**Examining Evangelical Concentrations and International Migrations in the U. S. and Canada: A Call for More and Better Urban Research**

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Evangelicals in the United States, historically, have not placed much confidence in research. It was not until the middle to latter half of the twentieth century that biblically guided missiological research came to be seen as a blessing and not a bane by a large number of people. Over the past few decades, Evangelical researchers have produced some amazing reports reflecting outstanding missiological research to guide missionary strategy.

Research helps the Church cut through the fog of uncertainty. And while abuses and too much dependency on research exist, research has significantly shaped the face of missions in the latter 20th and early 21st centuries. It was the emphasis placed upon research that helped launch and define the Church Growth Movement. It was the value of research that led the editor of *Mission Frontiers* to place on the cover of the January-February 2008 edition the title, “God Cannot Lead You on the Basis of Information that You Do not Have.”[[2]](#footnote-2) It was the value of research that led to the formation of the World Christian Database, the Joshua Project, and the Global Research Department of the International Mission Board.

While Evangelicals have come a long way from Carey’s emphasis on the value of research noted in his *An Enquiry,* we have a great distance yet to travel. And one of the places where this journey is still long is found in North America. While Evangelicals have fairly good understandings of who are the peoples residing in the non-North American countries of the world, their evangelical statuses, and what groups are ministering among them, here in the United States and Canada Evangelicals face a different situation. We have little to no knowledge of the peoples in our neighborhoods.

The United States and Canada are two of the world’s most diverse countries and two of the world’s most researched countries. Multitudes of scholars have studied this region of North America from a variety of sociological and anthropological angles. And while we have statistics galore on both the magnificent and the mundane and the macro and the micro, Evangelicals in the United States and Canada lack the missiological research to guide wise missionary strategy. We have excellent information on a small unreached people group “over there,” but *have little to no* *understanding of the peoples living in our backyards.*

While the Lord leads His Church, even when she is ignorant to reality, how much better is it when the Church understands her context? How much better stewardship is involved whenever she understands the Somalis living across town, the Quebecois across the river, or the Anglos moving into the new apartment complex down the street?

It is difficult to hit a target, if one does not know that target. The Church may have a great zeal to reach others with the gospel and plant churches; but zeal with ignorance is not healthy for the Kingdom. The writer of Proverbs reminds us, “desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way” (Prov 19:2, ESV).

**Purpose**

My purpose in writing this paper is to extend a call to Evangelicals to begin conducting more and better urban research in the United States and Canada. I plan to show support for this need by drawing attention to two research projects that I have conducted over the past couple of years. The first project was a study of Evangelical concentrations found across the United States and Canada, with particular examination of the metropolitan areas. The second project draws from my people group research in my forthcoming book *The Strangers Next Door: Global Migrations and the Great Commission Opportunity for You and Your Church*. By revealing the limitations in my research, I hope to provide a much better perspective on the dearth of urban research needed for strategic planning that affects missional endeavors both in North America and throughout the world.

**Case Study #1: Evangelical Concentrations in the U. S. and Canadian Metropolitan Areas**

To begin, it is necessary to provide a general statistic for Evangelicals in the United States and Canada. According to the U. S. Religious Landscape Survey of 2008 released by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, among all U. S. adults, Evangelicals consisted of 26.3% of the population.[[3]](#footnote-3) Jason Mandryk in *Operation World* noted that the Evangelicals comprised 7.7% of the Canadian population.[[4]](#footnote-4) Rick Hiemstra with the Center for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism estimates the average percentage across the provinces being 12%, with Quebec consisting of 2-3%.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**What We Know**

The statistics on U. S. Evangelicals have been made available for free *and* on-line to the public since 2006 through The Association of Religion and Data Archives (The ARDA).[[6]](#footnote-6) Prior to that time, the data was available for purchase in 2002, appearing in the book *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United* *States: 2000* published by the Glenn Mary Research Center.[[7]](#footnote-7) While such information has been readily available for anyone wanting to search through and compile the findings on Evangelicals, *I am not aware of any organization that collected these findings and* *disseminated them widely to the larger evangelical body, so they could develop* *evangelism and church multiplication strategies accordingly.* Therefore, I decided to collect, organize, and disseminate the findings in a way that would better guide missionary strategy in the United States.

