

A Great Global Village

By David Gonzalez

I began to write this article in my apartment in Olathe, Kansas, USA. In preparation for its composition, I spoke with my family in Mexico and my wife's family in Brazil. In addition, my wife spoke with several of her friends from Brazil... all this through the internet!

Undeniably, in recent decades the distances in the world have shrunk... and not just through the internet. Technological improvements in transportation, production, and media have played a key part in making the world more of a "global village." In addition, social networking tools such as Facebook, Hi5, Twitter, MySpace, Orkut, MSN, Yahoo messenger, and Skype have enabled us to establish relationships with people from other places, generations, and cultures.

Three years ago I read a book entitled *The World is Flat* by Thomas Friedman, and although I'm still not totally convinced of the veracity of that statement, I do think that the distances among the countries have been greatly reduced and interactions among people from different countries have increased enormously. I cannot say that occurrences and cultural trends that happen in one country will be universally accepted by all, certain cultural distinctions still exist, but I can say that what happens in one country can immediately be known by and affect others around the world.

I am not an expert on the topic of "globalization" but I am thrilled to know I am part of a global community. As a result, it is very important to make an effort to understand the global community in which I live and minister. Although many times it has been said that the Church is behind in many things, in my experience I learned about globalization in the Church far before I had heard about it elsewhere. In 1997, at my first Global NYI Convention in San Antonio, Texas, I discovered that the term "global" means far more than just the shape of our world. The term fully describes the interaction of people from different cultures, genders, locations, backgrounds, ethnicities, and ages. For the first time, I learned that NYI is, in essence, a global ministry.

During those days of fellowship, I found that listening to people from other places, learning from their ministerial experiences, and recognizing their needs and dreams that God had put in their hearts made me feel like I was a part of their ministry (even when I had never been to their location!). Additionally, for the first time I heard about the needs and challenges shared by my brothers and sisters from other places. I experienced feelings of satisfaction and responsibility as a direct result of the realization that I do indeed belong a great global family. All along, though, I kept thinking, "This is something I need to share with my local church!"

It has been more than 10 years since that time and perhaps the excitement and "newness" of that experience has diminished. However, today more than ever, I am convinced that the responsibility to make Christ-like disciples in the nations and take care of the God's creation is an urgent mandate for our church. I still feel that emotional excitement from time to time, knowing I am part of a global church, but I know that this requires more than excitement. This requires a clear awareness of what we want and what we are committed to be.

It is encouraging to know that we are ministering to a global audience of youth who are passionate and willing to explore beyond the limits of their own boundaries. Youth seem to embrace their instinctive search of novelty: going where the action is, having the courage to try something different, and pursuing ideals. It is this search of novelty that allows youth to cross borders, break paradigms, and think differently.

Now, this doesn't mean that young people are the only ones who should embrace global ministry. Neither am I saying that these adventures that young people partake have a lofty "happy ending." However, in the task of making Christ-like disciples in the nations, why not encourage young people to take that risk of venturing into missions and be residents of this global village! The apostle John said: "I write to you young men (*and women*) because you are strong, and the Word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one." (1 John 2:14b)

Further, this is not about propagating a social movement meant to impose a specific religious culture around the world. What I am talking about is living and sharing with young people the values of the Kingdom of God, which are universal, relevant, and applicable to any context. We do this by starting in our own local group and context, but striving to affect the whole world! We need to encourage our youth to cross territorial borders and to let the Holy Spirit break down those mental barriers that often stop us in becoming that alternative community. A community that personifies the values of the Kingdom of God – love, justice, peace, truth and freedom – and preaches that the only way to the Father is Jesus.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is to leave our comfort zones, environments we understand and dominate, to cross the line that allows us to get away from our small local village and move out to take care of our neighbor– whether that neighbor lives just around the corner or all the way around the world. Believe me, young people are willing to do that, but the experiences we desire to involve them in need to be truly relevant. They need to be experiences that positively affect the global society in which we live. More importantly, our young people will unconditionally embrace this cause when they realize that this is a genuine and authentic desire to fulfill God's call to love and restore our world and not just another program or agenda.

If I had to summarize why it is important to think globally in our local churches and ministries, I would offer these three keys:

- Our church lives in a global community, and therefore its ministry is essentially global. It's amazing to see how our young people travel through this great global village almost daily through their encounters with media.
- God's plan from the beginning has included the creation as a whole, giving special emphasis to humanity, not considering differences of gender or race [Genesis 1:27-30, 12:3, John 3:16, Luke 4:35].
- As disciples of Jesus, we are committed to the Master to fulfill the mission of making disciples in the nations [Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8].

Finally, the practical question remains, "How can my youth group be involved in global ministry?" Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately!), I do not have a perfect, all-encompassing answer. I have not written any books on this subject (although there are many good ones!), but what I can do is share what I have learned in my journey through this way of living and what I am still learning in my local context.

My first advice would be to make prayer a vital part of your local youth group. We already pray for the things that exist in our immediate personal context. We pray for our family, our work, our schools, our church, etc. However, when we pray for people we have never met, or perhaps even heard of, then we are integrating them in our personal context, or rather, we are integrating ourselves into their context. Invite your youth group to take advantage of all the technological advances in our culture and to establish friendships with youth from other countries. Encourage them to support and learn about what our church is doing in favor of the Kingdom in other places around the world. The challenge will be to create and find ways your youth group can pray intentionally, diligently, and fervently.

Another lesson I have learned is that global ministry begins at home. It is important to provide opportunities for youth to integrate with other members of the church, whether they be adults, elders, peers, or children. This also means involving them in projects that the local church is promoting. Also, it means cultivating personal practices to take care of the creation that God has given us, to initiate service projects that can involve our family and our church.

Now that I live in the USA I am amazed with the number of subcultures and ethnic groups that interact daily in this country! Please take advantage of this situation in your country or city and learn from the experiences of people who come from another country, or another ethnic group.

The key to all of this is taking opportunities to partake in cross-cultural activities, whether they be in your local context or in another area of the world. You will find that these shared experiences speak much more powerfully than simply speaking and hearing words. Through this kind of experience, the Word of God takes a visible and clear shape that makes it impossible to say, "I do not understand."

In recent years, something that I have started to do is enrich my preaching and teaching with elements that promote values of the Kingdom of God in relation to the society in which we locally live. I do this through emphasizing our responsibility to seek peace, share hope, live justice and compassion, address the needs that exist in our society, taking care of nature and sharing these values with others.

Finally, let me emphasize that every local church is already involved in global ministry although sometimes we refuse to accept it, thinking that "global" is what is outside or away from us. Right there, in your local church, you are part of the global church! We are already sitting in the roller coaster, moving to the top of the lift hill. Why be a passive participant when you can live the adventure of global ministry? As we move over the lift hill, the best response we can offer is to open our eyes, raise our hands, shout all that our lungs can allow, and enjoy this spectacular trip of being part of a global church!