DIASPORA MISSIONS AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS IN RURAL COUNTIES IN TENNESSEE

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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December 2019

APPROVAL SHEET

DIASPORA MISSIONS AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS IN RURAL COUNTIES IN TENNESSEE

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For the glory of God

For Charla, without whom this project would have been impossible.

For Gabbi and Conner, who brought joy and laughter in the midst of writing.

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PREFACE

The journey that has brought me to the culmination of this dissertation and degree has been possible only because of the support of others. The influence, encouragement, assistance, and support of the following have been indispensable. I am deeply grateful to each individual listed below, including those who make up the institutions listed below.

The churches of which I have been a member have deeply impacted my love for God and his mission. Three, specifically, should be mentioned. First, during my teenage years, the Oakhurst Church of Christ in Farmington, West Virginia, shaped my faith. This church consisted of blue-collar workers, many of whom were coal miners. These Christians inspired my love for ministry and learning. They shaped me in ways that they probably do not realize. Second, the Iglesia de Cristo, Congregación Ayllu was my training ground for church planting and missions. The first members of this congregation allowed a group of naïve Americans to disciple them. I will always cherish the years my family spent in Cusco, Peru, and the deeper love for missions that those years developed in me. Finally, the Stantonville Church of Christ in Stantonville, Tennessee, has impacted me in ways that its leaders and members will never fully understand. They supported my wife and me in our first ministry with them, on the mission field, and now for the past six years as their preaching minister. I am deeply thankful for their patience with me over the past four years as I have worked on this degree. I have not always been able to give them the effort and energy that I wanted to during this time, but they have always been supportive. I could not have completed this degree without their support and encouragement.

Our time as a church-planting team in Cusco, Peru, with the Kizer and Reaves

families also had an abiding impact on my family. Barton Kizer and Gary Reaves became like brothers to me. While our family's time in Cusco was cut short by illness, Barton and Gary continued to partner with God to work, serve, disciple, and successfully grow a church in a culture not their own. Though my continued involvement in foreign missions has been primarily academic, their experience and practical wisdom are unparalleled. I can only wish to know as much about missions as they do.

Without Freed-Hardeman University, I would not be completing this doctoral degree. I am thankful for the professors who invested in me when I was an undergraduate student. They challenged me academically, but more importantly, they inspired me to be a cross-cultural missionary. I am deeply grateful for the impact of Dr. Earl Edwards, Dr. David Lipe, Dr. Ralph Gilmore, Dr. Roy Sharp, Dr. Billy Smith, Dr. David Powell, Dr. Mark Blackwelder, Dr. Dowell Flatt, Dr. Sam Hester, Mark Hooper, and David South. In graduate school at Freed-Hardeman, in addition to several of the professors listed above, I am thankful for the impact of Dr. Ted Burleson, Dr. Kevin Moore, Dr. Clyde Woods, Dr. Terry Edwards, and Dr. Kevin Youngblood. This group of professors in biblical studies and missions fostered in me the desires and abilities needed to pursue a doctoral degree.

Six years ago, several of these men became my colleagues and have encouraged me in my academic work both at Freed-Hardeman and Southern Seminary. In addition to those mentioned above, it has been a privilege to work alongside of and be encouraged by Dr. Doug Burleson, Dr. Justin Rogers, Dr. Kirk Brothers, Dr. Rick Brumback, and Dan Winkler. Dr. Stan Mitchell, a constant source of encouragement and corny jokes, passed away suddenly during the writing of this dissertation. The way he cared for and mentored students will serve as an example for the rest of my academic career.

Dr. Billy Smith was the dean who hired me at Freed-Hardeman and encouraged me to pursue this degree. His support and encouragement have been

unceasing. Dr. Mark Blackwelder has been my dean for the last year and a half of this degree, and his support, wisdom, and encouragement have also been indispensable. The Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. C. J. Vires, has also continually supported and encouraged me through this process. I am thankful for the leadership of each of these administrators.

The students of Freed-Hardeman University are some of the best in the world. They have challenged me to be a better scholar, teacher, and practitioner, and their attitude in the classroom has made it a joy to teach them every day. Four students, in particular, have been especially helpful. Kayleigh and Callie have been my student assistants and have made my life significantly easier because of their organizational skills and disciplined work ethic. David and Danny assisted me in several interviews for this dissertation. Their insights on ethnicity have been invaluable.

In my first visit to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, I knew that I wanted to study there. I have not been disappointed. My experience at Southern has been nothing short of first-class. As an outsider, I have been accepted and loved at Southern. I have developed lasting friendships with brothers I love. My professors have been outstanding. I have taken Dr. David Sills for all missiology seminars and Dr. George Martin for all world religions seminars. These men displayed scholarship, wisdom, and concern for students that I will never forget. These seminars prepared me for my dissertation and a career in teaching.

Dr. John Mark Terry stepped in to be my advisor and dissertation chair at a late point in the process, and he has been outstanding. Though we have met only once in person, it has been an honor to work with a reputed scholar and Christian gentleman like Dr. Terry. His speed in responding to questions and editing chapters has amazed me. Having talked to my colleagues who have gone through the dissertation process, I know I have been very fortunate to have Dr. Terry as my advisor. I am thankful to Dr. Martin, mentioned above, who graciously agreed to be a part of my dissertation committee in

spite of his busy schedule. I am also thankful to Dr. John Klaassen, who agreed to serve on my committee even though we have never met. Both were helpful and gracious, and I am confident that the final product will be much richer because of them.

