of unknowns have

gained traction by becoming experts at social media.

The Apostle Paul and Martin Luther Were Social Media Experts

The Roman Social Media System

It is unexpected, to say the least, to call the Apostle Paul and Martin Luther social media

experts. Social media is typically considered a relatively new form of communication. Thomas

Standage, deputy editor at *The Economist* and author of "Writing on the Wall: Social Media –

The First 2,000 Years", explains how most people today do not think of social media as an old

form of communicating:

> because people alive today have grown up in the era of mass media, so we tend
> to assume that this is how media technology has always worked: in a centralized,
> vertical, one-way, broadcast manner. But it hasn't. The way newspapers, radio
> and TV worked during the 20th century turns out to have been a consequence of
> the short-term high cost of equipment that could reach large audiences
> efficiently: steam presses, radio transmitters, and so on... the mass media era that
> is now coming to an end was a historical anomaly.[11]

Standage goes on to demonstrate that current modern forms of social media, such as

Facebook and Twitter, are in fact a return to an ancient way of distributing information. He

writes, "[Historically], you see information traveling in a decentralized, horizontal, two-way,

conversational manner, as people passed information along social connections. It is, in other

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[11] Jesse Hicks, "Cicero's Twitter: Tom Standage on the forgotten history of social media," The Verge,
December 3, 2013, accessed January 11, 2018, https://www.theverge.com/2013/12/3/5170440/tom-
standage-on-the-forgotten-history-of-social-media.

words, social media."[12] It is important to keep this definition of social media in mind: social forms of media are media based on sharing, copying and personal recommendation.[13]

As literacy became more widespread in Ancient Greece, the Greeks had the opportunity to give birth to the first social-media culture based on the exchange of written information.[14] However, Standage explains that "Greek culture, it seems, never quite shook off its skepticism toward writing."[15] Rather, it was the Romans who developed the first social media system.[16] The Romans developed a system of exchanging written letters as a means of sharing information and maintaining relationships in their vast empire. Standage explains, "Cicero and his web of contemporaries became so used to exchanging information by letter, with messengers coming and going throughout the day, that they considered it an extension of spoken conversation."[17]

"The most successful users of the Roman social-media system were the followers of a charismatic Jewish preacher of the early first century," notes Standage. "They used the sharing of media as a central part of their efforts to establish a new worldwide religion based on his teachings: Christianity."[18]

Twenty-four of the 27 books of the New Testament are either letters or contain letters in them. An additional 9,000 letters written by Christians survive from antiquity." Standage concludes, "Although Christians are sometimes described as 'people of the book,' the early church might be more accurately described as a community of letter-sharers."[19]

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[12] Hicks, "Cicero's Twitter".
[13] Tom Standage, *Writing on the Wall: Social Media – The First 2,000* Years (New York, Bloomsbury USA, 2013), 239, Kindle.
[14] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 18.
[15] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 18.
[16] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 21.
[17] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 23.
[18] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 42.
[19] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 42.

The Romans developed a system of letter sharing, and early Christian church leaders were experts at using what was then a new form of communication technology. God used the social media system of letter sharing developed by the Romans as a means for a small group of early Christians to increase its reach and influence an entire region. Within three centuries of sharing the Apostle Paul's first letter, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.[20]

Martin Luther and Social Media

Social sharing of Luther's works played a critical role in the sixteenth century reformation of the church. The development of the moveable-type printing press by Johannes Gutenberg is well documented. Luther is credited with inventing a new way to converse through books, namely pamphlets.[21]

> Martin Luther and his allies took the new media of their day – pamphlets, ballads and woodcuts – and circulated them through social networks to promote their message of religious reform…
>   The media environment that Luther had shown himself so adept at managing had much in common with today's online ecosystem of blogs, social networks and discussion threads. It was a decentralized system whose participants took care of distribution, deciding collectively which messages to amplify through sharing and recommendation. Modern media theorists refer to participants in such systems as a 'networked public', rather than an 'audience', since they do more than just consume information. Luther would pass the text of a new pamphlet to a friendly printer (no money changed hands) and then wait for it to ripple through the network of printing centres across Germany.
>   Unlike large books, which took weeks or months to produce, a pamphlet could be printed in a day or two. Copies of the initial edition, which cost about the same as a chicken, would first spread throughout the town where it was printed. Luther's sympathizers recommended it to their friends. Booksellers promoted it

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[20] Bindeshwar Pathak and S P Singh, *Glimpses of Europe: A Crucible of Winning Ideas, Great Civilizations and Bloodiest Wars* (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2010), 370.
[21] Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe – and Started the Protestant Reformation* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), Chapter One, New Wealth and New Inventions, Kindle.

and itinerant colporteurs hawked it. Travelling merchants, traders and preachers would then carry copies to other towns, and if they sparked sufficient interest, local printers would quickly produce their own editions, in batches of 1,000 or so, in the hope of cashing in on the buzz. A popular pamphlet would thus spread quickly without its author's involvement.

As with 'Likes' and retweets today, the number of reprints serves as an indicator of a given item's popularity. Luther's pamphlets were the most sought after; a contemporary remarked that they 'were not so much sold as seized'. His first pamphlet written in German, the 'Sermon on Indulgences and Grace", was reprinted 14 times in 1518 alone, in print runs of at least 1,000 copies each time. Of the 6,000 different pamphlets that were printed in the first decade of the Reformation, more than a quarter of them Luther's.[22]

Luther and his followers demonstrate how a small group led by an individual can have a huge impact through the use of social media. Luther is regularly listed among the most influential people of the past millennium.[23] As with early Christians, God used the social media system of printing and pamphlet-sharing to increase the reach and influence of the 16th Century Reformation.

From Socrates, to 17th Century Oxford, to Today: Concerns with New Communication Technologies

The Internet and Forgetfulness

In April 2016, *Fortune* magazine rather ironically published an online article entitled

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[22] "Social media in the 16th Century: How Luther went viral," *The Economist* (December 17, 2011), http://www.economist.com/node/21541719.

[23] "100 Most Influential People of the Millennium," A & E's Biography, accessed January 10, 2018, https://wmich.edu/mus-gened/mus150/biography100.html.

"The Internet Makes Us Stupid and Here's Why".[24] Included in the article are references to a 2008 study by UCLA and another study published in the *Journal of Digital Information*. According to these studies, the constant clicking and interruptions we experience online are causing us to retain less information. "By reading incessantly on the Internet, we scatter our minds, lessen our focus, and diminish our aptitude," the article concludes.[25]

The *Fortune* article references Nicholas Carr, author of the well-known New York Times bestseller *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brain*. Carr summarizes his investigative research in his book: "The more we use the Web, the more we train our brain to be distracted – to process information very quickly and very efficiently but without sustained attention. That helps explain why many of us find it hard to concentrate even when we're away from our computers. Our brains become adept at forgetting, inept at remembering."[26]

The above reaction to a relatively new form of communication technology is remarkably similar to opinions expressed by a couple of ancient and highly intelligent men. Socrates and Plato similarly found themselves confronted with a new technology used for communicating: the alphabet and writing things down.

On writing, Socrates posits, "[Writing creates] forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves… [Use of the alphabet] is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, [which gives disciples] not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will

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[24] Kabir Sehgal, "The Internet is Making us Stupid and Here's Why," *Fortune*, February 3, 2016, accessed January 11, 2018, http://fortune.com/2016/02/03/nicholas-carr-internet/.
[25] Sehgal, "The Internet is Making us Stupid and Here's Why".
[26] Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 194.

generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality."[27]

Similarly, Plato criticized his pupil Dionysius for writing down his philosophical treatise. Plato felt writing something down did not mean you had absorbed and understood the material.[28]

Social Media as a Time Waster

Another criticism is often leveled against new communication technologies. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are accused of being huge time wasters. A December 2017 article in *The Times of India* reports Americans spend 100 minutes a day on social media. Indians, however, actually spend 140 minutes a day on social media platforms![29]

This accusation that social media is a time waster is nothing new. Standage explains how coffee houses were a form of social media in 17th and 18th century England. Check out the criticisms leveled against them.

Anthony A. Wood resided in 17th century Oxford and authored the two-volume book *Athenae Oxonienses: An Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops who Have Had Their Education in the University of Oxford*. Concerning coffee houses, he critiques, "Why doth solid

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[27] Plato, "The Phaedrus – A dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus," circa 370 BC, accessed January 11, 2018, https://www.units.miamioh.edu/technologyandhumanities/plato.htm.
[28] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 19.
[29] Shalina Pillail, "Indians spend 70% of mobile internet time on social media, entertainment", The Times of India, December 19, 2017, accessed January 11, 2018, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/indians-spend-70-of-mobile-internet-time-on-social-entertainment/articleshow/62125840.cms.

and serious learning decline, and few or none follow it now in the university? Answer: Because

of coffee houses, where they spend all their time."[30]

Using the 16th century form of social media, the author of "The Grand Concern of

England Explained", a pamphlet published in 1673, comments:

> [Coffee houses had] done great mischiefs to the nation, and undone many of the King's subjects: for they, being great enemies to diligence and industry, have been the ruin of many serious and hopeful young gentlemen and tradesmen, who, before frequenting these places, were diligent students or shopkeepers, extraordinary husbands of their time as well as money; but since these houses have been set up, under pretence [sic] of good husbandry, to avoid spending above one penny or two-pence at a time, have gone to these coffee-houses; where, meeting friends, they have sat talking three or four hours; after which, a fresh acquaintance appearing, and so one after another all day long, hath begotten fresh discourse, so that frequently they have staid [sic] five or six hours together in one of them; all which time their studies or shops have been neglected.[31]

Weighing the Good with the Bad

The truth is neither Socrates nor Carr nor Wood nor *The Times of India* are wrong. The

conversion from an oral to written culture, as well as the advent of the Internet, have impacted

our brains. They do not work quite the same as they once did. The changes have not all been

positive. Who of us today can recite ten thousand lines of poetry from memory as Socrates

could? And who of us can memorize the way those from an oral culture often can? Similarly,

coffee houses, Facebook, and other forms of social media can be great wasters of time.

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[30] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 111.
[31] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 112.

Socrates was not wrong, but neither did he grasp all the benefits of writing things down. These benefits, such as being able to reach a wider audience and being able to reference material at a later date, were not fully realized during his lifetime.

On the value of coffee houses, Standage writes, "No doubt there was some time-wasting in coffee houses, as their critics claimed. But coffee houses also provided a lively intellectual and social environment in which people could meet and ideas could collide in unexpected ways, producing a stream of innovations that shaped the modern world. On balance, the introduction of coffee houses did far more good than harm, which should give those concerned about the time-wasting potential of Internet-based social platforms pause for thought."[32] To demonstrate the value of coffee houses, Standage explains how Adam Smith's book *The Wealth of Nations*, as well as Isaac Newton's *Principia*, the London Stock Exchange and Lloyd's of London insurance market, among others, all owe their development to the social media platform of English coffee houses, a hotbed for innovative collaboration.[33]

When studying the history of communication technologies and social media systems the words of King Solomon come to mind: "What has been, will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."[34] Further, one comes to realize that new ways of communicating have always been met with hesitation. This is a typical human reaction to change. Those new communication technologies have then become common and accepted and used to criticize the next invention.

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[32] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 117.
[33] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 113-116.
[34] Ecclesiastes 1:9; All scripture citations are taken from the New International Version, 2011, unless otherwise noted.

At the same time, one should not expect the most recent technology out there to be the answer to all our problems. Neither is anything under this sun perfect. Since Adam and Eve first doubted God and believed Satan's lie, everything in this world has become tainted and imperfected by sin. As Carr encourages, it is wise to carry out "an honest appraisal of any new technology… we shouldn't allow the glories of technology to blind our inner watchdog to the possibility that we've numbed an essential part of our self."[35]

Still, it is also important to recognize the value and benefits that come from utilizing the means of communication available to us. As we can see how God blessed the early Christian church's use of letter sharing, and Martin Luther's practice of pamphlet distribution, so we should seek to incorporate means of communication that God has given us today into our ministry efforts.

Not everyone has access to the same communication tools. Paul and Luther utilized the communication tools available to them, but those tools changed. Today, those living in suburban America and rural Haiti will have access to different communication tools. I call the means of communication available to a particular person "everyday means of communication". Before we consider how these means can be used in church planting, it is necessary to define the term.

Defining Everyday Means of Communication

In David Garrison's book, *Church planting movements*, he reports the results from two gatherings of leaders involved in church planting movements. During those gatherings, leaders

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[35] Carr, *The Shallows*, 212.

identified elements in every church planting movement, elements in most church planting movements, and the seven deadly sins of church planting movements.[36]

Means of communication are not specifically discussed in his book, a common issue in books on church multiplication movements. However, they can be used in ways that facilitate elements Garrison identifies as present in every church planting movement. One element identified as present in every church planting movement is extraordinary prayer. Henry is a leader working to start a church planting movement in his homeland of Colombia. When his son suffered a life-threatening accident, Facebook empowered people all over the globe to pray for the recovery of his son. Examples like this one are plentiful and occur on a daily basis.

Abundant evangelism, local leadership, house churches, and healthy churches are all elements identified by Garrison in every church planting movement that can be facilitated using everyday means of communication.

Christian videos that go viral and seed sowing ministry efforts that incorporate active Facebook pages are examples of abundant evangelism that include everyday means of communication.

Martin and Carlos are Mexicans living in the states of Jalisco and Oaxaca, respectively. They are able to receive and participate in distant learning programs that incorporate the use of Android smartphones. They also have easy access to many leadership resources via these same phones. This is an example of how everyday means of communication can facilitate the development and empowerment of local leadership.

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[36] David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources LLC, 2004), Chapter 14, Seven Deadly Sins, Kindle.

House churches need to consider how to incorporate quality music and a well-organized worship experience into their house church setting. More Mexican homes have televisions than refrigerators.[37] House church leaders who learn how to use their televisions as both a musician and service folders are making use of everyday means of communication.

At the same time, technology and modern means of communication can fall into the category of the seven deadly sins of church planting. Garrison identifies subsidy for pastors and churches as one of the seven deadly sins of church planting. He explains, "Building a movement on foreign funds is like running a machine with an extension cord that stretches across the ocean. When the movement reaches the end of the cord's length, it will abruptly stop. A church planting movement must have an internal engine and internal fuel if it is going to flourish."[38] Technology that increases dependency on outsiders, is not native or easily replicable is technology that falls into the seven deadly sins of church planting.

This is why it is important to focus on maximizing everyday means of communication. Two examples of what everyday means of communication are not will help define what they are.

First Example: Portable Projectors

More Christians are utilizing video to share the gospel. This is good. In a widely distributed report, CISCO forecasts that videos will constitute 82 percent of all global Internet

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[37]T.W. "TVs Outnumber Fridges" *The Economist*, April 28,2011, accessed on April 12, 2017, http://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2011/04/mexico%E2%80%99s_census.
[38] Garrison, *Church Planting Movements,* Chapter 14, Seven Deadly Sins, Kindle.

traffic by the year 2020.[39] The rising number of individuals who keep a miniature video studio in their pocket is a significant reason for this.[40] Watching video is becoming an everyday occurrence for a significant portion of the world. People who live in areas where videos are not easily available are quickly drawn to a Jesus movie in their native language. The opportunity is significant. However, there is a danger of introducing outside technologies that actually limit the potential reach of Christian media.

In recent years an attempt to use portable projectors to reach more people with gospel-based media has grown in popularity. Most churches in developed nations regularly use projectors. People want to export what they enjoy. Portable projectors can reach areas of the world where people do not even have ready access to electricity! Stories are told of native leaders hiking into remote regions of the Himalayas with these amazing devices. The leaders gather wide-eyed throngs around a portable projector and teach them the wonderful gospel message.

While these attempts are well-intentioned, Rona's experience with portable projectors in Haiti is much more common. Every month Rona boards a bus and hits the road to train national leaders busy serving orphanages and starting churches in his native Haiti. In a conversation with Rona, the topic of using technology in ministry came up. He quickly bemoaned a couple of portable projectors he had been given. "Those things don't work!" he exclaimed. His impression of projectors was that they were wasted American resources.[41]

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[39] "Cisco VNI Forecast and Methodology, 2015-2020," Cisco, updated June 1, 2016, accessed April 4, 2017, http://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/solutions/collateral/service-provider/visual-networking-index-vni/complete-white-paper-c11-481360.html.
[40] I believe a key mistake most people over the age of 40 make is to consider smartphones as telephones that come with features. Don't think of them as phones. They are powerful computing and communications devices that fit in your pocket.
[41] Personal conversation with author, July 9, 2016.

Even though the devices were portable, they needed to be connected occasionally to an

outlet to charge. However, whenever they were connected to an outlet they received surges

due to unreliable electricity. That issue, along with the heat and humidity, took a toll. The

devices not only failed Rona; they also made him hesitant to use any form of communication

technology for ministry.

Second Example: Proclaimers

A Proclaimer is a digital player preloaded with an audio Bible recording. The makers of

this device primarily target gatherings of people in developing nations. People congregate

around a Proclaimer and can listen to an engaging dramatized version of the New Testament. It

has many positive uses. Those who can get their hands on one typically enjoy it. A Proclaimer is

a useful and carefully crafted tool. However, it is not easy for locals to obtain a Proclaimer on

their own. Typically, nationals must wait until an outsider obtains, imports and gifts them one. If

something happens to the device, the local leader using it must depend on an outsider to bring

in a replacement.

Here is a request on the Proclaimer website: "Please help me to get a Proclaimer to my

church in remote Haiti… This is a small village. I only have contact with them via Internet by the

one cell phone they have in the village… They don't have Bibles. Please help me."[42] It appears

this village would benefit from someone teaching them how to use the cell phone and Internet

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[42] "Proclaiming the Good News," Faith Comes by Hearing, Comment included at the end of blog post, accessed August 31, 2016, https://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/news/blog-post/proclaiming-good-news.

they already have to access the Bible without having to rely on outside support. In this type of situation, the Proclaimer is increasing dependency.

This case is similar to the "Devil's Candy" of subsidy for church buildings and pastor salaries. A church that relies on outside technologies will be limited in the number of churches its members can plant by the amount of outside support they receive. Rather than importing outside products that increase dependency, it is more beneficial to help people look at what is already available to them. With opened eyes, locals can consider how to use locally available technologies for gospel ministry.

Look Around You

Everyday communication technologies are the devices and means average people use and can easily access in their particular setting. Exactly what they are will change depending on location. In the United States, a projector is an everyday means of communication. It is easy and feasible for a small group or individual to obtain one. It is affordable. It works in that setting.

The number of people using smartphones in 2016 on the streets of Haitian cities is striking. Two anecdotes illustrate this. The first anecdote involves a special event held at a church in a small mountain village in the long southern finger of the island. The people there were celebrating the confirmation of three local leaders Rona had been training. It might have been a low-income area of the most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere, but when the service started, one of those three leaders pulled out his phone and started shooting video!

The previous Sunday, Rona hosted a dinner at his home. During the meal his wife, Jasmine, pulled out a basic Samsung smartphone. Rona spoke of how Facebook is growing in popularity in Haiti, and how he uses his phone to call and teach classes to future church planters he is training.

The next day Rona was taught how to use a Samsung phone to shoot and edit a video with a gospel message and share it on Facebook. This simple truth was impressed on Rona: don't look at what God has not given you. Look around you. What has God blessed you with? How can you use those blessings to share God's Word with more people and plant more churches in your country? Teaching Rona and others to intentionally incorporate the communication technologies they regularly use is key to empowering local leaders to plant more churches.

Smartphones in Latin America

Smartphones have become an everyday means of communication throughout the Americas. In 2015, SIL Americas' Area Scripture Engagement team carried out a survey to measure cell phone technology usage among 12 to 24-year-olds in Latin America. [43] They surveyed 21,000 young people in three impoverished regions. Here are some key findings from their study.[44]

Figure 1. Smartphone Usage

Region	Basic phone ownership	Smartphone ownership	3 most popular forms of social media
Zapoteca communities, Oaxaca, Mexico	16%	64%	Facebook WhatsApp Google+
Outlying areas of Huácuco, Peru	52%	25%	Facebook Google+ WhatsApp
Towns and villages around Huehuetenango, Guatemala	25%	60%	Facebook Google+ WhatsApp

This study strongly backs widespread anecdotal evidence. More than 60 percent of young people in some of the poorest areas of Mexico and Guatemala have smartphones! Other regions are close behind. Martin Lange, the director of the study, stated at a Mobile Ministry Forum

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[43] SIL Americas is part of SIL International. They were formerly known as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, but now simply use the acronym as their name.

[44] Martin Lange, "Scripture Engagement in the Digital Age: 'Voice of the New Generation' Survey Report", SIL-International – Americas Area, March 31, 2016, accessed on June 22, 2016. http://vision-emaus.net/assets/downloads/2015-survey/Every-Cellphone-A-Bible-Survey-Final-report.pdf, 5-6.

webinar that the percentage is significantly higher in urban areas.[45] He also stressed the report's

statistics were already a year old at the time of the webinar. The percentage of people with

smartphones continues to grow. The study draws the following conclusion:

> Since the survey was completed, there have been two developments that make owning a smartphone even more attractive.
> First, the WhatsApp application has been released as a completely free service, without the subscription fee they were planning to charge. This makes it very attractive, since users can talk (think Skype), [and] send text messages and images to anyone in the world that has the WhatsApp application installed. Users of WhatsApp don't have to pay for SMS when they can send messages via WhatsApp for free.
> Second, some cellphone network operators have begun offering free Internet access via Internet.org, without counting it against their data plan. This means that any of their subscribers with a smartphone can read or post anything to Facebook, Wikipedia and some other selected sites without having to purchase phone credit.
> These two factors have made smartphone ownership very attractive, especially since full-featured touchscreen Android phones can be purchased for less than $50 in all three countries where the survey was conducted.
> We are seeing a very rapid adoption of cellphone technology, and in particular, the adoption of smartphones. Many are predicting that smartphone ownership will almost double between 2015 and 2019. It has been forecasted that video will account for 60% of app traffic by 2020. Since smartphones are icon-based, oral-tradition learners are able to leap the print boundary and make the phone do what they want it to do, without having to learn to read.
> Interestingly, even youth who may have limited access to the cellphone network and Internet are still buying smartphones because of the multi-function nature of the device.
> By 2020, 70% of the world's population will own a smartphone… The late Francis Schaeffer said, 'Each generation of the church in each setting has the responsibility of communicating the gospel in understandable terms, considering the language and thought-forms of that setting.' Were he still alive today, he would be encouraging the Church to embrace this technology in order to communicate the gospel to the world.[46]

Smartphones, Facebook, Google+ and WhatsApp have become everyday means of

communication in Latin America. By 2015, WhatsApp was being used to send fifty percent more

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[45] Martin Lange, Comment made during a presentation attended by the author, "Resources to Accelerate Your Mobile Ministry Webinar" hosted by the Mobile Ministry Forum on June 22, 2016.
[46] Martin Lange, 11.

messages than standard texting (SMS).[47] Since Android smartphones are an everyday means of communication, that means Android apps should also be considered an everyday means of communication as they are the principle platform smartphones are made to use. There are two additional advantages of focusing on local everyday technologies. First, we don't have to figure out how to get them into the hands of locals. Second, unlike the portable projector in Haiti, they are used by locals because they work in the local context.

The first portion of chapter one focused on the setting that surrounds Latin America as far as everyday communication. We will now switch our attention to the development of *Academia Cristo* and the launching of a church planting movement in Latin America. It is necessary to understand both everyday means of communication in Latin America as well as *Academia Cristo* to comprehend the project connected to this thesis, which consisted of testing the value of using Facebook to recruit potential church planters in a church multiplication movement.

Academia Cristo and the Launching of a Church Multiplication Movement

It is worth repeating that *Academia Cristo* exists to teach anyone, anywhere how to share Jesus with Spanish speakers. This is done with the goal of identifying and discipling leaders who participate in multiplying churches that faithfully preach and teach God's Word. Missionaries have found the hourglass illustration[48] to be a useful means for explaining *Academia Cristo*'s ministry.

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[47] Daniel Rowles, *Mobile Marketing: How Mobile Technology is Revolutionizing Marketing, Communications and Advertising* (London: Kogan Page, 2017)*,* 211.
[48] "Hourglass" by Miraceti is licensed under Creative Commons GNU Free Documentation License.

Figure 2. Academia Cristo's Hourglass Ministry Approach

Proclaim

Identify & Disciple

Multiply
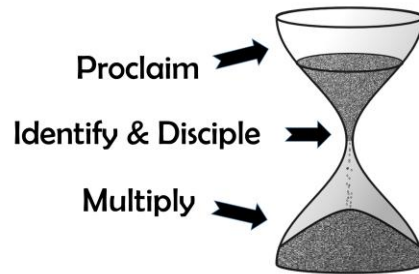
Proclaim: Academia Cristo Online Promotions

When the *Academia Cristo* project first launched in early 2014, a decision was made to focus at the top of the hourglass, developing the ministry as we worked our way down. The top of the hourglass focuses on wide proclamation with the purpose of becoming known in Latin America as an entity that believes the following about the Bible: that it is the Word of God and therefore true in everything it teaches.

The website, academiacristo.com, was launched in February 2015. Designed to be mobile friendly, the first version of the website simply offered free downloadable video-based Bible studies and the *Come Follow Me* movie. In order to get these resources into the hands of as many people as possible and begin the quest of becoming a known entity in Latin America, it was determined to launch the *Academia Cristo* Facebook page, promoting the page and website using the Facebook platform.

God has blessed this young ministry. *Academia Cristo* reaches 2 million people a week, on average, with Gospel messages and free Bible resources. While it is encouraging to see a growing audience and usage of Biblical media distributed by *Academia Cristo*, the goal of a church multiplication movement is not to merely pass out material. The narrow portion of the *Academia Cristo* hourglass focuses on identifying and discipling leaders.

In April 2016, a little more than a year after launching the website, academiacristo.com began offering its first live online Bible class. The training program is still in its early stages, and some of the courses are still in production; however, the first 18 months of teaching have enabled us to develop our training process.

It should first be stated that not all *Academia Cristo* discipleship and multiplication courses are taught online. An increasing number of *Academia Cristo* on-the-ground workshops are being held both in Latin America and the United States. That said, most of those who sign up for an *Academia Cristo* class do study online.

Here is how signing up for a class works: those who follow the *Academia Cristo* Facebook page receive a post inviting them to sign up for an *Academia Cristo* course to learn how to share Jesus and plant a church that faithfully proclaims God's Word. Anyone who clicks on this post is taken to the sign-up page on the academiacristo.com website. There they fill out and submit a form.

After filling out the form, prospective students receive a welcome message via WhatsApp.[49] (The form they filled out included their contact info and consent.) The welcome

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[49] WhatsApp is a social media platform. "More than 1 billion people in over 180 countries use WhatsApp to stay in touch with friends and family, anytime and anywhere. WhatsApp is free and offers simple,

message is sent less than 48 hours after signing up. Within a few weeks they are enrolled in the introductory course, *Heme aquí* (Here I Am).

Enrollees receive a WhatsApp message with course information and instructions for downloading Zoom.[50] The enrollee must then download Zoom, an online conferencing tool, onto a phone, tablet or computer. Additionally, the student is placed into a WhatsApp group with up to 100 other students. Once the class begins, WhatsApp serves as an online discussion group for the class, as well as a means for sharing course content and submitting homework assignments.

Academia Cristo courses have between 6 to 10 lessons. Classes typically meet live online twice a week. The online conferencing tool, Zoom, is used to host meetings. It was determined to use Zoom because it works best in low Internet speeds. It is also easy to record the class on Zoom. This way, if a student misses a class due to a scheduling conflict or Internet issues, the student can still watch what was taught.

Prior to each online meeting, students watch a video that introduces the lesson. Additionally, all the materials used for the class are made available to the students, so they can easily share and even teach the material to others.

Below is a screenshot of an *Academia Cristo* introductory class taught in November 2017. Allow a few observations: first, notice the images on the right. All five students and the instructor are connected via video. Additionally, all five students are men between the ages of 20 and 40 years old from Paraguay. Three of the five live in rural Paraguay. Using online promotions, it was fairly simple to target 20 to 40-year-old Paraguayan men interested in planting churches that faithfully preach and teach God's Word. The project connected to this

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secure, reliable messaging and calling, available on phones all over the world." – Quote from whatsapp.com accessed on January 11, 2018.
[50] Zoom is an online conferencing tool. For more information, visit zoom.us.

thesis will explore the process, value and possibilities related to recruiting students such as these Paraguayans to a church planting program.

