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REVITALIZATION AMID DIASPORA

Consultation Three: Explorations in World Christian Revitalization Movements

The Center for the Study of
World Christian Revitalization Movements
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The Asbury Theological Seminary Series in World Christian Revitalization Movements

J. Steven O'Malley, Editor

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*Revitalization amid Diaspora. Consultation Three: Explorations in World Christian
Revitalization Movements*

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CHAPTER 3

A Filipino Congregation in Diaspora as a Church Planting Revitalization Movement

NARRY F. SANTOS, PHD, WITH EUNICE L. IRWIN, PHD

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to present this case study on the Greenhills Christian Fellowship (GCF) in Toronto. It is an honor. A presentation at the EMS Annual meetings in 2010 featured the church planting aspects of the GCF movement in Canada.¹ We use some of that material for historical background here, but aim to focus this paper on revitalization themes. Thus, the title of “Re-Reading the GCF-Toronto Story.”

GCF-Toronto Members and Congregation

On Sunday mornings, GCF-Toronto is a hub of activity. There are 150 members, with 70% of them living in Scarborough (the eastern part of Toronto) and with 60% of them relatively new landed immigrants in Canada. The GCF-Toronto site is located at the Centennial College Residence and Conference Centre (CCRCC), 940 Progress Avenue, Scarborough. For the past two years, the church has been renting a ballroom for the Sunday morning worship service at 11 am – 12:30 pm, two small conference rooms for children’s Sunday School (which has an average of 25 kids), and another ballroom for the bi-weekly youth worship service (which has an average of 35 youth). GCF-Toronto also has 17 growth groups (or small groups) that meet regularly throughout the year.

Who Are these Filipinos and Diaspora Peoples, and Why Are They Here?

Experts across disciplines are paying close attention to international migration patterns and its implications on politics, economics, law, religion, and other fields. In particular, missiologists and church-planters are monitoring and analyzing the recent mass movements of people. In “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge,” (*Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 2003, 534) Ralph Winter writes:

As history unfolds and global migration increases, more and more people groups are being dispersed throughout the entire globe... Not many agencies take note of the strategic value of reaching the more accessible fragments of these “global peoples.”

While it is true that many agencies are responding slowly to the realities of diaspora (unprecedented movements of people) and their strategic value for reaching the “global peoples”, we are thankful for congregations that are “reading the times” and are “riding on the wave” of God’s movement. The purpose of this case is to showcase such a group - GCF in Toronto, Canada. Specifically, this case is a model demonstrating the effectiveness of diaspora church-planting in the most diverse and multicultural city in the world.² GCF-Toronto is a local church that has developed its evangelism, discipleship, and missions programs.

Why is This Case Study Significant to Revitalization?

The case study of Greenhills Christian Fellowship-Toronto is a contribution to a general understanding of missions for Filipinos in diaspora, and perhaps to other visible minorities and even to Christian organizations (e.g. denominations and para-church ministries). In the context of revitalization, it contributes specifically to understanding the role diaspora congregations play in extending church-planting movement transnationally. It searches for connections between vitality of the church and success in their witness among immigrants and diasporic peoples residing in the urban, multicultural cities of Canada.

Methods, Goals, Definitions, Organization of the Case

The research methods employed by the writers are *Case Study and Participant Observation*. The case study approach utilized in this paper is assumed to be the study of a case “over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 1998, 61). Interviews and collection of literature on GCF, including documents from archives are used for gathering data.

Participant observation methodology was also utilized for gathering data for this case. Assuming the complete participation of the observer, this method entails the “highest level of involvement...[which] probably comes when [the authors] study a situation in which they are already ordinary participants” (Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview*, 1980, 61). It is used because one of the authors is the founding pastor of GCF-Toronto and is able to effectively make systematic observations about the birth and development of GCF-Toronto. This is based on first-hand knowledge, close ties, and familiar relationships with the “mother church” in Manila, Philippines, as well as the GCF-Toronto members involved in the past and present activities of the church.

Two definitions provide the framework of discussion that will form part of the response to the paper. These terms are “revitalization” and “an intercultural diaspora movement.” Definitions that follow are provided by the CSWCRM leadership.³

Revitalization: denotes a process or movement marked by a sense of divine intervention that not only gives new life but breaks spiritual and temporal principalities and powers of human bondage, including conditions of injustice against humanity and the natural order, found within and without the prevailing forms of organized religion. The outcome of the intervention is typically perceived as effecting a renovation of the image of God within humanity and the release of creation from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:18-23).

An intercultural diaspora movement: a cohesive group of people who have relocated from a homeland location to a new social environment, who seek to move beyond the barriers of their community to embrace persons of other ethnic identity from themselves and bring those persons into their fellowship, including their religious identity, or persons from a particular ethnic or religious identity in a diasporic context who join with persons of one or more other ethnic identities to form a new religious community that may draw from features of the old group identities but who find a higher value or meaning in their common fellowship.

The case is organized in four parts:

1. *Canada-wide and Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Diaspora Landscapes*
Diaspora landscapes of the GTA⁴ are included to better understand the cultural diversity of the city and the geographical context of the subject, which is GCF.
2. *GCF-Philippines: The Story of a Church-Planting Movement*
GCF-Toronto has historical links to the church started in Manila, Philippines. The Toronto church plant marks a status change in GCF, from a national movement to now a transnational one.
3. *GCF-Toronto: Journey to be Sojourners and Missional People among Diasporas*

The situation of the Filipino church planters, along with their commitment to reach other immigrant groups (diasporas) and locals in Toronto, reveals the congregation's call to be multicultural, missional, and metropolitan. The church restructured around these goals.

4. *Reflections on the GCF Movement in Canada: Questions and Conclusions*

Observations and Questions about the GCF-Toronto movement conclude the paper.