Finally, no words are adequate to express my thanks for my family. Dad and Mom have always supported, encouraged, and blessed my life. Their love has been a constant in my life. They have been especially encouraging during the process of completing this degree. My brother, James, has proofread all of my papers and all of this dissertation. I think he enjoyed the opportunity to correct his brother, but his insight has been invaluable. I am deeply thankful for his friendship. Our children, Gabbi and Conner, are such a joy. Playing with them and participating in their activities has been my "break" from reading, writing, and studying. They energize and enrich my life, but they are first God's children, and I am excited to see how he will use them. Finally, doctoral studies are a team effort, and these studies would not have been possible without the constant love, encouragement, grace, and support of my wife, Charla. The diploma will have my name on it, but her love has made it possible. Again, thank you is not enough.

I am hopeful that this dissertation will be useful in the kingdom. I am hopeful that this degree will help me to more effectively fulfill God's call in my life. Every person and blessing listed above are gifts from God's gracious hand. To him alone be all glory and honor and thanks.

Matt Cook

Henderson, Tennessee

December 2019

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century church faces a reality that it must not ignore: international migration. A 2017 report from the United Nations reveals that "the number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow over the past seventeen years, reaching 258 million in 2017, up from 248 million in 2015, 220 million in 2010, 191 million in 2005 and 173 million in 2000."[1] The United States hosts 49.8 million international migrants, the highest number in the world and more than four times the country that hosts the second highest number of immigrants.[2] While the current political climate focuses on the immigration of Hispanics, the Asian American population grew faster than any other major racial or ethnic group between 2000 and 2015 and Asian Americans "are projected to become the largest immigrant group in the country, surpassing Hispanics in 2055."[3] The United States Census Bureau estimated in 2016 that over 21 million Asians live in the United States.[4] Indicating the rising cultural influence

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[1] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *International Migration Report* (New York: United Nations, 2017), 4, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf.

[2] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *International Migration Report*, 6.

[3] Pew Forum, "Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population," September 8, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/.

[4] United States Census Bureau, "Newsroom: Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month: May 2018," May 1, 2018, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2018/asian-american.html.

of Asian Americans, the top ranked movie recently on iTunes in the United States was *Crazy Rich Asians*, celebrated for its entirely Asian American cast.[5]

While urban counties in the United States draw the majority of immigrants (14.8 percent of urban county residents are foreign born), rural counties are also home to immigrants. In mostly rural counties, the foreign-born population is 2.6 percent, compared to 2.3 percent in completely rural counties.[6] Visits to evangelical churches in rural areas, especially in the southern United States where evangelical Christianity is the strongest, indicate that the foreign-born membership of churches in these areas does not match the foreign-born population.

Diaspora missiology, then, can not only assist in reaching the larger diaspora populations of urban centers, but it can also stimulate the concern of churches in rural counties for their foreign-born neighbors. Over the past fifteen years, diaspora missiology has emerged as a legitimate subfield of missiology.[7] Diaspora missiology studies occur at the intersection of missiology and migration theory, with an emphasis on strategies to minister to and through the diaspora populations of the world.[8] While much continues to

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[5] iTunes, "iTunes Charts," accessed December 28, 2018, https://www.apple.com/itunes/charts/movies.

[6] Thomas Gryn, "The Foreign-Born by Urban-Rural Status of Counties: 2011–2015," The United States Census Bureau, December 8, 2016, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2016/12/the_foreign-bornby.html. According to Gryn, the Bureau defines counties as mostly urban if 50 percent or more of the population lives in urban areas. If 50 to 99.9 percent of the population lives in rural areas, the county is described as mostly rural. If 100 percent of the population lives in a rural area, the county is described as completely rural. An area is considered urban if the population of the municipality is above 2500 and the population density is higher than 1000 people per square mile.

[7] Recent significant scholarship on diaspora missiology includes Sadiri Joy Tira and Tetsunao Yamamori, eds., *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016); Chandler H. Im and Amos Yong, eds., *Global Diasporas and Mission*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 23 (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014); Michael Pocock and Enoch Wan, eds., *Diaspora Missiology: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World*, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 23 (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2015).

[8] For an extended list of definitions of diaspora missiology, see Tira and Yamamori, *Scattered and Gathered*, 538–43.

be written about diaspora peoples in urban centers of the United States, less has been written about the diaspora population in non-urban areas of the United States. Specifically, compared to the literature on rural Latino Americans, the Asian American population in small, southern towns, though a small demographic, is neglected in the literature of diaspora missiology and in secular literature.

Research Question

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the experience of Asian diaspora populations in rural, southern, evangelical contexts. My research question, specifically stated, is: What is the general and religious experience of the Asian diaspora in mostly and completely rural counties[9] in Tennessee, the state with the highest percentage of evangelicals in the United States?[10] In regard to their experience, I have sought to hear the story of Asian Americans, learn how they arrived in a rural area rather than an urban area, and discover if they have been the victims of mistreatment. I have been especially interested in discovering their experiences with evangelical Christians, their churches, and the level of engagement that has occurred between the research population and evangelicals.

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[9] As determined by the spreadsheet provided by the United State Census Bureau: United States Census Bureau, "New Census Data Show Differences Between Urban and Rural Populations," United States Census Bureau, December 8, 2016, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2016/cb16-210.html.

[10] Pew Forum, "Religious Landscape Study: Evangelical Protestants," *Pew Research Center*, May 11, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/. Tennessee is followed by Kentucky, Alabama, Arkansas, and Oklahoma as the states with the highest percentage of evangelicals in the United States.

Background

History of Research in Diaspora Missiology

Diaspora missiology, referred to by Michael Pocock as an "emerging discipline,"[11] not only explores the intersection of missiology and migration theory, but also investigates the rich history of migration's role in the history of Christianity. The Old Testament contributes to diaspora missiology through its description of diaspora peoples and its call for the ethical treatment of foreigners.[12] Further, diaspora peoples are used by God in the New Testament story, especially the Jewish diaspora. With few exceptions, Werner Kahl notes, "The dissemination of the Christian faith in the first century was not the result of a conscious decision drawn by believers aiming to evangelize the peoples of the world. It rather was the result of painful developments beyond their control that forced them into migration."[13] Modern Christian immigrants find themselves at the mercy of similar painful developments and diaspora missiology explores how they interpret their circumstances as a calling from God to evangelize in their new places of residence.