Figure 3. Online Class
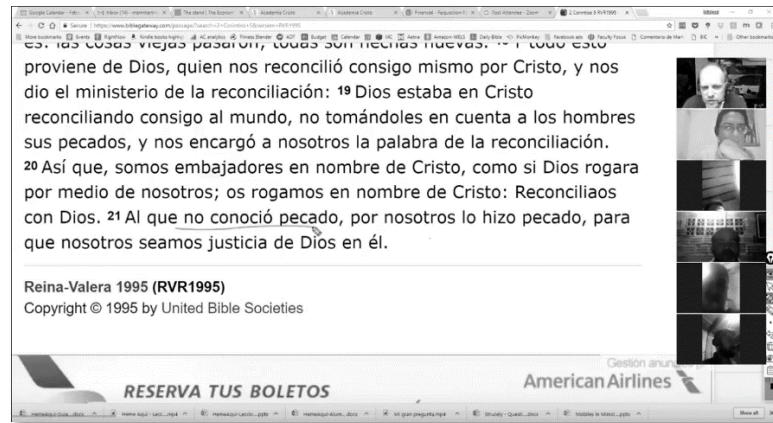
Permit one final note as it relates to everyday means of communication: the images on the screen reveal that three of the five students are connecting via their smartphones. While Americans might baulk at the idea of taking a course using their smartphone, quality is relative. *Academia Cristo* appears to be meeting a need in Latin America.

Multiply: Academia Cristo's Chain of Disciples Church Multiplication

Recall the *Academia Cristo* hourglass. The final portion of the hourglass focuses on multiplying disciples and churches. This portion of the project is just beginning to develop. The WELS Latin American missionaries met in November 2017 to launch the multiplication side of this program. Two key *Academia Cristo* courses that focus on multiplying disciples and churches are under development and should become available in 2019.

Perhaps right now this section of the program is best illustrated with the following

anecdote: In early 2016 Jackson was surfing Facebook at his home in Venezuela when he saw an

Academia Cristo post. Interested, he clicked on the post, which took him to the website. After

connecting to the website, he signed up to receive daily devotions from *Academia Cristo* via

WhatsApp. That led to him join the study program, and eventually Jackson made the decision to

become a Confessional Lutheran. Excited by what he was learning, he began gathering a group

in his home with the goal of planting a church in his city. He also left home and visited family

and friends in five other Venezuelan cities, sharing with them what he had discovered and

telling them, "I'll help teach you how to plant a church and share Jesus by using *Academia*

Cristo, which is teaching me."[51]

As a strong potential candidate for multiplying churches, Jackson was connected to

Henry Herrera who would serve as his mentor and guide. Henry, a seminary trained missionary,

counsels Jackson as he works through the training program and seeks to disciple and guide

those he is leading. This is one example of the chains of discipling leaders *Academia Cristo* is

seeking to establish as it works to multiply churches in Latin America.

Hypothesis and Thesis Outline

This thesis proposes that utilizing everyday means of communication facilitates a church

multiplication movement. In this first chapter we saw how the Apostle Paul, Martin Luther and

other leaders of Church Planting and Gospel Movements were extremely adept at maximizing

the everyday means of communication available in their day. However, while much has been

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[51] Interview with Jackson Rodriguez, November 28, 2017.

written about Church planting movements, and much exists on the importance of communication tools in ministry, little has been written on how these two subjects connect.

This chapter also defined everyday communication technologies and closed with a description of the specific church multiplication movement in which the project for this thesis will be tested, *Academia Cristo.*

Chapter two will consider what the Bible says concerning church multiplication movements and everyday communication technologies. To do this, it will consider key doctrines such as Solus Christus (Christ Alone), How Confessional Lutherans read the Bible (Scripture Alone), The visible and invisible church, the Universal Priesthood, the need for well-trained Christian leaders, and God's call for Christians to become well known as they strive to make disciples.

Chapter three, the literature review, will consider key insights of those who have written on the subjects of church multiplication movements and everyday communication technologies.

There are several areas where specific projects on using everyday communication technologies to facilitate a church planting movement could be done with *Academia Cristo* as a test case. For example, so far no Learning Management System (LMS) has been identified that truly meets the needs of developing nations – one that is not dependent on email and prioritizes the use of smartphones. However, developing a LMS that fits the needs of most people in developing nations is an enormous project, and one that goes beyond the scope of a thesis paper.

Using Social Media to Recruit Potential Church Planters

This thesis will focus on a project that I believe is both timely and broadly useful. With

the rebirth of social media during the previous decade, Barak Obama has been described as the

United States' "first social media president".[52] Studies of how the Obama campaign's use of

Facebook, YouTube and Twitter facilitated his election are well documented.[53] A similar

plethora of articles can be found on how Donald Trump used social media marketing during his

successful election campaign. The project for this thesis will focus on using the same social

media tools to recruit potential church planters. Specifically, the project will study Facebook

promotions used to invite people to sign up for *Academia Cristo*'s introductory class. This

project will seek to test the hypothesis that utilizing Facebook, an everyday means of

communication, facilitates recruiting potential church planters in a church multiplication

movement. Chapter four will outline the project and chapter five will analyze the results.

Conclusion

Throughout history, God is constantly giving people new means to communicate with an

ever-wider audience. This should not surprise us. The great commission Jesus gave his disciples

is a communications assignment. Scattering the seed of the gospel, making disciples and training

Christian leaders are all tasks that require communication. It is essential we consider everyday

means people use to communicate as we develop ministry plans to reach, teach and train

according to the commission God has given us. The next chapter will explore what Scripture says

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[52] "Obama Makes His Mark as First 'Social Media' President", Seattle Times, January 6, 2017, accessed June 13, 2018, https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/obama-makes-his-mark-as-first-social-media-president/.

[53] "Social Media Case Study: How Barak Obama Became President", Devumi, accessed June 13, 2018, https://devumi.com/2017/12/social-media-case-study-how-barack-obama-became-president/.

about these topics. It will explore the following questions: What is a church? Why multiply

churches? And what does the Bible have to say about becoming known and using everyday

means of communication?

CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

If You Only Know One Thing, Know Christ Alone

In 2017, Lutherans and many others around the globe celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Included among the many forms of celebration was the release of a Boettcher/Trinklein Productions documentary, *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*. The film sums up Martin Luther's inner conflict as an attempt to answer the question, "Am I a good person?" Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, expands, "What was [Luther's] struggle? His struggle was, in a way, the same as we all go through. How do I get God's love? How do I get salvation? How can I, a big ugly wretched sinner, be saved?"[1]

Tormented by this question, Luther went to extremes trying to make up for each failure and sin, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. God's impossibly high standard of perfection crushed him. Later in life, Luther explained, "I was myself more than once driven to the very abyss of despair. I wished I had never been created. Love God? I hated him."[2]

Johann von Staupitz was Luther's confessor. Tired of Luther's hours-long confessions, Staupitz eventually appointed Luther as a teacher of theology courses at the University of Wittenberg, where he began lecturing on Romans and Galatians.[3]

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[1] Timothy Dolan, *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*. DVD. Directed by David Batty. Public Broadcasting Service: Arlington, 2017.

[2] Martin Luther, *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*. DVD. Directed by David Batty. Public Broadcasting Service: Arlington, 2017.

[3] Dan Graves, "Johann von Staupitz, Luther's Confessor", Christianity, June 2007, accessed January 12, 2018, https://christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1501-1600/johann-von-staupitz-luthers-confessor-11629932.html.

Regarding his class prep, Luther commented, "I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his letter to the Romans. But thus far there had stood in my way that one phrase, 'The righteous will live by faith.' I thought righteousness was the grim wrath of God with which he punished sin. So, I hated Saint Paul with all my heart. I meditated night and day on those words, until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context."[4]

Through his study of Romans, it finally began to dawn on Luther what Christ did. The righteous will live by faith *alone*. Our forgiveness and salvation depend on Christ alone. This rediscovery of the gospel as the central message of Scripture is the most important impact the Reformation had on the church.

Today, Lutherans are famous for the three *solas*. Yet at the time of the Reformation it was typical to talk about five *solae*. The three popular today are *sola gratia* (by grace alone), *sola fide* (by faith alone), and *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone). The fourth and fifth *solas* are *Solus Christus* (Christ Alone) and *Soli Deo Gloria* (To God alone the glory).[5]

This paper will delve into several specific doctrines that apply to this thesis, but *Solus Christus* must remain at the forefront of everything. There is no reason to plant churches unless they clearly preach and teach the gospel of Christ alone. We do well to recall the Apostle Paul's reminder to the Corinthian church he planted: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."[6] Christ Alone is the heart of what it means to be a Confessional Lutheran.[7]

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[4] Martin Luther, *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*. DVD. Directed by David Batty. Public Broadcasting Service: Arlington, 2017.
[5] Paul Prange, "In Christ alone: The foundation and focus of our mission and ministry", presented at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN during the 2013 WELS convention, on July 30, 2013.
[6] 1 Corinthians 2:2.
[7] Confessional Lutherans are simply those who believe that the statements of belief published at the time of the Reformation in the 1580 Book of Concord, continue to apply today because they accurately reflect

An Overview

The first chapter introduced several issues related to establishing a church planting movement. Specifically, it presented the problem of being unknown, the importance of utilizing social media and other everyday means of communication, and the need for well-trained leaders. This chapter will explore what Scripture has to say about those matters. To have a complete understanding of the Scriptural foundations for those topics, we must consider several other items: Scripture alone, the invisible and visible church, and the priesthood of all believers.

The Bible, and How Confessional Lutherans Read It

As mentioned in the first chapter, there are very few Lutherans in Latin America. That is particularly the case when it comes to Confessional Lutherans.[8] As a result, when Latinos find out someone is a Confessional Lutheran, a famous Lutheran question typically pops into their head: "What does this mean?"[9] The way one reads the Bible is key to what it means to be a Confessional Lutheran.

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what the Bible says. The term "confessional" is added to Lutherans because most Lutherans today no longer share this conviction and fall into the category of Christian churches that question and reject some of the most basic teachings of Christianity. For more on this subject, read *WELS and Other Lutherans*, 2nd Ed. by Dr. John F. Brug (Northwestern Publishing House, 2009).

[8] The term "Confessional Lutheran" is typically used by Lutherans who wish to distinguish themselves from Lutheran churches associated with the Lutheran World Federation. As is common among denominations, there are great differences between Lutherans in the Lutheran World Federation and those in the fellowships of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. A key dissimilarity is the view of Scripture and the Lutheran confessions. For more on this subject consider the source *WELS and Other Lutherans*, 2nd Ed. by Dr. John Brug, (NPH: Milwaukee, 2009).

[9] In Luther's Catechism he famously inserted short explanations to the commandments and other key elements of Christian doctrine as a learning device. For example, the first commandment reads "You shall have no other gods." To this Luther added "What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things."

Almost everyone will say it is a good thing to read the Bible. Even non-Christians talk about the value of reading the Bible to broaden one's appreciation and understanding of art and culture. Thomas Jefferson is one of the men credited with founding the United States. He loved learning and enjoyed reading the Bible, especially the words of Jesus. However, Jefferson did not believe in the supernatural. Neither did he think Jesus claimed to be God.[10] With these presuppositions in mind, he created his own personal bible, literally cutting out nearly all references to the supernatural from his Bible. He even cut out Jesus' resurrection. Jefferson entitled his Bible "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth." In a letter to George Washington, Jefferson placed Jesus alongside other famous philosophers such as Socrates.[11]

The example of Jefferson demonstrates how presuppositions affect how a person interprets information. Presuppositions are what someone assumes beforehand to be true. They greatly impact how that person processes data every single day. If you support a politician and wake up to hear a news report that the politician has been caught breaking the law, you will interpret the news as bad. If you have the opposite presupposition, and believe the politician is no good in the first place, you will probably interpret the report as good news—that he was finally caught. One of the great challenges scientists face is to avoid allowing presuppositions to affect how they interpret the results of an experiment.

Confessional Lutherans believe the Bible is God's Word. During certain periods of history, it would have come across as ridiculous to use this statement to begin a theological study. "Jesus loves me this I know *for the Bible tells me so*," is so simple a four-year-old can understand it. However, with so many Christians today doubting the Bible truly is the Word of

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[10] Thomas Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible* (Kindle: Amazon Digital Services, Inc, August 4, 2014) Introduction, April 21, 1803 letter to Washington, Kindle.
[11] Jefferson, Introduction, April 21, 1803 letter to Washington, Kindle.

God, it is essential to make this clear from the start. Confessional Lutherans do not believe parts of the Bible are God's Word, or that you can make a distinction between God's Word and the Bible. Rather, based on what the Bible says about itself, they believe the Bible *is* the Word of God given to men by inspiration of God. "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."[12] Lyle Lange was a Confessional Lutheran during his lifetime. In his book on Christian doctrine, he sums up inspiration with these words: "We speak of the *plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture.* This means that all of the Bible – the command to write, the message to convey, and the words to convey the message – is given by inspiration of God. Paul told the Corinthians that his message came to them in words he had learned from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13). The Holy Spirit caused the writers of the Bible to write the exact words that they wrote."[13]

John Wesley believed there are four principal factors that every Christian individual and denomination use as they draw conclusions of what they believe. These four elements are 1) Scripture, 2) tradition, 3) reason and 4) experience. This formula has come to be known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.[14]

The following graph[15] shows how this author, and other Confessional Lutherans, prioritize these four areas when it comes to developing doctrines and beliefs.

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[12] 1 Peter 1:21.
[13] Lyle W. Lange, *God So Loved the World* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), 44.
[14] "Wesleyan Quadrilateral," United Methodist Church, accessed August 18, 2015, http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/wesleyan-quadrilateral.
[15] James Hein, "So Many Denominations, but THIS Is Why I'm WELS Lutheran…," Bread for Beggars, October 8, 2014, accessed August 18, 2015, http://www.breadforbeggars.com/2014/10/08/so-many-denominations-but-this-is-why-im-wels-lutheran/.

Figure 4. Confessional Lutherans and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Pastor James Hein formerly of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Rochester, Minnesota, outlined

a personal study he carried out while struggling to determine which church body to join. His

study shows how he perceives different denominations evaluate the four pillars of the Wesleyan

Quadrilateral. His conclusion serves as a good summary of how Confessional Lutherans

approach Scripture:

> [The above graph shows] why I'm WELS Lutheran. The church I belong to and pastor in
> learns from the faith of the saints who have gone before us (Hebrews 13:7), but also
> recognizes that these leaders were great not because of their perfect faithfulness, but
> because of their profession of Christ's faithfulness. Therefore, traditions, customs, and
> rituals developed by leaders of previous generations, while helpful, are not mandated
> by God nor should they be elevated to the status and authority of God's Word.
> Additionally, the church I belong to and pastor in values reason as a blessing from God
> for applying his Word to our lives (James 1:22) and for subduing his creation (Genesis
> 1:28), but also recognizes that it would be inappropriate to subjugate the Bible to flawed
> human reason, especially since there are undeniably "hidden" components of God's
> Holy Will (Isaiah 45:15). And finally, the church I belong to and pastor in values personal
> experience. We regularly encourage Christians to tell of the great things that God has
> done for us (Deuteronomy 3:24) and to use the resources the gospel gives us for humility
> and confidence and perspective and optimism (Romans 8:28). But my church also
> recognizes that a sinner, even a believing one, living in a sinful world, is going to
> experience highs and lows and that whether I *feel* God in my life or not, I can *know* he's
> there (Matthew 28:20).
>   [Confessional Lutheranism's approach to Biblical interpretation] acknowledges both
> the inerrancy of the Bible and the potential pitfalls of church tradition, human reason,

and personal experience, and thereby identifies the Bible as the clear and supreme authority by which we formulate our beliefs.[16]

Two statements are very important to Confessional Lutherans and help explain how they read the Bible. Those statements are: "Let Scripture interpret Scripture" and "Sola Scriptura." Sola Scriptura is Latin for "by Scripture alone." The above section on the Wesleyan Quadrilateral reflects the belief that, by Scripture alone, one ought to determine what the Bible says. The following section briefly highlights the hermeneutical[17] approach of letting Scripture interpret Scripture.

Occasionally, Lutherans are criticized for making Luther their pope and simply following what he says. Confessional Lutherans are not simply repeating what Luther taught. They imitate Luther in *how they interpret* Scripture. [18] Ernest Sweibert in his monster of a book entitled *Luther and His Times* writes, "[Luther] accepted the Bible as the Christian's supreme guide to be understood in only one sense, that established by the context. Furthermore, Luther believed that the Scriptures explain themselves by means of the grammatical-historical method and the examination of a passage in the light of its context and its relationship to the entire book."[19] Luther's approach to only letting Scripture interpret Scripture was on display during his famous statement at the Diet of Worms. The Diet of Worms is the name for a key meeting that took place in Europe in the year 1521. Charles V, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, presided over the meeting. Martin Luther was summoned to the meeting to renounce or reaffirm his writings. In answer to whether he recanted what he had written Luther said, "Unless I am convinced by

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[16] James Hein, "So Many Denominations, but THIS Is Why I'm WELS Lutheran."

[17] Hermeneutics is a theological term which means "Biblical interpretation".

[18] David Kuske, *The History and Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics*, (Mequon, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Press, 1989), 152.

[19] Ernest G. Sweibert, *Luther and His Times* (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 1968), Chapter 13, The Leipzig Debate, The Contestants Compared, Kindle.

the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason—for I can believe neither pope nor

councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves—I

consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience

is captive to the Word of God. Thus, I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's

conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen."[20]

David Kuske, former professor of Hermeneutics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary sums it

up well:

> For Luther, the only way an interpreter can be sure his interpretation is the correct one is if he lets God tell him what a passage means. This does not happen by some kind of immediate illumination from God, but from the careful study of Scripture in which reason plays its proper role as servant, not master. In Luther's approach, besides considering the historical and grammatical settings, a third setting is all important, namely, the scriptural setting.
> Scripture must interpret Scripture, Luther insisted. The meaning of a given passage is determined only: 1. By comparing what it says with all the other passages of Scripture which address the same subject; and then 2. By letting what God said in all those other passages explain what God means by the words in the passage under study. This is the only proper way to interpret a passage of Scripture because in this way God himself becomes the arbiter of what he means by those words.[21]

A practical example of how a Confessional Lutheran reads the Bible can be seen in the

passages in which Jesus talks about the Lord's Supper. The Bible states that during the Last

Supper Jesus picked up the bread from the table and said, "Take and eat. This is my body."[22] The

Bible could not state any more clearly what Jesus said. The same phrase is repeated by

Matthew, Mark, Luke in their gospels and by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians. τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ

σῶμά μου[23] – the original words the Biblical writers wrote are just as clear as the English. In fact,

like Spanish, the fact that the verb "to be" (ἐστιν) is written out only makes the statement more

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[20] Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (English edition), (Yale: Yale University Press, 1989), 39.
[21] Kuske, *The History and Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics,* 152.
[22] Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24.
[23] Matthew 26:26.

emphatic. There is nothing in the context that makes Jesus appear to be speaking metaphorically. The problem is it makes no sense. When Ulrich Zwingli debated Luther on the topic of the Lord's Supper in the town of Marburg he said, "The finite is not able to contain the infinite."[24] A Confessional Lutheran who holds the bread in his hands as he prepares to distribute it cannot see Jesus' body. Neither can he smell it, feel it, or taste it. But he accepts that it is Jesus' body because it is what Jesus said.

Siegbert Becker, a Confessional Lutheran author of the book *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther*, expands on this point when he writes, "Faith is the evidence of things not seen. To strengthen our faith in an unseen thing, namely the forgiveness of sins, the Savior offers us other unseen things, his body and his blood so that we may become accustomed to believing what sense and reason cannot comprehend."[25]

Like the biblical teachings of the Trinity, Jesus as true God and true man, the Creation, and the fact that blood shed 2,000 years ago somehow washes away a living person's yet-to-be-committed sins, the Bible is filled with things our little human brains cannot fathom. Then one looks at a young child and remembers God calls those who love and trust in him his children. Jesus' encouragement to receive the kingdom of God like a little child comes to mind.[26] There are many things loving fathers do that children do not understand. So, Confessional Lutherans simply submit their reason, and trust their Heavenly Father's Word.

The Confessional Lutherans' emphasis on *Sola Scriptura* as explained above presents an opportunity for church planting in Latin America where tradition and a lack of Biblical

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[24] Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Northwestern Publishing House: Milwaukee: 1982), 199.
[25] Becker, 200.
[26] Mark 10:15.

understanding exist alongside a still relatively high view and respect for Scripture. There are many in Latin America searching for others who submit to Scripture because it is God's Word. Unfortunately, Confessional Lutheranism and its approach to Scripture are nearly unknown in Latin America.

The Church

In the first chapter of Craig Ott and Gene Wilsons's book, *Global Church Planting*, they write: "A Biblical study on the nature of the church should be included in the early teaching of any church plant."[27] A deep understanding of the Scriptural definition of church is extremely important in Latin America where, like in the U.S., traditional concepts of church have often caused both those inside and outside of the church to be relatively unfamiliar with the church as seen in the New Testament. The next foundational doctrine this chapter will explore is the church. What is it? Why are more churches that multiply other churches needed in Latin America?

The Visible and Invisible Church

It doesn't matter if you are a foreigner who briefly vacationed in a Latin American country or you were born and raised there. Anyone who has spent any time in Latin America has seen plenty of church buildings. A classic Latin American town photo includes a pretty church on the central plaza. According to the Pew Research Center, 90 percent of the Latin American population is Christian.[28] (This same study states that 75 percent of Europe is Christian.)

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[27] Craig Ott and Gene Wilson. *Global Church Planting* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2011) Chapter One The Task of Church Planting, Kindle.

[28] "The Global Religious Landscape", Pew Research Center, December 18, 2012, accessed August 25, 2015. http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/.

Picturesque images of the church on the plaza and research from groups such as the one

mentioned make it appear as if there is no need to open new churches in Latin America.

However, to be able to properly make use of any study, it is important to understand how the

study defined its terms. The Pew Research Center states it uses self-identification as the basis

for determining who Christians are. Therefore, since the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses,

Christian Scientists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Catholics, Baptists and Lutherans all consider

themselves Christian, anyone who is considered to belong to one of those organizations is a

Christian.[29] This understanding of Christianity is significantly different than what the Bible

teaches about Christianity and the church.

Armin Schuetze, former Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor and author of *Church-*

Mission-Ministry: The Family of God, explains, "When the Bible speaks about the church, it is

talking about people. The word used in the Greek (*ekklesia*) means a gathering or meeting, or

more literally, a group of people who have been called out or brought together."[30] The Bible

uses the word church in two different ways. It talks about those who are believers in Christ and

those who gather around God's Word. Lutherans refer to believers in Christ as the *invisible*

church. Those who gather around God's Word are called the *visible* church.

Henry Hamann helps connect the *invisible* church to the *Una Sancta*[31] as confessed in

the Nicene Creed in his book *On Being a Christian.* "All Christian denominations, as far as I am

aware, confess the reality of the "one, holy Christian and apostolic Church" of the Nicene Creed.

[This is] the *Una Sancta…* Lutherans too confess their faith in the Una Sancta, but to them this

confession means something far different from what it means to almost all other Christian

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[29] "The Global Religious Landscape", Pew Research Center.
[30] Armin W. Schuetze, *Church-Mission-Ministry: The Family of God*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), 11.
[31] These are the Latin words for *one* and *holy* in the Nicene Creed statement.

churches."[32] Confessional Lutherans believe the *Una Sancta* is hidden here on earth.[33] We call it the *invisible* church.

Let us look at what the Bible teaches about the *invisible* church of believers in Christ. It is important to understand that like the word "Trinity", you will not find the term *invisible* church in the Bible. It is a term invented by people to briefly describe something God reveals in the Bible. So, to understand what the Bible teaches about the *invisible* church of believers in Christ, it is necessary to first review who is a believer in Christ.

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[32] Hamann, Henry, *On Being a Christian: A Personal Confession* (Northwestern Publishing House: Milwaukee, 2014), Chapter 7 Concerning Me and Other Christians, Kindle.
[33] Hamann, *On Being a Christian,* Chapter 7 Concerning Me and Other Christians, Kindle.

Who Makes Up the Invisible Church?

Although God created humans to be perfect[34], they quickly lost this perfection when Adam and Eve doubted God and disobeyed his command. This action contaminated them and all their descendants. [35] God didn't leave mankind in his lost state for long but stepped in quickly. When God announced to Adam and Eve the consequences of their disobedience, he also shared with them the first promise of hope. An offspring of Eve's would crush the serpent's head.[36] God's promise to send a Savior from sin was repeated over and over for thousands of years prior to Jesus' birth. Those who believe God's promises are known as believers. Abraham is a good example of an early believer in God's promises. Moses writes how God took Abraham outside on a sleepless, starry night. After repeating his promises to Abraham, we're told, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."[37]

More than two millennia later, the Apostle Paul highlights this passage as an important Scriptural proof that salvation comes to us through *believing* God's promise.[38] The Galatians were struggling to understand what made a person a Christian. In Genesis, as in Galatians, it was not Abraham's action of circumcision that made him a believer. Neither was it his willingness to sacrifice his son, or leave his homeland, or the fact that he built altars and made sacrifices to God. Those were all merely ways for him to thank God for promising to save him from the consequences of his sin through the Savior God promised to send into the world. Believing this promise made Abraham a believer, and Jesus' righteousness was credited to him.

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[34] Lange, 189.
[35] Genesis 1:26, 27; 5:1-3.
[36] Genesis 3:15.
[37] Genesis 15:6.
[38] Galatians 3:6.

The writer to the Hebrews includes Abraham in the list of heroes of faith.[39] Abraham is a great example of someone who believed God's Word, but that doesn't discount his sinful weaknesses. Look at how he treated his wife in the account of Hagar and during his visit to Egypt![40] In Genesis 20:9,10 the words of King Abimelech, an apparent unbeliever, shame Abraham. Who has not seen a Christian commit deeds that are shameful by everyone's standards? An honest self-evaluation will most certainly lead each Christian to admit to having personal moments like Abraham when a nonbeliever called them out.

This is due to our sinful nature. The Bible contains two key teachings: the law and the gospel. The law declares God's will to us. It is found woven throughout all Scripture. God revealed his will to Adam, Noah, and Moses. His will was revealed through King David's psalms, Solomon's proverbs, and all the prophets' teachings. Additionally, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and the rest declare God's will. And God's law is without exception. God tells us what he wants and that he expects complete compliance. Jesus commands us to "be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."[41] Jesus is simply restating a command given to the Israelites: "Be holy because I the Lord your God am holy."[42] There is no wiggle room. The rich young man found that out in his conversation with Jesus.[43] God could not state the fact that the law is without exceptions any clearer or more emphatically than he does through Paul in Romans chapter 3: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."[44]

It is important to understand that becoming a Christian does not free a person from doing things that are wrong or lessen temptation. Temptation will still be there because the sad

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[39] Hebrews 11.
[40] Genesis 12:10-20; 16.
[41] Matthew 5:48.
[42] Leviticus 19:2.
[43] Mark 10:17-22; Matthew 19:16-22.
[44] Romans 3:23.

reality is our human nature remains flawed. Jesus said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly."[45] Paul refers to himself as the worst of sinners some *30 years after* his call to be a missionary to the gentiles![46]

Fortunately, God's promises are filled with comfort. The second key Bible teaching is the gospel. The gospel is simply another way to reference God's promises. First and foremost, God promises he loves us. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."[47] Reread the account of Adam and see how God's love for mankind is completely undeserved. Neither is it dependent on our loving him. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."[48] Paul goes on to describe how God loved us while we were still his enemies.[49] This undeserved love is called grace. And God's grace is completely unconditional. Just as the Law has no exceptions, so also the Gospel. If you proclaim God's promises and throw in a "but," you have placed conditions on his grace. "God so loved the world… that whosoever believes"[50] includes no exceptions. He loved murderous terrorists (Paul), back-stabbers (Peter), cowards (Abraham) and prostitutes (Rahab).[51] And he promises that whoever believes in Jesus as their substitute Savior from sin has forgiveness and eternal life.[52]

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[45] Mark 7:20-22.
[46] 1 Timothy 1:15.
[47] 1 John 4:10.
[48] Romans 5:8.
[49] Romans 5:10.
[50] John 3:16.
[51] Acts 9:1; Luke 22:54-62; Genesis 12:11-13; 20:2; Joshua 2:1.
[52] This thesis does not focus on the importance good works play in the lives of believers. They don't save us. They are simply our response to God's action of salvation. The Bible tells us that like trees bear fruit, so Christians do good works.

Why the Church is Invisible

The previous section described those who are believers, but here is the complication: it

is not possible for a human to identify believers with absolute certainty. Christianity is a matter

of the heart. When Prophet Samuel arrived at Jesse's home to anoint the next king, he saw

Eliab, Jesse's oldest, and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord."[53]

God famously responded, "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the

outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."[54] Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; I

know my sheep and my sheep know me."[55] God knows who believes in him. People can't see

into hearts. People can only see who gathers around God's Word and who says they believe.

That is the reason for distinguishing between the *invisible* church and the *visible* church. The

difference comes down to this: the *invisible* church is made up of all who *are* believers in Christ.

Visible churches are made up of all who *say* they are believers in him.[56]

Schuetze summarized the *invisible* church this way:

> The church is made up of those who, through faith in the Lord Jesus, have become
> part of God's family, the church. It consists of believers…
>   For this reason, the church, consisting only of believers, can be called invisible.
> This is not to say that the believers who make up the church are invisible. The
> faith in their hearts, however, is invisible to us, so it is impossible for us human
> beings to gather together into one outward church body all believers and exclude
> all hypocrites and unbelievers. We, therefore, cannot identify the church of God
> with any one denomination, because it extends into all denominations. There are,
> for example, Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and
> Episcopalians who believe in the Lord Jesus as the Savior from sin. Yet, the exact
> identity of each believer remains unknown to us. In that sense, the church of
> believers remains invisible to us.
>   Nevertheless, the church is not a phantom, an invisible product of the
> imagination. It consists of real people, who live and labor in this real world. We

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[53] 1 Samuel 16:6.