While this data is presently a decade in age, it is the most extensive and best research available on congregations and memberships in the United States. The 2010 Religious Congregations and Membership Study will provide the next comprehensive religious portrait of people in the United States. However, it will still be in the future when the results of this extensive study will be made public.

Outreach Canada has been a champion for Evangelical research in Canada. In 2005, Murray Moerman, edited the book *Discipling Our* *Nation: Equipping the Canadian Church for Its Mission* with an extensive amount of tables revealing a wealth of data presenting the church planting needs across the country. This information was based on 2001 statistics. Lorne Hunter with Outreach Canada shared with me their 2006 data for my research project so that I could include the Canadian as well.

 Using this data, I was able to produce the following information as related to the urban contexts:

A list of U. S. Metro areas with less than a 10% evangelical population

A specific list of U. S Metro areas with less than a 3% evangelical population

The number of evangelical churches and the evangelical church to population ratios in selected Canadian metro areas (2006)

**The Evangelical Benchmark**

When conducting missiological research in order to better understand what percentage of the people in an area are followers of Jesus *and* are the most likely to continue to share the gospel with others, missiologists often attempt to discern the number of Evangelicals present. Now, clearly not all Evangelicals are regenerate and are faithful in sharing the good news with others. Also, there are people who do not consider themselves Evangelicals but are faithful followers of Jesus and faithfully share the gospel with others. However, by most definitions, an Evangelical is someone who professes to have had a conversion (regenerate) experience by grace through faith in Christ and believes in the importance of telling others about the good news of this salvation. Therefore, missiologists need a benchmark to attempt to gain a better understanding of how many people have had a conversion experience and are calling others to Jesus as well. This is the reason the generic category of “Evangelical” is the focus of this research project.

**Other Concerns to Consider**

In addition to using Evangelicals as a benchmark, there are a few other matters for consideration. The findings of this study for the U. S. were limited to the data found on The ARDA’s web site. The findings of this study for Canada were limited to the data collected and shared by Outreach Canada. It should also be noted that while the Canadian data is from 2006, the best public U. S. data is much older, from 2000. Though the U. S. data is a decade in age, this information is a good beginning point for such research today.

The definition of *Evangelical* is worth mentioning here as a limitation. From a sociological perspective, the definition of Evangelical used when collecting the data published in *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States: 2000*, would be fairly accurate. While there are a few limitations noted by those disseminating the data, most researchers would be mostly in agreement with what groups were considered Evangelical. From a conservative, Evangelical, missiologist’s perspective—and more importantly—from a Kingdom citizen’s perspective, I am not comfortable with the original definition of “Evangelical” found in *Religious Congregations and Membership* *in the United States: 2000*. While the original researchers did separate mainline churches, world religions, and cults from Evangelicals, the definition on which the research was based is too broad for accurate understanding of the number of Kingdom citizens present *and* involved in engaging their communities with the gospel.[[8]](#footnote-8) Also, the definition of evangelical “adherents” in the data set is also more problematic when attempting to determine the estimated number of Evangelicals in a particular area of the U. S. According to the Association of Religion Data Archives’ web site: “Congregational ‘adherents’ include all full members, their children, and others who regularly attend services. The historically African American denominations are not included in the 2000 congregation and membership totals.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

With these facts in mind, it is assumed that *the number of regenerate people in all of these locations in the U. S. is much lower than presented in this research; therefore, the need for the gospel in all of these areas is much greater than what is represented here.* Since I do not know the *evangelical* groups counted byOutreach Canada, I cannot comment on possible realities in Canada.The U. S. counties that were studied were selectedfrom The ARDA’s web site because of their lower evangelical populations. It should benoted that the counties presented do *not* necessarily represent all of the U. S. countieswith less than 10% evangelical populations. These are only presented to give an ideaof the realities in the United States.