Intertwined with biblical studies in diaspora missiology is the study of immigration in light of Scripture. In connection with its political tension among evangelicals, several books have been written addressing immigration from an

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[11] Michael Pocock, introduction to *Diaspora Missiology: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World*, ed. Michael Pocock and Enoch Wan, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 23 (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2015), xv.

[12] M. Daniel Carroll, "Diaspora and Mission in the Old Testament," in Tira and Yamamori, *Scattered and Gathered*, 100–117; Carroll, "Biblical Perspectives on Migration and Mission: Contributions from the Old Testament," *Mission Studies* 30, no. 1 (2013): 9–26; Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

[13] Werner Kahl, "Migrants as Instruments of Evangelization: In Early Christianity and in Contemporary Christianity," in Im and Yong, *Global Diasporas and Mission*, 72; see Steven S. H. Chang, "From Opportunity to Mission: Scattering for the Gospel in the New Testament Story," in Tira and Yamamori, *Scattered and Gathered*, 118–31; J. D. Payne, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 67–85; Narry F. Santos, "Diaspora in the New Testament and Its Impact on Christian Mission," *Torch Trinity Journal* 13, no. 1 (2010): 3–18.

evangelical perspective.[14] The conclusion of each is similar to Yang's: "God loves immigrants and provides for them, and calls his followers to do the same (cf., Deut 10:18; Ps 146:9; Zech 7:10; Ezek 22:7; Mal 3:5; Jer 7:6; Deut 24:21). In Matthew 25, God commands us to extend hospitality (literally, the love of strangers)–with the suggestion that they may bless us more than we assist them (cf., Rom 12:13; Matt 25:35–45; Heb 13:2)."[15] In light of the Bible's teachings on immigrants, the attitude of some evangelicals is unfortunate. According to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), the most negative attitudes toward immigrants come from white evangelical Protestants.[16] White evangelical Protestants "stand out as the only religious community in which a majority (53 percent) believe that immigrants threaten traditional American customs and values,"[17] compared to 34 percent of all Americans who believe that immigrants threaten traditional American customs and values. Further, a 2010 study by the Pew Research Center indicated that only 12 percent of white Evangelicals said that religion was the biggest influence on their views on immigration.[18] Diaspora missiology becomes even more important in light of these negative attitudes and lack of biblical influence on immigration views.

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[14] I.e., Mark R. Amstutz, *Just Immigration: American Policy in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017); Carroll, *Christians at the Border*; James K. Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009); Payne, *Strangers Next Door*; Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009).

[15] Jenny Hwang Yang, "Immigrants in the USA: A Missional Opportunity," in Im and Yong, *Global Diasporas and Mission*, 152.

[16] Robert P. Jones et al., "How Americans View Immigrants and What They Want from Immigration Reform: Findings from the 2015 American Values Atlas," PRRI, March 29, 2016, http://www.prri.org/research/poll-immigration-reform-views-on-immigrants/.

[17] Jones et al., "How Americans View Immigrants."

[18] Pew Forum. "Few Say Religion Shapes Immigration, Environment Views," *Pew Research Center*, September 17, 2010, http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/17/few-say-religion-shapes-immigration-environment-views/.

Aside from biblical history and theology, missiologists like Andrew Walls have also traced the significant impact of immigration on Christian missions across the two-thousand-year history of Christianity, noting specifically that diaspora populations have typically advanced the growth of Christianity.[19] Diaspora missiology also addresses factors that cause migration and the role those factors play in successful missiological strategies.[20]

Diaspora missiology as a discipline traces its roots to early proponents like Tom Houston and Samuel Escobar.[21] Sadiri Joy Tira rightly claims credit, along with Enoch Wan, for developing the term "diaspora missiology,"[22] though the most significant advancements in the field have occurred through the Lausanne Movement, the focus groups it has gathered, and the succeeding publications issued by those groups.[23] For

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[19] Andrew F. Walls, "Mission and Migration: The Diaspora Factor in Christian History," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5, no. 2 (December 2002): 3–11; see Enoch Wan and Linda Gross, "Christian Missions to Diaspora Groups: A Diachronic General Overview and Synchronic Study of Contemporary USA," *Global Missiology English* 3, no. 5 (March 23, 2010), http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/59.

[20] Amador Remigio Jr., "Globalization, Diasporas, Urbanization and Pluralism in the 21st Century: A Compelling Narrative for the Missio Dei," in Tira and Yamamori, *Scattered and Gathered*, 18–24; see Michael Pocock, "Global Migration: Where do We Stand?," in Pocock and Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 16–17.

[21] Tom Houston, "Postscript: The Challenge of Diaspora Leaders for World Evangelism," in *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence*, ed. Luis L. Pantoja, Sadiri Joy Tira, and Enoch Wan (Manila, Philippines: LifeChange Publishing, 2004), 363–68; Samuel Escobar, "Migration: Avenue and Challenge to Mission," *Missiology* 31, no. 1 (January 2003): 17–28.

[22] Sadiri Joy Tira, "Diaspora Missiology and the Lausanne Movement at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century," in Im and Yong, *Global Diasporas and Mission*, 217. In this chapter, Tira does a favor for those interested in diaspora missiology by describing more fully the development of the field.