Canada-wide and GTA Diaspora Landscapes

Canada is known to be a nation of immigrants. Early Canadian society was composed of people who were originally immigrants from Europe (18th and 19th Century). In the 20th and the 21st Century, Canada has opened its doors to diasporas from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In just the last two decades, Canada has extended its immigration policy to include rising numbers of foreign workers (on work contracts) working from the vineyards of British Columbia, to the oil sands of Alberta, to the Tim Horton's donut outlets inside the Toronto airport, to the fishing boats off New Brunswick. There are also thousands of foreign students from the secondary school level to the colleges and universities across Canada. Also, Canada welcomes Asylum Seekers and Refugees (e.g. the political, religious, and climate refugees), who can be found living in high-rise apartments of large cities such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Evidently, Canada is a hospitable country renowned for its multiculturalism.

By December 2009, Canada had: (1) a total of 404,886 foreign workers as temporary migrant workers; (2) granted initial entry to 253,575 foreign students; (3) welcomed 129,219 refugees; and (4) granted 252,179 people permission to make Canada their home as permanent immigrants. Of these, the Top Ten Source Countries for Permanent Immigrants were (in descending order): China, India, Philippines, USA, Pakistan, UK, Iran, South Korea, France, and Colombia.

According to Canada's migration experts, "visible minorities" or "non-Caucasian Canadians" are predicted to dominate the three Canada's mega cities (Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver) by the year 2017. These people would be coming from Asia -- mainly the South Asians and Chinese. Clearly, these immigrants are established members of the Canadian community. They have already built their own ghettos (e.g. Little Saigon, China Town, Bombay Palaces), places of worship, and have established cultural associations.

The Filipino-Canadians⁵ are one of the largest immigrant groups of recent years⁶; particularly the GTA. Like other diaspora groups, they have become active participants in shaping the communities of which they have become a part. People of Filipino descent have connected across the country, gathering locally, and branching out to other Filipinos through media and organized meetings, including political, socio-cultural and religious gatherings.

The imagination of a missiologist is bogged by Canada's multi-ethnic society. The multitudes of people from all four corners of the globe, represent-

ing all colors, languages, smells, and cultures are not just a quaint minority in Canada, but are truly Canadians. It is to this Canada that God has called “peoples” to be Canadian disciples of Christ, including the Filipino-Canadian disciples, to evangelize and mobilize diaspora peoples for global mission.

GCF-Philippines: The Story of a Church-Planting Church

GCF was started in Manila, Philippines for the purpose of “reaching the emerging, self-reliant Filipinos who have the influence, and the leadership to do a significant work in spreading the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the Philippines and even to other nations”

GCF-Center (now called “GCF-Ortigas”)

GCF is a 33-year-old Baptist church in Pasig City, Metro Manila, Philippines. GCF was founded and pastored for 15 years by Rev. David Yount, a Conservative Baptist⁷ missionary. Rev. Yount led the church in its growth to more than 600 members through intentional evangelism and discipleship among middle and upper-middle class people in and around Manila. He also guided the church in the purchase of a lot and in the building of a church facility that could accommodate 1,500 people at the worship hall.

After 15.5 years, Rev. Yount handed the spiritual leadership of GCF to Dr. Luis Pantoja, Jr., who shepherded the church for the last 16.5 years.⁸ The ministry of Dr. Pantoja was marked with an emphasis on satellite development (the GCF term for church-planting). Aside from its main church in Pasig City (called GCF-Ortigas), GCF has 20 satellites (or church-plants) in the Philippines and Canada (i.e., 15 in the Philippines and five in Ontario).⁹

GCF-South Metro: The First GCF Satellite

I (Narry Santos) started ministry at GCF on June 1, 1994. After serving as Christian Education Pastor in GCF-Ortigas for three years, I was assigned to plant the first GCF satellite south of Manila, which is called GCF-South Metro. On January 17, 1997, GCF-South Metro was launched (or “birthed”). For ten years, I was the Resident Pastor of this first GCF satellite. On our tenth year, we had 900 people worshipping with us, 300+ students attending our Children’s Sunday School, and 88 growth groups (or small groups) meeting weekly.¹⁰

In 2006, GCF-South Metro was able to buy a lot and to put up its own building that could accommodate 1,500 people and a Christian school that attracted 300+ students from preschool to high school. GCF-South Metro also spearheaded the launch of three other satellites further south of Manila. These three satellites are GCF-Batangas City (which was launched in 2001 and now has 250 people), GCF-Santa Rosa (which was launched in 2006 and

now has 300 people), and GCF-Parañaque (which was launched in 2008 and now has 200 people).

Preparation for Vision Beyond the Philippines

How did the mission and vision develop to start GCF beyond the Philippines?

Context for a GCF Diaspora Church-Planting Vision

In such a context of growth, the GCF-South Metro leaders have sensed beginning in 2004 that the Philippines is too small a place to fulfill the Great Commission. We started to realize that God wants us to be part in the fulfillment of the global GCF vision.¹¹ Our leaders have owned the conviction that the Great Commission is nothing less than global.

The years 2003 to 2005 witnessed a string of five families who were preparing to go to Canada as new immigrants. I was getting frustrated with this disappointing development, however, because after I had discipled, trained, and mentored them for years, they would all go to Toronto. I felt that my investment of time and energy was wasted. In fact, the first family that left for Toronto was one of our GCF-South Metro pioneer families, the father of which served as an able Chairman of the Council of Elders.

In hindsight, such an exodus of families was the trigger that solidified our commitment to go outside of the Philippines to help fulfill the Great Commission. These families were to be the catalysts in starting the first international GCF in North America. I began to see them not anymore as “losses” to GCF-South Metro but as core leaders of what God was about to do for GCF outside of the Philippines. Thus, my frustration and disappointment turned to hope and anticipation.