[54] 1 Samuel 16:7.

[55] John 10:14.

[56] Richard E. Lauersdorf, "God's Church: Invisible, Yet Visible", Forward in Christ, February 28, 2015, accessed August 25, 2015, *https://wels.net/gods-church-invisible-yet-visible/*.

see them and live and work with them. But only God knows who is truly a believer and a member of his spiritual family.[57]

Since humans cannot see who the true believers are, it is necessary to leave the work of building the *invisible* church to the Holy Spirit who plants faith into the hearts of believers. However, even though the church of believers is invisible, it is not unnoticeable. Human beings might not be able to see people's faith, but they can observe what people do and say. The things Christians do and say things that are pleasing to God are called "fruits of faith". Jesus said, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit."[58] The next section explores the Biblical description of a *visible* church, and the assignment God has given to Christians.

Marks of the Church

Jesus commanded Christians to go and make disciples.[59] He wants them to celebrate the Lord's Supper, baptize, and teach people everything he has commanded. [60] He also promises to be there whenever two or three of them gather together in his name.[61] Additionally, God promises that his Word is powerful. "It will not return to me empty; but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."[62] All these promises that God gives to Christians lead us to recognize that, while it is not possible to see into hearts and identify

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[57] Schuetze, *Church-Mission-Ministry,* 15-16.
[58] John 15:5.
[59] Matthew 28:19, 20.
[60] 1 Corinthians 11:25; Matthew 28:19, 20.
[61] Matthew 18:20.
[62] Isaiah 55:11.

believers with complete certainty, there are visible marks that demonstrate God's church is

present. Hamann does a good job summarizing the marks of the church[63]:

> Since the Holy Spirit does not work through error or falsehood, it is only the pure teaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments that are marks of the church. So, the Lutheran believes and knows the Una Sancta to be present where the marks of the church are present or are to be found. He knows and believes this because of the promise of God that the Spirit through these marks of the church, the Means of Grace, will bring people to faith in Jesus Christ. Where people are joined to Christ through faith, there the church is. All who believe are Christ's, united with him and the Father and the Holy Spirit. They are members of Christ's body, and that is the New Testament definition for the Una Sancta.
>
> Where the marks of the church are present, even when they are in competition with error and falsehood – as they are in most or all churches – there Christians will be found. So, the Lutheran does not deny the name Christian to other church bodies where the essentials of the Christian faith are proclaimed. He expects that the Holy Spirit will bring people to faith also in those churches that must be described as erring churches when judged by the standard of the Word of God.
>
> On the other hand, where the marks of the church are found in their purity, or in something approaching purity, the Lutheran does not expect that all people congregated around such marks of the church will be Christian. Word and sacraments are not automatically effective means for making Christians, for converting people to Christ. The Spirit still works faith when and where he pleases in those who hear the gospel. Human beings always have the power to resist the power of the Spirit in the Means of Grace, no matter how truly these means are made use of.[64]

What a Visible Church Looks Like

A planted church is a visible church. *Visible* churches are found in the Bible. In Romans,

Paul greets Priscilla and Aquila and the "church that meets in their house."[65] John addresses

seven specific churches in Revelation.[66] From David to Hebrews, Scripture repeatedly

emphasizes an eagerness to meet together around God's Word. A few well-known examples of

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[63] Lutherans often refer to the Marks of the Church as the Means of Grace.

[64] Hamann, *On Being a Christian,* Chapter 7 Concerning Me and Other Christians, Kindle.

[65] Romans 16:3-5.

[66] Revelation 1:4; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14.

this are: Let's us not give up meeting together.[67] I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go

to the house of the Lord."[68] They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the

fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer… *Every day* they continued to meet together

in the temple courts.[69] The Bereans… received the message with great eagerness and examined

the Scriptures *every day* to see if what Paul said was true.[70]

Jesus met together with people in synagogues.[71] He continually gathered with others

and taught them on mountain tops,[72] in a house,[73] in a boat,[74] in an isolated outdoor location,[75]

in the temple,[76] and many times as they walked along the road.[77] We see early Christians

gathering in the temple courtyard,[78] in homes,[79] in upstairs rooms,[80] in synagogues,[81] and down

by the river.[82] The point of these lists is to demonstrate God wants and encourages believers to

regularly meet together around his Word, but Christians are given freedom when it comes to

the form this gathering takes.

The author has personally witnessed this freedom in gathering during a lifetime of

visiting *visible* churches in Latin America. These churches have been located in a classy

downtown hotel, in houses and shacks, in a converted store, in an unroofed cement structure,

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[67] Hebrews 10:25.
[68] Psalm 122:1.
[69] Acts 2:42, 46; emphasis added.
[70] Acts 17:11; emphasis added.
[71] Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Luke 4:16; Mark 1:21.
[72] Matthew 5:1; 24:3.
[73] Matthew 13:36; 26:18.
[74] Matthew 13:1-3; Luke 5:3.
[75] Mark 6:32-34.
[76] Matthew 21:23; John 7:14; 8:2.
[77] Mark 8:27; John 11:40-42.
[78] Acts 2:46.
[79] Acts 18:7; Romans 16:5.
[80] Acts 20:8.
[81] Acts 17:2, 3.
[82] Acts 16:13.

an open-air plaza, in a closed-off street, under a tree, on the beach, and in beautifully constructed Latino-style classic church buildings. All of these are examples of *visible* churches.

Similarly, Christians are given freedom when it comes to the rites, forms, style of worship, clothing and vestments, and the music and instruments they use when they gather together. Jesus tells us the Scriptures testify about him.[83] Christians want to make Christ the center of their worship. The primary purpose of the Bible is God's means to communicate the rescue of mankind and in so doing, motivate the believer to acts of thanksgiving and service. The need for rescue and the assurance of having been rescued will come out in Christ-centered worship. However, the exact format one must follow during our meetings is not prescribed.

Dr. John Lawrenz, former president of Asia Lutheran Seminary, says it well: "The New Testament is not prescriptive at all. If anything, it recognizes that the people in place, with their heritage and their customs were the ones that the apostles put to use in forming congregations and allowing the ekklesia (church) to come out of mission work. It was after a while that these things became turned around; when the shape and traditions of the ekklesia (church), [and] the hierarchy of the church [took priority, that] things went haywire."[84]

From the very beginning, early Christians seemed to recognize the fact that culture would cause differences in forms. They saw that Paul "had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews."[85] The Greek and Hebrew world were co-existing, but they were not the same. As all cultures, the Greek and Jewish cultures had different strengths. They also struggled with different temptations. The Jews struggled with how much of the Old Testament law to follow. The Greeks drifted into moralizing.

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[83] John 5:39.
[84] Interview with Dr. John Lawrenz, September 3, 2015.
[85] Galatians 2:7.

The Bible does not really talk about a single over-shadowing polity or organizational structure, but it seems to have respected that family and country will influence that.[86] We see the church dealing with these matters during the first Jerusalem Council in Acts chapter 15. Notice they came to agreement in doctrine during that council, while allowing for non-doctrinal differences.[87] Outside of the marks of the church, God does not tell us what our *visible* church needs to look like.

There is, however, one warning we should consider regarding the freedom we have to adapt our ministry efforts to the context in which we are working. Former Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor Ernst H. Wendland spent more than 20 years teaching as a missionary in Africa. He writes:

> Proclaiming the gospel in context is certainly an important missiological concern, if understood correctly. We as Lutherans will want to remember the words of our Augsburg Confession (Article VII): 'It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.' We will want to let other nations express their faith and joy in the Lord in ways which reflect their own identity. We will want to guard against giving the impression that our Western culture is of itself superior. We will avoid showing a domineering spirit when working in cross-cultural relationships.
>   At the same time, we will not want to 'contextualize' the gospel in the sense of making it more palatable. Where native custom and culture come into conflict with the teachings of Scripture, we'll not be afraid to proclaim the truth no matter how disturbing this might be to cultural sensitivities.[88]

Glossing over the Biblical truth that all mankind is sinful and going along with the Latin cultural idea that poverty is somehow a meritorious act is an example of contextualization gone wrong. The apostle Paul wrote three letters to young church leaders, Timothy and Titus. Again

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[86] Lawrenz interview.

[87] *Adiaphora* is a term used to describe things that are neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture.

[88] Ernst H. Wendland, "An Evaluation of Current Missiology." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 79 No. 3 (Summer 1982), 183.

and again Paul urges these young leaders to stand firm and defend "sound doctrine". Christians want to do the same. Yes, God has given Christians a lot of freedom regarding forms and the way of doing things, but believers dare never change or gloss over Biblical truths. Every culture struggles with particular sins. As each church planter gathers a group of believers and forms a church, God wants them to keep Christ as the center focus of their gatherings, and teach everything God proclaims in the Bible, no matter how it may go against local custom. However, when it comes to style, do what fits in the local culture and customs.

The Need to Multiply Visible Churches in Latin America

God's great commission to Christians of making disciples of all nations happens through the proclamation of God's Word by Christians who are regularly meeting together. This is why planting churches is an essential task of the Church. The need to plant churches that clearly proclaim God's message of law and gospel (love) is stressed by Dr. Timothy Keller in his book *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*.

> The default mode of the human heart is works-righteousness — we do not ordinarily live as if the gospel is true. Christians often believe in their heads that "Jesus accepts me; therefore, I will live a good life," but their hearts and actions are functioning practically on the principle "I live a good life; therefore, Jesus accepts me." The results of this inversion are smug self-satisfaction (if we feel we are living up to standards) or insecurity, anxiety, and self-hatred (if we feel we are failing to live up). In either case, the results are defensiveness, a critical spirit, racial or cultural ethnocentricity to bolster a sense of righteousness, an allergy to change, and other forms of spiritual deadness, both individual and corporate. In sharp contrast, the gospel of sheer grace offered to hopeless sinners will humble and comfort all at once. The results are joy, a willingness to admit faults, graciousness with all, and a lack of self-absorption.[89]

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[89] Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2012), Chapter 4 The Need for Gospel Renewal, Kindle.

Dr. Keller is describing the *opinio legis* (The opinion of the law). This is a person's natural tendency to try and save himself by his own actions. Churches and Christians that fall into the trap of the *opinion legis* lose their primary purpose for existing. They are no longer proclaiming the central message of Scripture, that our forgiveness and salvation depend on *Solus Christus* (Christ alone).

The documentary, *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy* concludes, "The millions of words that Luther wrote, taught and preached all boil down to one idea - the breakthrough and understanding that changed his life, summarized in just two words: God forgives. And a forgiven person wants to help others."[90] Proclaiming God's forgiveness and helping others happen when churches are planted as places for people to gather and mature into well-trained Christian leaders through the study and use of God's Word. The multiplication of well-trained disciples of Christ is an essential component to multiplying churches.

The Need for Abundant Well-Trained Church Leaders

A study of two commonly used Lutheran terms is key to understand the training of leaders in a church planting movement. Those two terms are: The universal priesthood of all believers and the public ministry.

The King James Version of Matthew 20:26 quotes Jesus as telling his disciples, "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your *minister*." The New Living Translation reads, "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your *servant*." The fact that the King

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[90] *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*. DVD. Directed by David Batty. Public Broadcasting Service: Arlington, 2017.

James translates διάκονος "minister" while the New Living Translation translates the same word as "servant" highlights an important truth: ministry equals service.

Every Christian is called to serve others. God's commands can be summed up with the word love: love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. God's love for us has freed us to focus our Christian lives on loving others. The Apostle John writes in 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us." Luther explains it well when he writes, "Here is the truly Christian life: when a man applies himself with joy and love to serving others, voluntarily and for nothing. Doing only what is healthy, advantageous, and wholesome for our neighbor. Since by faith we already abound in all good things in Christ."[91]

A Well-Trained Universal Priesthood

Thus, as Christians are all called to serve others, so they are all called to ministry. Lutherans refer to this universal call as the "priesthood of all believers" or "universal priesthood". Peter's first letter contains the *sedes doctrinae*.[92] He is referring to all believers when he writes, "You…are being built into a spiritual house to be a *holy priesthood* offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ… You are a chosen people, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."[93]

Peter explains why Christians have been made a holy and royal priesthood. The purpose is to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

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[91] Martin Luther. *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*. DVD. Directed by David Batty. Public Broadcasting Service: Arlington, 2017.
[92] The sedes doctrinae is a passage that best sums up a doctrine.
[93] 1 Peter 2:5, 9, emphasis added.

Leading a person out of darkness and into the light of the Savior is not a responsibility best left

to pastors and public preachers. It is something every Christian is called to do. Each Christian is

called to declare God's praises. Therefore, each Christian needs to know what to say. On the

matter, Paul writes:

> So, Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors
> and teachers, *to equip his people for works of service*, so that the body of Christ
> may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the
> Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness
> of Christ.
>   Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and
> blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness
> of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will
> grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is
> Christ.[94]

The above section of Paul's letter to an Ephesian congregation involved in multiplying

churches in the Roman province of Asia explains how God intends to equip his royal priesthood

for ministry. Some members of the Church are set apart to equip God's people. Lutherans call

this type of service "public ministry". There are different forms of public ministry, as seen in

Paul's words above. These forms are called public because they are carried out in the presence

of others. Like public office, public ministry is done on behalf of and for the benefit of those

who called the person into the position.[95] The doctrine of the divine call and a detailed study of

the public ministry go beyond the focus of this paper because, as will be demonstrated,

everyone, not just publicly called pastors and missionaries, can participate in planting churches.

Rather, here we see the importance of public ministers to train everyone for ministry.

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[94] Ephesians 4:11-15, emphasis added.
[95] Schuetze, *Church-Mission-Ministry,* 98.

The public minister is not doing the ministry in place of the royal priesthood. The book of Acts recounts how the murder of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, set off a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem.[96] Everyone, Luke writes, was scattered except the apostles.[97] The apostles, called into public ministry by Jesus himself, had spent three years with Jesus receiving constant and in-depth training from him. From our human standpoint, it would make sense to use those who had been most highly trained in this new missionary effort. But God did not do that. The apostles remained in Jerusalem. Everyone else "who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went." [98] God did not leave the work of multiplying churches to the most highly trained Christians.

While God did not leave church planting to the professionals, he does intend all Christians to mature and not remain "infants, tossed back and forth by the waves"[99] of every new teaching. Priscila and Aquila demonstrate how the Apostle Paul, another example of a public minister of the gospel, lived the words he wrote in Ephesians chapter four. After meeting Paul in Corinth, Priscila and Aquila moved their business and traveled with Paul as far as Ephesus. Unable to spend more time in Ephesus himself, Paul left them in that city. Soon Apollos, an Egyptian Jewish man, arrived. Unaware of everything God taught about Baptism, Priscila and Aquila pulled Apollos aside and "explained to him the way of God more adequately."[100] Not long afterwards, Apollos moved on to another city, continuing to declare God's praises wherever he went.

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[96] Acts 8:1; For the entire account read Acts 6:8-8:8.
[97] Acts 8:1.
[98] Acts 8:4. Please keep in mind, I do not intend to state that the Apostles never left Jerusalem. They were simply not the first ones to leave. In Act chapter 9 and 10 we find Peter traveling to cities outside of Jerusalem to visit believers. Christian tradition and historical evidence make it quite certain that the apostles did eventually leave Jerusalem to proclaim the gospel in other parts of the world.
[99] Ephesians 4:14.
[100] Acts 18:26.

This account in Acts gives us great insight into Paul's church planting efforts. He equipped Priscila and Aquila and put them into active service. They, in turn, helped equip Apollos, who then expanded the work of the church in another region. Priscila and Aquila were not "professional" clergy, but they were well-trained royal priests. In addition to them, the Apostle found many other Jews and proselytes (non-Jewish converts) who accepted the gospel. Such people would typically have had a strong founding in the Old Testament. All of this demonstrates the importance Paul placed on well-trained Christian leaders in his church planting movement.

As Christians mature, motivated by the gospel, they naturally do ministry that involves declaring God's praises. Stephen and Philip were called to lead a table waiting ministry,[101] but the next chapters of Acts describe Stephen declaring God's praises to the Church's enemies and Philip explaining Christ to a gentleman who may have been the first to bring the gospel to his homeland of Ethiopia. Leaders in a church multiplication movement will do well to keep their eyes open for the Priscilas, Aquilas, Stephens and Philips who, as they mature in their Christian faith, begin declaring God's praises by discipling others.

Preparing the Universal Priesthood for Ministry

One part of a well-trained priesthood is training people to know what God says, and to be able to repeat it to others. However, God does not want his priesthood to simply be book smart. He wants them to live spiritually mature Christian lives. This happens through the regular and constant use of God's Word which is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training

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[101] Acts 6:2.

in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good

work."[102] The key is spiritual people immersed in the Word of God so that church is no longer a

place they occasionally attend, nor is ministry something they do in their free time; rather it

becomes a lifestyle.

Consider Philip Zarling's description of how Jesus prepared himself and then equipped

his disciples:

> Jesus prepared himself for his public ministry. He studied the Scriptures, even as
> a child amazing scholars and rabbis in the Temple with his grasp of Bible doctrine.
> When the time came for him to train his disciples, he was thoroughly grounded
> in the Word so that he could answer their questions and refute his critics on the
> basis of what God said. And then, in turn, he thoroughly grounded his disciples in
> the Word with sermons, and parables, and lessons and quotes from the Old
> Testament so that they were prepared to lead in the church.[103]

Jesus prepared leaders to be spiritual. When those disciples picked new leaders, they looked

first for spiritually mature people. For example, when the disciples chose others to lead the

distribution of food to the widows they said to the congregation, "Brothers and sisters, choose

seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom."[104]

While God wants us to develop spiritually mature leaders, it is important to note the

equipping will never end. We will never fully obtain the picture described by Paul in Ephesians

four. This is due to human nature which will never fully shed its sinful side during this lifetime.

Paul recognizes this reality in himself when, years after his conversion, he expounds on his

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[102] 2 Timothy 3:16.
[103] Philip E. Zarling, "Training Leaders in the Church to Serve", presented at the Southern Pastor, Teacher, Delegate Conference at Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Lee's Summit, Missouri on February 3, 2003, 15.
[104] Acts 6:3.

continued struggle with not doing the good he wants to do, but rather continually doing that which he hates.[105]

We should not expect well-trained leaders in a church planting movement to have left sin behind. But we do want to strive for spiritually mature leaders who daily use God's Word on themselves in a self-disciplining manner. Luther's Catechism and *Academia Cristo*'s *en Vivo* training program are tools established by Christians to develop a well-trained priesthood of believers. However, to train people for ministry, you must first become known to them.

Becoming Known

The need to become known in the area where one is serving is easy to demonstrate from Scripture. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation,"[106] and, "Go and make disciples of all nations."[107] He instructed them, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[108] None of these implies secretive actions, rather just the opposite. Jesus called us to be part of a wide and well-known movement. We see Jesus put this into practice. He was extremely well-known in the region where he carried out his public ministry. Of course, today Christianity is known world over. With an estimated 33 percent of the world calling themselves Christian[109], it is likely the remaining two thirds of the world know of or about Christians.

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[105] Romans 7:14-25.
[106] Mark 16:15.
[107] Matthew 28:19.
[108] Acts 1:8.
[109] Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., "Status of Global Christianity, 2017, in the Context of 1900-2050", World Christian Database, accessed July 12, 2017, http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/StatusofGlobalChristianity2017.pdf.

The Temptation to Keep One's Head Down

The challenge faced today is that while most people know of Christians, their perception of them is commonly negative. In David Kinneman's book *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity… and Why it Matters*, his research leads him to conclude 38 percent of young outsiders in the United States have a bad impression of Christianity.[110] One individual put it this way, "Most people I meet assume that Christian means very conservative, entrenched in their thinking, antigay, antichoice, angry, violent, illogical, empire builders; they want to convert everyone, and they generally cannot live peacefully with anyone who doesn't believe what they believe."[111]

Peter was confronted by those whose bosses had such a negative opinion of Jesus that they had arrested Jesus and were seeking to take his life. On this occasion, Peter fell into the trap of trying to keep his head down and not be associated with "those people," the disciples of Jesus. He did this even though it appears John did not hide his connection with Jesus when he entered to watch the show trial.[112]

Joseph of Arimathea, on the other hand, is not criticized for hiding his faith. He was a prominent member of the Jewish Council and a secret disciple of Jesus because he feared the other Jewish leaders. Yet, when he approaches Pilate to request Jesus' corpse, Mark describes his action as bold.[113]

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[110] David Kinneman, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Thinks about Christianity… and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007) 25, Kindle.
[111] Kinneman, *Unchristian,* 26.
[112] John 18:25 in the NIV reads, "You aren't one of his disciples <u>too</u>, are you?" The Greek μη και συ, not also or even you, makes it appear that John was knowingly allowed in as a disciple of Jesus.
[113] Mark 15:43.

Those involved in global evangelism efforts know there are legitimate times for discretion. First century, persecuted Christians used the fish symbol to covertly identify themselves.[114] It is one thing to be wisely discreet in a country where Christianity is illegal. It is another thing to remain comfortably anonymous because you are embarrassed about what others will think of you. Friendship evangelism is a wonderful means of encouraging and training Christians to share their faith one-on-one with close connections. However, take care friendship evangelism does not turn into an excuse for a quiet-as-possible-keep-your-head-down type of evangelism.

In this author's opinion, Confessional Lutherans tend to be strong teachers but weak at becoming known in our communities. Out of the 156 evangelism essays in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's online essay file, not one has as a primary focus the importance of becoming well-known in the community. Obviously, this is not the case with all Confessional Lutherans. It most definitely was not the case with many early Christians who intentionally sought to become known wherever they went.

Early Christians Strove to Become Known

Using everyday means of communication and becoming known are interconnected. When one maximizes the first the second typically occurs. Consider how Paul used the means of communication available to him as he worked to make the gospel known throughout the Roman Empire.

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[114] Elesha Coffman, "What is the origin of the Christian fish symbol?", Christianity Today, accessed July 13, 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/what-is-origin-of-christian-fish-symbol.html.

The first chapter emphasized how early Christians excelled at the Roman social media platform of letter sharing. It's important, however, to not just consider technologies when it comes to everyday means of communicating. It's essential to also look at where people gather to communicate. This is why I prefer the term everyday *means* of communication over communication *tools*. That's because "means" includes both tools and gathering places. The first Christian church regularly met in the very public gathering place of the temple courts.[115] Jesus, Paul, Barnabas and others made a habit of visiting synagogues when they arrived in a city.[116] In Philippi, Paul and Luke headed outside the city to the river where they expected to find a place of prayer.[117] Quite often, these gatherings at public places allowed Paul to identify people to follow up with. The follow up sessions usually took place in more intimate settings, such as homes.[118] These examples are often used to encourage Christians to plant churches in coffee houses and other public places. Consider also how they apply not only to face-to-face gathering places, but wherever people might congregate, such as social media platforms.

Using Everyday Means of Communication Help Christians Become Known

Paul's visits to an Athenian marketplace landed him an invitation to a more important gathering place, the Areopagus.[119] This helped Paul become well known in Athens. As a result, Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, and others became believers.[120] Despite some negative reactions, a church was planted. Paul had an even more encouraging experience in the

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[115] Acts 2:46.
[116] Luke 4:16; Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1, 17:2, 10; 18:4.
[117] Acts 16:14.
[118] Acts 18:7.
[119] Acts 17:17.
[120] Acts 17:34.

Ephesian lecture hall of Tyrannus. He held daily discussions there for two years, "so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."[121]

Christianity became so well known in all of the Asian province, and indeed throughout the entire eastern Roman Empire, that Paul determined to go elsewhere. Paul introduces his plans to visit Rome and Spain with these encouraging words: "From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ is not known… But now… there is no more place for me to work in these regions."[122]

Big Targets

Jesus gave us a big target when he commissioned his followers to make disciples of all nations. While no human being will personally reach everyone, Jesus did not want us to shy away from making big goals and large targets. Jesus encourages us not to be worried about standing before rulers and authorities, or even governors and kings. "Do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."[123] Paul found himself living this on multiple instances. Paul witnessed about Jesus before government leaders in at least three Roman provinces, and also, it appears, before the emperor himself.[124]

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[121] Acts 19:9, 10.
[122] Romans 15:19, 20, 23.
[123] Luke 12:11, 12.
[124] Paul and Barnabas witnessed to Lucius Sergius Paulus proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13). He also spoke with the magistrates in Philippi (Acts 16). He got cut off before Gallio proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18). He also witnesses to Governors Felix, Festus as well as King Herod Agrippa while imprisoned in Caesarea. Finally, he appealed to the emperor and was shipped to Rome.

This chapter concludes with an encouraging example of God's blessings through Paul's large public witness. During his first journey, Paul and Barnabas arrived at the city of Antioch in Pisidia. Located in central Asia, this city had a large population of retired Roman soldiers. Out of devotion to their emperor, the citizens had built an impressive temple. Dedicated to Cesar Augustus, the structure stood in the most prominent location in town: the city square. When Paul and Barnabas arrived in town, they headed to the synagogue per usual. "On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord!"[125] Where was the one place the entire city's population could have gathered? A visit to the site makes it clear the only spot with enough space would have been in the city square, with Cesar Augustus's temple dominating the scene. The setting must have become more intense and intimidating when jealous Jewish leaders began agitating the crowd and "heaping abuse" on Paul. Yet, as promised, God was with those missionaries. The word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region. Paul returned to Pisidia Antioch on his second and third missionary journeys to encourage, train and mentor those involved in the church multiplying efforts occurring in the region. Our God, who has called us to faith, motivates us with his gospel to love others and boldly proclaim the good news of Solus Christus, planting as many churches as possible that are faithful to Scripture.

Conclusion

Now that we have examined what Scripture says on the topics of church, multiplying churches, and becoming known, let us move on to what others have written on these subjects. A few questions that will be considered are: What was Martin Luther's media strategy? How has

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[125] Acts 13:44.

the concept of strategic locations changed due to global interconnectivity? What are key dos

and don'ts of church planting?

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The previous chapter examined key biblical foundations related to church planting and everyday means of communication. This chapter will focus on what others have written on these topics.

Three books will serve as primary sources and outline this chapter. They are: *A Portrait of Paul,* by former Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary president and church planter, David Valleskey; *Church planting movements, How God Is Redeeming a Lost World,* by David Garrison, who served as a missionary with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, and currently serves as executive director for the New York-based Global Gates ministry; and *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe – and Started the Protestant Reformation* by Andrew Pettegree, professor at the University of St. Andrews School of History, former vice-president of the Royal Historical Society, and a recognized expert on the European Reformation.

Additional authors will be brought into the conversation. The first of these is Timothy Keller, founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, chairman and co-founder of Redeemer City to City, and author of *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City.* Judith V. Boettcher is the former director of Education and Technology Services at Penn State University, as well as a former executive director of the Corporation for Research and Educational Networking. She authored *The Online Teaching Survival Guide: Simple and Practical Pedagogical Tips.* Daniel Rowles is the CEO of TargetInternet.com and has 20 years

of experience in digital marketing. He is the author of *Mobile Marketing: How Mobile Technology is Revolutionizing Marketing, Communications and Advertising.* Phil Cooke is president of Cooke Pictures. He is an internationally known Christian writer who has produced media programming in more than 60 countries. He wrote *Unique: Telling Your Story in the Age of Brands and Social Media.* Finally, Tom Standage's book *Writing on the Wall: Social Media – The First 2,000 Years* will be mentioned. The book was highly influential in the making of this thesis and was already highlighted in chapter one.

A Portrait of Paul by David Valleskey

In *A Portrait of Paul*, Valleskey examines the world in which Paul lived, and explores Paul's life and ministry as a church planter with a special emphasis on his teaching and leadership methodology.

Valleskey takeaway #1: Take Advantage of the Opportunities Presented to You in Your Setting

The first key impression from Valleskey's book is an encouragement to make the most of the favorable circumstances presented to you in your particular environment. In his opening chapter, Valleskey delves into the times during which the Apostle Paul lived. More Jews were living outside of Palestine than within it. Notice the opportunities this presented:

> Paul generally found Gentiles in the synagogues as well as Jews, for many of the Jews of the Diaspora, especially of the pharisaical persuasion, were evangelistic in their own right. Recall Jesus' words "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (Matthew 23:15). Though the message they brought as they sought to win proselytes was far from a perfect one, they did proclaim the Bible's message that there is no God but one, that all the gods of the nations are idols, that the Lord

and the Lord alone made the heavens, and that he alone is worthy of our worship. This was helpful preparation for Paul's visits.[1]

When Paul arrived in a city he typically found Jews open to foreigners and a gathering of people who already had a foundation on which he could build. This openness to foreigners lasted briefly. As the destruction of Jerusalem neared, Jews were dominated by the school of Shammai and had become introverted.[2]

This is not the only time Christians made the most of windows of opportunity. Luther's use of the printing press to distribute pamphlets allowed him to out publish his opponents by a margin of nine to one.[3] However, the freedoms Luther enjoyed in the publishing world did not last forever. Standage explains that "over the course of the 16th century, increasingly strict controls were imposed across Europe on what could be printed, and by whom."[4]

Paul, like Luther, was in part reforming the Church, correcting error and refocusing those gathered on the Biblical Messiah rather than on misguided Jewish dreams of an earthly messiah who would return Israel to the golden age of kings David and Solomon. At the same time, Paul quickly identified those with a Scriptural foundation who he could train to multiply churches that accurately proclaimed the fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus of Nazareth.