[23] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Diasporas and International Students: The New People Next Door*, Lausanne Occasional Paper 55 (Pattaya, Thailand: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005), http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/871-lop-55.html; Sadiri Joy Tira, "Diasporas: People on the Move," *Lausanne Movement*, August 28, 2009, https://www.lausanne.org/about/blog/diasporas-people-on-the-move; Narry F. Santos, "Diaspora Occurrences in the Bible and Their Contexts in Missions," *Lausanne World Pulse Archives*, March 2009, http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles-php/1104/03-2009; Lausanne Diaspora Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather: Embracing the Global Trend of Diaspora* (Manila, Philippines: LifeChange Publishing, 2010), https://www.ncdcma.org/enews/1112/Scattered-to-Gather.pdf.

example, the Lausanne Diaspora Educators Consultation proved significant because its attendees produced "The Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology," which defined diaspora missiology as "a missiological framework for understanding and participating in God's redemptive mission among people living outside their place of origin."[24] The number of works in the attached bibliography on diaspora missiology that have been produced over the past fifteen years is a testimony to the valuable work accomplished by diaspora missiologists in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

Definitions

While other terms are defined elsewhere in this dissertation, the following represents the most important terms that need precise definitions.

Diaspora. This term's common usage in the literature refers to "those who take up residence away from their places of origin."[25] While many subcategories of diaspora have been identified, the key phrase in this definition is "take up residence."

Diaspora missiology. For the purposes of this dissertation, this phrase is used as it has been defined by the Lausanne Diaspora Educators Consultation in the Seoul Declaration: "a missiological framework for understanding and participating in God's redemptive mission among people living outside their place of origin."[26] Diaspora missiology and its product, diaspora missions, includes theory and strategy for ministry *to*, *through*, and *beyond* the diaspora.[27] My research is focused on ministry *to* the diaspora.

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[24] "The Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology," *Lausanne Movement*, November 14, 2009, https://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/the-seoul-declaration-on-diaspora-missiology.

[25] Enoch Wan, introduction to *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*, ed. Enoch Wan, 2nd ed. (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2014), 3.

[26] "The Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology."

[27] For example, Thomas, Tira, and Wan structure their paper around these paradigms of

Immigration. For the purposes of this dissertation, immigration refers to the movement of people into a country to live there. Emigration is generally understood as the departure from one's country to settle in another. For example, an individual emigrates *from* a country when he leaves (goes from) that country. On the other hand, an individual immigrates *to* a country when he comes to that country to live.

Migration. This term is used in this dissertation to refer to "the act or process by which people, especially as a group, move from one location (city, country, region) to another."[28]

Additional Clarifications

This dissertation has been written from an evangelical Christian standpoint, seeking to understand all things under the sovereignty of God and the authority of the inspired and inerrant Word of God. In conjunction, the movement of peoples in the world is understood as the work of God using diaspora groups for his own glory. An affirmative answer is assumed in response to Remigio's question: "Considering the missiological reality that 'those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word' (Acts 8:4), could it be that God has, in His sovereignty, allowed the extensive scattering (and sometimes the unspeakable suffering) of His migrant people to enable them to be bearers of the Gospel message to the furthest corners of the earth?"[29] The negative attitudes of

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diaspora missiology. T. V. Thomas, Sadiri Joy Tira, and Enoch Wan, "Ministering to the Scattered Peoples," *Lausanne Movement*, July 6, 2010, https://www.lausanne.org/content/ministering-to-the-scattered-peoples.

[28] Leonore Loeb Adler and Uwe P. Gielen, *Migration: Immigration and Emigration in International Perspective* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=125491&site=ehost-live.

[29] Remigio, "Globalization, Diasporas, Urbanization," 40. Yang astutely states, "For Christians who participate in God's redemptive purposes, the migration of people, whether forced or voluntary, should be viewed not as accidental, but part of God's sovereign plan. . . . We are called to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matt. 28:19); with immigration, the nations show up on our doorstep. The mission field has crossed our borders and settled into our communities as our coworkers and neighbors." From Yang,

evangelical Christians toward immigration are unfortunate in light of the reality of God's activity among the diaspora.

Personal Interest

This research is personal to me because, other than when my family lived in Peru, I have lived in small, southern towns. Each of these towns has a Chinese family running a restaurant and at least one South Asian family working in the service/hospitality or health industries. I grew up in a rural area of West Virginia and vividly remember the racist slur that was often used in reference to the Asian American young woman that began attending our middle school in the seventh grade. In the rural, southern county where I attended a liberal arts Christian university, the South Asian student who lived in the dorm room next to mine described the racist prank calls he often received. In the rural church where I first did full-time ministry after college, the only non-Caucasian regular attenders were the small children of the South Asian American family that owned a hotel and the Chinese American family that owned a restaurant, all of whom came with their kindergarten teacher. My current residence is in a small town in a county classified as "mostly rural" by the United States Census Bureau, with 65 percent of the population living rurally. Just this week, though, I have twice greeted an Asian family at the youth soccer fields in this mostly rural county. At the university where I teach in this small town, I am aware of Asian American students whose parents immigrated to the United States from South Korea, Japan, China, the Philippines, and India. The only donut shop in our small town is owned and operated by Lao Americans. In each of these rural settings, evangelical churches need to be better equipped to reach these segments of the population, and I am hopeful that this research will provide the

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"Immigrants in the USA," 148.

necessary information to open up the possibilities for increased engagement between evangelicals and the Asian American diaspora in small towns.