These transformed sentiments are expressed in the coffee-table book entitled “Ten Years, Ten Values,” which commemorated GCF-South Metro’s 10th anniversary: “As a global paradigm of missions was sweeping GCF South Metro in 2004 and 2005, who would have known that the initial ‘losses’ of key leaders and members leaving for Canada in the early years would be the very catalyst for bringing the GCF global dream into reality?”¹²

Confirmation for a GCF Diaspora Church-Planting Vision

God’s confirmation for a GCF *diaspora* church-planting vision came to us from both the new immigrants people in Toronto and the leadership in the Philippines. On their end, the five families took strategic steps to move toward owning a GCF church-planting vision:

These initial families . . . began to conduct informal Bible studies. . . which became a recognized official GCF Growth Group. As the frequency of fellowship meetings increased to twice a month, Pastor Narry . . . visited the group in

2005 to challenge the Toronto brethren to explore the possibility of launching the first-ever global satellite church of GCF. As the fellowship increased, the satellite adopted the small group model for church-planting and February 2006, the first evangelistic event was conducted. . . (It) continued to grow with the addition of several families from the GCF community and from new members drawn from various activities.¹³

Moreover, the new group registered an official religious entity in Toronto and elected its officers.

On its end, the GCF-Ortigas Board of Elders (BOE) approved the request of Pastor Pantoja in his Pastoral Ministry Report at the Board of Elders meeting on April 21, 2006. The request is for a “GCF Toronto Feasibility Study – the Senior Pastor assigned Pastor Lito Villoria to visit Elder Oddy Bondoc and the GCF core group that intends to organize itself into GCF Toronto. As an outcome of such visit, Pastor Lito will report to this body and to the deacons the feasibility of launching the first GCF satellite overseas.”¹⁴

After the Toronto visit, Pastor Villoria recommended at the June 16, 2006 BOE meeting that “GCF proceed with establishing GCF Toronto as our first GCF overseas satellite and as the parent body, we are asked to provide a fulltime Resident Pastor and to subsidize their annual operating budget. The Senior Pastor intends to ask Pastor Narry Santos to spearhead the project on a minimum two-year assignment as GCF pastor-missionary beginning February 2007. . .”¹⁵ This recommendation was passed as a resolution by the GCF-Ortigas Board of Elders, as follows: “Motion prevailed to proceed with the plans to launch GCF Toronto. . . and implement according to the proposed time table” (2006-BOE-064).¹⁶

GCF-Canada: Historical Account of GCF Members as Diaspora

On my end, I sensed God’s hand in opening the opportunity for my family and me to be part of God’s global vision for GCF. I knew and already saw that God could start something totally new and exciting. I saw it when God used GCF-South Metro to start GCF-Batangas City in 2001. I saw it when God again used GCF-South Metro to start GCF-Santa Rosa. Even in my absence, God again used GCF-South Metro to start GCF-Parañaque in 2008. Having seen God use us in starting satellites before, I knew that God could use us again in starting satellites for Filipinos and other different groups in Toronto and beyond.

On our 10th anniversary on January 21, 2007, GCF-South Metro commissioned my family and me to be their global missionaries, aside from installing the new pastor for GCF-South Metro. In addition, the GCF-Ortigas BOE approved this motion on March 9, 2007: “Motion prevailed that we officially receive a ‘Shower of Blessing’ in the form of cash donations for the month of April 2007 as our share in the ministry in Toronto” (2007-BOE-031).¹⁷ On April 9, my family and I left Manila for our new global missions assignment.

GCF-Toronto was officially launched as the 13th GCF satellite on May 6, 2007 at the Centennial Community Centre in Toronto. In its four years, GCF-Toronto has moved from a small basement (that could accommodate 60 people) in a North York library, to three adjacent rooms (that could hold 120 people) at a Chinese Cultural Centre in Scarborough, to its current location in a ballroom (that could put in 220 people) at the Centennial College Residence and Conference Centre.

In our first prayer, vision-casting, and planning retreat as a satellite on June 16, 2007, we discussed three issues of prime importance. In our workshop materials on that day, we summarized the three major issues this way: (1) “We Are All Placed in Toronto by God’s Providence”; (2) “We Will Not Be a Filipino Church in Toronto”; and (3) “GCF-Toronto Will Be a Church-Planting Church.”¹⁸

Birth of a GCF-Canada Diaspora Church-Planting Vision

As a result of GCF-Toronto leaders’ commitment to a diaspora church-planting vision, the GCF-Canada Triple Vision was born. This triple vision is taken from the Acts 1:8 process of progress. The process begins in Jerusalem, then progresses into Judea and Samaria, and peaks at the ends of the earth.

For the first seven-year cycle (2007-2014), we will trust God for this GCF-Canada Strategic Vision: seven GCF satellites in seven years in the four provinces of Canada (i.e., Ontario; British Columbia; Alberta; Manitoba). This is the proposed breakdown of the triple vision per satellite:

GCF-Toronto Triple Vision (2007-2010)¹⁹

The vision to launch GCF-Toronto in May 2007	(our “Jerusalem”)
+	
The vision to birth GCF-Peel in March 2008	(our “Judea & Samaria”)
+	
The vision to birth GCF-Vancouver in May 2010	(our “Ends of the Earth”)
+	
GCF-Peel Triple Vision (2008-2011)	
+	
The vision to launch GCF-Peel in March 2008	(our “Jerusalem”)
+	
The vision to birth GCF-Etobicoke in October 2010	(our “Judea & Samaria”)
+	
The vision to birth GCF-Winnipeg in October 2011	(our “Ends of the Earth”)
+	
GCF-Vancouver Triple Vision (2010-2013)	
+	
The vision to launch GCF-Vancouver in May 2010	(our “Jerusalem”)

The vision to birth GCF-Surrey in October 2012 (our “Judea & Samaria”)

The vision to birth GCF-Calgary in September 2013 (our “Ends of the Earth”).

Once the GCF-Toronto Triple Vision (1st Cycle) is fulfilled, GCF-Toronto will pause, pray, and plan for its 2nd cycle of its triple vision. God willing, the next GCF-Toronto Triple Vision will be by Countries: (1) GCF-Canada as GCF-Toronto’s “Jerusalem”; (2) GCF-U.S.A. as GCF-Toronto’s “Judea & Samaria”; & (3) GCF-Australia as GCF-Toronto’s “ends of the earth.”