**From 35,000 Feet to 15,000 Feet**

This report on Evangelicals in the United States and Canada is an attempt to assist the Church in moving its missiological perspective of these two countries from what I refer to as a high altitude perspective to a lower altitude perspective. An examination of world maps showing the global status of evangelical Christianity are usually color coded to provide the reader with a quick understanding of the percentages of evangelicals in countries across the world.[[10]](#footnote-10) Red areas are the least reached areas while the dark green areas are the most reached areas. While such maps and color codes are good and needed for both a proper understanding of Evangelicals and global strategy development, there is an inherent problem. The major limitation is that the perspective provided does not offer the realities in the communities within those countries. Rather, an average approximation is provided.



Again, such mapping is helpful and necessary. However, the Church must not stop at the 35,000 feet perspective. Rather, it is important to move to a lower altitude and eventually *land the plane* in order to know truly what is going on in the communities.

This presentation of the research is an attempt to change perspectives on the United States and Canada from being seen as simply green countries, and thus “reached” with the gospel. By moving into the state/provincial, metro, and county levels, church planters will get a better perspective of the reality of lostness in these two countries. *It should be noted that* *in no way does this presentation attempt to diminish the fact that by far the world’s* *greatest areas of need are found outside of these countries.* Rather, my hope is that this information would sound the alarm to the realities and opportunities facing the Church in the United States and Canada.

**What is Not Here and Why Better Research is Needed**

First, this project does not reveal the ground-level realities, but only the perspective from 15,000 feet. Pockets of significant lostness are not represented in this study. For example, the slides of Kentucky reveal that this state is 34% evangelical with a ratio of one evangelical church for every 788 people—a high evangelical percentage and a fairly low church to population ratio. If we only looked at this information, we could easily assume that there is not much of a need for evangelical churches in this state. However, such a perspective does not reveal the apartment complex down the street with only 3% of the resident population being followers of Christ. It does not provide us with numbers related to subdivisions, mobile home and condo communities, etc.

Second, at the 15,000 feet perspective we do not see the reality of least reached minority people groups. For example—to return to Kentucky—in Louisville, Kentucky there are many Nepali and Somali peoples (two of the world’s least reached people groups) with few known believers in Louisville at the time of this writing (none among the Somali), and no churches among either group. Also, many Bosnians have chosen to reside in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Again, here is one of the world’s least reached people groups and no Bosnian believers (to my knowledge at the time of this writing) in Kentucky, and no church. From the 15,000 feet perspective we miss the number of least reached minority people groups, sub-cultures, and population segments.

**The Findings**

The findings in this study are visually displayed in the corresponding PowerPoint presentation. This presentation can be downloaded for free from the Articles section of www.NorthAmericanMissions.org.

The following two tables provide a quick glimpse of certain metropolitan areas in the United States and Canada, along with important statistics on the number of Evangelicals present.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **U. S. Metro Area** | **Total Evng. Percentage** | **Evng. Chu. to Pop. Ratio** |
| Provo-Orem, Utah | 0.6% | 1:18,427 |
| Pittsfield, Massachusetts | 1.5% | 1:9640 |
| Barnstable-Yarmouth, Massachusetts | 1.5% | 1:8889 |
| Providence-Warwick-Pawtucket, Rhode Island | 1.7% | 1:8230 |
| Springfield, Massachusetts | 1.9% | 1:9814 |
| New York-Northern NewJersey-Long Island, NY-NJCT-PA | 2.3% | 1:8517 |
| Salt Lake City-Ogden, Utah  | 2.3%  | 1:9808 |
| Boston-Worcester-Lawrence-Lowell-Brockton, Massachusetts | 2.5% | 1:7786 |
| New London-Norwich,Connecticut | 2.5% | 1:6477 |
| Hartford, Connecticut | 2.7% | 1:7557 |
| Albany-Schenectady-Troy,New York | 2.7% | 1:5837 |
| Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton,Pennsylvania | 2.8% | 1:6577 |
| Burlington, Vermont | 2.9% | 1:6630 |
| Dubuque, Iowa | 3.1% | 1:6857 |
| Glens Falls, New York | 3.1% | 1:4288 |
| Scranton-Wilkes-Barre-Hazelton, Pennsylvania | 3.1% | 1:4733 |
| Utica-Rome, New York | 3.4% | 1:4837 |
| Philadelphia-Wilmington-Atlantic City, PA-NJ-DE | 3.6% | 1:5704 |
| Syracuse, New York | 3.7% | 1:5049 |
| Bangor, Maine | 3.8% | 1:3535 |
| Portland, Maine | 3.8% | 1:4580 |
| Laredo, Texas | 3.9% | 1:4598 |
| Reading, Pennsylvania | 4% | 1:4018 |
| Rochester, New York | 4.1% | 1:5084 |
| Binghamton, New York | 4.4% | 1:3504 |
| Reno, Nevada | 4.6% | 1:4715 |
| Salinas, California | 4.7% | 1:3686 |
| Lewiston-Auburn, Maine | 5% | 1:4152 |
| Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania | 5% | 1:3978 |

