

Seize the Day

The Great Commission in the USA

— Dan Fredericks —



The USA a mission field?! Wait a minute. I thought we were a Christian nation. We sing, “God Bless America!” and, “America, America God shed his grace on thee.” We’ve sent thousands of missionaries all around the world. We have Christian radio, television, publishing companies. We’ve flooded the Internet with Bible teaching and study resources. Our land is saturated with churches. There is plenty of opportunity for people to hear the gospel. We can hardly be considered a mission field... or can we?

If you take time to dig below the surface of our “Christian coating” in the United States you discover that we, indeed, are a mission field. We are part of the world Jesus spoke of when He declared, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). America would most certainly constitute our Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8).

Our world is not static by any means. In our ever changing communities and cultures, in our shrinking and expanding global environment, we find the world flooding our shores and crossing our bor-

ders. Aside from the ethnic and cultural changes taking place, “our own” American-born citizenry is becoming increasingly more pagan. Someone has coined the term *glocal*, meaning we are experiencing an exponential acceleration of global criss-cross, impacting not only our big cities but our local communities and suburban neighborhoods.

*I find multiple cultures
living side by side,
pursuing the American
dream. I find scores
of churches, yet little
gospel witness. I find
an enormous and highly
strategic mission field.*

In an article by James H. Eaton, writing about the changing face of suburban America in his home town of Laurel, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C., he states: “I find paganism. I find multiple cultures living side by side, pursuing the American dream. I find scores of churches, yet little gospel witness. I find an enormous and highly strategic mission field. And

my heart cries out to God that He would send workers here.” (“Mission Field on the Edge,” *Message*, Vol.48, No.12 Winter 1996).

Dr. Earl Parvin is a long time IFCA member, missionary, pastor, Bible College professor, and former director of ANAM (Association of North American Missions). He has produced a valuable resource on the very topic of the mission field that is North America. Originally published in 1985 by Moody Press as *Missions USA*, it is now being updated online as *Missions in North America* (available at www.mission-susa.net). According to Parvin, “contrary to popular opinion, within North America are people groups beyond the sound of the gospel.”

Parvin continues, “America is a mission field even though 25 percent of its populace consider themselves to be Protestants. This is a fact because the evangelicals are not distributed among the unchurched people groups. Although the gospel is presented twenty-four hours daily via mass media, it is not meaningful to the great majority of pluralistic peoples in our society.”

North America as a whole is indeed a mission field. By stating this we are in no way attempting to distract from the overwhelming need still to send missionaries to “the world,” but we ought not do this at the neglect or naïve notion that the United States has been “evangelized.”

Consider these startling statistics:

In North America, some people groups are totally unevangelized, such as 27 million cultists, 6 million Muslims, 1.5 million Hindus, 500,000 Buddhists and 250,000 Sikhs. Others often forgotten and essentially bypassed by the gospel are 35 million handicapped, 10 million alcoholics, 7 million Jews, 4 million inmates in the prison system, 2 million Native Americans, 2.5 million French-speakers, and immigrants in varying numbers from every nation in the world.

*The greatest threat
to missions in America
is our own complacency
and naïve assumptions
that we “live in
Christian America.”*

As if this were not enough to convince us, consider also that significant numbers of our American ethnic populations are largely unreached. American Christians are unaware that 33 million African Americans are only 30 percent evangelized, whereas black Africans are up to 50 percent evangelized. Nor do they know that while Christianity explodes in Latin America, 27 million Hispanics here are only to varying degrees touched by the gospel. Or that nearly 1.6 million American Chinese remain almost as pagan as those living in China. Among the Native American population in North America, 95% remain in need of the gospel. Despite missionary and church planting efforts among this population group, many remain unchurched and without Christ as Savior due to a resurgence in traditional religion and the isolation of many reservations and reserves.

The United States needs to awaken to the fact that non-Christian religions are out-pacing the planting of Bible-believing and Bible-teaching local churches. Islam and Hinduism are both out-pacing the planting of evangelical

churches. Islam and Hinduism have established strategies to saturate key regions and cities in the United States for the purpose of responding to the growing populations and interest in their respective religions. Islamic and Hindu websites are popping up on the Internet, targeting a growing American curiosity with impressive savvy and modern appeal. One example is the website, Hinduism TODAY (notice its “Americanized” sounding name). It is also available in print form, as well as complete digital format, featuring articles and special interest stories for the growing American expression of Hinduism. In these post-9/11 days, Islam is growing in America at a staggering rate.

The Christian consensus has changed in the United States as well. Our Supreme Court has found unconstitutional the place of prayer in our schools. Claiming the Ten Commandments as the basis for all civil law is ridiculed and posting them in public buildings is forbidden. Religious pluralism, tolerance over truth, accommodating Roman Catholicism with Protestantism (as in the 1994 Evangelicals and Catholics Together Accord), radical environmentalism with pagan overtones, social rearranging of the traditional/biblical standards of marriage, family and education all demonstrate that the United States is a needy mission field.

Interestingly, in 1996 at the Annual Convention of IFCA International in Colorado Springs, Dr. Parvin delivered a seminar presentation that is as relevant today, if not more so, than the day he delivered it. I recently listened to this seminar on recording. It is striking and convicting to review Dr. Parvin’s exhortation in 1996. In the decade that has transpired I fear we have done little to respond to the challenge he delivered. This seminar is available from the IFCA International Home Office, in both cassette and audio CD format. Order it. Listen to it, and take action.

The greatest threat to missions in America is our own complacency and naïve assumptions that we “live in Christian America,” and that we are not a mission field. We must not become the proverbial ostrich with our heads in

the sand. We can view the ever changing landscape here in America as a great threat from which to run and hide. Or we can view it or as a grand opportunity that our God is bringing to our shores. It is time to seize the day!

Dan Fredericks is IFCA International Director of Church and Pastoral Ministries. He grew up, and then returned to serve, on the Navajo Reservation before coming to the IFCA International Home Office.