Seeing the GCF-Canada Triple Vision Gradually Happen

As God confirmed the GCF-Canada Triple Vision in our hearts, he gradually opened doors to make the birthing of these new satellites possible. Three months in our GCF-Toronto launch, we received a request to start GCF-Peel. In response, we started a growth group in Mississauga and then in Brampton. In September 2007, we conducted two preview worship services. From October 2007 onwards, we held weekly services until GCF-Peel was launched on March 27, 2008 (Easter).²⁰

In January and February 2008, we challenged a few former GCF members who now live in Vancouver to consider starting GCF-Vancouver. In response, a growth group was born in March, followed by another one later in 2008. These two growth groups became the core team in conducting monthly and later biweekly preview services in 2009, and weekly services in January 2010. On May 2, 2010, this satellite was launched officially, with Pastor Hizon Cua, a former GCF Satellite Pastor from Manila, serving at the full-time GCF-Vancouver Pastor.

We also received a request last January 2009 from Pastor Reymus Cagapan in Winnipeg that GCF-Toronto consider adopting the new church-planting work he initiated in October 2008 to be part of the GCF family of churches. In May 2009, Pastor Cliff Gonzales, a church-planter in Calgary, was referred to us by Pastor Pantoja, as a possible partner with GCF. Pastor Gonzales was inquiring if the new church-plant he would start in July 2009 can be part of the GCF family.

Initially, we were hesitant about these two requests, because GCF always starts satellite development from scratch. In all the 16 satellites that were launched by GCF in the past 16 years, we intentionally initiated the work in different strategic areas. However, in relation to the two requests from Winnipeg and Calgary, we sensed that these requests warrant our prayer and discussion, and that this may be a new and supplementary way to fulfill God’s Triple vision for us.

GCF-Canada Leadership Summit and GCF-Canada Covenant

The GCF-Toronto leaders were open to the mode of “adopting” in satellite development in addition to the “birthing” approach of church planting, primarily due to the corporate decision at the first biennial GCF-Canada Leadership Summit held on May 9, 2009. In that leadership summit, 68 delegates from GCF-Toronto, GCF-Peel, and GCF-Vancouver saw the value of the GCF-Canada Vision in the context of our multicultural realities. As a result of the summit, this manifesto was unanimously agreed upon:

- (1) That GCF-Canada shall be missional, metropolitan, and multicultural in its strategy and ministries;
- (2) That GCF-Canada shall be one with GCF-Philippines in its fundamental beliefs, mission, and vision but legally, administratively and financially autonomous;
- (3) That GCF-Canada shall partner with GCF-Philippines, Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, and Canadian Baptists of Western Canada in the areas of ministry, missions, leadership development, pastoral training, and other areas of ministry support.²¹

The GCF-Canada Leadership Summit Manifesto catalyzed the formation of the GCF-Canada Covenant, which established the framework of unity and partnership with GCF-Canada in July 2009. The ratified GCF-Canada Covenant specifies four points of agreement; namely: (1) mission; (2) vision; (3) statement of faith; and (4) ethos. These four items are designed to shape the unity of all satellites in Canada and are formulated to serve as the framework for birthing new and adopting potential GCF satellites.

Aside from the four areas of unity, the GCF-Canada Covenant subscribes to three governing perspectives in our satellite development, expressed explicitly at the First GCF-Canada Leadership Summit Manifesto of May 9, 2009. The Covenant states, “GCF-Canada shall be missional, metropolitan, and multicultural in its strategies and ministries.” This is how we describe these three strategies in satellite development:

- (1) **Missional** Church – the satellites will be intentionally multiplying satellites (through the satellite triple vision) and will incarnationally add value to our communities;
- (2) **Metropolitan** Community – the satellites will intentionally and strategically minister in the urban centres (i.e., targeting the cities); and
- (3) **Multicultural** Country – the satellites will intentionally be on mission to the *diaspora* (i.e., reaching the immigrants in countries that are open to receive different ethnic groups) of “all nations.”

Thus, by God’s grace & for His glory, GCF-Canada will be multiplying repro-

ducing missional churches in metropolitan communities in the multicultural country of Canada.

GCF-Winnipeg and GCF-Calgary: Shift from Birthing to Adopting Also

With the ratified GCF-Canada Covenant at hand, Elder Rick Manguerra (Chairman of the GCF-Peel Council), Atty. Abesamis, and I went for an exploratory visit to Winnipeg on July 23-27, 2009. We were sent by GCF-Peel to conduct the exploration, because GCF-Peel owns the Triple Vision of going to Winnipeg for its “ends of the earth” satellite. We met Pastor Cagampan and the core leaders of the new church-plant in Winnipeg, presented to them the GCF-Canada Covenant (containing the GCF Mission, Vision, Faith, & Ethos), narrated our GCF-Canada two-year story of satellite development, joined their two small groups sessions and worship service with 60 people.

On their end, Pastor Cagampan and his leaders agreed to bring to their people the option that their new church-plant be adopted as GCF-Winnipeg, to pray about it for one month, and to inform us of their group’s decision at the end of August 2009. In a month, they informed us of the decision of the whole groups to be adopted as GCF-Winnipeg.

To move this decision forward, Pastor Pantoja, Elder Joseph Cachola (Chairman of the interim GCF-Canada Board), Elder Manguerra, Atty. Abesamis, and I visited Winnipeg on September 18-20, 2009 to sign the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between GCF-Canada and the new group, GCF-Winnipeg. This marks a shift in our GCF-Canada policy: from simply “birthing” daughter churches, we can now “adopt” young churches as well.

We also trained the leaders on how to do satellite development in their target area. In addition, we continue to mentor and guide the GCF-Winnipeg leaders through our visits, sharing of resource materials, and skype meetings. GCF-Winnipeg is scheduled to be launched as a satellite on October 2, 2011.