**Table 1. U. S. Metro Areas of 5% or Less Evangelical**

There are at least twenty-nine U. S. metro areas with an evangelical population less than or equal to 5%. The Provo-Orem, Utah area is by far the least evangelical metro area in the country. Evangelicals comprise 0.6% of the 368,536 people living there. There are 20 evangelical churches in the area, making the church to population ration 1:18,427. The runner-up category is a tie between two Massachusetts areas. Pittsfield and Barnstable-Yarmouth, Massachusetts are only 1.5% Evangelical. The church to population ratio in Pittsfield is 1:9640, and for Barnstable-Yarmouth, 1:8889.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **METRO AREA** | **PROVINCE** | **EVANGELICAL****CHURCH TO****POPULATION RATIO** |
| Quebec City  | Quebec | 1:23,331 |
| Saguenay | Quebec | 1:21,733 |
| Trois-Rivieres | Quebec | 1:9508 |
| Montreal | Quebec | 1:8688 |
| Sherbrooke | Quebec | 1:8668 |
| St. John’s | Newfoundland | 1:6718 |
| Ottawa-Gatineau | Ontario | 1:6129 |
| Oshawa | Ontario | 1:5381 |
| Toronto | Ontario | 1:5229 |
| Great Sudbury | Ontario | 1:4764 |
| Calgary | Alberta | 1:3818 |
| Windsor | Ontario | 1:3773 |
| Victoria | British Columbia | 1:3674 |
| Hamilton | Ontario  | 1:3654 |
| Kingston | Ontario | 1:3604 |
| Halifax  | Nova Scotia | 1:3539 |
| Edmonton | Alberta | 1:3420 |
| London | Ontario | 1:3351 |
| Vancouver | British Columbia | 1:3269 |
| Thunder Bay | Ontario | 1:3214 |
| Winnipeg | Manitoba | 1:3169 |
| Regina | Saskatchewan  | 1:3148 |
| St. Catherine’s-Niagara | Ontario  | 1:2390 |
| Saskatoon | Saskatchewan  | 1:2331 |
| St. John | New Brunswick  | 1:2099 |

**Table 2. Selected Canadian Metro Areas Where the Evangelical Church to Population Ratio is Greater than 1:2000**

The overall percentage of Evangelicals in Canada is much smaller than that found in the U. S.. Table 2 reveals the church to population ratios in metropolitan areas across the country. The five greatest ratios are found in Quebec, with Quebec City at 1:23,331, and Saguenay at 1:21,733 dwarfing the other cities. It should be noted that at the time of this research, data was not provided for any of the Canadian Territories, or the overall evangelical percentages in each province or metro area.

**Case Study #2: The Strangers Next Door**

In my forthcoming book, *The Strangers Next Door: Global Migrations and the Great Commission Opportunity for You and Your Church,* I note the nationalities and the numbers of the world’s unreached peoples living in Western countries. The second piece of evidence that I wish to submit for consideration is that while many of the world’s unreached peoples are moving to the urban areas of the United States and Canada, little helpful information is known about them.