Significance of this Dissertation for the Field of Study

As stated previously, Asian American populations in small, southern towns, though a small demographic, are neglected in the literature of diaspora missiology. For this reason, the research question, which explored the experience of Asian American populations in small, evangelical towns in Tennessee, hopes to make a small contribution to the field by beginning to fill this gap in the literature. As Creswell suggests, a lack of literature in a field is the "strongest and most scholarly rationale for a study" that is qualitative.[30] Further, this research holds potential kingdom value because evangelical churches in small, southern towns (which are often very important to those towns) may utilize the results of the research and its implications to more effectively evangelize diaspora populations. This is especially important if these rural churches are unaware of the larger conversation about diaspora missiology. The findings of this dissertation could also contribute to conversations on rural church growth and revitalization by adding diaspora ministry to potential ministry opportunities. Initially, I feared that the Asian diaspora is not treated well by a segment of the population in these small towns, and the research indicated that this mistreatment was not as severe as anticipated. Still, though, Creswell notes that one of the hallmarks of "qualitative research today is the deep involvement in issues of gender, culture, and marginalized groups. The topics about which we write are emotion laden, close to the people, and practical."[31] This research conforms to the standards of this hallmark because of its focus on a marginalized group.

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[30] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 94.

[31] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 19.

Limitations and a Delimitation

This study is limited by multiple factors. First, Asian Americans have come to the United States from a variety of contexts. The differences in those contexts may affect the perceived experience of the interviewee. Second, theoretical or purposive sampling "decreases the generalizability of findings" and therefore prevents this study from being generalizable to all non-urban areas in the United States.[32] Third, qualitative researchers recognize that their research can be interpreted by other researchers with different results.[33] In terms of delimitation, this study confines itself to interviewing Asian Americans in mostly and completely rural counties in Tennessee, the state with the highest percentage of evangelicals in the United States.

Methodology

My research was conducted in four major steps. First, a thorough literature review in the field of diaspora missiology was conducted, and is found in chapter two. Second, and conducted concurrently with the bibliographic research, twenty-three Asian Americans who currently live or previously lived in mostly and completely rural counties in Tennessee were interviewed. Third, the data was analyzed through coding processes that facilitated the discovery of themes that, in turn, informed the theories that were developed. Fourth, these theories were combined with the best practices of diaspora missiology to form missiological implications that could inform the ministry of evangelical churches to diaspora populations in rural counties in the research area.

Qualitative Research

This dissertation stands solidly in the grounded-theory tradition of qualitative research. Qualitative research "produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures

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[32] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 111.

[33] Creswell, *Research Design*.

or other means of quantification."[34] Qualitative research often stands opposite of quantitative research, which produces numerical results emphasizing measurement and statistical analysis. Qualitative research, though, produces non-numerical results.[35] Qualitative research methods were chosen for this project because it is interested in attempting to "understand the meaning or nature of experience of persons."[36] Data is usually collected through interviews and observation and is then analyzed through non-mathematical coding processes with the goal of discovering interrelated concepts that will produce a theory or theories.[37]

Theory generation or discovery is, specifically, the goal of grounded theory.[38] A grounded-theory researcher does not approach the research with preconceived theories, but allows the theory or theories to grow directly from the data.[39] In grounded-theory research, "the theory needs to be grounded or rooted in observations; hence the term."[40] Because little research had been done in the selected field, I approached this dissertation with very little information and therefore was able to produce legitimate grounded theory based on the data, not preconceived theories. While the specific coding processes used in this research will be described in chapter 4, analysis of the data occurred simultaneously with the interviews, "with each informing and focusing the other throughout the research

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[34] Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 10.

[35] William M. K. Trochim, James P. Donnelly, and Kanika Arora, *Research Methods: The Essential Knowledge Base* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016), 57.

[36] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 11.

[37] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 10; Creswell, *Research Design*, 12.

[38] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 55.

[39] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 12.

[40] Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, *Research Methods*, 62.

process."[41] Originated by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s,[42] grounded theory continues to gain popularity in the fields of social science, education, and nursing.[43]

Qualitative Interviews

As qualitative interviewing is the primary data collection method for grounded theory, I conducted qualitative interviews as the primary data collection method.[44] Rubin and Rubin have defined qualitative interviews as "conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion."[45] These interviews attempt to understand the meaning of the experience of the interviewee, one of the primary reasons for qualitative research as stated above.[46] For Rubin and Rubin, the one being interviewed is described as a "conversational partner" because it emphasizes "the active role of the interviewee in shaping the discussion and in guiding what paths the research should take."[47] Because of this active role of the interviewee and the interviewer's usage of a small number of questions to guide the interview, some authors refer to this type of interview as a "semi-structured interview."[48]

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[41] Kathy Charmaz, "Grounded Theory in the 21st Century: Applications for Advancing Social Justice Studies," in Denzin and Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 507.

[42] Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1967).

[43] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 56.

[44] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*.

[45] Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 4.

[46] Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 13–14.

[47] Rubin and Rubin, 14.

[48] H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 5th ed. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2011), 156; Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission: A Companion* (London: SCM Press, 2013) 83, ProQuest

Sampling

Ideally, interviews would be conducted across the rural southeastern United States where evangelicalism is strong, but time and travel restrictions prevent a study of such an exhaustive nature.[49] A more feasible methodology narrowed the research population to Tennessee, the state with the highest percentage of evangelicals in the United States. The interviewees were chosen through purposive sampling, a process through which the researcher decides the purpose of the informants, and then finds participants that can fulfill that purpose.[50] Purposive sampling is necessary and effective with research populations that are small and sometimes difficult to find, which is descriptive of the research population of this dissertation.[51] Creswell describes theoretical sampling, also descriptive of the sampling used in this research, as a subcategory of purposive sampling in which interviewees are chosen based on their ability to contribute to the developing theory.[52] On occasion, an informant was found that was able to recommend other names in the research population, a method described as snowball sampling, which is also useful with small populations.[53] Several of the members of the

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Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/fhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3306199. Fontana and Frey coined the phrase "empathetic interviewing" to describe qualitative interviews with an emphasis on using the interview as an opportunity to advocate for the good of the interviewee. Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, "The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement," in Denzin and Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 695.