In addition to visiting GCF-Winnipeg, the team also explored the possibilities on September 17-18, 2009 of having the new church-plant of Pastor Gonzales and his leaders be adopted as GCF-Calgary. We presented to this leadership group the GCF mission, vision, statement of faith, ethos, and the GCF-Canada Covenant. In two weeks, they committed to be part of the GCF-Canada family of churches. Elder Manguerra and I returned to Calgary on October 14-18 to conduct satellite development training, to take part in their small group sessions and participate in the worship service with 70 people, and to sign the MOA between GCF-Canada and the new group, GCF-Calgary.

When we asked Pastor Gonzales and his leaders why they chose to be part of the GCF-Canada family of churches – knowing that we are just over two years old then and that we have meagre resources to assist them – they replied that they want to be identified with a group that has a clear vision to plant churches in Canada and beyond. Through occasional visits, sharing resource materials, and regular Skype meetings, we were able to mentor Pastor Gonzales.

les and his leaders in doing the GCF ministry in their context. As a result, GCF- Calgary was officially launched as a satellite on May 16, 2010.

GCF-Toronto: Journey to be Sojourners and Missional People among Diasporas

Decisions by a fledgling church planting team in Toronto implied adapting and changing to the new environment without loss of the original vision. There is the clear sense of mission from God to GCF, but as sojourners in Canada on a new journey among diasporas, the team needs to learn fresh lessons in fulfilling this mission. What does ministry look like today?

Worship Life

In our worship services, we value the role of God's Word through preaching and the dynamic worship of God through song and prayer. We seek to make the sermon biblically based and practically applicable in people's everyday life. Church members also regularly share their testimonies on how God works and reveals himself to them. In relation to church music, our weekly praise and worship volunteer teams, along with instrumentalists for guitars, drums, and keyboard, and an adult choir inspire us to sing praises to God.

"Music at GCF can be best described as a fusion. We are a contemporary church that remains in love and attached to Christianity's historical expressions and elements of worship."²² In addition to the pastoral prayer, we spend 10 minutes of prayer in small groups with the congregation before we conclude our celebration with a benediction and closing song. Our main desire is that we come out of the worship experience inspired to love God more.

Growth Group Life

In GCF, a growth group defined as "a voluntary and intentional gathering of five to fifteen people, regularly meeting together with the shared goal of helping each other realize GROWTH in their Christian life and experience."²³ It also serves as a microcosm of the church that aspires to live out together God's 5 purposes of evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and worship. In GCF, these 5 purposes are spelled in its mission statement: "For the glory of God, we commit ourselves to EVANGELIZE and ENLIST people into our fellowship, to EDIFY and EQUIP them for spiritual maturity and service, and to EXALT God together in worship."

The "Five E's" in the GCF mission statement refer to our five purposes as a church: (1) "Evangelize" refers to our commitment to be on mission in reaching out to our "community" (i.e., the people outside the church); (2) "Exalt" refers to our commitment to magnify God in worship among the "crowd" (i.e., the people who come on Sunday mornings); (3) "Enlist" refers to our commitment to the members in nurturing fellowship among the "congregation" (i.e., the people who joined the satellite as church members); (4) "Edify" is our commitment to be maturing in discipleship with the "committed" (i.e., the members who desire to follow Jesus as his disciples);

and (5) "Equip" refers to our commitment to equip for ministry those in the "core" (i.e., the members who volunteer in serving God and his people).

The growth groups seek to fulfill these 5 purposes together (i.e., they worship together; they disciple together; they fellowship together; they serve together; they evangelize together). In the Canadian context, we align our growth group sessions according to the 4 seasons of the year. We meet in homes for the fall, winter, and spring seasons, but we take a break in summer to do more outdoor events (e.g., picnic at the park; barbeque party; trip to the Niagara; garage sale; distribution of bottled water in parks and bus stations).

Witness Life

We desire our witness to be missional and relational for the people around us. Since the church rents the facilities of the Centennial College Residence and Conference Centre (CCRCC) on Sundays, we could focus our outreach to the 100 international students (out of the 400 students) who reside at the CCRCC. After much prayer on how to reach and serve these international students, God opened doors for us in September 2010 when we approached Miss Erynne Levesque, the CCRCC Community Life Coordinator. We asked her how we could serve the international students. She said that we could help carry the bags of new and returning students at the CCRCC on September 6, the Move-In Day for the residents.

After that, Erynne allowed us to hold the following holiday events: (1) a Canadian Thanksgiving Dinner for the 100 international students on October 8; (2) a Christmas Lunch for them on December 19; (3) 3 Ontario Family Day Luncheons for 35 international students with 20 church members who hosted these students at the college-run hospitality restaurant on February 13, 20, and 27; (4) an immigration seminar with a lawyer from our church for 42 international students on April 20; and (5) an Easter Dinner for 80 international students on April 22. As a result, I was able to conduct weekly Bible studies with 3 international students (i.e., 2 from mainland China & 1 from India) during the spring semester.

On June 13, Erynne gave me a call and informed me that of all their residence activities for the school year, the events with the international students sponsored by the church received much commendation. It was the first year for the residence to gather the highest number of international students for community involvement. She requested a meeting with me on June 15 to personally thank the church and to ask us to be involved in planning the next school year events for the international students and residents, since CCRCC now considers us as part of their community.

In addition to the CCRCC, the church has seen some open bridges of communication and services this summer to the residents of Tuxedo Court, a high-need area in Scarborough or East Toronto (with approximately 5,500 people housed in 5 buildings, one of which is part of the Toronto Community Housing). In Tuxedo Court, 81% are considered visible minorities, majority of which are South Asians, and in the 2006 census, unemployment rate there is 14.8% (compared to the 6.7% average for the rest of Toronto).

