

CHURCH PLANTING IN LOS ANGELES





Mission to North America
Presbyterian Church in America

1700 N. Brown Road, Suite 101
Lawrenceville GA 30043
T: 678.825.1200 • F: 678.825.1201
www.pcamna.org

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INSIDE MULTIPLY SPRING 2019

- CHURCH PLANTING IN LOS ANGELES
PLANTING CHURCHES IN LA COUNTY THROUGH PASTOR APPRENTICING
- CITY TO CITY LA
TRAINING & SUPPORTING CHURCH PLANTERS

From the Coordinator

“...Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything,
but only God who gives the growth.” — **I Corinthians 3:7**



This was one long, cold, wet winter, wasn't it? (If you are in the far north, forgive me for use of past tense!) I am ready for springtime, then summer to follow. I am ready for sunshine, for warmth, and for the greening of creation – the grass, the trees, the fields, and the flowers.

Even more, I long for the greening of the church, to see fresh seasons of the gospel bearing much fruit, as Jesus takes it down deeper into our hearts and minds. And out wider into our communities, working through our prayers, our evangelism, and our kingdom expressions of justice and mercy. May Jesus cause his gospel to run and be glorified!

We are utterly dependent upon the Lord Himself for this kind of kingdom harvest. We plant, we water, but God alone brings the growth. Paul noted to the Corinthians that neither he nor Apollos were anything; they were merely servants who planted and watered. God gave the growth of the kingdom in first century Corinth in abundance! (I Corinthians 3:5ff.)

Perhaps the Lord would do that in a place like Los Angeles in our time. Los Angeles is a city marked by great beauty, creativity, and diversity of peoples and cultures. LA is also a place of great need. In Los Angeles County, fewer than 5% of residents actively attend church. We could look at that number and be disheartened; instead, the servant planters and waterers in LA, rejoicing in the opportunities before them, are asking Jesus to bring growth. In this issue of *Multiply* you will read about LA churches that are developing future church planters through apprenticeships, mentoring and developing men who can go out into underserved communities, forging gospel relationships for witness and discipleship, exercising deeds of love and mercy, praying that this kind of witness will lead to the establishing of new churches, which will go and do likewise. Come check out their stories inside this issue. And may the Lord bring the growth, in LA and where you live! Amen.

Paul Hahn
MNA Coordinator

CHURCH PLANTING IN LOS ANGELES

With over 10 million people in Los Angeles County, 224 languages spoken, and only around 6% of residents active in churches, the opportunity for church planting is staggering. The Pacific Crossroads Church (PCC)



has met in Santa Monica since 1999. In 2016, second mission church of PCC (the first was King's Church in Long Beach) was sent out, providing what those in the region hope and pray will be the base for multiplying church planting throughout the county.

In San Gabriel Valley, The Way is led by church planter Tim Lien. Central to Tim's vision is the training of apprentices who are then sent out as church planters. "In calling an apprentice," said Lien, "we are committing ourselves to plant a new church." MNA church planting coach



Doug Swagerty advised Lien, "I know how we can build Jesus' kingdom – and kill your idols at the same time: always have a church planting apprentice. You can never become too awesome in your own eyes when your church is constantly giving to the next church."

Lien grew up in Orange County, just south of LA County. After serving in ministry in



Tennessee and Alabama, he and his wife Melissa participated in the MNA Church Planter Assessment Center as a part of con-

firming their call to church planting. From there, Pacific Crossroads asked the Liens to lead in developing a new church planting initiative with the goal of multiplying churches. At 10 million people, LA is much more a region than a city and needs many churches working together.

Michael Gregory was called as the first apprentice to work with Lien: "Michael is a gift from God. LA has a huge Pan Asian population. Michael speaks awesome Mandarin as a result of ten years of service with



Cru in China. He talks to everyone he meets – in the streets, stores, or neighborhoods."