Valleskey further illustrates how the Apostle Paul took advantage of the opportunities presented in his context:

> Three distinct blessings of God made the times right for the spread of the gospel: the Diaspora, the Greek culture, and the Roman peace. Paul took advantage of them all: the migration of Jews into the Mediterranean world, the synagogue, the

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[1] David J. Valleskey, *A Portrait of Paul: Making Disciples of All Nations* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002), 4-5.
[2] Valleskey, *Portrait of Paul,* 5.
[3] Pettegree, Brand, 210.
[4] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 84.

Septuagint, the Greek language, the emptiness of Greek philosophy and religion, the privileges of Roman citizenship, and the relative ease of Roman transportation. As we today consider the call to make disciples of all nations, it will do us well also to discern the times and take advantage of whatever opportunities the Lord sets before us. [5]

Both positives, such as ease of communication, and negatives, such as the breakdown of the family, can be allies of those who strive to plant churches as they carry out the great commission. Judith Boettcher explains how communication tools that now exist "make it possible to do [online] almost everything that we have been accustomed to doing in face-to-face classrooms.[6] Current everyday means of communication present the Church with a previously inconceivable opportunity to train leaders.

Valleskey Takeaway #2 – Paul Kept his Itinerary Flexible

Paul and his companions faced obstacles at nearly every stop. They were called and sent by a group of believers in Antioch, to whom they also reported. However, they were not bogged down by administrative requirements nor did they need to await decisions made by distant boards before they could act or alter plans. They were entrusted to make decisions and adapted as needed. In other words, they had a lot of flexibility.

Valleskey writes, "There appears to be order and direction, then, in Paul's travels, but there was no rigidity." Valleskey cites two evidences of Paul's flexibility.[7] The first is that while the Lord did not typically directly determine Paul's itinerary, Paul was nevertheless open to the

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[5] Valleskey, *Portrait of Paul,* 14.

[6] Judith V Boettcher, *The Online Teaching Survival Guide: Simple and Practical Pedagogical Tips.,* 2nd Ed (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey Bass, 2016), 52, Kindle.

[7] Valleskey, *Portrait of Paul*, 56-57.

Lord's leading. The Macedonian call he received in Troas is an example of this. The second

evidence is seen in Paul's response to setbacks and oppositions. Valleskey notes, "He didn't

grumble about how unfortunate circumstances had put a crimp into his plans. He simply went to

work preaching where he was… [Paul's strategy] would suggest to us today the need to strike a

proper balance between careful planning and goal-setting in [mission work] and a wholesome

flexibility that is open to the leading of the Lord."[8]

Cooke reflects Valleskey's stress on a flexibility. However, Cooke expands the concept to

include not only a flexible itinerary, but flexibility when it comes to one's entire approach to

ministry. Quoting Katy Klinnert, Creative Media Strategist at Time of Grace Ministries in

Milwaukee, he explains, "On an average Sunday, you might get a churchgoer's attention for an

hour or two. But since [the Nielsen ratings] tells us that U.S. Internet users spend more time on

Facebook than any other website, how much of their captive time during the week are you

missing out on if you're only reaching out on Sunday mornings?"[9]

Valleskey Takeaway #3. – Paul's Message was Contextual and Conciliatory but not

Compromising

Being flexible in our ministry approach does not mean changing the gospel. Keller

explains contextualization as follows:

> Contextualization is not — as is often argued — "giving people what they want to
> hear." Rather, it is giving people the Bible's answers, which they may not at all
> want to hear, to questions about life that people in their particular time and place

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[8] Valleskey *Portrait of Paul,* 57.

[9] Phil Cooke, *Unique: Telling Your Story in the Age of Brands and Social Media* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 142, Kindle.

are asking, in language and forms they can comprehend, and through appeals and arguments with force they can feel, even if they reject them.

Sound contextualization means translating and adapting the communication and ministry of the gospel to a particular culture without compromising the essence and particulars of the gospel itself.[10]

Valleskey backs this when he explains, "Paul's message was centered on the cross and the empty tomb."[11] It did not matter if Paul was speaking in the main room of a gorgeous beachside palace to an important Roman official, or outside of town, down by the stream, talking to a handful of hardworking ladies because there were not enough men in town to form a synagogue. Regardless of the setting "He communicated the one message in a manner relevant to each situation," Valleskey writes.[12] Cooke warns against Christians becoming irrelevant: "Too many religious leaders are answering questions the culture isn't asking… As Paul did in Acts 17, to engage a post-Christian culture, we need to speak in a language they understand."[13] The need to communicate in ways people understand should not only be limited to the message itself but should also consider tools used to communicate that message. Luther's pamphlets, attractive in the 16th century, are all but unreadable to the average person today. If a church would not use pamphlets decorated with woodcarving prints to reach out to the current generation, it should focus on 21st century communication tools.

Edgar Hoenecke was an early WELS foreign missions pioneer and author of the article, "St. Paul's Missionary Approach to the Unchurched." He is cited by Valleskey as providing a good explanation for Paul's approach to contextualizing the gospel message. Hoenecke speaks of "the complete freedom from hidebound rules in St. Paul's approach and his remarkable flexibility in

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[10] Keller, *Center Church,* Chapter 7, paragraphs 4-5, Kindle.
[11] Valleskey, *Portrait of Paul,* 71.
[12] Valleskey, *Portrait of Paul*, 73.
[13] Cooke, *Unique,* 69.

adapting himself and his message to all sorts of people and situations… [Paul] is the greatest

exponent and teacher of Christian doctrine after Christ, and yet one will search in vain for a set

pattern of dialectic preaching or teaching in his sermons."[14] Valleskey concludes that Paul's

message in Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra and Athens are examples of this.[15] He writes, "They are

preached in three dissimilar situations to three dissimilar audiences and serve as a fine example

of what Paul means when he says, 'I have become all things to all men so that by all possible

means I might save some' (1 Corinthians 9:22)"

Valleskey concludes, "Paul's message was contextual and conciliatory but not

compromising… He did not set out to alienate his audience but to woo and win it."[16] What this

means is that our message of Christ crucified and risen will be the same no matter the time or

place, but we should not simply spout the exact words or copycat the exact steps Paul, Keller,

Valleskey or others used as they planted churches. Rather, as Keller recommends, we ought to

give careful thought to "the character and implications of the gospel and the culture of both

Christians and non-Christians in the setting in which one serves."[17] Keller encourages the church

planter, "to create a profile of the common worldview of the people in your area."[18] At the end

of the day, we cannot avoid contextualization, but should contextualize with thought and care.

A concluding remark by Keller brings this out:

> I once had a Hispanic member of my church tell me, a bit sheepishly, that when
> he brought other Hispanic people to hear me preach at Redeemer, he had to tell
> them, "He really does believe what he is saying with all his heart, in spite of what
> it looks like." He had to do that because so many people from his culture felt that
> my level of emotional expression signaled indifference to my subject matter. "In
> our culture, if you really believe something and are committed to it, you express

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[14] Edgar Hoenecke, "St. Paul's Missionary Approach to the Unchurched," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (April 1964), 132.
[15] Acts 13:16-41; 14:15-17; 17:22-31.
[16] Valleskey, *Portrait of Paul,* 78.
[17] Keller, *Center Church,* Introduction, section 2, paragraph 8, Kindle.
[18] Keller, *Center Church,* Chapter 29, section 5, paragraph 3, Kindle.

more feeling." I was struck by the fact that if I adapted to a certain type of culture and expressed my emotions more fervently, it would look to people from another culture like a rant and be completely unpersuasive to them. There is no universal presentation. We cannot avoid contextualization.[19]

Valleskey Takeaway #4 – Target Strategic Locations

Valleskey notes Paul's focus on cities: "Paul carried on his work largely in the most strategic cities of an area… Paul evidently saw these cities as hubs from which the gospel could radiate into the rest of the provinces."[20] Keller stresses the same point in *Center Church.* He outlines how Paul's travels included Athens, the intellectual center of the Greco-Roman world; Corinth, a commercial center; Ephesus, a religious center; and finally, Rome, the empire's military and political hub. Citing John Stott, a principal author of the 1974 Lausanne Covenant, Keller concludes, "It seems to have been Paul's deliberate policy to move purposefully from one strategic city-centre to the next."[21] In fact, Keller goes as far as to describe a center church as gospel-centered, *city centered* and movement centered.[22]

Valleskey concludes, "In our day cities are, if anything, even more strategically important for mission work than they were in the days of Saint Paul."[23] Keller's summary of the strategic importance of cities today agrees with Valleskey's conclusion:

Globalization and urbanization are removing the very distinction between "home" and "foreign" missions (to use, for a moment, the old terminology). Consider the example of a church I know in the borough of Queens in New York City. This church has planted three daughter churches — one in New York's neighboring College Point, one in New York's neighboring Bronx, and one in the "neighboring" Philippines. They had reached so many Filipino immigrants in their

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[19] Keller, *Center Church,* Chapter 7, The Inevitability of Contextualizing, Kindle.
[20] Valleskey, *Portrait of Paul,* 58.
[21] Keller, *Center Church,* Chapter 12 Redemption and the City, City Ministry in the Early Church, Kindle.
[22] "Center Church: The Starting Point for Pastors", Redeemer City to City, accessed October 26, 2017, http://www.redeemercitytocity.com/centerchurch/.
[23] Valleskey, *Portrait of Paul,* 59.

own neighborhood that these new Christians wanted to plant a daughter church among their friends and relatives in their country of origin.[24]

Both Valleskey's book and the WELS mission boards agree with this analysis. It is one of the key motivations for the WELS Board for World Missions and the WELS Board for Home Missions to collaborate as the Joint Mission Council.[25]

Cooke argues that only recognizing the importance of global cities does not connect us to the largest daily gathering of people in the world. In the third quarter of 2017, Facebook reported 1.37 billion people use its social media platform *every day*. Facebook has more daily users than the population of China. Says Cooke, "This begs the following questions: Why are we not sending missionaries to [Facebook]? Why are we not planting churches there?"[26] Cooke continues, "In 2007, social media wasn't even on the radar for many organizations… but today, major companies and nonprofits wouldn't consider a communications strategy without including it." [27] Social media is a strategically important communication means. Church planting movements should incorporate social media into their efforts. "In the online age, Christian organizations need to stop thinking of 'missions' solely in terms of geographic boundaries and shift our thinking to include the digital mission field," Cooke writes.[28]

Social media and the ease of connecting with others through online conferencing and messaging tools are impacting the very essence of what constitutes a strategic location. Physical location still matters, as seen in Keller's example of the church in Queens that planted three congregations. However, one must also consider setting up a church planting movement in a

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[24] Keller, *Center Church,* Chapter 13 The Call to the City, The Challenge of Ministry in Cities, Kindle.
[25] *Book of Reports and Memorials* (Waukesha, WI: Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2017), 159.
[26] Cooke, *Unique,* 147.
[27] Cooke, *Unique,* 14.
[28] Cooke, *Unique,* 147.

way that facilitates connecting with potential church planters who are eager and able to labor in the digital mission field.

Valleskey Takeaway #5 – Paul Trained Others to Spread the Gospel

The final section of *A Portrait of Paul* shows how Paul nurtured those he had evangelized. He did so right away, building on the basic gospel message, even during his first visit.[29] This goes along with a key point that Garrison makes of encouraging missionaries to concentrate on training church members "rather than focusing on professional clergy to become the frontline evangelists and church planters."[30]

While Paul was blessed to typically work with groups where some already had a Scriptural foundation, he did not linger in appointing leaders.[31] In Garrison's book, church planters are asked the question, "When do you pass the torch to new leaders?" The unanimous response was, "In a Church planting movement you begin with the torch in their hand."[32]

To do otherwise can lead to "Alien Abduction". This is one the "Seven Deadly Sins of Church planting movements" Garrison highlights. To explain the term he writes, "Whenever foreigners linger too long, refusing to turn over the reins of church leadership, they are depriving the new church of the power to fall and the power to rise."[33] Garrison continues, "There are at least three ways that Church planting movements can succumb to alien abduction:

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[29] Acts 20:24; Colossians 1:28; 2 Thessalonians 2.
[30] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 3 India, Southeast of Madhya Pradesh, Kindle.
[31] Acts 14:23.
[32] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 11 In Every Church planting movement, Passing the Torch, Kindle.
[33] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 14 Seven Deadly Sins, The Fifth Deadly Sin: The Devil's Candy, Kindle.

1) by forcing new believers to exchange their cultural forms for alien ones, 2) by creating a welfare state of foreign dependency, and 3) by injecting foreign elements into the life of the church that cannot be locally reproduced. Any one of these alien invaders can cripple a Church planting movement."[34]

These warnings stress the importance of empowering local leaders early. Paul was able to do this in part through return visits. He revisited churches he founded both personally and via coworkers who strengthened believers.[35] He continued to nurture and train Christians through his practice of letter-sharing. In addition to his 13 epistles in the Bible, we know of other letters he wrote. As already stressed in chapter one, early Christians were a "community of letter-sharers." Consider how many more people he impacted in this way. When someone thinks of *Academia Cristo*, they should consider how Paul used his epistles to train leaders he was unable to be physically present with. He also used his epistles to provide these leaders with teaching tools. With these comments, let us shift our focus from Valleskey to Garrison.

Church Planting Movements, How God Is Redeeming a Lost World by David Garrison

David Garrison's book is a study of more than two dozen church planting movements from all areas of the world.

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[34] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 14 Seven Deadly Sins, The Sixth Deadly Sin: Alien Abduction, Kindle.
[35] Valleskey, *Portrait of Paul,* 90-91.

Garrison Takeaway #1: The Definition of a Church planting movement

In eight early chapters of *Church planting movements, How God Is Redeeming a Lost World,* Garrison features relatively recent church planting movements that have occurred around the globe. Similarly, Valleskey begins *A Portrait of Paul* by highlighting the church planting movement Paul participated in. Valleskey writes:

> To think of what God accomplished through Paul in just a few short years boggles the mind. In about ten years' time (A.D. 47-57), God used Paul to establish churches in at least four provinces of the Roman Empire – Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia – very likely also in Syria, Cilicia, and Illyricum, so that Paul could say, 'From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ' (Romans 15:19) At no time before or after has the church expanded so rapidly and into so many cultures in such a short time.[36]

Garrison provides a simple, clear definition of a church planting movement: "A Church planting movement is a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment."[37] Both Garrison and Valleskey agree that church planting movements thrive on indigeneity.[38] Aspects of indigeneity that are conducive to a church planting movement will be further described in the third takeaway of Garrison.

Garrison Takeaway #2: Dos and Don'ts of Church planting movements

Garrison details the results of two 1998 meetings of leaders of church planting movements. One meeting occurred in Virginia and the other in Singapore.[39] During these

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[36] Valleskey, *Portrait of Paul*, vi.
[37] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 2 What Are Church planting movements?, Kindle.
[38] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 15 Frequently Asked Questions, What is the role of foreign funding in Church Planting Movements?, Kindle.
[39] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 1 How It All Began, Kindle.

meetings the leaders developed a list of ten things all church planting movements have in common and ten qualities most church planting movements have in common. Out of this analysis came their ten commandments for a church planting movement and the seven deadly sins of a Church planting movement.[40]

The ten commandments for a church planting movement are: 1) Immerse Your Community in Prayer, 2) Saturate Your Community with the Gospel, 3) Cling to God's Word, 4) Fight Against Foreign Dependency, 5) Eliminate All Non-Reproducible Elements, 6) Live the Vision that You Wish to Fulfill, 7) Build Reproduction into Every Believer and Church, 8) Train All Believers to Evangelize, Disciple and Plant Churches, 9) Model, Assist, Watch and Leave, and 10) Discover What God is Doing and Join Him.[41]

The Seven Deadly Sins for Church planting movements are: 1) Blurred Vision (You can't hit what you can't see), 2) Improving the Bible (Think it can't be done? Just watch…), 3) Sequentialism (Inch by inch, step by step), 4) Unsavory Salt (When the salt loses its savor…), 5) The Devil's Candy (Shortcuts to glory.), 6) Alien Abduction (Who's in charge here?), and 7) Blaming God (Divine dismissal is still dismissal).[42]

The constraints of this paper make it impossible to fully explore each of the commandments and deadly sins listed above. These are not the only dos and don'ts that should be considered. The need to be flexible, adaptable and properly contextualize have already been highlighted, as has the need to use everyday means of communication. Other authors stress important don'ts related to means of communication. Cooke remarks, "Nearly 100 percent of potential visitors today will check out your website before they visit your church. So why is your

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[40] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 11 In Every Church planting movement, Kindle.
[41] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 14 Seven Deadly Sins, Ten Commandments for Church planting movements, Kindle.
[42] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 14 Seven Deadly Sins, Kindle..

website so lame?"[43] Standage explains how Luther's opponents committed a don't by failing to adapt how they communicated their message. "The trouble was that most of the sixty or so writers who rallied to the pope's defense did so in academic and impenetrable Latin, the traditional language of theology, rather than in German," he writes. "Where Luther's works spread like wildfire, their pamphlets fizzled: Luther alone outsold all his opponents combined by a factor of five to one."[44]

Rowles warns against simply using media without thinking through a plan. "I still see, on an almost daily basis, Facebook pages for the sake of Facebook pages and mobile apps for the sake of apps," he states. "This generally starts in one of two ways. Either somebody senior says, 'Why don't we have an app? Go make an app!' or somebody comes up with a half-baked idea that starts its life without any proper planning."[45] It is important to consider why you are doing something, which leads to the third key takeaway from Garrison.

Garrison Takeaway #3: Church planting movements Thrive on Indigeneity

This is an important note stressed by both Garrison and Valleskey, namely that Church planting movements thrive on indigeneity. Indigeneity is historically described as a church that can carry out its own self-government, is self-supporting and self-propagating. WELS World Missions added a fourth self, self-disciplining, due to its emphasis on preserving purity of doctrine and practice. [46]

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[43] Cooke, *Unique*, 174.
[44] Standage, *Writing on the Wall*, 60.
[45] Rowles, *Mobile Marketing,* 7.
[46] E.H. Wendland, "Our Identity as a WELS World Mission" delivered for the WELS Manitowoc Conference, April 24, 1995, accessed January 15, 2018, http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/662/WendlandIdentity.pdf?sequence=1, 5.

A key obstacle to church multiplication movements, as identified by Garrison, is

burdening a new church with all the trappings that come along with what people traditionally

consider a church and its leadership to look like. Instead, those involved in starting a Church

planting movement ought to focus on allowing the new church to develop according to the basic

Scriptural definitions of church and Christian leadership. Garrison writes:

> Church planting movements are often derailed by well intentioned, yet inflated,
> definitions for a church or overwhelming requirements for church leadership...
>   In many older mission fields, church planters labor under the weight of years
> of tradition- built definitions of church and church leadership. This happens when
> well-meaning Christians come to believe that they are not a church until they
> have been constituted by the national denomination, or have reached a certain
> congregation size, employed a seminary- trained pastor, secured church
> property, or constructed a building. All of these requirements exceed and
> encumber the biblical ideal. [47]

One apprehension concerning the loss of long-standing church traditions is that new

Christians will lose out on the experience and benefit passed on by Christians who have gone

before them. There can be great value in incorporating the traditions of ancient believers and,

without a doubt, we do not want to lose the valuable experience of mature Christians. Still, the

First Council at Jerusalem serves as a good guide for Christians involved in planting churches in

other cultures and settings. The leaders in Jerusalem, while assuring sound doctrine would be

taught, did not burden the new Gentile Christians with adopting Jewish customs.[48] Lutheran

church fathers said it well when they wrote, "Nor is it necessary that human rites or ceremonies,

instituted by men, should be everywhere alike."[49] Hamann summarizes it this way: "It is the

spirit and genius of Lutheranism to be liberal in everything except where the marks of the

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[47] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 14 Seven Deadly Sins, The Second Deadly Sin: Improving the Bible, Kindle.
[48] Acts 15:28, 29.
[49] *Augsburg Confession,* Article VII.

church are concerned. Church government, liturgy, history, church traditions, the names and

trappings of the office, and so on—these have only human value and are, in the long run,

indifferent matters, finally unimportant. But over against the gospel and the sacraments, the

Lutheran is unyielding."[50]

When it comes to multiplying churches, Garrison identifies the idea that church is

synonymous with church buildings as a significant obstacle in both Latin America and the United

States:

> Surveys of several Latin American countries reveal that up to 90 percent of the
> church buildings were constructed by volunteers from the U.S., and this left many
> local believers with the sense that North American help is essential to starting a
> new church. Church planting movement practitioners often comment that when
> local Christians are encouraged to plant new churches, they respond, "How can
> we start churches without American help? [51]

These issues, together with the reality that house churches are at the heart of every

church movement, [52] stress how vital it is to teach the doctrine of the church as detailed in

chapter two. Additionally, it warns against focusing efforts on trying to work with a group of

Christians who are inward focused and entrenched in their traditions. Garrison refers to this as

working with "Unsavory Salt". "Conventional wisdom holds that one should always work

through the local church to reach a neighboring people group. Though logical and intuitively

appropriate, this approach is often not born out in reality. In too many instances the local

church is the major stumbling block that is preventing the unreached from coming to Christ."[53]

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[50] Hamann, *On Being a Christian*, Chapter 7 Concerning Me and Other Christians, Marks of the Church, Kindle.

[51] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 8 Latin America, Kindle.

[52] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 2 What are Church planting movements? Kindle.

[53] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 14 Seven Deadly Sins, The Fourth Deadly Sin: Unsavory Salt, Kindle.

Garrison summarizes another obstacle to church multiplication movements with the term "Devil's Candy". This is primarily the use of subsidies to pay for pastors and church buildings. These usually appear to be shortcuts to jumpstart gospel work but end up snuffing it out. When Stateside funds reach their limit, so stops the church planting. "When we inject foreign elements into the church that the local believers cannot reproduce for themselves we alienate a Church planting movement," writes Garrison.[54] For this reason it is vital to focus on what is locally reproduceable. "Missionaries who are successful in seeing a Church planting movement have learned to begin each church plant with the question, 'Can this church be reproduced by these believers?'"[55] Thus the stress on using locally available means of communication.

One final emphasis is the importance of focusing on reproducing right away. Garrison notes, "Rapid reproduction starts with the DNA of the first church."[56] Keller calls this having a natural church planting mindset. He writes, "A natural church planting mindset means that church leaders will think of church planting as just one of the things the church does along with everything else. Church planting should not be like building a building — one big traumatic event followed by a deep collective sigh of relief that it's done."[57]

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[54] Garrison, *Church Planting Movements,* Chapter 14 Seven Deadly Sins, The Sixth Deadly Sin: Alien Abduction, Kindle.
[55] Garrison, *Church Planting Movements,* Chapter 14 Seven Deadly Sins, The Sixth Deadly Sin: Alien Abduction, Kindle.
[56] Garrison, *Church planting movements,* Chapter 11 In Every Church planting movement, Rapid Reproduction, Kindle.
[57] Keller, *Center Church,* Chapter 29 Church Planting as a Movement Dynamic, Making Church Planting Natural, Kindle.

Brand Luther by Andrew Pettegree

Brand Luther is a fascinating study of Martin Luther's media strategy and the birth of publishing.

Pettegree Takeaway #1: Adapt

Few people would be considered less compromising than Luther. He stood up to the two most powerful men of his day. Even when his life was endangered because of it! While Luther never changed his message, he was extremely adaptable in how he shared that message. Rowles speaks of the importance of adapting in our increasingly fast-changing world. He states, "The only guarantee is that the pace of change within the arena of digital technology, and the rate at which this impacts our organizations and wider society, will get faster and faster. Organizations (and individuals) that are able to adapt to ongoing change will be best placed to survive and thrive in this environment."[58]

Pettegree brings to light how Luther adapted. Luther did not simply make use of the printing press. Humanly speaking, the reason Luther's publications took off was because he adapted to the medium itself.

Cooke explains, "The medium is the message. In other words, the medium we choose to deliver a message has a significant impact on the message itself." [59] It was not just what Luther wrote, but how he wrote it, that contributed to his works going viral. In March 1518 Luther wrote a printer in Nuremberg that he would "have spoken far differently and more distinctly [in the 95 theses] had I known what was going to happen." [60] Standage writes, "Luther realized that if he wanted to address a large audience about corruption in the church, then writing in scholarly Latin and having his words translated into German by others was not the best

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[58] Rowles, Daniel, _Mobile Marketing,_ 52.
[59] Cooke, _Unique,_ 120.
[60] Standage, _Writing on the Wall,_ 53.

approach. Accordingly, he switched to simple direct German for the publication later that month

of his 'Sermon on Indulgences and Grace.'"[61]

> Pettegree explains the genius behind Luther's adaptability:

> The Sermon on Indulgence and Grace alerted the German printing industry to Luther's potential value. But what is perhaps most remarkable about this modest, unassuming work is what it reveals about Luther's completely unexpected facility as a vernacular writer. This was his first serious foray into vernacular writing, yet it can only be described as a work of intuitive genius. Luther replaces the ninety-five propositions of the Latin theses with twenty short paragraphs, each developing a single aspect of the question. None is more than three or four sentences long; the sentences are short and direct. The whole work is a mere fifteen hundred words. It fits perfectly into an eight-page pamphlet. This was a revolution in theological writing. For this was not an age that in general valued brevity, as the 95 theses of Luther and 106 of Tetzel made clear. Luther's colleague Andreas von Karlstadt, ever a man of extremes, even contrived 406 theses.[62]

> The medium is the message. And when one adapts to the medium, good things happen.

Pettegree explains on Luther's works:

> And many of Luther's works, as we have seen, were very short, allowing them to be reprinted very quickly. A well-organized print shop could print five hundred copies of an eight-page pamphlet in a day. What was so remarkable was how quickly, instinctively, Luther adapted his writing to optimize benefit for the printing trade. Of his forty-five writings of these years, twenty-one were eight pages long or less.[63]

> This adaptation was intentional on the part of Luther. He stated, "I am doing this so that

not too big a book frightens readers and buyers."[64] He had a keen understanding of the

technical and practical disciplines of bringing his works into the public domain. His ability to

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[61] Standage, *Writing on the Wall,* 53.
[62] Pettegree, *Brand Luther,* 81.
[63] Pettegree, *Brand Luther,* 106.
[64] Pettegree, *Brand Luther,* 141.

adapt to printing realities allowed printers to make quick profits which they could then reinvest

in other projects. [65] German publishers produced three times the number of books printed in

France and Italy combined. In other words, the printer working in a free market benefited from

Luther and so Luther and his message benefited.

Pettegree Takeaway #2: Become Known

An advantage of adapting to the everyday means of communication of his time is that it

made it easier for Luther and his message to reach a much wider audience. Pettegree writes,

"Luther swiftly made his way into the homes of thousands of his fellow citizens, who had

probably never before owned the work of a living German author." [66] Pettegree's statement

brings to mind much of the developing world that is just getting online through their

smartphone. They never owned a laptop and computer. The fact that they are connecting for

the first time now presents an opportunity for church multiplication movements that seek to

become known.

The *Return to Grace* documentary explains no one would have probably ever heard of

Luther and his message had it not been for his use of the printing press.[67] "Luther himself had

reached his maturity, and a position of modest responsibility and respect in his local order,

without publishing a book. Yet within five years of penning the ninety- five theses, he was

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[65] Pettegree, *Brand Luther,* 107.

[66] Pettegree, *Brand Luther,* 81.

[67] Bonneville, Hugh (Narrator), *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*. DVD. Directed by David Batty. Public Broadcasting Service: Arlington, 2017.

Europe's most published author."[68] Luther took advantage of what was happening

technologically and in doing so, had a huge impact.

In addition to Luther and early believers, there are many other examples of Christians

who took advantage of the everyday means of communication of their times to impact their

region. Nineteenth century Scottish evangelicals and German Lutherans in America are two

examples of those who also maximized the pamphlet concept through periodicals and

newspapers. The *Evangelical Magazine* launched in 1793 served as a catalyst for a new

movement inside the Church of Scotland.[69] The publication of the church newspaper *Der*

Luteraner in 1833 by C.F.W. Walther had a wider impact on U.S. Lutheranism than anticipated.

Pastors who were dissatisfied with the lax conditions in many United States English-speaking

Lutheran Church bodies connected with Walther and became leaders in what would become the

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.[70]

The problem comes when Christians today fail to adapt, like Luther's opponents, and

continue to use what were wonderful tools in previous generations but are now obsolete and

irrelevant.