As a result of prayer and a visit at Tuxedo Court last June 18, a couple from church has started a weekly Tuesday Bible Study with 3 elderly Filipino women at 50 Tuxedo Court (Toronto Community Housing). After more prayer and discernment, the church was able to host an after-“Canada Day” celebration at the party room of the building on July 10. We brought South Asian delicacies, rendered a traditional dance, special song numbers, and a message of hope in both the Tamil and English languages. There were 43 residents who came (23 of whom were South Asians), and 39 church members volunteered to help in the food and program preparation. As a result, two people decided to follow Jesus.

Prayer Life

We have seen more breakthroughs in our immediate family and the church family this year, because of a renewed ministry in prayer. A group of 7 members, led by a church elder, Joseph Cachola, sensed a clear call from God to initiate Connection 365, a year-long prayer ministry through 4 major strategies: (1) monthly prayer cards (challenging a group of 30 members every month to pray for the church at particular days of the month); (2) Sunday prayer study at 10-10:45 a.m. before the worship service; (3) quarterly prayer breakfasts (preceded by a week-long prayer and fasting); and (4) 10-minute prayer time in small groups during the Sunday worship services. Encouraged by this prayer emphasis, GCF-Vancouver adopted a similar Connection 365 strategy.

Power of God to Transform

What brings a lot of vitality in the church is when people turn to Jesus for salvation and when they decide to follow him in the waters of baptism. Out of the 150 members, 34 of them were baptized through the ministry of GCF-Toronto. Out of the 19 new members in 2011, 9 of them decided to trust Jesus by faith and were baptized (one of whom was born and bred in Toronto but whose parents originally came from Antigua). We give these transformed followers of Jesus opportunities to share their testimonies at their baptism ceremony, the worship service, and pre-New Year Thanksgiving service.

Discipleship and Leadership Training Life

Discipleship and leadership development is important to our church life and ministry. I hold discipleship sessions at our place with all 13 leaders and their spouses in two batches every month. My wife prepares the dinner for these leaders and leads the discipleship for the wives, while I teach the whole group and disciple the men. We basically follow our church leadership development framework of 3 C's (Character, Care, & Competence).

In relation to lay training, I conduct 5 seminars on the church's 5 purposes (or the 5 E's of Enlisting [fellowship], Edifying [discipleship], Equipping [ministry], Evangelizing [mission], and Exalting [worship]). Having these seminars helps our people learn how to fulfill God's purposes for their per-

sonal lives and for the church. Completing these 5 seminars also forms part of the requirements for nomination as a church elder, deacon, or deaconess.

In addition, our church got approval from Tyndale Seminary to give our leaders an 8-course diploma program called "Foundations on Missional Ministry & Church Leadership" through the TIM (Tyndale Intercultural Ministries) Centre. This program is now offered for 15 of our church leaders. The 8 courses are divided into two categories (i.e., 4 on missional ministry and 4 on church leadership), with each course requiring 40 hours of class time and course work. Moreover, the CBOQ (Canadian Baptists of Ontario & Quebec), our church's denomination in Canada, has agreed to credential the graduates of this diploma program as a Level 2 Part-Time Pastor or Church Worker. CBOQ has also given GCF-Toronto a "Barnabas Initiative" Grant, as its support to this church-based leadership development program with the TIM Centre.

Motives for Joining the Church

Since 60% of our members are new landed immigrants in Canada, we normally attract families who are looking for a significant sense of belonging. They seek new friends and a feeling of being part of a bigger family. This is what they often find in the church: GCF (God's Caring Family). We are serious in providing venues for loving relationships for them.

In addition to our small groups, these loving relationships occur in big groups. In the first two years of the church life, we had Sunday pot-bless lunch fellowships (i.e., after the morning worship service). It was an informal time to enjoy each other's company over a meal. When we moved to our current facility, we were limited to have such meals together only on special occasions (e.g., church anniversary; Family Day; Easter; Mothers' Day; Philippine Day; Thanksgiving; Christmas) and quarterly business meetings after the worship services. We also have an annual three-day family camp outside of the city and a sports day during the summer.

Our desire is that our relationships would reflect the GCF-Toronto ethos, which is spelled out through the acronym G.R.E.E.N.H.I.L.L.S.:

1. G = Gifts-based Ministry
2. R = Responsible Stewardship
3. E = Effective Structures
4. E = Empowering Leadership
5. N = Needs-oriented Evangelism
6. H = Holistic Growth Groups
7. I = Inspiring Worship
8. L = Loving Relationships
9. L = Life-Enriching Preaching
10. S = Sustainable Spirituality

Partnership Life

Since there are no Conservative Baptists in Canada, we decided to partner with a like-minded family of churches, the CBOQ for GCF-Toronto, GCF-

Peel, and GCF-York, and the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (CBWC) for GCF-Vancouver, GCF-Calgary, and GCF-Winnipeg. It is affirming to belong to a bigger family of churches whose mission and vision resonate with ours. In addition, CBOQ committed to support the GCF-York church plant for two years while CBWC has starting supporting the church plants of GCF-Vancouver, GCF-Calgary, and GCF-Winnipeg.

Since we cannot keep “importing” GCF-Philippines pastors for GCF-Canada (which we were able to do for GCF-Toronto, GCF-Vancouver, and GCF-Peel), we saw the need in 2009 to home-grow local leaders. Thus, the partnership with Tyndale Seminary through the TIM Centre was born in 2010. This partnership in the diploma program is also recognized by CBOQ. Current discussions are being made for the GCF western satellites to explore possibilities for a similar diploma program for the leaders of these three satellites.

Since we do not have the experience and expertise to do campus ministry among international students, we saw the need to partner with the International Students Ministries Canada (ISMC) to minister to these students. As a result, Margery Topalian, ISMC’s Toronto Director, now worships with us at GCF-Toronto, assists and coaches us on how to connect with and care for the international students in a sustaining manner.

Since we are trusting God for the next seven-year cycle of the GCF-Canada Triple Vision by countries, we are looking forward to a partnership with CBAP (our association in the Philippines) and GCF-Philippines in seeking to have GCF in Australia and New Zealand. At the CBAP biennial conference on November 28 - December 1, 2011, a Memorandum of Understanding is projected to be officially signed in praying, preparing, and planning together to start GCF-Australia and GCF-New Zealand.