[49] The East South Central Division of the United States Census Bureau includes Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, the states with the highest percentage of evangelicals in the United States, and Mississippi, which has the sixth highest percentage. United States Census Bureau, "Census Regions and Divisions of the United States," United States Census Bureau, accessed June 23, 2018, https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/mapsdata/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf; Pew Forum, "Religious Landscape Study: Evangelical Protestants."

[50] Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*, 145; see also Greg Guest, "Sampling and Selecting Participants in Field Research," in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, ed. H. Russell Bernard and Clarence C. Gravlee (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015): 223–24.

[51] Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*, 146.

[52] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 118.

[53] Trochim, Donnelly, and Arora, *Research Methods*, 80; Bernard, *Research Methods in*

sample population were found through ministry friends in non-urban counties in Tennessee who had contact with Asian Americans in their community.

Differing opinions exist regarding the size of the sample needed to saturate the categories in a grounded-theory research study. Bernard, who argues for a minimum of ten interviews in qualitative research, notes, "There is growing evidence that ten to twenty knowledgeable people are enough to uncover and understand the core categories in any well-defined cultural domain or study of lived experience."[54] Specifically for grounded-theory studies, Creswell suggests that the researcher "typically conducts twenty to thirty interviews" in order to saturate the categories.[55] Guest discovered that very little new information was discovered after twelve interviews, but acknowledges that there is no "magic number" and that the literature does not commonly offer recommendations on sample size.[56] For this study, 23 Asian Americans were interviewed. I began to suspect that the categories were near saturation after interviewing 13 individuals, and full saturation was obvious after having interviewed 19 Asian Americans. Because I had scheduled interviews with 4 more, a total of 23 was reached and data collection ended.

Procedures

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews. These interviews often occurred in neutral environments such as restaurants or cafes. Though these atmospheres created background noise, the high quality of the digital recorder used effectively eliminated this noise.[57] The interviews were recorded with the permission of the

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Anthropology, 145.

[54] Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*, 154.

[55] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 56.

[56] Guest, "Sampling and Selecting Participants in Field Research," 230.

[57] Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*, 170.

respondent and stored on my password-protected computer and in a password-protected file on Dropbox.[58] After each interview, field notes were taken and the interview was transcribed.[59] Though each interview was viewed as a "conversational partnership,"[60] each conversation was guided to the following four open-ended questions. First, "What factors led you to a rural community instead of an urban center?" Second, "How would you describe your experience in this community?" Third, "How have you been treated by the Christians here?" Fourth, "What has your interaction with Christians and churches been like?"

This research was deemed as "low risk" by the Research Ethics Committee of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and therefore required only a verbal statement of informed consent. Per the "Risk Assessment and Informed Consent Guide," before each interview and before recording began, the interviewer clearly verbalized the purpose of the research, emphasized that the information provided would be held in strict confidence, and stated that names would not be reported or identified with responses.[61] Further, the interviewee was informed that participation was voluntary and that he or she could withdraw from the study at any point.

The credibility of this research is important for legitimate distribution of the research and both my professional reputation and that of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The research process described in this chapter, based on established procedures in qualitative research, demonstrates credibility. Further, Creswell specifies specific procedures for the purpose of research verification and recommends

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[58] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 134.

[59] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 171.

[60] Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 14.

[61] The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, "Risk Assessment and Informed Consent Guide," accessed October 28, 2018, http://www.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2017/09/Risk-Assessment-and-Informed-Consent-Guide-.pdf.

"that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study."[62] In this study, two of those procedures, triangulation[63] and thick description,[64] were employed. The credibility of this research is also enhanced by adherence to Enoch Wan's five criteria of integrative missiological research: scripturally sound, theologically supported, analytically coherent, relevantly contextual, and strategically practical.[65]

Chapter Summaries

Following this introduction, chapter 2 will provide a full literature review in the field of diaspora missiology. Chapters 3 and 4 will explore and analyze the information discovered in the interviews. Chapter 3 will take a narrative approach, describing the interviewees and their stories. Qualitative research requires the writing of long passages showing multiple perspectives, often through the inclusion of quotations, which are abundant in chapter 3.[66] Chapter 4 will chronicle the discoveries made through the coding process.

Chapter 5 will report the theories that were produced through the coding process. Chapter 6 will combine these theories with the best practices of diaspora missiology to form missiological implications and offer suggestions for diaspora ministry

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[62] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 203.

[63] Specifically, the use of twenty-three interviewees from different locations as sources and the use of many diaspora missiology sources provide adequate triangulation. See David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by Step*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 93-94; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 202.

[64] Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 13; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 203. Though used for verification purposes, thick description is a natural result of qualitative interviews.

[65] Enoch Wan, "Inter-disciplinary and Integrative Missiological Research: The 'What,' 'Why,', and 'How,'" *Global Missiology* 4, no. 14 (2017): 5, http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/%20article/viewFile/2019/4514.

[66] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 17.

for evangelical churches in mostly rural counties based on the findings of the interviews. Chapter 7 will summarize the dissertation and offer suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

A LITERATURE REVIEW OF DIASPORA MISSIOLOGY

Introduction

Though, as Hanciles notes, "Few factors are as consequential in the history of the human race as migration,"[1] migration's impact on the twenty-first century has been especially impactful. In the United States, spurred on by globalization, the influx of international migrants has created a rich diversity of culture and language that is welcomed by some and opposed by others. The American Christian who is alert to the opportunities of mission should see this influx as what Adeney calls an "unprecedented need and opportunity."[2] She vividly describes this opportunity:

> Today there is an unprecedented need and opportunity for such people. Globalization scatters human beings everywhere. Businessmen from all continents trot off planes, clutching briefcases and iPhones. Laborers migrate by the millions. Families waft in on winds of hope for a better future. So do students. Refugees spew out of violent zones. Taken all together, these "global flows" bring the nations into our neighborhoods, complementing the peoples who have been here since long before the Mayflower docked.[3]

These "global flows" create mission opportunities, but the situation is undoubtedly complex.