Pettegree Takeaway #3: The Importance of Branding

Perhaps an obvious takeaway from a book entitled *Brand Luther* is the importance of

branding. Yet according to Cooke, the idea of branding is typically frowned on by Christians who

think this means the Bible is being reduced to a logo.[71] Cooke explains, "The truth is, branding

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[68] Pettegree, *Brand Luther,* Preface, Kindle.
[69] David Alan Currie, "The Growth of Evangelicalism in the Church of Scotland, 1793-1843." (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews, Scotland, 1991), 397.
[70] C.F.W. Walther, *Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible: A Reader's Edition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), xxvi.
[71] Cooke, *Unique,* 19.

isn't about crass commercialism, manipulation, corporate abuses or bad advertising. The AIGA

Center for Brand Experience calls it simply, 'A person's perception of a product, service,

experience, or organization.'" Much more than a logo, Cooke prefers to define branding as What

people think of when they think of you, your product or your organization.[72] He writes, "At its

core, branding is simply the art of surrounding a product, organization or person with a powerful

and compelling story." [73] Jesus himself often used the power of stories as an everyday means to

communicate.

If branding is important, then Lucas Cranach was Luther's graphic designer. Pettegree

explains the impact of Cranach's single woodcut title page frames. "A new movement required a

new sort of book. In mastering these design challenges, Germany's printers gradually settled on

a look that was distinctive and instantly recognizable. This was Brand Luther, and it was one of

the great unsung achievements of the Reformation."[74] He continues, "The distinctive look of the

Reformation Flugschriften [pamphlets] as they emerged from the print shops of the 1520s owed

everything to the design brilliance of Lucas Cranach. It was Cranach who would be the authentic

creator of Brand Luther."[75]

Pettegree Takeaway #4: Using Everyday Means of Communication to Meet Ministry Needs

Luther did not merely solve every issue he faced by producing more pamphlets. He

came up with creative solutions that maximized the communication technologies of his time to

meet the varying needs he saw. In addition to pamphlets, Pettegree explains, "Luther and his

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[72] Cooke, *Unique,* 19.
[73] Cooke, *Unique,* 46.
[74] Pettegree, *Brand Luther,* 145.
[75] Pettegree, *Brand Luther,* 157.

friends used every instrument of communication known to medieval and Renaissance Europe: correspondence, song, word of mouth, painted and printed images."[76]

In 1528 Luther participated in the visitation of the evangelical churches in Saxony. There he witnesses firsthand the ignorance of people and clergy. He stated, "How many pastors are altogether incompetent and live like dumb brutes and irrational hawks. The common people have no knowledge whatsoever of Christian doctrine." [77] Luther explains how the inability of the average rural Christian leader to distinguish "their right hand from their left" was the impetus for him to develop his Catechism. "The deplorable, miserable condition which I discovered lately, when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to [publish] this Catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form."[78] Luther advised pastors "to devote yourselves heartily to your office, to have pity on the people who are entrusted to you, and to help us inculcate the Catechism upon the people, and especially upon the young."[79] The encouragement which appeared above each section of the catechism was aimed at the people, "as the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household."[80] The small catechism was published as illustrated posters that could be placed on the walls of homes. Clearly Luther wanted the Catechism to serve as a teaching tool to lead both pastors and people out of their spiritual ignorance.[81]

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[76] Pettegree, *Brand Luther,* 11.

[77] Martin Luther, *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*. DVD. Directed by David Batty. Public Broadcasting Service: Arlington, 2017.

[78] *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 533.

[79] *Triglot,* 533.

[80] *Triglot*, 539.

[81] John M. Koelpin, "Brotherly Admonition in the Congregation: God's Seeking Grace", Presented to 2012 Symposium on Brotherly Admonition, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI, September 17, 2012.

There are many other forms of everyday communication available to us today that can be used to meet ministry needs. The situation in Latin America is not unlike that of rural Germany in 1528. Basic Christian education is needed. Consider Boettcher's description of current online educational tools and their ability to be connected to quality pedagogics.

> The differences between traditional courses and online and blended courses are getter smaller and smaller for two reasons. First of all, technology advances have made synchronous meetings and gatherings much easier. This means that faculty and students can interact in real time, close to the interactions in a traditional classroom. Secondly, understanding about how we learn from brain and cognitive research has resulted in more active teaching and learning strategies, no matter which environment is being used.[82]

While the study of online educational tools in Christian education would be a valuable topic to research, the next two chapters focus on another everyday means of communication tool: the use of Facebook to help *Academia Cristo* find and recruit potential church planters in Latin America. The next chapter clearly lays out the project connected to this thesis.

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[82] Boettcher, *The Online Teaching Survival Guide,* 8.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESIGN

On his website, redeeminggod.com, Jeremy Myers wrote an intriguing blog titled "10 Lessons Church Planters Can Learn from Will Smith". Lesson nine jumped off the page: "Go where the people are… Why try to gather a crowd on your own when you can just use a readymade crowd?"[1]

When I first began in ministry I served as an evangelist missionary in Mexico City. The congregation offered free English classes as a way to connect with the community. To advertise these classes, we went down to a metro stop during rush hour. I could literally distribute a thousand fliers in minutes. Later, at a church in a smaller city in northern Mexico with no heavily used subway system available, members distributed fliers at major intersections near the church. In both cases, we were following Will Smith's rule number nine: Go where the people are. Why try to gather a crowd when you can just use a readymade one?

Today Facebook, with 2.23 billion monthly users during the second quarter of 2018, is the largest crowd on the planet.[2] There is no doubt church planters should be active in this group of people.

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[1] Jeremy Myers, ""10 Lessons Church Planters Can Learn from Will Smith", Redeeming God, accessed August 30, 2018, https://redeeminggod.com/church-planting-with-will-smith/.
[2] "Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2018", Statista, accessed September 5, 2018, https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/.

A Need for Well-Trained Church Leaders

Dr. Craig Parro, president of Leadership Resources, has worked to equip and encourage

pastors and churches throughout the United States, Latin America and Asia. During a

presentation he gave at the 2015 International Consultation of Evangelical Theological

Educators, Parro highlighted quality leadership training programs as a key need his organization

identified. According to his organization's analysis, pastors lack even basic training and Scriptural

understanding.[3]

Dr. Terry L. Schultz has 20 years of experience serving as missionary in Lima, the

Peruvian Amazon and Haiti. He has spoken many times about the lack of training among church

leaders in Haiti where "you can go to sleep, have a vision, and wake up a pastor."[4]

Martin Teigen, former Evangelical Lutheran Synod missionary to Peru, wrote about what

God expects of church leaders:

> Part, although not all, of the requirements that the Bible expects leaders of the
> church to fulfill are the following: the ability to preach the law and the gospel: the
> ability to teach what the Bible says, an ability that implies first of all, a knowledge
> of the Bible; the ability to rebuke wrongdoing, which ability implies the capacity
> to recognize error, explain why the error is error, and demonstrate what is the
> correct teaching; the ability to correct the fallen and lead them back to the truth,
> which ability implies the capacity to apply the Word to individuals; and finally, the
> ability to encourage the Christian to walk in godliness, an ability that implies the
> application of the gospel and the third use of the law.[5]

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[3] Craig Parro. "Asking the Right Questions." Lecture, Fourth Plenary Session, International Consultation of Evangelical Theological Editors, Antalya, Turkey, November 10, 2015.

[4] Comment made during multiple personal conversations

[5] David Haeuser, "The History and Operation of the Peru Seminary", presented at the Lima Mission Conference, November 1995, 5.
The "third use of the law" that Teigen references is the use of God's law as a guide for Christian living.

The examples given by Parro, Schultz and Teigen illustrate the lack of and need for quality leadership training in Latin America. It is important to note, however, that the current situation in Latin America is not the first time a region's spiritual leaders have significantly lacked Biblical training and comprehension. Luther himself witnessed a similar situation when he toured the Saxon countryside in 1528. Erik Herrmann, professor at Concordia Seminary, explains, "What [Luther] realized after they went around and visited these churches is that nobody really knew anything about the Christian church, or the things that they knew where just strange and odd… the priests and pastors were uneducated."[6] This reality led Luther to develop his Catechism. Latin America faces a similar need.

Academia Cristo seeks to meet a regional need of providing quality training to leaders and those wishing to plant churches in Latin America. Every Spanish speaker in the world is invited to take *Academia Cristo*'s introductory course: *Heme aquí* (Here I Am). It is a ten-lesson course that outlines the law-gospel plan of salvation. Students learn five Bible stories and how to share those stories with others.

To successfully complete the course, you need to finish the final project. For it, students must videotape themselves sharing one of the five Bible stories they learned with someone else. *Academia Cristo* uses this final project as a key step to identify students to invite to continue in the training program.

During the last four months of 2017, 279 students actively participated in an *Academia Cristo* course. Ninety-seven of them successfully completed a course. After this encouraging beginning, an even greater opportunity and challenge presented itself. More than 1,500 people

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[6] Erik Herrmann, *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*. DVD. Directed by David Batty. Public Broadcasting Service: Arlington, 2017.

signed up to take an *Academia Cristo* course during a six-week period at the end of 2017. This happened with very little promotion. It reflects the need Parro, Schultz and Teigen highlighted.

Facebook Meets the Need for Training – Digital Flier Evangelism

Think of Facebook posts as digital fliers. *Academia Cristo* uses Facebook in the same way physical churches distribute fliers or mailers to those in their neighborhood. The fliers invite people to do something connected with the church, and help the church be visible in its community.

In the first three years of its existence, *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page grew to more than 980,000 likes (followers).[7] It appears to be the most followed Lutheran Facebook page in the world. The people who have liked the page become the primary audience.

In August 2016, the *Academia Cristo* Facebook page sent out 171 free posts (digital fliers). An average of 22,489 people saw each post. *Academia Cristo* reached a total of 74,729 different people each day during August using free Facebook posts. (Facebook defines "reach" as the number of people who saw your posts.) On average, 2,652 people engaged with each post. This engagement consisted of clicking on a link in the post, writing a comment, sharing the post or reacting to it. The majority of the people reached using these free posts are those who have liked the *Academia Cristo* Facebook page.

In addition to free posts, *Academia Cristo* spends money to distribute some digital fliers more broadly. In December 2017, *Academia Cristo* promoted the now available *My Son, My*

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[7] All Facebook statistics are provided through Facebook Business Manager.

Savior movie. For every dollar spent, the Facebook promotion reached 850 people. Of those people, 10.2 percent clicked on the Facebook promotion, which took them to the academiacristo.com website. During the same month, more than 10,000 videos were downloaded from *Academia Cristo*'s website.

Paying for Facebook promotions enables *Academia Cristo* to grow the size of its primary audience. It also increases the number of people it reaches with free posts. In August 2016, a total of $3,650 was spent on Facebook "digital flier distribution" (Facebook promotions). As a result, 9.5 million people were reached. The number of Facebook page likes grew by 13,523 likes. During the month, 175,824 unique visitors went to the academiacristo.com website. Most of those visitors were the result of Facebook promotions.

As a point of comparison, *El Mensajero Luterano* (The Lutheran Messenger) was a printed newsletter printed for four decades. For the same price as what was spent on Facebook "digital flier distribution" in the month of August 2016, 1,827 copies of the newsletter could have been printed and mailed to 198 locations.[8] Compare the impact of promoting on Facebook to printing and mailing a newsletter, and it quickly becomes obvious that Facebook wins out. *Academia Cristo*'s goal of having one million watch at least some of the "Come Follow Me" movie was surpassed quicker than thought possible thanks to God's blessing through Facebook promotions, an everyday means of communication.[9] Additionally, *Academia Cristo* and the resources it provides are beginning to become known in Latin America. Television stations in

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[8] Information provided by Multi-Language Publications (MLP), who previously distributed *El Mensajero Luterano*, and now funds *Academia Cristo*'s online promotions and distribution.

[9] As of January 2018, the Spanish version of "Come Follow Me" has been viewed more than 256 thousand times and downloaded more than 103 thousand times from academiacristo.com. It is assumed that a downloaded movie is viewed on average by multiple people. Additionally, the movie has shown on multiple television stations in Latin America, is showing up on other websites, and the number of times clips and highlights of the movie have been viewed on the *Academia Cristo* Facebook page is in the millions. (vimeo.com and facebook.com stats accessed on January 29, 2018. Vimeo serves as host for the "Come Follow Me" movie on academiacristo.com website.)

Latin America regularly show the movies available on academiacristo.com during Christmas and Holy Week. Numerous television station managers became aware of those movies through Academia Cristo's Facebook promotions. Web searches reveal other groups distributing *Academia Cristo* material on their websites.

Hypothesis

Chapter One introduced the hypothesis of this thesis, namely that utilizing everyday means of communication will facilitate a church multiplication movement. The thesis-project seeks to test the hypothesis by focusing on one form of everyday means of communication: Facebook. In Latin America, Facebook is the most used social media platform.[10] This project seeks to test the hypothesis that utilizing Facebook enables a church multiplication movement in Latin America to recruit more potential church planters in that region of the world.

Both Google Analytics and Facebook provide their users with a large amount of statistical information. However, a quick survey of this information can both be overwhelming and lead the user to incorrect conclusions. This is one reason it is valuable to take the time to carry out a careful analysis of the Google Analytics and Facebook statistical information connected with *Academia Cristo*. The goal is to accurately determine the following primary objectives.

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[10] "Top 10 Social Media Platforms in Latin America, Racked by Average Monthly Unique Visitors, 2016", eMarketer, April 28, 2017, accessed June 24, 2018, https://www.emarketer.com/Chart/Top-10-Social-Media-Platforms-Latin-America-Ranked-by-Average-Monthly-Unique-Visitors-2016-millions/207116. "Number of Facebook users in Latin America from 2014 to 2019", Statista, accessed June 24, 2018, https://www.statista.com/statistics/282350/number-of-facebook-users-in-latin-america/.

Objectives

1) Determine whether *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook efforts resulted in an increase of

   potential church planters compared to historical methods used by WELS missionaries in

   Latin America.

2) Define what, if any, the increased benefit was.

3) Determine what issues are faced when recruiting church planters via social media

   promotions.

4) Recommend steps to consider improving future church planter recruitment efforts.

Project Description

To complete these objectives, the project will be carried out in three phases. The first

phase will analyze sign ups. The second phase will investigate how many of those who

signed up participated in and completed the introductory course. The third phase of this

project will consider active students who have completed at least two courses. The first

phase of the project is the primary focus. Phases two and three are intended to supplement

and assist in assessing the objectives.

The primary research tools used to complete this project will be data from Google

Analytics, Facebook Insights and Facebook Ads Manager, as well as interviews with key

people involved in each part of the process. What follows is a description of each phase of

the research process for this project.

Research Process

Phase One: Sign ups

Three tests will be carried out to complete the first phase of the project. These tests will seek to measure the impact and value of using paid targeted Facebook posts to get potential church planters to sign up for the *Academia Cristo en Vivo* Introductory course. The tests will proceed as follows:

1) A three-day test will be carried out, during which no Facebook paid posts or free posts will be published on *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page. It will evaluate how many people in the target group sign up for the *Academia Cristo En Vivo* program when there are no active Facebook promotions or organic social media activity on Facebook.

2) The second assessment consists of a three-day test of a targeted promotion. How many people in the target group sign up for the *Academia Cristo En Vivo* training program when paid targeted Facebook promotions are used that specifically target potential church planters?

3) The third part is a three-day test in which paid Facebook promotions are used that do not specifically target potential church planters. How many people in the target group sign up for the *Academia Cristo En Vivo* program when there are general Academia Cristo Facebook promotions, but nothing that specifically targets signing up for a certain class?

In addition to the three tests, an interview will be carried out with the lead promotions team person for *Academia Cristo*.

First Control

The three-day test of an *Academia Cristo* Facebook promotion targeting potential

church planters (test number two) will be compared with nine completed *Academia Cristo*

Facebook promotions that targeted potential church planters. This is to attempt to determine if

the results of test number two are an anomaly or if they are consistent with other similar

promotions. It will also present an opportunity to learn additional information related to the

project.

Second Control

A second control will be used in addition to the nine targeted Facebook promotions

previously mentioned in phase one of the study. This second control is a 2016 systematic

analysis focused on a training program in Mexico led by WELS missionaries between the years

1964 to 2016. The purpose for including that analysis is to give the current *Academia Cristo*

social media promotions method a point of comparison. *Academia Cristo* is a ministry effort of

WELS missionaries in Latin America. A comparison of *Academia Cristo* and past WELS efforts will

assist with the completion of the first objective: determining whether there was an increase in

recruiting potential church planters.

A key assumption is made in using this systematic analysis. The assumption is that the

results of this study in Mexico are representative of experiences in other Latin American

countries. A study of all WELS training programs in other Latin American countries goes beyond

the scope of this project. However, both personal experience and the comments of those who

participated in the systematic analysis seem to indicate this to be a fair assumption.

Phase Two: Participation in Introductory Course

Phase one is expected to be the largest part of this project. Phase two will follow those who signed up for *Academia Cristo*'s *En Vivo* training program since its initial launch in April 2016 through March 2018.

Phase two will include interviews with key people involved in the process of taking those who signed up and enrolling them in the introductory course. It will also evaluate statistical information related to the sign ups and introductory course, outlining the process and seeking to answer two questions:

1) How many of the people who signed up for the *Academia Cristo en Vivo* program participated in the introductory course, *Heme Aquí* (Here I Am)?
2) How many of the people who signed up successfully completed the introductory course?

Phase Three: Active Students

Since the *Academia Cristo en Vivo* training program is still in its infancy, a study of those who have successfully completed the program will need to be left to a future project. However, it is possible to look at the number of students who are active in the program and have successfully completed at least one additional course after the introductory course. The third and final phase of this project will analyze this information. It will seek to answer two key questions:

1) How many students who signed up for *Academia Cristo en Vivo* have successfully completed two courses?

2) How many students who first came into contact with WELS missionaries and associated church leaders via online means have received a face-to-face visit from an *Academia Cristo* teacher or mentor?

Outcomes

Based on findings and outcomes of the project, recommendations will be made for the future of the *Academia Cristo* ministry effort. In March 2018, *Academia Cristo* launched its first app, a leadership app. After dipping our toes in the waters of app development, a second, much larger app development project is being considered. WELS is considering producing a multi-language school app platform. Can this school app platform be used to further improve recruitment of potential church planters for *Academia Cristo*? God willing, the information learned from this project will provide valuable insight for the multi-language school app initiative.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part details the outcomes of the project described in the previous chapter. The second part of the chapter considers what was learned and its impact on *Academia Cristo*'s future ministry efforts.

The first section is divided in three parts to coincide with the three phases of the project. The first phase studies the process of using social media to have people sign up for *Academia Cristo*'s introductory church planting course. The second phase considers students who completed the introductory course. The third phase looks at active students who have completed at least two courses in the church planting program, *Academia Cristo en Vivo* (Live). The second and third phases of the project are to fulfill the project objectives listed at the beginning of chapter four.

Phase One: Sign ups

Phase one of this project involved carrying out three tests. The tests compare the impact of using targeted social media promotions on Facebook to motivate people to visit academiacristo.com and sign up for the *Academia Cristo en Vivo* introductory course. In one of the tests a promotion is created that specifically targets potential church planters.[1] This promotion is compared with nine other promotions that specifically targeted potential church planters.

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[1] See Appendix B for a detail description of the promotion.

These tests look at two specific Facebook tools. Those tools are *free* posts and *paid*

promoted posts. In the tests, some of the paid posts specifically target potential church planters.

Others do not. A specific example of a paid Facebook post targeting potential church planters is

included as Appendix B. Appendix D provides detailed charts and graphs related to these tests.

In summary, the three tests examined the following:

1) The first test looked at individuals who signed up when no social media posts or paid

promotions were utilized.

2) The second test evaluated who signed up when a specific sign-up social media promotion was

used in conjunction with other social media efforts.

3) The final test examined those who signed up when social media was used without a specific

sign-up promotion.

Test One: June 21-23, 2018 – No social media posts or paid promotions

There are two primary ways to reach people via Facebook. You can create free Facebook

posts. (This is what most Facebook users are doing every time they post something.) Or you can

make a Facebook post and then pay Facebook to distribute it to a certain audience. These are

the paid promotions and show up as "sponsored" in a user's Facebook feed. Your organic reach

consists of the number of people who see your free posts.[2] The number of people you reach

through paid posts is known as your paid reach. Reach refers to the number of unique people

who view the content of a particular Facebook post.

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[2] Facebook refers to the number of people reached for free as the "organic reach". This reach can happen
in one of two ways. It happens when a Facebook post you create enters the screen of a Facebook user
without your having paid for it to happen. It also happens when a Facebook post you create enters the
screen of a Facebook user because their friend likes or follows your page, engages with a post or shares a
post.

From June 21-23, 2018, no social media posts of any kind were made on the *Academia Cristo* Facebook page. Ceasing all social media activity during a three-day period created a point of comparison. This could be used later to better measure the impact of utilizing paid posts on Facebook as a means for recruiting potential church planters. Here are the results from the three-day window of no posts:

Figure 5. No Posts

	Reach	% of Total Reach	Cost
Organic reach	48,598	100%	$0
Paid Reach	0	0%	$0
Total Reach	48,914	100%	$0

Results

Although no posts were created during this time, the organic reach was 48,914 people. This is attributed to existing posts on the Facebook page that had been published prior to the test. In other words, throughout this three-day test people continued to share and see posts *Academia Cristo* created prior to the test. Obviously, the cost of creating zero posts was zero.

The number of visitors to academiacristo.com during this time was as follows:

Figure 6. Website Visitors

Website Visitors	Totals
Total Sessions[3]	696
Users	621
New Visitor	390
Return Visitors	244

One person signed up to study in the *Academia Cristo En Vivo* program during this time.[4]

Test Two: February 28 – March 2, 2018 - Facebook Posts and Targeted Promotions

The second test looked at the impact of using a targeted Facebook promotion ad in conjunction with regular Facebook activities. The February 28 to March 2, 2018 dates were chosen for the second test because they met the criteria of a three-day period when free Facebook posts, general promotions, and a targeted Facebook ad motivating potential church planters to sign up for the training program were all active.

A targeted ad ran from February 28 to March 2, 2018.[5] This ad targeted men between the ages of 18 and 64 who live within a 10-mile radius of the city of Asunción, Paraguay. These men were encouraged to visit academiacristo.com and sign up for an online class (*Heme Aquí*)

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[3] Total Sessions refers to the times people visited, i.e. used, the website. Users refers the total number of people who used the website. New Visitors and Return visitors help you identify how many have used your website on previous occasions versus how many used it for the first time.
In other words, during the above time period, the website was used a total of 696 times by 621 different users. 390 of those who used the website did so for the first time during the period in question. 244 had previously used the site.
The reason the total number of users does not match the number of new and return visitors is because one user might visit the site for the first time as a new visitor, and then return during the same time period, but now as a return visitor. It is one user who was counted both as a new and return visitor.
[4] Academiacristo.com tracks Sign-ups on three Google Sheets files.
[5] See Appendix B for a detailed description of the promotion that was run.

which would teach them how to plant a biblical church.[6] *Academia Cristo* spent $232.72 to run this three-day ad.

Besides the specific ad mentioned above, 18 free Facebook posts were created during that time. An additional $577.23 was spent during those three days promoting other resources on *Academia Cristo*'s website. These promotions focused on Lenten resources available on *Academia Cristo*'s website, as well as building the *Academia Cristo* Facebook audience. These promotions did not encourage church planters to sign up for the *Academia Cristo En Vivo* training program.

Screen shots showing the Facebook reach during these three days can be seen in appendix D. Sixty-two people signed up to study in *Academia Cristo*'s *en Vivo* training program. Of those, 59 were men.[7]

Results

Figure Seven summarizes the number of people *Academia Cristo* reached via its Facebook page during this three-day test:

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[6] Native speakers involved in this project encouraged using the term *iglesia bíblica* (Biblical church) since Lutheran is an unknown term and the word Biblical gets to the heart of what our goal is: churches that clearly and faithfully proclaim God's Word.

[7] See Appendix D.

Figure 7. Reach During February 28 to March 2 Test

	Reach	% of Total Reach	Cost	% of Total Cost
Organic reach	185,598	13%	$0[8]	0%[9]
Paid reach for Paraguay sign-up promo	99,183	7%	$232.72	28.7%
Paid reach of other promos	1,140,168	80%	$577.23	71.3%
Total Reach	1,424,929	NA	$809.95	NA

The next figure shows the number and origin of the class signees during this test period.

Figure 8. Sign ups during February 28 to March 2 Test

Sign ups	Who	% of Total
Men from Paraguay	56	90.3%
Men from other locations	2	3.2%
Men from unconfirmed locations	1	1.6%
Women from Paraguay	0	0%
Women from other locations	3	4.8%
Women from unconfirmed locations	0	0%
Total	62	NA

Figure nine compares traffic to academiacristo.com during the February 28 to March 2

test and the June 21-23 test:

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[8] Academia Cristo utilizes both part-time paid and volunteer Facebook posters. 15 of the 18 posts were done by part-time paid Facebook posters. Three were done by volunteers. Therefore, the cost of these 18 posts was not entirely free. However, it should be noted that the two paid posters that created the 15 posts during this time period work on average 5 hours a week and have other responsibilities in addition to creating posts.

[9] See above footnote.

Figure 9. Traffic Comparison

Website Visitors	June 21-23	Feb 28-Mar 2
Total sessions	696	5,830
Users	621	5,445
New users	390	4,589
Return visitors	244	1,069

It should be noted that although 18 to 64-year-old men were targeted, it was not possible to determine the ages of those who signed up. Neither was it possible to identify with absolute certainty the specific content that motivated someone to sign up for the *Academia Cristo* church planting program. That said, according to Facebook's data, 1,089 men who watched the targeted ad clicked on the link to the *Academia Cristo* webpage where they could then decide to sign up for the introductory class. In other words, while certainty is not possible, there is a high level of confidence that the 56 men in Paraguay who signed up for the introductory course did so after receiving a targeted ad.

Analysis of the above information leads one to conclude that the 28.7 percent of the total cost of a targeted ad, while accounting for only 7 percent of the total reach, led to 90.3 percent of the sign-ups. It is also natural to conclude that the 9.6 percent of the sign-ups who were not part of the target group resulted from web traffic to the website. In other words, approximately 6 people signed up as a result of visiting the website without having received a specific invite to sign up for the program. Half of those six fell into the primary target category as men. However, none of those men were from Paraguay, the specific target area of this particular ad.

Test Three: May 17-19, 2018 – Sign-ups for the Church Planting Program during Facebook

Posts and General Promotions (No Targeted Ads)

The May 17-19, 2018 dates were chosen for the third test because they met the criteria of a three-day period when Facebook posts and general promotions were active. However, there were no specific Facebook ads running during this period that targeted church planters, encouraging them to sign up for the training program.

Eight paid promotions were active during at least part of the time between May 17th and May 19th. Four of these promotions invited people to discover different resources on *Academia Cristo*'s website. One promotion invited people to download *Academia Cristo*'s newly released leader app. Another promotion invited people to a live *Academia Cristo* on-the-ground event in Quito, Ecuador. Two final promotions invited people to participate in *Academia Cristo* Facebook Live events. During this period of very active online promotions, a total of $1,132.92 was spent.[10] However, none of these promotions invited people to sign up for *Academia Cristo*'s *En Vivo* church planting training program.

In addition to the paid promotions, there were 16 free posts on *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page.[11] Screen shots showing the Facebook reach during these three days can be seen in appendix D.

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[10] Data provided by Facebook Ads Manager for *Academia Cristo*.

[11] 15 of the 16 posts were created by part-time paid *Academia Cristo* Facebook team members. The other was created by a volunteer.

Figure ten summarizes the number of people *Academia Cristo* reached via the Facebook

page during this three-day test:

Figure 10. Reach during May 17 to 19 Test

	Reach	% of Total Reach	Cost	% of Total Cost
Organic reach	106,356	7.1%	$0[12]	0%[13]
Paid reach for sign-up promos	0	0%	$0	0%
Paid reach of other promos	1,383,770	92.9%	$1,132.92[14]	100%
Total Reach	1,490,126	100%	$1,132.92	NA

The next figure shows who signed up for the class and where they came from during this

test period:

Figure 11. Sign ups during May 17 to 19 Test

Sign-ups	Who	% of Total
Men	4	50%
Women	4	50%
Total	8	100%

A third figure compares how many people visited academiacristo.com (web traffic)

during the three different testing periods:

Figure 12. Website Visitor Comparisons

Website Visitors	June 21-23	Feb 28-Mar 2	May 17-19
Total Sessions	696	5,830	4,452
Users	621	5,445	4,352
New Users	390	4,589	3,645
Return visitors	244	1,069	771

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[12] See related footnote on Graph C.
[13] See above footnote.
[14] Costs of online promotions vary greatly due to multiple factors such as audience and location. A study of these costs is left to a future project.