**What We Know**

The United States and Canada rank among the countries with the highest numbers of international migrants. The United States is by far the world’s largest migrant receiving nation, absorbing 20% of the 214 million people who are on the move outside of their homeland. While Canada receives a much smaller portion, it is a much more ethnically diverse country, with a much larger percentage of its residents being born in another country.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Country** | **Estimated number of international migrants at mid-year, 2010** | **As Percentage of Global Total** |
| United States | 42,813,281 | 20 |
| Canada | 7,202,340 | 3.4 |

**Table 3. Numbers of International Migrants in the United States and Canada, 2010.[[11]](#footnote-11)**

Consider the following statistics as related to the numbers of international migrants to the United States and Canada:

* Between 2000-2010, the United States gained 8 million international migrants and Canada 1.6 million.[[12]](#footnote-12)
* In 2005, countries with at least 20 million inhabitants where international migrants

constituted high proportions of the population included Australia (20 percent), Canada (19 percent), France (11 percent), Germany (12 percent), Saudi Arabia (26 percent), Spain (11 percent), Ukraine (15 percent), and the United States (13 percent).[[13]](#footnote-13)

* Between 2000-2007, the number of international students more than doubled to over 2

million. The main destination countries were the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Australia.[[14]](#footnote-14)

* In 2010, migrants comprised 22% of the total population in Australia, 21.3% of Canada,

13.5% of the United States, 10.4% of the United Kingdom[[15]](#footnote-15)

* By 2017, 1 Canadian in 5 could be a visible minority person[[16]](#footnote-16)

**Students.** Every year, large numbers of international students travel to Western countries to study, with the United States and Canada receiving large portions of such students. The following table contains data from the Institute of International Education. It should be noted that students from China and Indian comprise over one-third of the international students studying in the United States during the 2009-2010 academic year.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Rank** | **Country** | **2009/10** | **Percent of Total** |
|  | World Total | 690,923 | 100 |
| 1 | China | 127,628 | 18.5 |
| 2 | India | 104,897 | 15.2 |
| 3 | South Korea | 72,153 | 10.4 |
| 4 | Canada | 28,145 | 4.1 |
| 5 | Taiwan | 26,685 | 3.9 |
| 6 | Japan | 24,842 | 3.6 |
| 7 | Saudi Arabia | 15,810 | 2.3 |
| 8 | Mexico | 13,450 | 1.9 |
| 9 | Vietnam | 13,112 | 1.9 |
| 10 | Turkey | 12,397 | 1.8 |
| 11 | Nepal | 11,233 | 1.6 |
| 12 | Germany | 9,548 | 1.4 |
| 13 | United Kingdom | 8,861 | 1.3 |
| 14 | Brazil | 8,786 | 1.3 |
| 15 | Thailand | 8,531 | 1.2 |
| 16 | Hong Kong | 8,034 | 1.2 |
| 17 | France | 7,716 | 1.1 |
| 18 | Indonesia | 6,943 | 1.0 |
| 19 | Columbia | 6,920 | 1.0 |
| 20 | Nigeria | 6,568 | 1.0 |
| 21 | Malaysia | 6,190 | 0.9 |
| 22 | Kenya | 5,384 | 0.8 |
| 23 | Pakistan | 5,222 | 0.8 |
| 24 | Venezuela | 4,958 | 0.7 |
| 25 | Russia | 4,827 | 0.7 |

**Table 4. Top Places of Origin for International Students in the U. S., 2009-2010.[[17]](#footnote-17)**

 **Refugees and Asylees.** Another important source fueling international migration is that of refugees and those seeking refugee status (asylees). The table below shows the numbers representing these two groups for the United States and Canada in the year 2009.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Country** | **Refugees** | **Asylum-Seekers (pending cases)** |
| Canada | 169,434 | 61,170 |
| United States | 275,461 | 63,803 |

**Table 5. Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in the United States and Canada as of 2009[[18]](#footnote-18)**

In 2009, the largest numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers to the United States came from Iraq, Burma, Bhutan, and Iran. The information in the following table, taken from the United States Department of Homeland Security, reveals the largest numbers of refugees, by country of nationality:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Country** | **Number** |
| Iraq | 18,838 |
| Burma | 18,202 |
| Bhutan | 13,452 |
| Iran | 5,381 |
| Cuba | 4,800 |
| Somalia | 4,189 |
| Eritrea | 1,571 |
| Vietnam | 1,486 |
| Congo, Democratic Republic | 1,135 |
| Burundi | 762 |
| Other | 4,786 |