The complexity of these opportunities is generated by the diversity of the global flows. The immigrant could be a Christian who has brought his church with him to

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[1] Jehu Hanciles, "Migration and Mission: The Religious Significance of the North-South Divide," in *Mission in the Twenty-First Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission*, ed. Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 118.

[2] Miriam Adeney, "Colorful Initiatives: North American Diasporas in Mission," *Missiology* 69, no. 1 (2011): 6.

[3] Adeney, "Colorful Initiatives," 7.

the United States. The immigrants may not be Christians, but they could now be more open to faith in Christ because of separation from family, cultural, and religious influence. Portraying this complexity, Rynkiewich writes of immigrants, "Others are at a crisis point in their lives, in special need of a new community and a new worldview. They may be more open to Christ, but they are also vulnerable to competing new ideologies and temptations."[4] Additionally, some second generation immigrants struggle with their identity, and sometimes face "serious confusion regarding identity."[5] Recently, I spoke to two Asian American college students about potential interviews for this dissertation, both of whom were unsure if they even considered themselves to be Asian American, though they recognized their ethnic Asian backgrounds.

Diaspora missiology is the field which attempts to address the complicated missions opportunities created by international migration. It explores how immigrants are not only the objects of Christian mission, but "also the subjects of the church's mission."[6] Though a relatively new field of academic study, as Tira notes in his very first words of the seminal *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, "Diaspora is not a new phenomenon, and missiology is not a novel field of study."[7] From biblical times, God has carried out his mission both to and through diaspora groups. Further, the church's expansion throughout history "cannot be explained without taking

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[4] Michael A. Rynkiewich, "Mission in 'the Present Time': What about the People in Diaspora," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 30, no. 3 (July 2013): 106, https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/30_3_PDFs/IJFM_30_3-Rynkiewich.pdf.

[5] Sungho Choi, "Identity Crisis for the Diaspora Community," in *Korean Diaspora and Christian Mission*, ed. Sŭng-hun Kim and Wonsuk Ma (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 33.

[6] Stephen Bevans, "Mission among Migrants, Mission of Migrants, and Mission of the Church," in *Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, ed. Daniel G. Groody and Gioachhino Campese (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 90.

[7] Sadiri Joy Tira, preface to *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, ed. Sadiri Joy Tira and Tetsunao Yamamori, Regnum Studies in Mission (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 1.

into consideration God's sovereignty, ruling over the nations, and the moving of His people from everywhere to everywhere."[8] Understanding God's sovereignty over the diaspora movements throughout history, this chapter will conduct a literature review of the field of diaspora missiology. Specifically, the following will examine the definitions of diaspora, explore the phenomenon of migration, define diaspora missiology, and explore its history. Further, a theology of diaspora missiology will be developed followed by an explanation of current diaspora missiology theories.

What Is a Diaspora?

Especially since the inauguration of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* in 1991, the term *diaspora* has been the source of much scholarly debate, especially outside of the evangelical "diaspora missiology" discussion.[9] Broadly, diaspora refers to any group of people that have been dispersed from their homeland, but some have argued for a specific set of qualifications that a group must meet to be appropriately described as a diaspora group. From these two extremes, diaspora is seen either as "catchall or private club," but "both . . . belong to the history of the word."[10] As will be shown below, secular diaspora scholars tend to be more concerned with the precise nuances of the term while missiologists adopt a broader definition. In a study of diaspora missiology, one should at the least be aware of this discussion.

Diaspora was originally used in the Septuagint and rabbinical writings to refer to the scattering of Jewish people from Jerusalem and Judea dating to the time of the

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[8] Chandler H. Im and Tereso C. Casiño, introduction to *Global Diasporas and Mission*, ed. Chandler H. Im and Amos Yong, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 23 (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 1.

[9] Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 2.

[10] Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 2.

Babylonian exile and was later used to discuss the scattering of African peoples through the slave trade.[11] In modern times, however, Braziel and Mannur note that its use in "anthropology, film studies, queer theory, area studies, ethnic studies," make it difficult to determine how the term is being used.[12] Stierstorfer and Wilson also describe the "lexical eclecticism" inherent in the term:

> This snapshot of the variable, often harsh conditions experienced by migrants describes current population movements that are often summarized by an unspecific use of "diaspora" as a rubric, frequently including related concepts such as transnationals, refugees, asylum seekers, expatriates, exiles, contract workers, and so on. Such lexical eclecticism and expansion of terms referring to migration due to many new contexts of movement (e.g., Syrians fleeing civil war, refugees from Northern Africa, Mexicans crossing into the US, and East-European peoples moving to the UK) show the risk of the label diaspora being applied as a generic one indiscriminately, to the point of losing distinctiveness and hence usefulness as a descriptive tool in research.[13]

In light of this generic and indiscriminate usage, several scholars provide a list of common features found in a diaspora.

Lists of common features developed by Robin Cohen and William Safran are those most often cited.[14] Combining their two similar lists, which Cohen does, creates the

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[11] Jana Evans Braziel, *Diaspora: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 11–13.

[12] Braziel and Mannur, *Theorizing Diaspora*, 2.

[13] Klaus Stierstorfer and Janet Wilson, general introduction to *The Routledge Diaspora Studies Reader*, ed. Klaus Stierstorfer and Janet Wilson (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018), xv.