Conclusions Drawn from Three Tests

Figure 13 compares the efficiency in motivating the targeted audience to sign up for the

Heme Aquí (Here I Am) introductory church planter course:

Figure 13. Sign ups Efficiency

COMPARISON	Cost	Reach	Website traffic[15]	Sign-ups	Cost per sign-up	% in target group[16]
June 21-23	0	48,914	696	1	0[17]	0%
Feb 28-March 2	$809.95	1,424,929	5,830	62	$13.06	95.1%
May 17-19	$1,132.92	1,490,126	4,452	8	$141.62	50%
TOTAL	$1,942.87	2,963,969	10,978	71	$27.36	84.5%
Feb 28-Mar 2 sign-up promo[18]	$232.72	99,183	1,089[19]	56	$4.16	100%

Following are six conclusions drawn from all of the tests results:

1) The fact that the May 17-19 promotions had a cost per sign-up ratio of $141.62 does

   not mean those promotions were a poor use of resources. They served other

   purposes such as promoting an *Academia Cristo* on-the-ground event in Quito,

   inviting people to *Academia Cristo* Facebook Live events, and bringing people to

   academiacristo.com to use and download free shareable Christian resources. These

   purposes are steps along the way for *Academia Cristo* to reach the goal of becoming

   a known entity among Spanish speakers.

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[15] This number is the total sessions taken from graph H.
[16] While both men and women are invited into *Academia Cristo*'s *En Vivo* program, the program primarily targets men. This number is the percentage of sign-ups who were men.
[17] Keep in mind the reach is mainly due to having over 1 million people who liked the *Academia Cristo* Facebook page as a result of previous promotions and activity.
[18] There were two types of promos run February 28 – March 2. The first promo in Figure 13 was a general promotion that did not specifically encourage people to sign-up. The second promotion did specifically encourage people to sign-up.
[19] According to Facebook Ad Manager, 1,089 men clicked on the link to visit academiacristo.com.

2) General promotions and activity on the *Academia Cristo* Facebook page did not result in a high number of sign-ups. Those that did sign up had only a 50 percent chance of being in the target group.

3) Even with general promotions, people did sign up for the classes. This topic will be further explored in phase two of the project.

4) The overall number of people reached does not necessarily increase by purchasing sign-up ads for classes. But, the number of people who signed up for a class increased 34 times upon receiving a specific invite.[20]

5) The phrase "results may vary" comes to mind. Other ministries may experience different results in their settings. *Academia Cristo*'s experience among Spanish speakers in the United States has been very different than its experience in Latin America. Facebook may not have the same impact in another setting as it has in many Latin American countries.

6) It would be worthwhile to do further tests. For example, what happens if only organic (free) posts are used to invite people to sign up for a class rather than paid promotions?

The next section will compare the February 28 to March 2 promotion with nine other *Academia Cristo* Facebook promotions that targeted potential church planters.

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[20] 34 is the $141.62 cost per sign-up from May 17-19 divided by the $4.16 cost per sign-up from the specific promotion.

The Ad in Test Two Compared to Other Ads Targeting Potential Church Planters

Between October 18, 2016 and March 2, 2018 *Academia Cristo* ran 10 separate paid promotions. These promotions invited prospective church planters to visit academiacristo.com and sign up for the *Academia Cristo En* Vivo introductory course. The ad in test two is included as one of these promotions. This section will compare test two with the other nine ads. A detailed graph comparing these ads can be found in appendix D.

The primary reason for comparing the February 28 to March 2 targeted Facebook ad which was evaluated in test two, with the nine other similar targeted ads was to determine whether the February 28 to March 2 promotion was an anomaly. It appears it was not. Five of the 10 promotions targeted only men. The average cost per sign-up for those promotions was $2.71.[21] The most expensive ad ran at $5.81 per sign-up. The cheapest ran at $0.41 per sign-up. The February 28 to March 2 promotion fell within this range and was similar in cost to promotion number nine which ran immediately prior to the ad used for the test.

The comparison of the different promotions also reveals that the two most expensive promotions did not exclusively target men. As a result of those two promotions, only 38 to 40 percent of those who signed up were men. The fact that both men and women were targeted appears to have significantly impacted cost.

It is worth mentioning that women are invited and welcome to study in the *Academia Cristo en Vivo* training program. They can profit from the program and there are God-pleasing ways for them to participate. The point here is not to debate whether women should participate in the program. The important factor to consider at this moment is that we determined not to

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[21] This number was determined by adding the total amount spent on the five ads ($1,507.23) and dividing by the total number of targeted sign-ups (557).

make women a primary target. We decided to focus on men. When we failed to specify men and eliminate women from our targeted ads, the majority of those who signed up did not fit what we considered to be an important qualification. In addition to adversely affecting cost, those involved in teaching the classes reflected on how the mixed group of targeted and non-targeted individuals significantly impacted the dynamics of the classes.

Altogether, it appears those who received the ad and signed up were consistently within the target range. All five promotions that targeted men resulted in sign-ups that were between 86 to 100 percent of the target group. It appears we did not always fully define for Facebook who we really wished to target. This will be discussed further in the second part of this chapter.

A surprising result of the project is the realization that not everything fit perfectly as one might expect. Promotion number five had a cost per targeted sign-up of only $1.03 and promotion number one cost only $0.59. Both of these promotions targeted both men and women.

Another unexpected and perhaps extremely valuable observation is worth noting: ads that costs less than $100 were much more cost efficient than ads that cost more than $100. Promos one, two, three and five all cost less than $100. Their average cost per targeted sign-up was only $0.61. On the other hand, ads in which more than $100 was spent had an average cost per targeted sign-up of $4.09, irrespective of whether only men or both men and women were targeted.

It appears cheaper advertisements were more cost efficient. Furthermore, it appears specific targeting makes the expenditure of time and efforts more efficient. More tests will be needed as *Academia Cristo* moves forward. There are other potential factors that could have impacted these results. For example, were the first three promotions more cost effective

because people were seeing them for the first time and excited to try something new? Or has the cost efficiency declined because Facebook is increasing the advertising fee? Did long waiting lists turn people off and create a negative experience? The issue of long waiting lists will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Another factor worth continued evaluation is this: The best cost per sign-up occurred when less than $100 was spent to target all men in Mexico who were interested in religious topics, but they did not have to be an *Academia Cristo* Facebook follower or lookalike[22]. Are we missing people when we require them to be *Academia Cristo* Facebook followers or lookalikes in order for them to receive an invite? Why not use other factors to target audiences? The second half of this chapter will deal with this when it discusses future steps and the use of a "personas" document.

Two final factors potentially impacted results. The first is the timing of the promotions. Did running a promotion after New Year's or during Christmas positively or negatively impact results? How much of an effect did other promotions that were running simultaneously but not specifically encouraging potential church planters to sign up have on sign-ups? Tests two and three lead one to believe other promotions do have a limited impact on sign-ups.

Keep in mind the only thing *Academia Cristo* has at the end of the promotions and sign-up phase of this process is contact information for those who viewed a Facebook ad inviting them to sign up for a class and decided to go ahead and take a few minutes to sign up. The next two phases of the project follow the students who signed up to determine whether there was an increase in recruitment of potential church planters compared to previous efforts. These next

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[22] A Facebook Lookalike Audience are people who do not like your page but are likely to be interested because they are similar to your best followers.
(https://www.facebook.com/business/help/164749007013531 accessed July 3, 2018).

two phases also attempt to determine what, if any, were the benefits of using social media as a recruitment tool.

Phase 2: Sign-ups Who Completed the Introductory Course

Between April 2016 and March 2018, 5,845 people signed up for *Academia Cristo*'s *en Vivo* introductory course, *Heme Aquí* (Here I Am).[23] Seven hundred ninety-seven people participated in an introductory *Heme aquí* (Here I Am) course. Two hundred thirty-two successfully completed the course and were invited to continue to study in the program.

As a part of my research for this second phase, I carried out interviews with two key team members. Joel Sutton manages the sign-ups, enrollment and class scheduling for *Academia Cristo*. Andrew Johnston works with the mentors and the students that make it into the church planter mentoring portion of the program. Both regularly teach *Academia Cristo* online courses. I divided the interview into two parts. The first part focuses on what has been learned. The second part focuses on challenges moving forward. I am including portions of the interviews below.

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[23] This number was determined by using the three Google Sheets documents where sign-ups appear. Duplicate and empty sign-ups were eliminated. However, incomplete sign-ups were included. The reason for including incomplete sign-ups is because a person did in fact attempt to sign up for the course even if they did not successfully complete the application form.

Question: Has the Introductory class always been run in the same way? What are some

changes? What have you learned?

Sutton:

  a. *Changes:*
       i. *We started with GoToMeeting but Zoom seems to be more user-friendly and designed for a classroom. We even found a few people in Latin America who had used Zoom before working with us.*
       ii. *At first, we would start [the Heme Aquí introductory course] with smaller groups (50-70 people), but we found that you need a bigger pool of people that signed up in order to consistently have a viable course that doesn't fizzle out.*

  b. *Learned:*
       i. *The number of people who signed up and participated at least once is roughly 15% for the introductory course (797 out of 5048).*
       ii. *The number of people who complete the course is about 5%.*
       iii. *Very few people respond to e-mail.*
       iv. *Even mediocre cell phones and Internet connections seem to be able to use the application Zoom.*

Johnston:

> *I think one of the strengths of our team is that we are continually adjusting to improve what we do. We have found that Zoom is better for what we do than GoToMeeting, so we switched class applications. We have found that offering more than one class time is better than "shoving" people into a single time slot, so we have begun offering every class multiple times per day. Recently, we found it useful to have multiple instructors per course, so we have begun to make that change*

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[24] Joel Sutton, Interview carried out via email, July 3-9, 2018.
Andrew Johnston, Interview carried out via email, July 3-8, 2018.

Question: Initially, *Academia Cristo* attempted to use Moodle as its platform. Moodle is a popular Learning Management System popular with many online education organizations. Were you around at that time? What were the issues with Moodle? Why change?

Sutton:

> *Moodle was e-mail based. Using Facebook to advertise, and WhatsApp to communicate with the participants makes sense because those are apps that people already have and are using.*

Johnston:

> *Moodle was before my time.*

Question: So, one of the problems with using Moodle was that it required to potential students to sign up by using an email address. What are the issues with email sign-ups? In your opinion, why such low response rate?

Sutton:

> *Latin Americans clearly don't use their e-mail much. Most people HAVE an e-mail address, but don't use it daily, and don't use it for personal communication with people. There's a small chance they MAY read something they receive via e-mail. There's an even smaller chance they will respond to an e-mail.*
>
> *On a daily basis people are sending dozens or even hundreds of messages via WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.*
>
> *Side note: My wife is Mexican, and she is the perfect example of this. She has e-mail. Occasionally she uses it for checking an online shopping order, but she never writes a personal e-mail to people. And she will not respond to e-mails. Her personal communication happens almost entirely through WhatsApp. She gets much of her news and information through Facebook.*

Question: Many express concerns with the lack of personal connection when teaching online classes. What are your thoughts on this?

Sutton:

> *There's some truth to this. I feel that the mentoring aspect of our ministry provides that personal connection. There's a follow-up plan to see and meet people in person as much as possible when someone seems to fit our target. The combination of face-to-face and distance is not all that different from [the Apostle] Paul writing letters to people in between visits.*
>
> *Last month a lady finished Heme Aquí with tears of joy (over the Internet) as the class concluded. Yes, it's not as personal as face-to-face. But really with Zoom and WhatsApp you can have regular, real communication with people. One of my colleagues and brothers in Christ- Professor/Pastor Jackson Rodríguez from Venezuela- he and I have never met. Yet I feel a close bond as we work together in Christ. The bridge is started and constructed through online communication. In many (but not all) cases, the bridge of confianza (trust) is completed when there's face-to-face contact.*

Johnston:

> *I would say that those who express that concern have probably not taught a live, online class before. With that being said, there is less of personal connection in online classes (though I would think the difference is much smaller than some might assume). However, that negative factor is small in comparison to the many, many more people we can reach and teach through online classes (as opposed to the much smaller number reached if we only offered classes to those whom we could teach in person).*

Question: What do you believe are key factors to consider should someone else attempt to replicate what we're doing in another setting?

Sutton:

> *Don't just copy what Academia Cristo is doing. Take the underlying principles and apply them in each setting. The apps or tech or process we're using in Latin America might not be the ones that'll work in India or mainland China or with immigrants in the US.*

Johnston:

> *I think the key factors are those which are reflected in the hour glass. [25] I think if you want to reach a lot of people through local leaders at the bottom of the hour glass, you need a way to have a large pool from which to identify and train leaders at the top of the hour glass.*

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[25] See Chapter 1 for an explanation of the hourglass ministry approach mentioned by Andrew Johnston.

Question: Were there particular issues in some areas of the world as opposed to others? If so, specify which areas and what the issues were.

Sutton:

> *E-mail is useless in Latin America.*
>
> *Because of the current instabilities, Venezuelans are struggling to find a stable connection to participate in live courses.*
>
> *Latin America covers 5 time zones. You have to take that into account with scheduling.*
>
> *Latinos, in general, work hard and work long hours. Many people prefer late time slots for classes. It's not out of the ordinary for someone to arrive home from work at 9 p.m. and take a class with us at 10 or 11 p.m. (their own time zone).*
>
> *The clash of Roman Catholicism and the Pentecostal and Evangelical movements have left many Christians in extreme positions doctrinally. They struggle to walk that narrow middle road of just what the Bible says.*

Question: What are key things you do differently now that you didn't do at the beginning?

Sutton:

> *I pray more. It's easy to get caught up in all the busy-ness and the numbers, communicating and planning. Our God is in heaven. He does whatever pleases him. We ask him to bless our efforts, and the Word that is being planted and watered.*
>
> *When possible, we coordinate classes with professors/missionaries who will naturally be the ones to follow up in-person with course participants. In other words, when possible, the guy in Ecuador will teach the Ecuadorians, at least one class, in order to have that pre-existing confianza (trust) for when the time comes to meet face-to-face they already know each other.*
>
> *Better record-keeping systems developed in the last few months have helped from people getting stuck for several months without taking a class.*
>
> *We've raised the number of potential participants in each class based on the normal participation rates that we've identified.*

Question: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Sutton:

> *In recent months we have found some success in team teaching and offering multiple time slots. We take on more people who have signed up and then team up two teachers to man the WhatsApp groups and teach the Live classes.*

Sutton and Johnston Interviews: Current Challenges

Question: Do you see benefits in continuing sign-ups as we are doing them? If so, what are they? What are the challenges?

Sutton:

> *The benefit is that anyone can receive good Biblical training in sharing their faith.*

> *The challenge is that ANYONE can receive good Biblical training in sharing their faith. In other words, many people don't really fit our target audience. We don't have a built-in filter right from the start.*

> *Another challenge is that it's very labor intensive to be messaging hundreds of people personally.*

> *Some people get annoyed by being in another WhatsApp group. Others have cheap cell phones that are unable to handle when somebody in the group gets the urge to share large video files. For some people who have pre-pay phones it gets expensive when someone's sharing video files all the time. Note: We as teachers try to share the links to the videos, not the videos themselves. This all seems minor but becomes a big deal when people who would like to participate are unable to because their phone is filling up or their cell phone service runs out almost daily.*

Johnston:

> *I think the benefits are that we get a lot of people to sign-up. One of the challenges is our sign-up to participant ratio which remains well below 50 percent.*

Question: What would you recommend as ways to improve?

Sutton:
> *A filter system of some kind that sorts through the people who sign up to see who fits our target audience and is serious about sharing their faith and receiving Bible-based training.*

Johnston:

> *I think that one thing that could improve the rate of participation of those who sign up is if people sign up for a particular time slot instead of having them sign up without knowing when the class will be taught. I think this would guarantee more people are available for the class and also will give people a sense of control.*

Question: What are key issues you face?

Sutton:

The whole process is a chain. If there are hold-ups in the chain (promotions, processing sign-ups, not enough professors available, the course materials are not finished), this slows down the work. [If one spot in the chain breaks, it impacts everything else.]

Final Observation

Since neither Johnston and Sutton are involved with the promotions side, there is one factor that they would not be aware of: more than 50 percent of those who signed up for *Academia Cristo*'s training program did not do so as a result of receiving a targeted sign-up promotion. They were simply visiting academiacristo.com, saw the sign-up invite on the homepage, and filled it out. It appears this is impacting both participation ratio and the long waiting lists.

Phase 3: Active Students Who Have Completed At least Two Classes

The final phase of the project looked at those who have completed at least two courses in the *Academia Cristo en Vivo* training program. One hundred twenty-five students have completed at least two courses. Of the 232 who completed the original introductory course, 180 were people we met for the first time online.

A goal of the *Academia Cristo* training program is to connect potential church planters with mentors who regularly meet together. These mentors do not just mentor the student on church planting, but also seek to mentor the student to mentor other potential church planters. This creates a chain of disciples not dissimilar to the chain of disciples seen in the book of Acts.

Additionally, *Academia Cristo*'s courses are designed to be replicable. In other words, students in the *Academia Cristo* program learn a course they can share with others and learn a simple mentoring style they can use with those they themselves train as they strive to multiply churches.

Of the 125 who have completed at least two courses, 21have made it into the church multiplication mentoring program, which was formally launched in October 2017. At least four of those 21 are actively mentoring others. At least two of the four actively mentoring others have mentorees who are themselves training and mentoring more church multiplication leaders.

Here is one example: I am mentoring Henry who, among others, is training and mentoring Jackson, who is training and mentoring Jony, Egar and Isaías. Jony and Egar are training and mentoring two others. I know Henry well and meet with him regularly. I have met Jackson. Henry knows Jackson well and they meet regularly. Next month he will be traveling with Jackson to meet Jony, Egar and Isaías.

Keep in mind Jony, Egar and Isaías are not counted among the *Academia Cristo* students because they are not formally being trained in the program. This brought up the issue of quality control. *Academia Cristo* needs to develop standards for "franchising" *Academia Cristo* training programs and certify *Academia Cristo* teachers. It was determined that any student who successfully completes the *Academia Cristo* training program will be eligible to be certified as an *Academia Cristo* teacher and start their own *Academia Cristo* training school that uses the materials developed by *Academia Cristo*. More work needs to be done in this area. A goal was set to develop and lay out the plan by June 2019.

An additional fact we learned during this study of *Academia Cristo* students who have successfully completed at least two courses is that 40 of the 125 students who have completed at least two courses were identified as strong prospects and received at least one face-to-face visit.

Part Two: Lessons Learned and Future Steps

The final section of this chapter is divided into four parts to coincide with the four objectives stated at the beginning of the project. The next sections begin by listing the objective. Then an evaluation of each objective is given.

Objective One: Determine whether *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook efforts resulted in an increase of potential church planters compared to historical methods used by WELS missionaries in Latin America.

Yes, there was an increase in recruiting potential church planters when paid Facebook promotions targeting potential church planters were utilized. While this conclusion was expected, there was real value in exploring the increase. The second objective will explore additional benefits of utilizing social media and specifically paid Facebook promotions to recruit potential church planters. This first section will focus on the increased recruitment itself.

In 2016 I carried out a systematic analysis of the WELS missionary led national called worker program in Mexico. The analysis focused on the years 1964 through 2016, during which time the program was active.[26]

The analysis strove to answer this question: How effective was the WELS led seminary training program in Mexico? For the sake of simplicity, three yes or no questions were developed. Question one: Did the individual who entered the seminary program complete the training program as developed for him?[27] Question two: Did the individual serve at least five years in the public ministry after completing the training program? Question three: Did the individual leave the ministry for cause or doctrine after graduation?

A total of 34 men studied in the worker training program between 1964 and 2016. The following figure summarizes the results:

Figure 14. Men in Mexican Worker Training Program

	Began worker training program	Completed training	Served for at least 5 years <u>after</u> completing training[28]	Did not leave for cause or doctrine after graduation[29]
1964-1993	9	7	7	5
1993-2016	25	11	6 (+2 not yet)	3 (+4 still active)

It is important to keep in mind the above analysis focused solely on Mexico. In addition to Mexico, WELS world missionaries have been actively involved in four other Spanish speaking Latin American countries: Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Colombia. Following

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[26] The analysis summary document is included as Appendix A.
[27] The exact training program changed over the years and was adapted to the specific needs of the student. Some went through more of a colloquy program. The point is to simply answer the question did the individual complete the program of study that he was asked to complete?
[28] The number below reflects only those who completed their training.
[29] The number below reflects only those who completed their training.

the assumption laid out in chapter four, that these places had relatively similar experiences, we

might extrapolate the above figures by five to reflect the total number of countries:[30]

Figure 15. Estimated Latin American Worker Training Program

	Began worker training program	Completed training	Served for at least 5 years _after_ completing training[31]	Did not leave for cause or doctrine after graduation[32]
Estimated totals in six Latin American countries where WELS was active	170	90	75	60

Compare those numbers to the early results of _Academia Cristo_'s training program:

Figure 16. Early Results Academia Cristo Training Program

	Signed up	Participated in Introductory course	Completed Introductory course	Completed at least two courses	Received face-to-face visit
Between April 2016 and March 2018	5,845	797	232	125*	40

It is clear that more people are being recruited for church planting through _Academia_

Cristo's online training program than were ever recruited via previous methods. In this project,

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[30] According to WELS annual statistical reports, the Mexico mission effort was regularly the _largest_ WELS mission effort in Latin America. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the numbers in the above graph probably overstate the reality. However, for the purposes of this study it was not necessary to pour over decades of statistics and interviews. The point is clear.

[31] The number below reflects only those who completed their training.

[32] The number below reflects only those who completed their training.

the number of people who signed up for the introductory course increased 34 times when a targeted promotion was used. Additionally, analysis of the targeted promotion in test number two revealed that while only 28.7 percent of the total promotions cost during the test was spent on the targeted ad which accounted for only 7 percent of the total reach during the test, 90.3 percent of the sign-ups during the test came through the targeted promotions. In other words, many more potential church planters are being recruited through the targeted ads.

A potential criticism of the *Academia Cristo* program is that it does not provide seminary level training. This is true. *Academia Cristo* has a purpose similar to Luther's original purpose for developing his small and large catechisms. When Luther visited rural churches in Saxony he discovered church leaders lacked an understanding of the most basic Christian truths. This led Luther to develop his catechism. *Academia Cristo* is not meant to be a seminary. However, it is a first step toward finding more and higher qualified students for seminary level training. While most future *Academia Cristo* graduates will not necessarily continue with seminary level education, some will benefit from and desire this opportunity. For this reason, WELS missionaries need to begin the development of a University of Phoenix styled Spanish Language Confessional Lutheran seminary. Graduation from the *Academia Cristo* training program will be a prerequisite. The seminary needs to be styled after a University of Phoenix training model since its students will be scattered and active in ministry. (The University of Phoenix targets working business people looking to improve.)

Confessional Lutherans understandably place a high degree of importance on a church having well-trained church leaders. Review chapter two for more on this. Not all church planters require a seminary level training. Most church planters in the early Christian church were not the apostles, bishops and elders. However, a church will benefit from some of its leaders being

highly qualified. I believe those future highly qualified leaders will benefit from having gone through a two-year intensive church planter training program prior to entering the seminary.

Objective Two: Define what, if any, the increased benefit was

The previous section focused on the increase in recruitment and made a quick glimpse into the future. This second objective seeks to define whether there were other benefits from using the social media and targeted Facebook promotions as a way to recruit potential church planters. Three benefits were identified:

1) We are becoming known.

I can remember getting excited during my first years in Mexico City when more than a hundred people signed up for free English classes at the church after we handed out a few thousand fliers at a nearby metro stop. We attempted to advertise on a billboard a block from the church along one of the main arteries in the city, but the project became too big and too complicated. It was never completed.

People with a yearning to participate in the great commission want to become known so their message is well-known and heard by many. Facebook posts are simple to make and can reach more people in a day than we reached in a year in Mexico City.

While Facebook posts are not very personal, neither are handing out fliers at a metro stop, putting up billboards or advertising on radio and television. In June 2018 *Academia Cristo* free Bible resources were downloaded nearly 6,000 times in 30 different countries.[33] During the

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[33] Between the dates June 1-30, 2018. Statistics from *Academia Cristo*'s Vimeo page where videos are stored.

same time period more than 900 people from 16 countries signed up for *Academia Cristo*'s

introductory church planting course.[34] *Academia Cristo*'s Bible resources are frequently being

used by local television and radio stations in Latin America. In fact, Facebook itself has

recognized *Academia Cristo*, assigning our account to a Facebook marketing specialist who

provides us with personal and individualized service and training. Becoming known is a long-

term goal, but clear steps are being made in that direction. A key issue to consider for the future

is what will we be known for? It is important *Academia Cristo* continue to strive to be known as

an organization that is focused on *sola scriptura* and quality practical training.

2) We are reaching more places

By utilizing social media and everyday communication technologies, *Academia Cristo* is

becoming known on a regional level. In 2000 WELS had more than 15 missionaries working

fulltime in seven Latin American countries. While those missionaries worked hard, and God used

them to positively impact the lives of people with whom they came into contact, Confessional

Lutheran missionaries struggled with the issue of anonymity. By focusing on social media and

other everyday means of communication common in Latin America, *Academia Cristo* has been

able to get into the hands and homes of countless more people than previously imagined.

Previously mentioned tests demonstrate this reality.

3) More people are involved in Word ministry

The WELS World Missions program tracks nine key numbers they identified as "Healthy

Church Characteristics."[35] One of those key characteristics is "Confirmed Members leading Word

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[34] Between dates June 1-30, 2018. Statistics are from *Academia Cristo*'s Google Sheets sign-up files.
[35] The nine "Healthy Church Characteristics" tracked by WELS World Missions are:
1) Adult Word Contacts (How many adults gathered to hear the word in Bible studies, worship or other gatherings)
2) Children Word contacts (How many children gathered to hear the word in Bible studies, worship, or

Ministry." WELS World Missions explains this as the number of communicant members participating in the Gospel ministry of teaching or proclaiming to others. This should include visitors to the sick, homebound, institutions, etc., teachers of both young and old and any other form of proclaiming ministry.

Simply put, *Academia Cristo* is providing more people with the opportunity to serve in Word ministry activities. There are currently 65 "communicant members" actively participating in Word ministry via *Academia Cristo* by either teaching, creating and developing Bible resources, sharing their faith via social media or by creating social media Word-based materials. This number does not include people doing non-Word-based ministries. Nor does it include fulltime WELS missionaries and employees.

In my opinion, there are a couple of reasons for this. First, we are using everyday communication technologies. It is relatively simple to recruit Christians to help with *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page since so many use Facebook. We have merely looked for members of our churches who are active on the social media tools we wish to use. They like the tool and are already using it. They are typically excited to be asked to use something they enjoy for the benefit of God's kingdom.

A benefit particular to using paid Facebook promotions is reflected in the tests that were carried out. While *Academia Cristo* now has a built-in promotions budget, you do not need a lot of funds to get started. Promotions that cost less than $100 have a positive impact. Neither is it necessary to use a professional online marketer. *Academia Cristo*'s promotions team leader

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other gatherings)
3) Communion attendance; 4) Baptisms; 5) Confirmations; 6) 1st time visitors
7) Members leading Word ministry 8) Offerings gathered 9) Total of outside subsidy (Under normal circumstances, this one is healthy when avoided or reduced).

is a nurse by training. However, she is also a naturally gifted promoter. Her family always joked she should sell used cars. In my interview with her she spoke highly of Facebook Blueprint which offers free online training for advertising on Facebook. This resource is beneficial for church organizations that are often not blessed with a professional marketer in their midst but do probably have a couple of people who are naturally gifted promoters and encouragers.

Objective Three: Determine what issues are faced when recruiting church planters via social media promotions.

This project identified six key issues *Academia Cristo* faces as a result of recruiting church planters via social media promotions. They are as follows:

1) Many more people are signing up than we are set up to handle. These sign-ups happen without our promotions, but simply due to the website traffic level.

2) A result of the large number of sign-ups is that there is a long waiting list. It is taking too long to get a person started in a course after enrolling. While Latin American cultures are typically more patient and accustomed to waiting than Americans, these long waiting times have the danger of causing negative feedback, frustration and increased drop-out rates.

3) A lot of people drop out. In many ways, this is understandable and expected. It takes very little effort to watch a 30 second video, tap your phone's screen a few times and fill out a simple form. Actively participating and successfully completing a course is a much larger commitment that requires considerable effort.

4) The *Heme aquí* course seems to be doing a fairly good job of weeding through the many to find the few. However, it takes a sizeable amount of time for missionaries and

teachers to carry out the process of identifying a few people who should be invited into *Academia Cristo*'s training program after having completed the introductory course.

5) Are we missing people? Are we targeting the right people? We have gone through a learning curve in this area. The importance of clearly defining your target group became crystal clear. One result was that *Academia Cristo*'s team decided to develop a "personas" document.[36] Personas are fictional characters created based on our research that represent the type of people we wish to target. This personas document has been given to *Academia Cristo* promotions. Changes are being made, but there will also be challenges along the way. In my interview with the promotions team leader, she reflected on the challenge of targeting people with some of the characteristics that we describe in the personas document such as "they are searching for the truth and biblical teaching." It appears Facebook algorithms are not structured to easily enable us to find those we are looking for. More work and experimenting will need to be done in this area.