**Table 6. Refugee Arrivals in the United States by Country of Nationality, 2009[[19]](#footnote-19)**

**How Many Unreached People Groups are in the United States and Canada?**

Table seven displays the numbers of unreached peoples living in the United States and Canada as tallied by Joshua Project and the Global Research Department. Since the latter organization uses a less than 2% Evangelical definition for an unreached people group, I decided for comparison sake to provide an additional column showing the Joshua Project numbers, using the same statistical definition. Joshua Project notes that 76 unreached people groups reside in the United States and Canada as compared to 641 unreached people groups according to the Global Research Department. While the difference lessens whenever “Adherents” is removed from the Joshua Project definition (while including those groups with an unknown Evangelical status), revealing 368 unreached peoples, there is still much discrepancy between these databases.[[20]](#footnote-20)

While I recognize the strategic reasons the Joshua Project subscribes to defining an unreached people in consideration of their adherence level, theologically and missiologically, I am not comfortable with such a guideline. Since membership within the Kingdom demands the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit involving repentance and faith, and not simply a person’s subscription to a traditional or cultural understanding of Christianity, I am more comfortable working with the 2% or less definition. Also, the inclusion of the adherence level as a defining characteristic for a group being “reached” or “unreached” keeps the Church at the 35,000 feet perspective. An example of this high altitude view is evident whenever researchers turn their attentions toward Europe. According to the Joshua Project, in Spain, the French are 0.5% Evangelical, the Portuguese are 0.13% Evangelical, and the Spaniards are 0.4% Evangelical. Yet, since these peoples have come from and reside within Christianized lands—and would describe themselves as Christians—they are not counted as unreached people groups. Therefore, by comparing the third and fourth columns in table seven, it is possible to come to a better approximation of the number of unreached peoples in the United States and Canada. While additional limitations will be noted in the next section, it is likely that there are somewhere between 368 and 641 unreached people groups living in the United States and Canada.[[21]](#footnote-21)

**X-Factors Affecting Urban Strategy**

 There are several limitations in my research on international migration to the United States and Canada. Each of the following matters provides a limitation to the development of robust urban mission strategies. And with the development of diaspora missiology and growth of international migrations, it is even more critical that the Church have a better understanding of what is presently taking place in these two countries.

**Unknown People Groups and Evangelical Percentages**

The irony is that while the United States and Canada are two of the most researched counties in the world, the present data on these nations regarding the number of unreached peoples are very limited. For the most part, the Joshua Project has spent the majority of the time focused on countries other than the United States and Canada, where the numbers of Evangelicals present and access to the gospel is more limited. In a recent conversation with Dan Scribner, Director, Joshua Project, I was told that their data for the United States and Canada are representative, but not comprehensive. While their information is a starting point for understanding the present realities, it is based primarily on Census data and does not provide the details for an accurate understanding of the people groups. In other words, just because Nigerians show up in a national count, the research has not been accomplished to provide the people groups among them.

I received a similar response from Jim Haney, Director, Global Research Department. At the time of this writing, the Global Research Department of the International Mission Board has the exclusive assignment of researching every country of the world *except* the United States and Canada. And because their research also has been focused on other countries, they are not confident to provide accurate people group counts and the evangelical percentages of the various peoples living in the United States and Canada, or information as to whether or not anyone is engaging such peoples with the gospel and planting churches among them. Despite this limitation, the Global Research Department is able to provide the names and estimated populations of several hundred unreached peoples residing in these countries. However, the status of these groups being considered unreached is partially based on the assumption that since they are clearly unreached in other countries of the world, then it is assumed that it is highly likely they are also unreached in the United States and Canada.

According to the Southern Baptist Convention’s policy, the North American Mission Board is assigned to missionary activity in the United States, Canada, and their respective territories. Unfortunately, very little research has been conducted by the North American Mission Board on their assigned region of the world.