In Summary

These eight corporate expressions of GCF-Toronto’s life and ministry enable us to see the hand of God at work in revealing himself and his mission, and in enabling us to be the church that reflects his nature and work among his people and for the community where he sovereignly placed us.

Reflections on the GCF Movement in Canada: Questions and Conclusions

The re-reading the GCF-Toronto story for revitalization purposes is an important reflective task that needs articulation. Such articulation comes in two forms; namely: (1) seven observable shifts that the church has gone through in its missional journey in Canada; and (2) three relevant questions that can help shape the movement’s future.

Seven “SHIFTS” that Occurred on the GCF-Toronto’s Journey into Diaspora Mission in Canada

The journey to become an international movement, to reach diasporas and locals within their new urban contexts, has required GCF-Toronto to gain new skills and training. Regular programs of church-based discipling, mentoring of leaders, and pastoral training, continues, but many are done in new ways. Yet all church members now realize their new identity as Christian (Filipinos)/Canadians who are living out the Gospel and sharing it in neighborhoods and sites where they live. This has transformed them from what could have become merely an immigrant church in isolation from other ethnic groups.

They have become a trusted community as they move from one group to another, and between religious communities. Why? They adapted to the context of Toronto, and the changes they made brought “new life” to their churches. These “shifts” are measurable in the GCF-Canada church planting movement:

From	To
Shift #1: Feeling of Loss	Feeling of Opportunity
Shift #2: Identity as Filipinos	Identity as Christian (Filipinos)/Canadians
Shift #3: Joy of Birthing (Disciples/Churches)	Joy in Adopting them as well
Shift #4: Meeting People	Meeting People’s Needs
Shift #5: Reaching Out to Neighbors	Loving Neighbors
Shift #6: Being an Attractional Congregation	Being an Incarnational Congregation
Shift #7 : Partnership with GCF network	Partnering beyond GCF network too

1. GCF-Toronto is a safe place for immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and diasporas. Programs quickly envelop them within relationships where they find members who understand and respond to their needs.
2. The congregation invites cultural diversity. Within the multicultural environment, new members create hybridity of their own understandings because of activities that allow culture-learning and sharing. The congregation is not just for Filipinos.
3. GCF-Canada stepped into new relationship with non-GCF church planting organizations. They demonstrate openness to work as a team to strengthen any work, and in a few cases, accept like-minded church plants that wanted to join GCF but which were birthed through their own model.
4. Members embrace newcomers in their neighborhoods or into the circles

- of their congregation's fellowship.
5. The ethos of the church prepares people to move toward relationships with outsiders. This is learned through regular programs of the church. Growth groups provide genuine times of fellowship and service, as well as times of Bible study, and this is the training ground for relational outreach.
 6. GCF-Toronto has intentionally decided to become hands and feet to those in need in their neighborhoods. Although they still invite members to special events that attract them to the church, members are learning that community service is an important avenue for explaining the meaning of their faith.
 7. GCF-Canada has become open to allowing new church plants outside their own denomination to be part of the movement through "adoption." The church leadership is committing its pastoral training, in part, to denominations and persons beyond their own trusted network of Conservative Baptists. GCF-Toronto now partners with a network of ripple Canadian churches, and we anticipate the effects of her *glocal* ministry (meaning, global and local at the same time).

Relevant Questions on Church-Planting Movements

We observe interesting facets in the "new life" of the GCF-Toronto congregation. These touch on the past, yet raise questions for us about the GCF that relate to diaspora church planting and have implications for revitalization discussions today, as well as for structural considerations in the future.

Legacy of GCF Missionary Pioneers

*Do visions and values remain unchanged? If so, how do these visions and values remain as part of any movement?

It is evident that GCF-Toronto is a product of a providential history, from the early missions initiatives of the colonial period in the Philippines to the great scattering of the Filipino peoples of the last three decades. In August 2007, Dr. Mary Wilder of Western Seminary said of the Filipinos, "...100 years ago, the Filipinos were a mission field. Now, they are moving out to take their place in missions, reaching around the world in very creative ways!" Indeed, we affirm GCF-Toronto's role as a diaspora church reaching "the world" in our diverse nation. May her model be emulated by diaspora churches in Canada and everywhere around the globe, wherever diaspora people may be.

Yet, there remains the unfinished task of the Great Commission. For now, however, we give glory to God and celebrate the "colonial" missionaries who evangelized the Filipinos and who gave us a heritage. GCF is a legacy of American Conservative Baptist missionary work through the ministry of Rev. (and Mrs.) David Yount.²⁴

The same vision continues 33 years later in GCF and in GCF-Canada. The structures and programs may continue (such as 5 E's, etc.) but a new context of multicultural church planting is the areas where methods and ministry strategies have been broadened. It creates enthusiasm for ministry and vibrancy of worship, with steady church growth because leaders and members trust God to make them into a missional congregation, with vision, equipped and able to minister in the globalized cities of Canada where immigrants abound.

Filipino Global Scattering

*How is the scattering of Filipinos both a loss and a blessing to their contexts?

Scattered The Filipino Global Presence (Pantoja, Tira, and Wan, 2004) is a compendium describing the global scattering of the Filipino people.²⁵ Evidently, their Filipino glocal is an act of God. They are a providentially dispersed nation, destined to be heralds of the Gospel. While many of them became "born again" Christians while working abroad, many also have lived out their faith wherever they reside. This is the case of many Filipino immigrants in GTA who have become members of GCF-Toronto.

Diaspora Filipinos, therefore, are not only subjects of evangelism but can be mobilized to help fulfill the *Missio Dei*! Revisiting the topic of global partnerships for mission one is amazed at the providence of God in raising Filipinos to partner with the whole Church in bringing the whole Gospel to the whole world.