6) Chapter one twice mentioned *Academia Cristo* exists to teach anyone anywhere how to share Jesus with Spanish speakers. While this is an admirable goal, is it too broad? Is it leading us to initially allow people to sign up for the Heme Aquí introductory course that we don't really want to focus our time on? It appears so. Steps need to be taken to separate the paths of those who only wish to learn how to share Jesus with those who desire to plant biblical churches. Two potential solutions to this issue will be developed in the final section.

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[36] See Appendix C for the Personas document.

Objective Four: Recommend steps to consider improving future church planter recruitment efforts.

This final section looks at four steps that could potentially improve future *Academia Cristo* church planter recruitment efforts.

1)   Consider removing the sign-up buttons from the home page.

Right now, Academiacristo.com's home page looks like this:

Figure 17. Academia Cristo Homepage
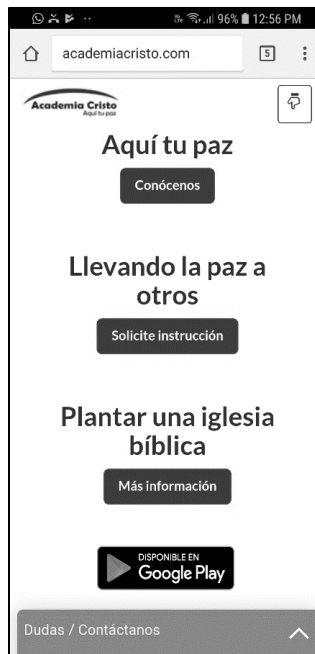
While the page appears attractive and well-designed for smartphone users, perhaps it is creating an unnecessary problem. Look at the middle and bottom button. Above the middle button it reads *Llevando la paz a otros* (Bringing peace to others). Above the bottom button it reads, *Plantar una iglesia bíblica* (Plant a biblical church). By clicking on one of these two buttons, people can quickly sign up for *Academia Cristo*'s introductory course: *Heme aquí* (Here I Am). Our primary target is potential church planters. Too many people outside of our primary

target group are signing up for classes because they saw our homepage while visiting the

website for another reason. Having a clear invitation to sign up for a church planting course on

the home page is a good way to be known as a place that trains church planters. There is a

danger of losing our focus because too many people sign up who are outside of our target.

Could the sign-up pages be moved to simple landing pages? It is possible to make it impossible

or difficult to find the sign-up page. People could only sign up if they received an invite. This

might help us in the short term while we work to develop a means that enables both people

simply interested in learning how to share Jesus as well as potential church planters to begin

their paths of learning without taking up too much missionary and teacher time.

2)   Consider creating cheaper ads.

Surprisingly, the tests revealed that ads which cost less than $100 appeared to have a

greater impact than those which exceed $100. This potential reality should be further explored

and tested. It may be cost effective to run more, short cheap ads rather than longer, pricier

ones.

3)   The importance of using Android apps.

As previously shown, Android apps are an everyday communication technology in Latin

America. This is due to the explosion of Android smartphones. What became apparent in this

research project is how much *Academia Cristo* relies on apps. Most people first come into

contact with *Academia Cristo* via the Facebook app on their phone. When people sign up for

classes, they are contacted via the WhatsApp app. *Academia Cristo* teachers discovered

students prefer using YouTube to watch class videos rather than Vimeo. We use Vimeo because

it allows the user to legally download the video for use offline. However, we now host videos on

both YouTube and Vimeo. The reason students appear to prefer YouTube is because they have a

YouTube app on their phone. (Most do not have the Vimeo app on their phone.) Classes are taught via the Zoom app, and recordings of the classes are shared again via the YouTube app.

Reliance on web browsers and email do not appear to be as effective in Latin America as they are in the United States. I believe this is because of the widespread use of laptops and high-end smartphones in the States. The majority of people in Latin America use cheaper model smartphones.

4) The need for an *Academia Cristo* school app.

This brings us to the final step to consider as *Academia Cristo* moves into the future. As mentioned at the end of chapter four *Academia Cristo* dipped its toes into the waters of app development when it released its initial app earlier this year. That app targets leaders. What is needed is another app that can be used by students, enabling us to do the following:

a) We need to be able to more easily separate the two paths: those interested in studying God's Word for personal benefit and those interested in church planting

b) We need to spend less time filtering through thousands of sign-ups. Keep in mind, we're getting better at targeting people, so we could easily increase sign-ups. We're holding back right now because we are not currently equipped to handle such large numbers.

c) Apps work well is Latin America because of the typical user's reliance on middle to low range smartphones.

d) Facebook allows us to advertise our app on our Facebook page. Early testing of the *Academia Cristo* beta version of the leader app was extremely positive.

e) At the end of chapter one, I highlighted the reality that so far, no Learning Management System (LMS) has been identified that truly meets the needs of developing nations – one that is not dependent on email and prioritizes smartphone use over laptop use.

Learning Management Systems have developed apps, but they are still focused primarily for laptops. There appears to be an opportunity here to develop an app that serves as a LMS for Christian organizations focused on Gospel work in developing nations.

What follows is a brief description of what this app might look like. Keep in mind, it would be available in multiple languages, similar to the YouVersion Bible app or other multilingual apps.

Academia Cristo School Android App

1) The app can be downloaded from Google Play

2) When the app is opened, the user will need to log in via their Facebook or Google account.[37]

3) After logging in for the first time, the user will take a relatively short placement test.[38]

4) Based on the answers of the placement study program will be recommended.

The courses on the app must meet the following criteria.

1) Each course is no more than 10 lessons long.

2) Each lesson contains: a video that is less than eight minutes long and a multiple-choice review test.

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[37] It is essential that we be able to see which courses each user has completed. The ability to track completed courses will enable us to determine who is invited to continue to study in the program after completed the automated classes on the app.

[38] Each student will answer between 10-15 questions. However, their answer will determine what the next question will be. We would have to find a theologian, an evangelist, a person who understands these types of tests and a programmer who can do it in order to develop the placement test. Those four would work together with us to develop the questionnaire.

Similarly, it is essential that we be able to see the users answers to their placement tests.

3) Courses need to have the option to turning in a project at the end of the course.

   Projects need to be able to be completed with a smartphone. [39]

4) Ideally, courses could have an additional resource material. However, links to that

   material might need to take the student out of the app.

5) Each course has been reviewed and approved by the app owner.

Other considerations

1) The app needs to be light and not take up too much space on the phone.[40]

2) Any course developed by <u>anyone</u> that meets the above criteria can be added to the app.

3) The app is available in an ever-growing number of languages.[41]

4) The app will be promoted via social media. It supports a broader ministry but is focused

   on finding and training potential church planters.

This app would be promoted by *Academia Cristo*. Anyone could download it and sign up.

The person who downloads the app will answer a relatively simple placement test. Based on

their answers, a course will be recommended. This is how we can separate paths. Potential

church planters will be encouraged to take four self-study courses. Those who successfully

complete those courses can then be connected to a personal teacher and enrolled in the

Academia Cristo church planting program.

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[39] I would suggest that WhatsApp Business might be how the project is turned in. Both the videos and the review tests could explain the project and inform the student how to submit the project.

[40] See Khan Academy's app which appears to have accomplished this well. Users will require an internet connection to really use the app, but it is not a mobile app. It <u>must</u> be downloadable from Google play or we won't be able to promote it via social media.
[41] We will need to investigate how other multi-language apps accomplish this. (See Facebook, Khan, YouVersion, etc.).

Summary

In December 2013 a group of seven Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) missionaries determined to take a new direction in their Latin American mission efforts. I wish I could say we entered that meeting with a clear plan to maximize everyday communication technologies to reach and train as many people as possible. We did not. We simply were guided by our conviction that Jesus is real and so is hell. We have something wonderful to share. God led us down the path of using everyday communication technologies to facilitate a fledgling church planting movement.

We are not the first people to be led down this path. From the Apostle Paul to Luther to Scottish Christians and German Lutheran immigrants, history is filled with people who were blessed as they made use of the communication technologies available to them. Our commission is a communication assignment. As church planters, let us strive to maximize the everyday communication tools available to us. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Appendix A[1]

2016 Analysis of the National Called Worker Program in Mexico[2]

WELS mission work in Mexico can trace its roots back to 1964 when Pastor David Orea Luna sought out the WELS for confessional reasons. Mission work in Mexico can be divided into two periods with 1993 serving as the hinge. Prior to 1993, WELS missionaries to Mexico worked out of El Paso, Texas, making periodic visits to instruct national leaders and counsel congregations. This was done because Mexican law did not allow residency to foreign missionaries. When the law changed in the early 1990s, missionaries Ernest Zimdars and Larry Schlomer moved to the city of Monterrey as the first WELS resident missionaries in the country.[3]

The following analysis attempts to answer this question: How effective was the seminary training program in Mexico? An in-depth study of educational effectiveness goes beyond the scope of this paper. For the sake of simplicity, three questions were developed. They can be answered either yes or no and help determine effectiveness. Question one: Did the individual who entered the seminary program complete the training program as developed for him?[4] Question two: Did the individual serve at least five years in the public ministry after completing the training program? Question three: Did the individual leave the ministry for cause or doctrine after graduation?

A total of 34 men studied in the worker training program between 1964 and 2016. The following graph summarizes the results.

Figure 18. Worker Training Program

	Began worker training program	Completed training	Served for at least 5 years after completing training[5]	Did not leave for cause or doctrine after graduation[6]
1964-1993	9	7	7	5
1993-2016	25	11	6 (+2 not yet)	3 (+4 still active)

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[1] The appendix is referenced in Chapter five, part 2 "Lessons Learned and Future Steps."

[2] This systematic analysis was carried out in 2016 in partial fulfillment of a research paper assigned at the end of the second cohort.

[3] Accessed August 30, 2016, https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/latin-america/mexico/history/.

[4] The exact training program changed over the years and was adapted to the particular needs of the student. Some went through more of a colloquy program. The point is to simply answer the question did the individual complete the program of study that he was asked to complete?

[5] The below number reflects only those who completed their training.

[6] The below number reflects only those who completed their training.

The point of the three questions is to keep our primary goal in front of us. We want to train people well who are going to make a positive impact on the church.

Key External Factor

Any investigation that explores a period of more than 50 years is going to be impacted by external factors. In this case study, a key factor involves outside forms of financial subsidy. This paper will not explore all the negatives and realities of subsidizing ministry. I will merely say I believe Garrison's description of subsidy for church buildings and pastors' salaries as *The Devil's Candy* is right on.[7]

Interestingly, this analysis revealed all 18 of those who completed the training program outlined for them received some sort of outside financial support after completing their training. Before 1993, two had their outside support eliminated, which was due to a lack of service. Since 1993, two local leaders had outside financial support eliminated. Both are still actively serving.

Comparison to WELS Seminary Program

In an attempt to determine effectiveness, a comparison was done between the Mexican and traditional WELS pastoral training programs[8]. The traditional WELS pastoral training program lasts eight years. It includes four years of college in the pastor track and four years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. I decided to use a random sample of 10 years. I picked students that entered the pastor track during the 1990s. One reason I chose this timeframe is because I was in the WELS worker training system at that time. I remember church leaders regularly talking about a pastoral shortage during those years. My thought is that they wanted us to finish the program because there was a definite need. In Latin America a need for nationals in worker training programs has also always been stressed.

Up until 1995 Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin served as the WELS' pastoral training college. In 1995 the pastoral training program relocated to Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. Nearly all graduates from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary went through this program.

Between the years 1990 and 1999, 662 men began studies in the freshman year of the college pastor track program. Three hundred seventy-six of them graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. This means 56.8 percent of those who began the program finished it. That compares to a completion rate of 52.9 percent in Mexico.

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[7] Garrison, Kindle Location 3864.
[8] It did not look at either the Staff Minister or Pastoral Studies Institute programs.

Unfortunately, the WELS does not keep statistics on how many of those 376 graduates served at least five years in the public ministry after finishing their training, and how many of them left for cause or doctrine. I was able to ascertain the following information.[9]

Figure 19. WELS Graduates and Resignations

	Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Graduates	WELS Pastoral Resignations
1970s	505	41
1980s	539	127
1990s	405	200
2000s	406	176

While exact answers to the second two numbers cannot be determined from this graph, it does demonstrate the WELS pastor resignation to graduation rate is not insignificant.

Seven Takeaways from the Systematic Analysis

1) Do not get overly caught up on the high dropout rate. Other programs have similar dropout rates. It can simply reflect high standards. Do, however, focus on the need to develop spiritually mature leaders both during and after graduation.

2) "We were instructing too much, too soon. It was too top down. We were training pastors, but we had no congregations," says Paul Hartman, former WELS missionary to Mexico.[10] A number of different Bible institute level and lay level training programs were initiated through the years, but they did not appear to be given high priority. Opportunities were missed to get more faithful lay members involved in ministry. One reason for this was no doubt the impact of the Latino cultural view of clergy due to the influence of the Catholic church. Another factor appears to have been WELS missionaries simply replicating the training they received.

3) Ten times the number of students could have been taught during the same time period without seriously impacting the amount of resources needed. A large amount of time and effort were spent teaching very small classes.

4) Laying the initial foundation is the hardest part of any project. Previous missionaries often started with almost nothing. We benefit from what they worked hard to develop.

5) It is okay to have a high dropout rate if it means we are striving to maintain a high-quality training program that prioritizes faithfulness to Scripture. However, "one of our weaknesses was getting guys into the seminary too quickly without having a good chance to evaluate their motives."[11] As we look at ways to improve the screening process, we also want to increase the pool of potential leaders. One way to do this could be to develop a basic training program that empowers people to start churches. Some

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[9] Richard Gurgel, email message to author, September 1, 2016.
[10] Paul Hartman, phone interview, June 26, 2016.
[11] Larry W. Schlomer, phone interview, June 27, 2016.

of those who do so successfully could be invited into a full seminary training program. We should not expect an easy solution.

6) If you train too quickly you can end up with pastors such as those Parro describes who don't know the basics. If you do thorough training, it can take years. "Martin Teigen wrote in a 1990 paper for the Lima conference that it became evident to the staff on the field that it would take 20 years to finish the Theological Education by Extension curriculum as adapted by the mission."[12] If you use subsidy to speed up training, you fall into the trap of the *Devil's Candy*. Beware of easy solutions. "Every type of seminary has its advantages and disadvantages."[13]

7) Don't be overly critical of those who came before you. We are not always aware of all the issues they faced. David Haeuser talked about how Maoist guerillas and runaway inflation impacted the Peruvian seminary program.[14] Multiple kidnapping attempts, geography, isolation and laws that created obstacles for foreign missionaries all impacted worker training in Mexico.

I believe the former missionaries I spoke with during this study were too hard on themselves. We can always learn from the past as we look forward. Quality local leaders were trained. The key challenge was the low quantity of leaders who were trained. Recognizing that laying the first stones is hard work, can we increase the quantity of leaders we train while at the same time increasing the quality of leader candidates? That is the goal *Academia Cristo* seeks to accomplish.

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[12] Haeuser, 6.

[13] Haeuser, phone interview, June 24, 2016.

[14] Haeuser, phone interview, June 24, 2016.

Appendix B[1]

Sample Facebook promotional post that targets potential church planters.

What follows is the Facebook post that was used to target potential male church

planters who live within a 10-mile radius of Asunción, Paraguay.

The actual post can be seen at this link: https://fb.me/1H4vrzpxXbCVah1 [2] Here is a

screenshot of the promotion:

Figure 20. Academia Cristo Facebook Promotion

The post consists of both text and video. The video has a music only background. This is because videos on Facebook are often read and not listened to. The shots on the screen proceed as follows.

Figure 21. Video Script

Video		
Time (in seconds)	Scene	Text
1-4	Standard *Academia Cristo* opening with logo	*Academia Cristo presenta*[3]
5-9	Shot of person holding a smart phone. The phone is open to Academiacristo.com The phone zooms in on the screen and highlights the button at the bottom of the home screen which reads as follows in the text column.	*Plantar una iglesia Bíblica*[4]
10-14	Man rubs his chin thinking. A thought bubble pops up that contains the text in the text column.	*¿Cómo se hace?*[5]
15-19	A still image appears. People are gathered around a table with their heads bowed and hands folded in prayer. Open Bibles are visible on the table. A large red text drops down into view that reads according to the text column	*Así*[6]
19-21	A white background appears. The following word drops into view. (See text column)	*Vaya…*[7]
21-26	The white background continues. The word "vaya" disappears and the following words appear. (See text column)	*Nosotros te capacitaremos*[8]
26-29	The video concludes with the web address appearing on the white background	Academiacristo.com

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[3] Translation: *Academia Cristo* presents.
[4] Translation: Plant a Biblical church.
[5] Translation: How's it done?
[6] Translation: Like this.
[7] Translation: Go…
[8] Translation: We will train you.

Above the video, the Facebook post text reads as follows: *"Vayan y hagan discípulos de todas las naciones." Academia Cristo existe para capacitar a personas que desean cumplir con esta misión, entrenándolos para abrir una iglesia bíblica. Haz clic aquí para comenzar:* http://bit.ly//2eDvHjl [9]

Below the video are the words "*Academia Cristo*" and a button that says, "sign up". A person viewing the video can click on either the hyperlink in the post text or the sign-up button. Either action will take the person to an academiacristo.com landing page where they can find out more information and sign up for the *Academia Cristo en Vivo* introductory course.

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[9] Translation: "Go and make disciples of all nations." *Academia Cristo* exists to train people who desire to fulfill this mission, training them to open a biblical church. Click here to begin: http://bit.ly/2eDvHjl .

Personas for Academia Cristo

The following people are our main targets when we are planning, designing, praying, and working on our outreach using *Academia Cristo*. Of course, we want to reach everyone, but if we try to target everyone, we will dilute our ability to reach people. These personas are meant to make us wrestle with what our main priorities are and discuss the best way to reach them.

<u>In short, these are the people we are designing our promotions and classes for</u>.

In a snapshot, these are the categories of the people we want to target for our Heme Aquí classes. The more categories they fill the better:

- A. They are searching for the truth and biblical teaching.
- B. They don't know their Bibles very well but want to know it better.
- C. They want to start little groups and churches.
- D. They live in cities.
- E. They are between 24-56 years old. (The Facebook category)
- F. They are men.
- G. They are generally less affiliated with religious organizations.

These personas feed into the Target Market on our 2018 VTO:

Target Market/ "The List":
1. Men who are not in fellowship, yet:
    a. Are vigorously committed to finding the Truth
    b. Have the desire and gifts to plant a church
    c. Are Locally recognized as leaders
2. Men who are in fellowship leading a church multiplication effort.

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[1] The personas document in Appendix C is referenced in chapter five, part two, objective three: Determine what issues are faced when recruiting church planters via social media promotions.

Figure 22. Luis Zambrano Sánchez

Luis Zambrano Sánchez[2]—Ecuador, 36 years old, married, and lives in Guayaquil, Ecuador. He is a gregarious man who drives truck for a living. He grew up in a poorer area of Guayaquil but does well financially. He married a friend of the family, Ana Lucía, when he was 27 and she was 21. They have two young children—Luis (6) and María Elena (3). Luis comes from a large family and most of them still live in the neighborhood where he grew up. His family as primarily Catholic although some of his cousins have joined a Pentecostal church which meets in a garage. Luis has visited their church a few times but hasn't really connected with it. It seems too distant to what he grew up with. Luis himself considers himself a Catholic who is searching to learn more.

Despite his pleasant personality Luis has been wrestling spiritually for years. He's searching for peace of mind and never seems to find it. He isn't quite well read in the Bible but has watched a few Christian movies (His favorite happens to be *Courageous*). His wife worries about him but is happy that he is not searching in the bottle. (Luis did drink more than his share in his twenties.) As his children grow up, Luis is beginning to realize that he needs to commit to something so that he can be a good model for them. He also has a heart for sharing what he knows with his neighbors, but his first priority is his family.

(6 out of 7—he hasn't jumped on board with church planting yet, although he does want to share with others.)

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[2] Image is licensed under Creative Commons GNU Free Documentation License.

Figure 23. Antonio Vázquez Cruz

Antonio Vásquez Cruz[3]—El Salvador, 43 years old, lives in Los Angeles, and works in an architecture firm. Antonio has lived in the United States for a number of years. He arrived when he was 18 and has only gone back to El Salvador about 6 times. (He usually pays for his mother to visit him.) He is completely bilingual which has helped him get promoted in his career. When he was 25, he married Elizabeth, who is a second generation American from Venezuela. They have three children—Jonathan (17), Jason (15), and Jackie (9). As in most American families, the family is quite busy with all their activities—both in school and recreational. He does maintain his Latino roots as most of his neighbors and close friends are Latinos and he finds himself most relaxed when he is in that environment. He is bothered that his kids don't know Spanish very well and kind of push against speaking it.

Although Antonio seems too busy to think about religion, he has been thinking about his spiritual life recently, especially since his father passed away a year and a half ago. Antonio still doesn't think he has found his new normal yet and thinks about his father often. In fact, his father was probably one of the more religious members of his family. Together with the tremors of teenage rebellion in his household, Antonio finds himself a little disoriented. Is he searching for something?

(5 out of 7—he is not at the church planting point and is a little older than our target.)

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[3] Image is licensed under Creative Commons GNU Free Documentation License.

Figure 24. Alejandro López González
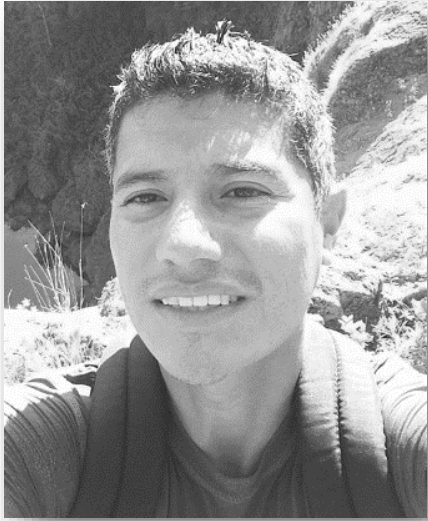
Alejandro López González[4] —Morelia, México, 39 years old, single, but well connected in the community. Alejandro is a born leader. He is charismatic, patient, and wise. He works for his uncle in a butcher shop and often strikes up conversations with the clients. He is well-known and liked in his neighborhood. In his 20s, Alejandro followed his wanderlust and hitch-hiked all through Mexico and parts of Central America. Adding this to his pleasant charisma, he often holds people captive in all his stories. He still likes to travel. He especially likes the outdoors. He recently posted on his Facebook page, "Nature is not a luxury, but a necessity for the human spirit, as vital as water and food."

Alejandro doesn't know his Bible very well, but he knows enough to string together some wise (although often skewed) insights about life which are (or sound) biblical. Because of this personality and biblically toned insights, his Pentecostal church put him in charge of a small group which meets regularly. He often wishes he knew how to prepare better for these studies because the group looks to him to lead them and answer their questions. He listens to some sermons on the Internet, but has never really committed to a specific course of study although he is open to anything that will help him in his learning endeavor.

(5 out of 7—he is part of his Pentecostal church and he doesn't live in a big city.)

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[4] Image is licensed under Creative Commons GNU Free Documentation License.

Figure 25. Adam Muñoz Rojas

Adam Muñoz Rojas[5] —Chile, 33 years old. Adam has lived in Santiago for his entire life and comes from a medium size family—actually he is the middle child of 5. He graduated from a local college and now works in Banco de Chile as a manager. He married Carolina 5 years ago and they have one daughter, Paola, who has just started school. Adam is looking forward to having a few more children and working his way up in his business. Although he lives in a transient community, he doesn't plan on moving out of Medan in the immediate future.

Adam's family attend a Pentecostal church in their neighborhood, but the pastor left a year and a half ago and the attendance has shrunk. A small group still meets semi-regularly and Adam has become the de facto leader of the group although, as he would quickly admit, he doesn't know how to be a pastor. The men in the group share the teaching responsibilities. If you would ask one of the members and even Adam himself what the future plan was for the group, they would respond that they only go week by week and sometimes look ahead a month or two. All the leaders of the group have the vague desire for more structure, plans, and especially some biblical training.

(7 out of 7)

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[5] Image is licensed under Creative Commons GNU Free Documentation License.

Detailed Charts and Graphs of Facebook Tests

Test One: June 21-23, 2018 – No social media posts or paid promotions

From June 21-23, 2018 no social media posts were made on the *Academia Cristo*

Facebook page. Neither were any paid promotions run during this time. Below are graphs

provided by Facebook Insights for the *Academia Cristo* Facebook page. They demonstrate the

drop in the number of people reached through Facebook when all posts were stopped.

The darker area shows how many people were reached through paid posts. The lighter

colored area shows how many people were reached through free Facebook posts. Facebook

reach refers to the number of unique people who saw the content of a particular Facebook post.

Figure 26. Organic Reach on June 21, 2018: 26,159
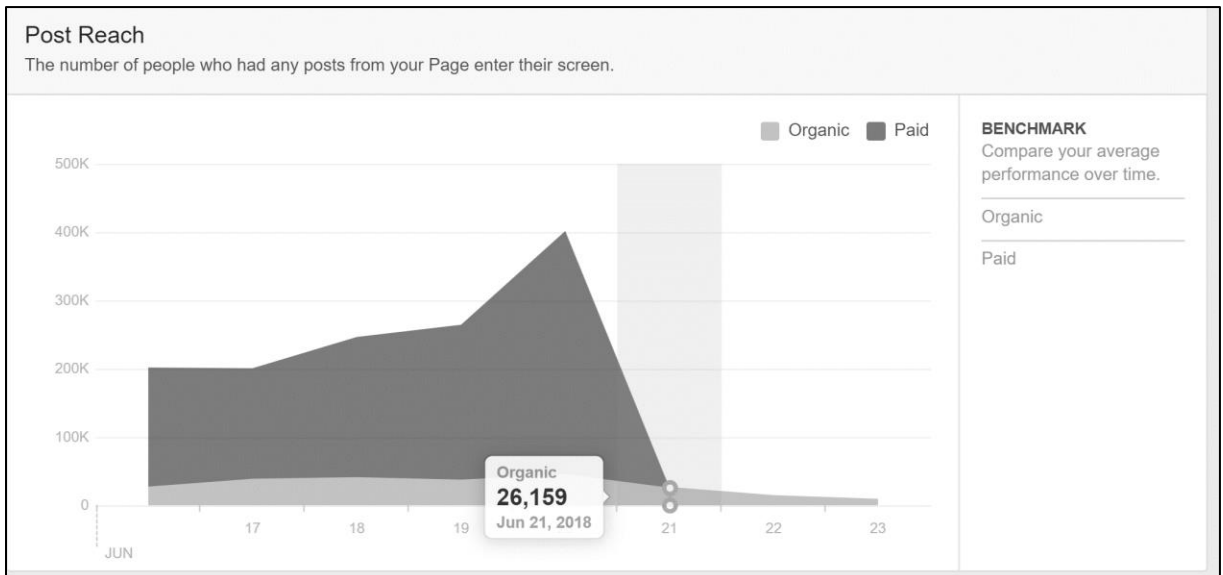
Figure 27. Organic Reach on June 22, 2018: 14,113
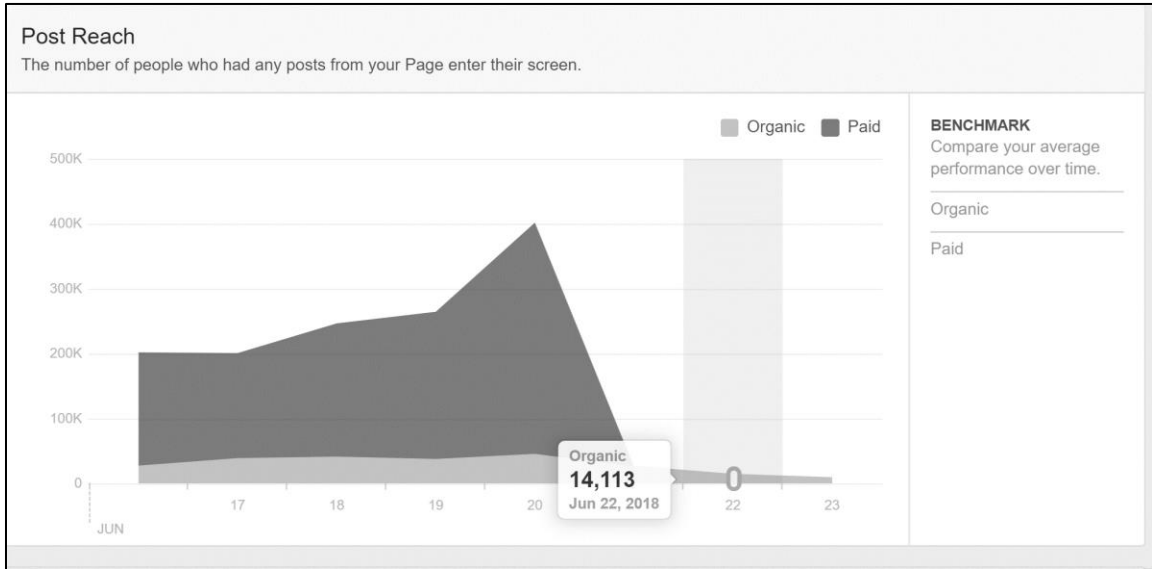
Figure 28. Organic Reach on June 23, 2018: 8,642
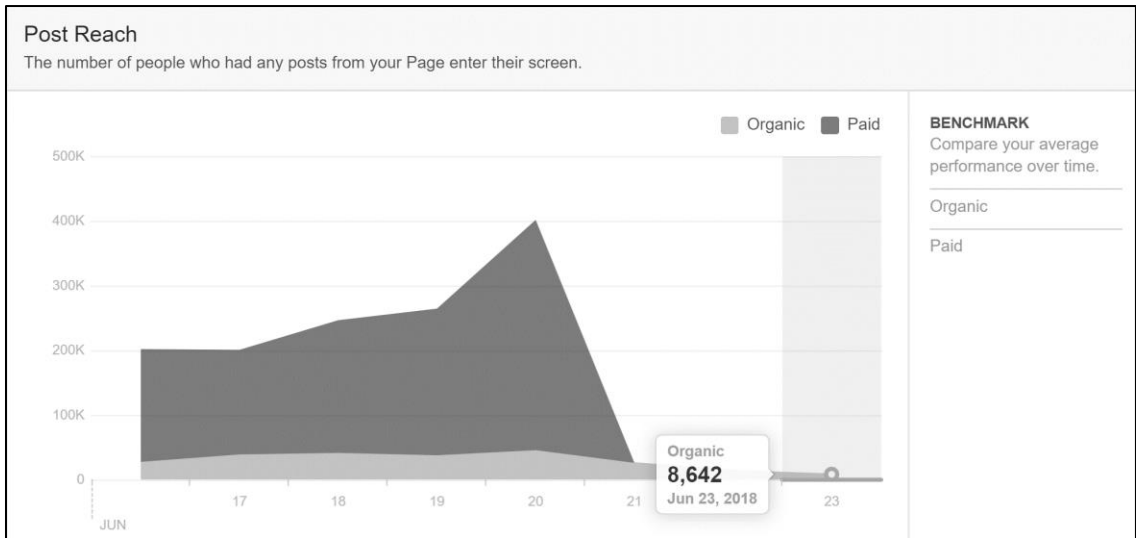
The column on the left in the below screen shot demonstrates there were no Facebook posts June 21-23, 2018.