Therefore, at the time of this writing, accurate information on the unreached people groups living in the United States and Canada does not exist. Not only do we not know who is living in our communities, we do not know their Evangelical statuses, and who may be working among them as church planters. The data does not exist because the research has not been conducted. *We have better data on an unreached people group living on the backside of the Himalayas than we do on that same people group living across the street from us in New York, Toronto, Chicago, or Montreal.* Such is an extremely pathetic reality, and reflective of much of the missiology found throughout North America.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Country | UPGs, Joshua Project | UPGs, Joshua Project using 2% Definition (and including groups with unknown Evangelical %) | UPGs, Global Research |
| Canada | 16 | 42 | 193 |
| United States | 60 | 326 | 448 |
| **Totals** | 76 | 368 | 641 |

**Table 7. Unreached People Groups in Canada and the United States, Joshua Project, Global Research[[22]](#footnote-22)**

**Unknown Receptivity Levels**

Hardly any research has been conducted in recent years on the receptivity levels among immigrants.[[23]](#footnote-23) This is an area that is pioneer territory for the urban missiologist.

**Unknown Global Social Networks**

International migrants usually remain in close contact with friends and relatives “back home.” Oftentimes, those who have migrated frequently send remittances back to loved ones in other lands. These social networks are important when it comes to developing integrated strategies that focus on reaching people “here” so others can be reached “other there.” Additional research is needed for a better understanding of the on-going transnational social relationships.

**Unknown Laborers in the Fields**

Again, very little research has been attempted in order to determine what churches, networks, and denominations are engaged in evangelistic and church planting activities among the international migrants living throughout North America. Recently, the North American Mission Board and Lifeway Research conducted one such study to determine what groups are presently laboring among first generation migrants[[24]](#footnote-24)

**A Proposal to Move Evangelicals in the Direction of More and Better Urban Research**

There are at least four important steps that should be taken to help move Evangelicals forward in the realm of conducting more and better urban research. The following are offered as starting points.

1. **Evangelicals must develop a missiology that values urban research for North America.**

Here is the area in which many Evangelicals fall short in the United States and Canada. Most of the missiology serving as a foundation for missional activity in North America fails to value research as a tool to assist in strategy development and contextualization.

1. **Evangelicals must recognize that better urban research at home has significant implications for missions abroad.**

Many of the world’s unreached peoples are moving to the urban contexts of the United States and Canada. Unfortunately, most Evangelicals continue to embrace a missiology that dichotomizes missions according to geographical boundaries: “International” missions happen “over there.” “Domestic” missions take place “here.” And never shall the two meet.

Transnational migrations, high speed transportation, and instant communication have reduced the appearance of distance between countries. Peoples migrate and continue to be active in the social and political realms in their countries of birth. Mission strategy needs to integrate strategies developed by missionaries “over there” with those developed by missionaries “over here.” Many of the peoples residing in North America are gateway peoples to reaching unreached peoples in other lands.

1. **Evangelicals must encourage, develop, and sustain support networks for a cadre of urban researchers at both the professional and volunteer levels.**

Evangelicals need to come together and form networks for urban research. Since the number of potential researchers is likely to begin as a small number, part of their responsibilities will include the recruiting and training additional researchers. Room must be made for collaborative work between both the professionals and the volunteers.

1. **Evangelicals must collaborate with one another to conduct, share, and disseminate findings as quickly as possible.**

Differing groups and denominations will likely form their own networks of urban researchers. While this matter is not a bad thing, the hoarding of findings, feeding egos, competition, and lack of cooperation are detrimental to the process necessary to provide healthy urban missiological research. The United States and Canada are too large for any one group to study. There must be collaborative efforts related to the study of the peoples of the cities. Without such cooperation among Evangelicals, the desperately needed work will likely remain unaccomplished.

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20. It should be noted that Joshua Project and the Global Research Department use differing definitions for what constitutes certain people groups (for more information see <http://www.joshuaproject.net/how-many-people-groups.php>). While the difference of 273 unreached people groups may be accounted for if both organizations used a common definition, I remain a bit skeptical that simply nomenclature is the reason for the sizeable difference. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. After the original presentation of this paper in March 2011 to the Southeastern Regional Evangelical Missiological Society, the Global Research Department began publishing a new statistic. In an article published in August 2011, the department presently notes that there are 584 “unengaged unreached people groups” in North America. <http://www.imb.org/main/news/details.asp?StoryID=9971>; accessed September 27, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
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