GCF, specifically GCF-Toronto's glocal vision and mission is to become a missional congregation – ministering both globally and locally simultaneously. It is important to nurture their vision and support their mission in order for them to reach other diasporas in Canada. Practical partnerships with like-minded individuals and organizations are now being appealed in this paper for Kingdom advance. Reaching the diasporas in GTA requires healthy partnerships.

Glocal Missions: GCF-Toronto Agenda and Ripple Effects

*What new movements or structures will emerge due to globalization or revitalization?

Diaspora congregations in Canada are on the rise as the flow of migration continues. However, GCF-Toronto seeks to be different, and while her ties to the homeland and her "hub" are evident as indicated by her choice of name "Greenhills Christian Fellowship" and affiliation with 19 other GCF satellites, GCF-Toronto endeavors to be purposely missional, metropolitan, and multicultural in the city where God has placed her.

Seeking to be "international" and not Filipino by definition, GCF-Toronto seeks to bring people of diverse cultural backgrounds together. It is our hope that the GCF-Toronto model will inspire many other diaspora congregations to join in this movement of reaching beyond cultural borders, and

partnering for the *Missio Dei*. May there be a ripple effect of diaspora church plants across the country, and even around the world, cropping up as quickly as the waves of migration and God's providence take them.

Conclusion

For diaspora missions in Toronto or through GCF-Canada, every person outside the "Kingdom" of God is priority, and these persons are "everywhere." GCF, specifically GCF-Toronto, remembers that it is God who determines where people will live at certain times, so that wherever they are in the universe, they can call upon Him and find Him (Acts 17:26-28).

Notes

1. This EMS 2010 article, which was co-authored by Narry F. Santos and Sadiri Joy Tira, was later included in the EMS Society Series no. 19, *Reflecting God's Glory Together: Diversity in Evangelical Mission*, A. Scott Moreau and Beth Snodderly, eds. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2011), pp. 63-90.

2. Refer to <http://www.toronto.cj/> for more information.

3. Terms here are quoted from the document, "Definition of Terms," related to the research project of the Center, distributed by J. Steven O'Malley, March 11, 2011.

4. <http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/101/cst01/demo24a-eng.html>; also http://www45.statcan.gc.ca/2009/cgco_2009_001-eng.html.

5. Canada Census 2006 by Place of Birth and Period of Immigration at <http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/101/cst01/demo24a-eng.html>.

6. See Canada at a Glance 2009 at http://www45.statcan.gc.ca/2009/cgco_2009_001-eng.html.

7. The Conservative Baptist Association of America (now called CB-America) started in 1947. In 2003, it had over 1,200 churches and over 200,000 members. For more information on Conservative Baptists, see Bruce Shelley, *A History of Conservative Baptists* (USA: Conservative Baptist Press, 1971). In the Philippines, CBAP (Conservative Baptist Association of the Philippines) celebrated its 50th year in 2006 with more than 400 churches. For a more information on CBAP, see Jim Davis, *From Carryall Beginnings to Crossing Borders: A 50-Year Journey of Conservative Baptist Ministries in the Philippines* (Manila: LifeChange Publishing, 2006).

8. Dr. Larry Pabiona was installed as the new Senior Pastor at GCF on May 28, 2011.

9. For more information on GCF, please visit the church website on www.gcf.org.ph.

10. For more information on GCF-South Metro, please visit the church website on www.gcfsouth.org.

11. Filipino awareness of global mission generally began a decade earlier, triggered by a study program known as the Concentrated World Missions Course, designed to train lay people preparing to work abroad. "Since 1994 over fifteen thousand Filipinos have taken the CWMC (Kairos course). It has helped in seeing a 'missions movement' sweep through the Filipino Church resulting in the Filipino Church moving from being 'missionary receiving' to 'missionary sending'. All thirteen unreached people groups in the country now have one or more fellowships of worshipping believers and

the Filipino Church now ranks as one of the top ten missionary sending countries of the world!" <http://www.kairoscourse.org/history.html>.

12. GCF South Metro, *Ten Years, Ten Values* (Las Piñas, Metro Manila, Philippines: GCF South Metro, 2007), p. 168.

13. *Ten Years, Ten Values*, p. 168.

14. The Pastoral Ministry Report of the Senior Pastor is part of the minutes of the GCF BOE Meeting on April 21, 2006.

15. This is part of Dr. Pantoja's Pastoral Ministry Report to the GCF BOE on June 16, 2006.

16. This resolution is the 64th resolution in 2006 by the GCF BOE at its regular meeting on June 16, 2006.

17. This resolution is the 31st resolution in 2007 by the GCF BOE at its regular meeting on March 9, 2007.

18. This is taken from page 6 of the "For Nothing is Impossible with God" Global Vision Workshop Materials.

19. God willing, one cycle of satellite triple vision takes 3-5 years to fulfill (plus one year to pause & pray after the first cycle, and one more year to plan & prepare for the next cycle of satellite triple vision).

20. Just as GCF-Toronto was officially recognized as a religious institution in Ontario in 2006, GCF-Peel was also officially recognized in Ontario in 2009.

21. Aside from the GCF-Canada Manifesto, the May 9, 2009 leadership summit also focused on the GCF Vision in both its global and Canadian perspectives, and started the formulation of the GCF-Canada ethos.

22. For details on GCF's worship philosophy, see <http://www.gcf.org.ph/pages/exalting>.

23. For details on GCF's growth group philosophy, see <http://www.gcf.org.ph/pages/equipping>.

24. The Baptists began their work in the Philippines in 1900. The Younts were deployed to the Philippines in 1967.

25. In their seminal work, the contributors agreed that the Filipinos are widely scattered (in over 210 countries) for a divine purpose. The Filipino diaspora is caused mainly by economic and political reasons. However, Filipino missiologists noted that many Christian Filipinos in the diaspora are actively witnessing for Christ and planting churches. Migrant Filipino workers are found in the 10/40 window, particularly in the Buddhist world, Islamic world, Hindu world, and Jewish world (see *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence*). They also can be found in the Western world, particularly in North America.