Figure 29. No Facebook Posts June 21-23, 2018

Test Two: February 28 – March 2, 2018 - Facebook Posts and Targeted Promotions

The February 28 to March 2, 2018 dates were chosen for the second test because they met the criteria of a three-day period when free Facebook posts, general promotions and a targeted Facebook ad motivating potential church planters to sign-up for the training program were all active.

The following screen shots show the Facebook reach during these three days.

Figure 30. Organic Reach on February 28, 2018: 59,744
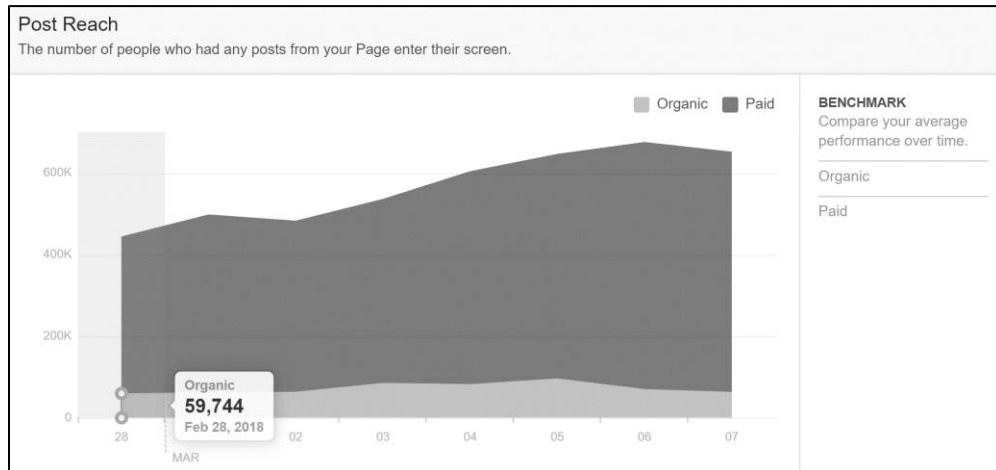
Figure 31. Paid Reach on February 28, 2018: 384,379
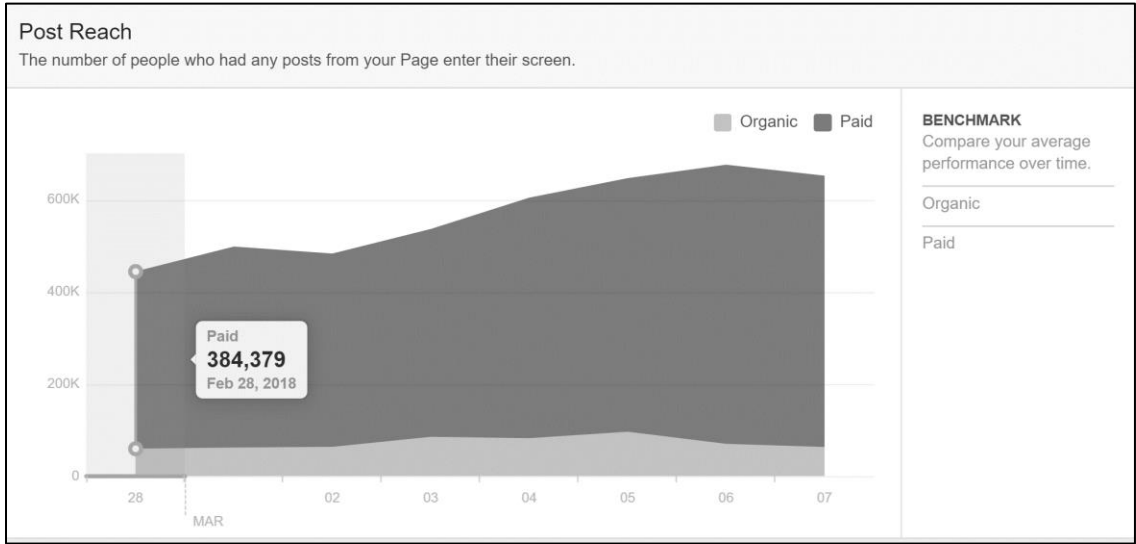
Figure 32. Organic Reach on March 1, 2018: 62,181
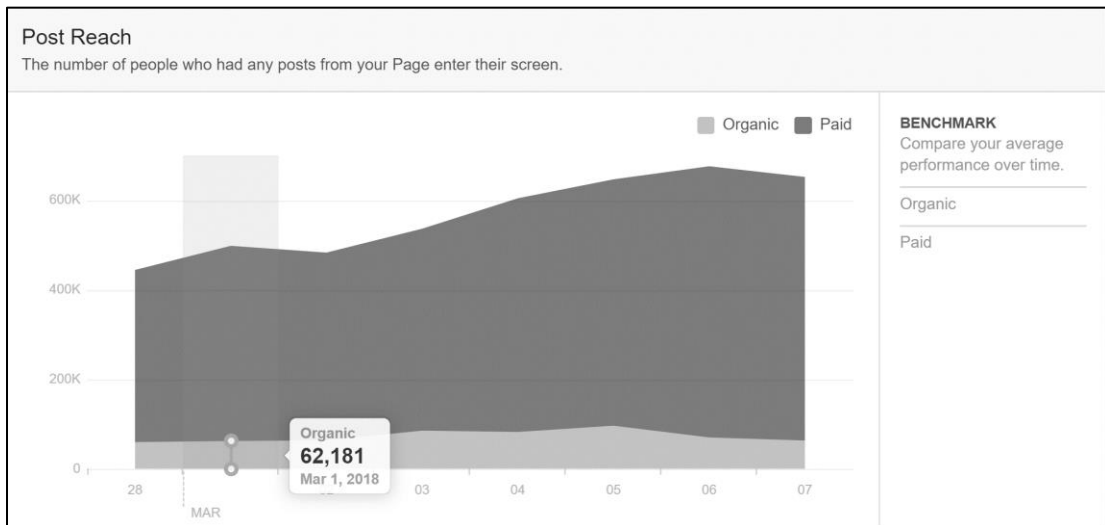
Figure 33. Paid Reach on March 1, 2018: 435,813
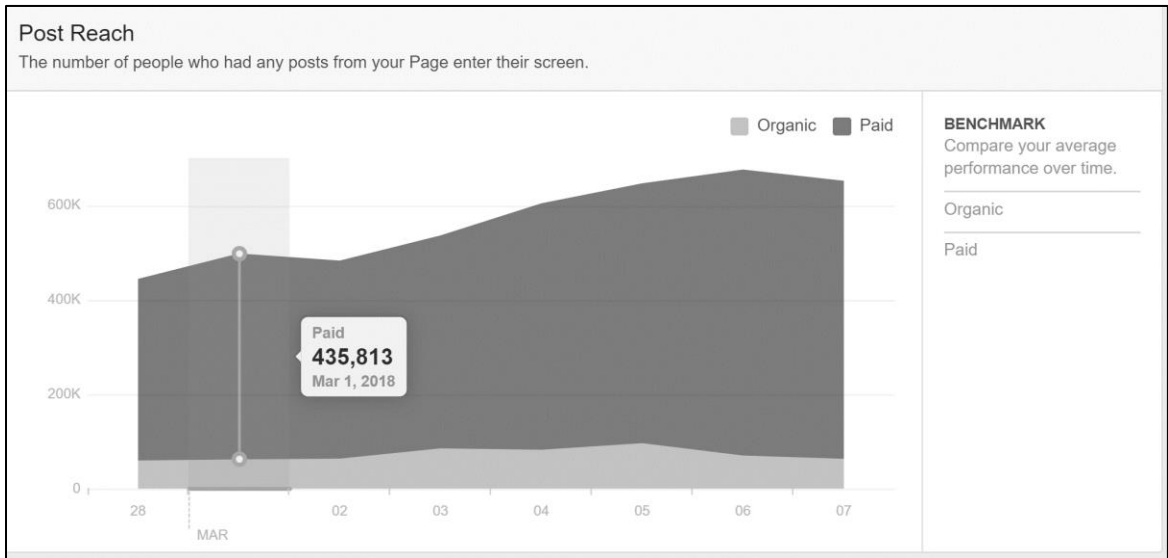
Figure 34. Organic Reach on March 2, 2018: 63,673
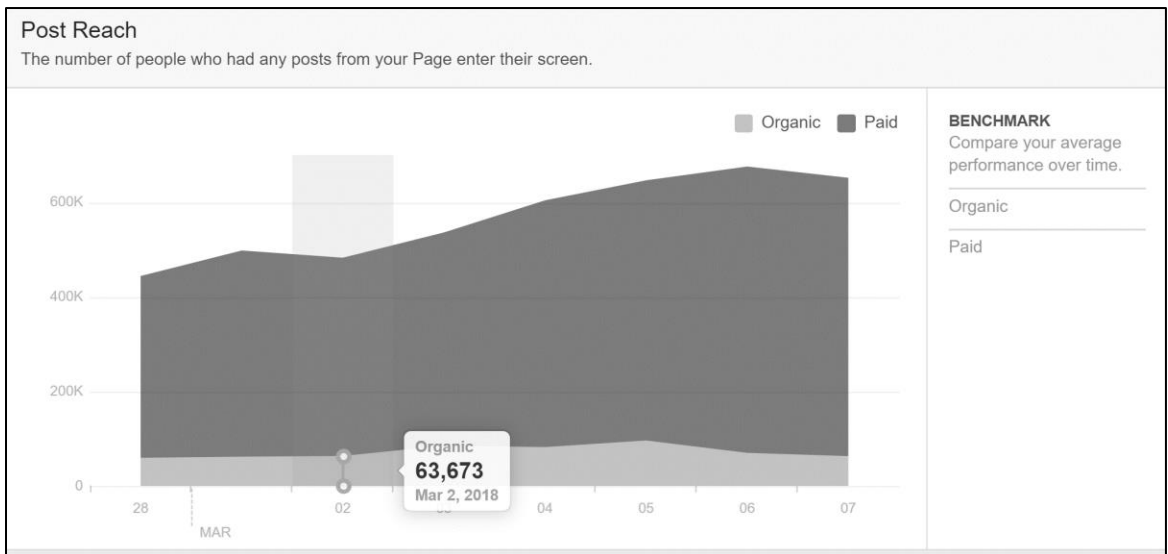
Figure 35. Paid Reach on March 2, 2018: 419,159
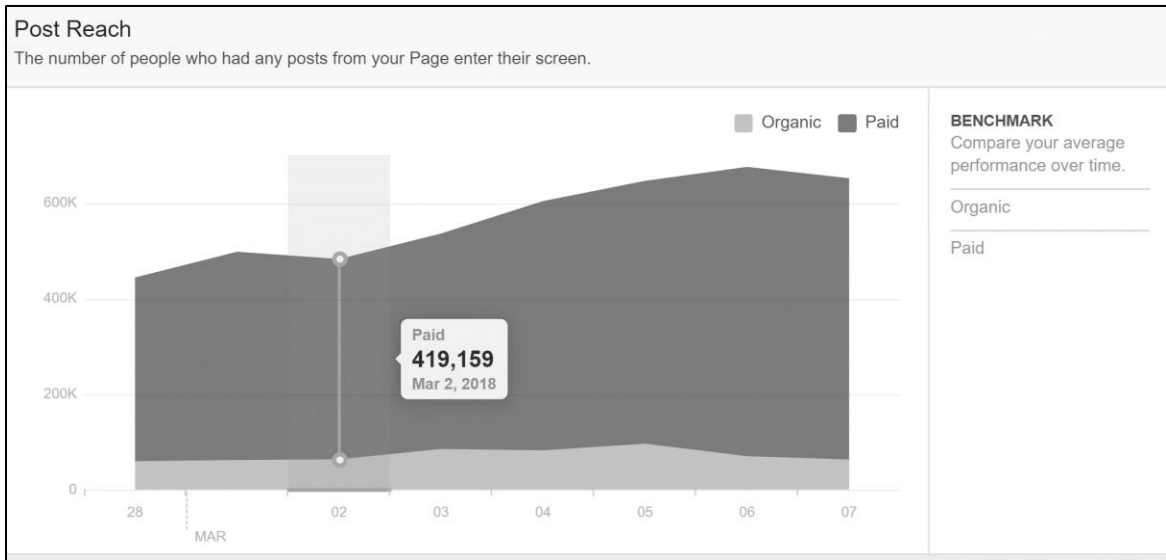
Test Three: May 17-19, 2018 – Sign-ups for the Church Planting Program during Facebook

Posts and General Promotions (No Targeted Ads)

The May 17-19, 2018 dates were chosen for the third test because they met the criteria

of a three-day period when Facebook posts and general promotions were active. However,

there were no specific Facebook ads running during this period that targeted church planters,

encouraging them to sign-up for the training program.

The following screen shots show the Facebook reach during these three days.

Figure 36. Organic Reach on May 17, 2018: 27,793
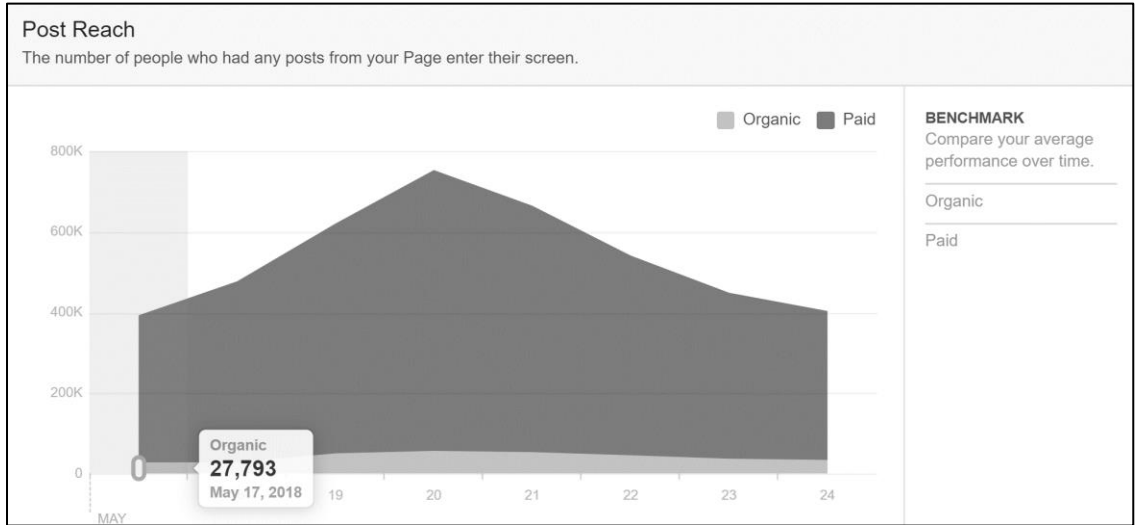
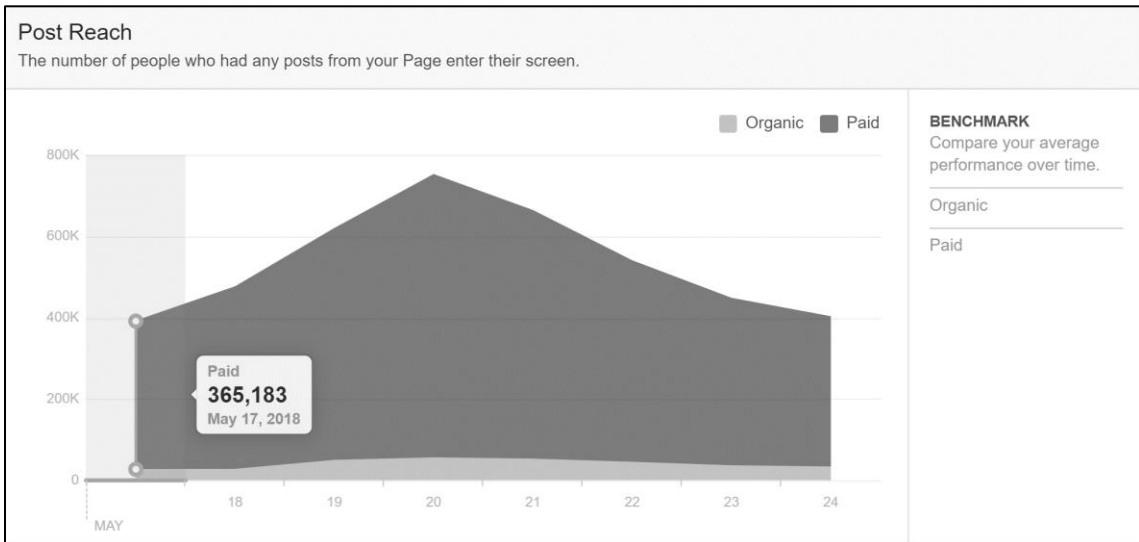Figure 37. Paid Reach on May 17, 2018: 365,183

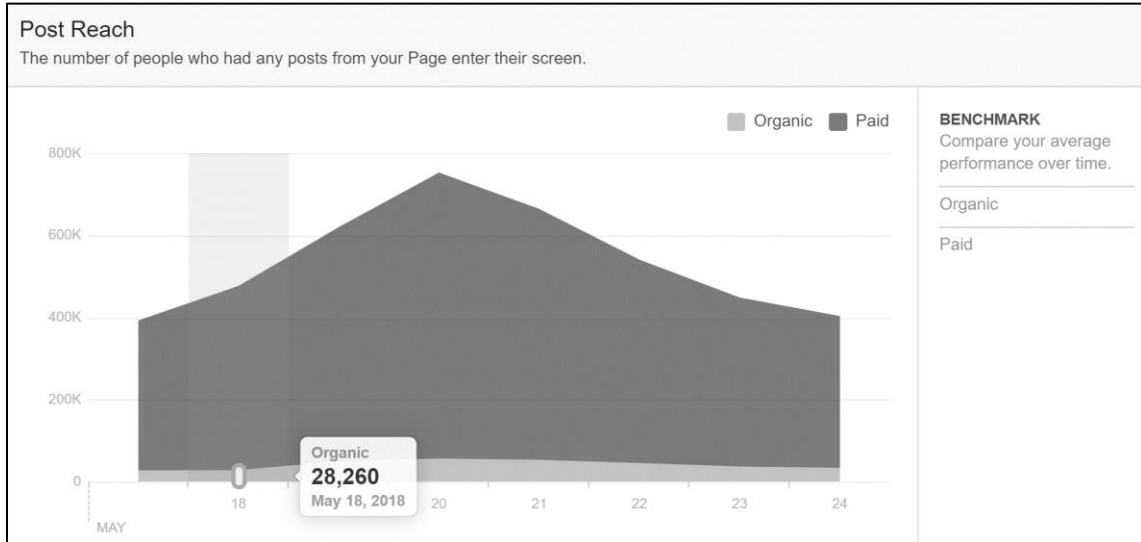Figure 38. Organic Reach on May 18, 2018: 28,260

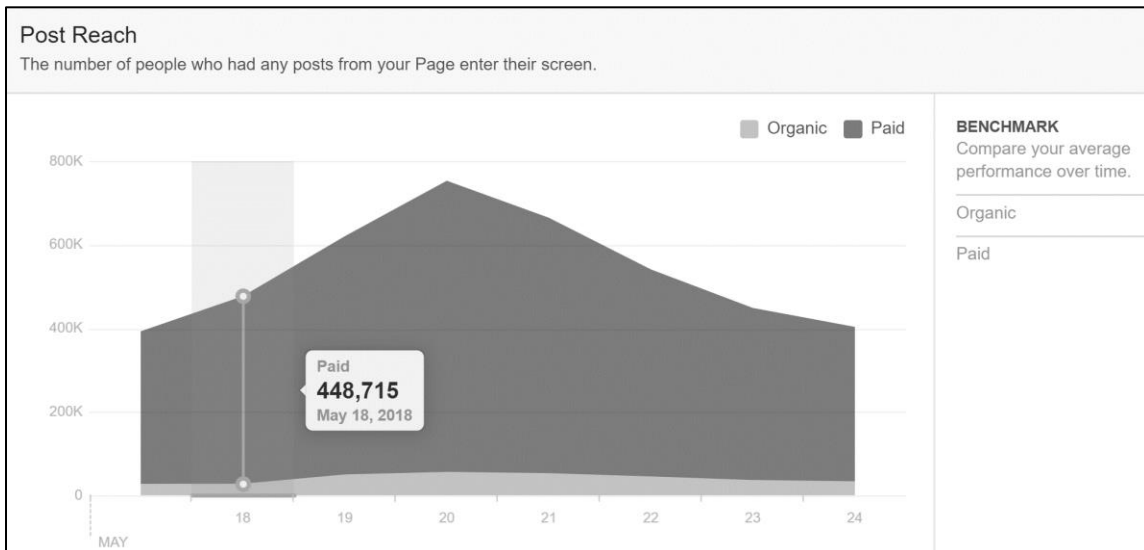Figure 39. Paid Reach on May 18, 2018: 448,715
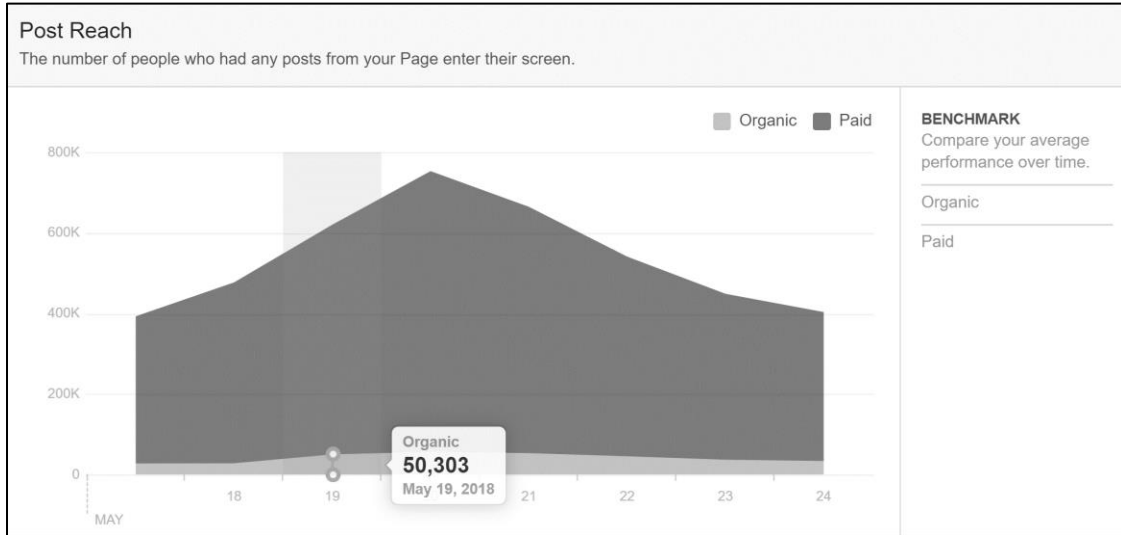
Figure 40. Organic Reach on May 19, 2018: 50,303
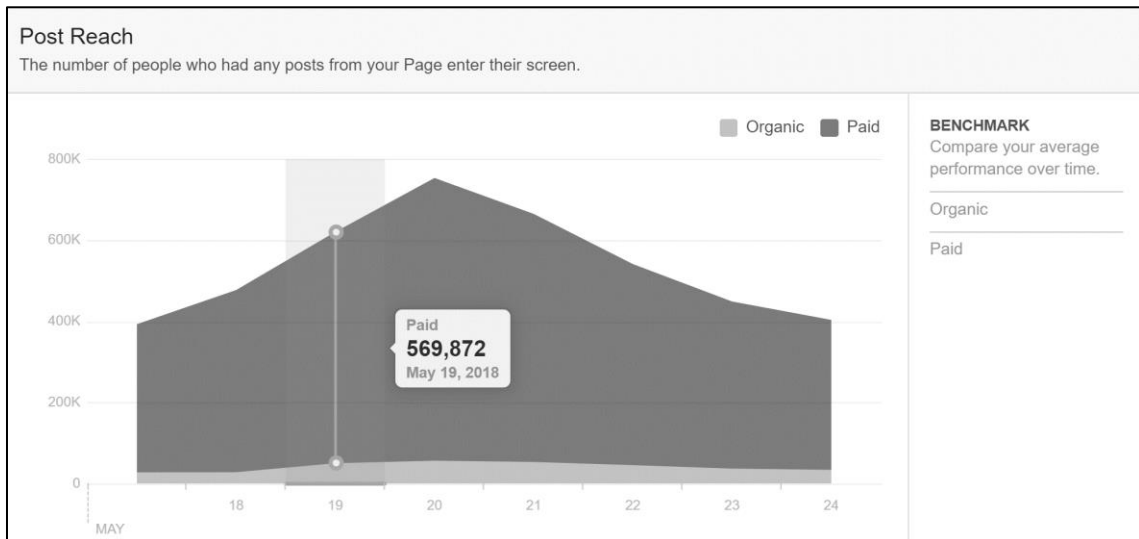

Figure 41. Paid Reach on May 19, 2018: 569,872

Chart Comparing Facebook Ad in Test Two to Other Ads Targeting Potential Church Planters

Figure 42. Test Comparisons

Figure I – 10 Facebook post ads								
Promo	Run time	Sex	Location	Target details	Cost	Sign-ups	Percent of sign-ups in target group	Cost per targeted sign-up
1	Oct 18-20, 2016	All	All Latin American Spanish speaking countries	Must like *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page	$70.00	211	56%	$0.59
2	Jan 10-12, 2017	Male	9 Mexican states	Must be interested in one of the following: Evangelism, God, Prayer, Religion, Bible, Faith, Worship or Jesus	$70.00	174	99%	$0.41
3	Jan 11-14, 2017	Male	20 Spanish speaking countries including Spain and USA Spanish speakers	Must like *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page	$79.00	106	100%	$0.75
4	Oct 1-8, 2017	Male	Paraguay	Must like *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page	$759.14	130	100%	$5.84
5	Mar 25, 2017	All	20 Spanish speaking countries (Spain yes, USA no)	Must like *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page	$31.65	29	66%	$1.03

6[1]	Dec 13-30, 2017	All	All Latin American Spanish speaking countries	Like *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page and lookalikes[2]	$1,298.52	509	53%	$4.81
7	Dec 29, 2017 – Jan 12, 2018	All	All Latin American Spanish speaking countries	Like *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page and lookalikes	$367.93	83	40%	$11.15
8	Feb 8-10, 2018	All	México, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua	All	$216.05	65	38%	$8.64
9	Feb 22-27, 2018	Male	14-mile radius around Asunción, Paraguay	All	$366.37	105	86%	$4.07
10[3]	Feb 28 – Mar 2, 2018	Male	10-mile radius around Asunción, Paraguay	All	$232.72	62	95%	$3.94

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[1] This promotion consisted of two separate posts that ran simultaneously. One ran from December 13-28 and the other ran from December 15-30. The targeting was the same. The costs, sign-ups and percentage are combined.

[2] A Facebook Lookalike Audience are people who do not like your page but are likely to be interested because they are similar to your best followers.
(https://www.facebook.com/business/help/164749007013531 accessed July 3, 2018)

[3] This is the promotion from test two.

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