"We wanted to serve an unchurched global city. LA has amazing opportunities to reach unreached people groups, similar to what we were doing in China. Tim asked me to serve in an apprenticeship for three years, to preach, and to see where we'd go to plant after the apprenticeship," said Gregory.

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—Doug Swagerty



“WE HAVE A LAUNCH TEAM OF 30 PEOPLE FROM THE WAY. IN ADDITION, PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY ARE COMING – AND NON-BELIEVERS TOO. I CAN’T IMAGINE PLANTING ANY OTHER WAY.”

—Michael Gregory



The Way leadership. From left to right: Tim Lien, Warren Leung, John Gunter, and Richard Lew with his son Dylan.

The Gregory family moved into an immigrant community near the targeted church plant area. “In the four houses around us, six different languages are spoken. We speak Mandarin Chinese every day,” said Gregory. “If I ask if I can share what I believe, people are very curious. The fact that we lived in a different country has helped develop amazing relationships in our neighborhood. We share meals with neighbors, work to build relationships, and in the past six months we’ve seen real relationships form in our community. We are seeking opportunities to share Christ through living in community. The apprenticeship afforded me time to pursue volunteer opportunities before launching into church planting. I began volunteering at the local school. Getting to know the community through the school system, we saw that the need here is massive and that it’s a great place to plant a church.”

The Gregorys’ daughter is now enrolled at the local public school, which has deepened

their connection to the school community. “My wife Beth has met so many parents from our daughter’s school. In addition to the many non-believers living close by, Beth meets with other Christian parents every other week to pray for the school. They told Beth, ‘We’ve been praying for revival for five years – we are so glad you’re forming the church here at our school,’” said Gregory.

Gregory also serves as a police chaplain, riding along with the community police officers to see the city from their perspective. When people request a chaplain, Gregory meets with them. “I get to see the needs of community through their eyes, and it’s a



Richard Lew (left) and Michael Gregory

piece of bringing renewal and reconciliation to the city.”

Looking forward to forming Bridges Community Church in the city of Alhambra, Gregory explains, “We have a launch team of 30 people from The Way.

In addition, people in the community are coming – and non-believers too. I can’t imagine planting any other way. I tell everyone to serve in an apprenticeship first. I’m thankful to be able to take time to build relationships.” Lien asks his congregation to consider joining with the new church, even as he is trusting God to bring many additional people to The Way.

As Bridges gets underway, Richard Lew will serve in an apprenticeship with Gregory.



Jordan Gonzalez

Once Lew is ordained, they in turn plan to call an apprentice to serve with them in the early stages of the church plant. Meanwhile at The Way, Jordan Gonzalez is slated to next serve with Lien in an apprenticeship. Gonzalez is Latino and started volunteering with The Way’s youth group. “He was working in the LA school district and I started bugging him to plant a church,” said Lien. Reluctant at first, through further conversations and participating in



MNA Church Planter Assessment, Gonzalez committed to an apprenticeship for the next three to four years. He will complete his seminary training through classes at Westminster Seminary West.

Russ Hightower is leading the next mission church from Pacific Crossroads, to be known as PCC South Bay. “PCC lead pastor Rankin Wilbourne and I went to seminary together. Rankin kept asking Amanda and me to think about coming out and working in LA, but I didn’t think seriously about church planting because I thought we were more about revitalizing churches in



Amanda and Russ Hightower

the Southeast. Finally Amanda asked, “Why aren’t we taking Rankin seriously?”

When Wilbourne took a sabbatical, he asked Hightower to come to LA and preach. “I thought my southern accent and style wouldn’t work out here. In my sermon that day, I talked about a tangible exercise

“IT DAWNED ON ME, HERE WERE TONS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR PASTORAL CARE. I MAY NOT KNOW LA’S CULTURE, BUT I KNOW GOSPEL MINISTRY.”

—*Russ Hightower*

in forgiveness. Immediately after the service, a man came up to me and said he was angry at his wife for cheating. He genuinely wanted to discuss how he might begin to forgive her. Next, a woman came up to me and asked about the man she was dating who says he’s a Christian but is still going to Hindu temple. It dawned on me, here were tons of opportunities for pastoral care. I may not know LA’s culture, but I know gospel ministry,” said Hightower. “That made me reconsider how God might use us in LA. We want to be part of a network of churches planting churches. The need is so great here just in LA county.”

Hightower has spent the last year working at Pacific Crossroads and held the first mission church vision meeting in the fall of 2018. The plan is to start a church plant with people who attend Pacific Crossroads but are driving 30 to 40 minutes to hear God’s truth.

“The vision is to be in the city, for the city. That starts in your own neighborhood. 120 people are driving from our area to Pacific Crossroads right now. If half come with us, that’s a great core group,” said Hightower. “One of our team members has said, “This can’t be merely about the convenience of a shorter drive for church people. We want to be a living body of believers among our non-Christian neighbors, with a church close enough to engage them.”

PCC Santa Monica members are encouraged to consider joining with PCC South Bay. “That is so encouraging to me as a pastor,” said Hightower. “That’s sacrifice for kingdom advancement. That’s missional. With the Way and PCC planting simultaneously, along with other plants across LA, there is a growing ethos of ongoing church planting. I am excited to be a part of that kind of kingdom movement.”

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—*Russ Hightower (quoting another team member)*

CITY TO CITY LA

“WE SET UP LEARNING COMMUNITIES WHERE CHURCH PLANTERS CAN FIND GENUINE FRIENDSHIP & A SAFE ENVIRONMENT TO BE DEEPLY CARED FOR & SUPPORTED.”

—Warren Leung

While serving as director of missions and working alongside many LA church planting leaders, Warren Leung recognized the challenges faced by church planters in the complexities of LA: “They were pouring their hearts out and struggling, with few resources. We knew we needed to provide more support to them.”

In Spring 2018, Leung began serving as the Director of City to City LA, a west coast training center founded by Brannin Pitre



Warren Leung, center, with wife Wendy, daughter Karis and son Roman.

of Grace Pasadena. Through City to City LA, PCA church planters are served along with other evangelical church planters. Joining with City to City (established by Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City) gave existing LA church plant-

ers greater resources that could be used as needed for their specific area. A grant from the MNA Antioch Fund for Church Multiplication provided further resources for the growing church planting ecosystem.

“City to City training material helps us produce healthier church planters, and prayerfully, healthier churches. We set up learning communities where church planters can find genuine friendship and a safe environment to be deeply cared for and supported,” said Leung. Twelve church planters and their wives currently meet as a cohort four to five times a year over two years. Participant Tim Lien explains, “Together, we picked ten church planting competencies that we struggle with and we are going through them together over the next two years. Getting to know each other through gospel renewal is vital. We share what we have learned. It’s affecting churches and the fabric of the city. Warren and I pray, with weeping, that in 20 years they will not mention our name, but we trust God that there will be a church planting movement. That hope makes us rejoice.”

The cohort sessions are open to observers, offering others the opportunity to see if the training might be helpful to them. Current

plans include launching a cohort for Spanish speakers by 2020, as well as the possibility of a cohort for bi-vocational church planters and other church leaders.



Brannin Pitre speaks at the training session.

City to City brings people together, increasing the connectivity in a unified effort for gospel-centered church planting. Leung emphasizes that City to City is more than training – it’s equally about grace renewal and centrality of the gospel. “We want always to make sure these pastors know they are God’s sons first. We want to create a culture that brings out repentance and brokenness in a transparent environment, addressing family and other needs. We all need this, and there isn’t another place for these pastors and their families like this.”

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1700 North Brown Rd. • Suite 101 • Lawrenceville, GA 30043 • P: 678.825.1200 • F: 678.825.1201 • mna@pcanet.org • www.pcamna.org