[14] Cohen's list is cited by the following authors: Tereso C. Casiño, "Why People Move: A Prolegomenon to Diaspora Missiology," in Kim and Ma, *Korean Diaspora and Christian Mission*, 17–18; Luther Jeom O. Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology toward "Diaspora Mission Church": The Rediscovery of Diaspora for the Renewal of Church and Mission in a Secular Era* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 20–21; Myria Georgiou, "Transnational Crossroads for Media and Diaspora: Three Challenges for Research," in *Transnational Lives and the Media: Re-Imagining Diaspora*, ed. Olga G. Bailey, Myria Georgiou, and Ramaswami Harindranath (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 14; Braziel, *Diaspora*, 11, 25; Klaus Stierstorfer and Janet Wilson, general introduction to *The Routledge Diaspora Studies Reader*, xvi. Safran's list is cited by Cohen and others: Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001), 6; Braziel, *Diaspora*, 25. Stierstorfer and Wilson also include Safran's chapter in their *Reader*. William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," in Stierstorfer and Wilson, *The Routledge Diaspora Studies Reader*, 5–9.

following list of common features found in a diaspora:[15]

1. Dispersal from a homeland.
2. Expansion from a homeland for purposes of work or financial gain.
3. A "collective memory"[16] of positives and negatives of their homeland.
4. Inability to be accepted by their host country and thus a sense of isolation from it.
5. An "idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity."[17]
6. A desire to return to the homeland, ranging from intermittent visits to the view that future generations should return if possible.
7. The view of some that the homeland is the ideal home, and those that can return in the future should return permanently.
8. "A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate."[18]
9. The belief that an enriching life can be developed in a host country if it is tolerant.

Though no group could have all of these characteristics, a consensus has not been reached as to how many of these characteristics a group must have to be distinguished as a diaspora.

In discussions specific to diaspora missiology, the definitions of diaspora tend to be broader, but center on two of the characteristics above. First, the foundational characteristic of a diaspora is the dispersal from a homeland. Wan specifically describes a diaspora as inclusive of those "who take up residence away from their places of origin."[19]

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[15] Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 6; Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies," 5.

[16] Both authors use this phrase.

[17] Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 6.

[18] Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 6.

[19] Enoch Wan, introduction to *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*, ed. Enoch Wan, 2nd ed. (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2014), 3. Though Casiño is more specific elsewhere, he broadly defines a diaspora simply on the basis of dispersion in "Why People Move," 43.

Second, missiologists have distinguished between all migrants and people of diaspora, based on a diaspora group's identity connections to the homeland either through memory or attempted physical connectivity.[20]

To summarize, secular diaspora scholars have defined *diaspora* in a variety of both broad and narrow ways, though lists of characteristics of diaspora have been helpful in clarification. In diaspora missiology literature, definitions have been broader, including dispersal from and connection to the homeland as the primary characteristics of a diaspora. For evangelical missiologists, this lack of specificity may be the result of a concern for reaching all immigrants with the Gospel and therefore not wanting to limit missions strategy by definitions that would exclude some immigrant groups.

The Force Behind Diaspora: Migration

Human migration is a fact of history, having occurred since the earliest stages of human history up to the modern realities of migration.[21] In his article on the history of migration and its impact on Christian mission, Andrew F. Walls describes immigration's impact on the Roman Empire, lands outside the Roman Empire, and Western Christianity. He argues that immigration usually helped the growth of Christianity. He concludes with a section on the new immigration of the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. Leading the reader to the significance of immigration today, he writes, "The great new fact of our time–and it has momentous consequences for mission–is that the great migration has now gone into reverse. There has been a massive movement, which all indications suggest will continue, from the non-Western to the Western world."[22] Because diaspora missiology probes the intersection of missiology and

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[20] Im and Casiño, introduction to *Global Diasporas and Mission*, 3; Rynkiewich, "Mission in 'the Present Time,'" 108.

[21] Jehu Hanciles, "Migration and Mission: Some Implications for the Twenty-First-Century Church," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27, no. 4 (October 2003): 146.

[22] Andrew F. Walls, "Mission and Migration: The Diaspora Factor in Christian History," in Im

immigration, experts in this field have been compelled to explore the causative factors of immigration.

Economists and sociologists have sought to explain migration from their respective schools of thought, and diaspora missiologists tend to summarize these theories and then quickly turn to a more coherent and useful explanation of the causes of immigration.[23] Remigio argues that the causes of migration can be summarized in two categories: push factors and pull factors.[24] To effectively minister to diaspora populations, one must be aware of the factors that led to migration in the first place. Remigio summarizes these factors, "It can be inferred that a combination of 'push factors,' (e.g., absence of job opportunity at home, persecution, poor medical care, substandard housing, racial or ethnic discrimination, lack of political or religious freedom) and/or 'pull factors' (e.g., more jobs in other countries, better living conditions, more educational and health care opportunities, family ties) makes migration an attractive alternative for many."[25] Further, diaspora missiologists divide these factors into voluntary and involuntary categories.[26]

Others have focused on the factors that are causing the acceleration of global migration. Samuel George lists the following factors: "(a) an integrated global economy, (b) rapid increase of independent states without adequate development or opportunities, (c) industrialization and globalized labor markets, (d) the telecommunication revolution,

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and Yong, *Global Diasporas and Mission*, 34.

[23] For the most helpful summary of these theories, see Casiño, "Why People Move," 35–47; Amador Remigio Jr., "Globalization, Diasporas, Urbanization and Pluralism in the 21st Century: A Compelling Narrative for the Missio Dei," in Tira and Yamamori, *Scattered and Gathered*, 18–24; Braziel, *Diaspora*, 27.

[24] Remigio, "Globalization, Diasporas, Urbanization," 18–21.

[25] Remigio, 19.

[26] Casiño, "Why People Move," 46; Craig Ott, "Diaspora and Relocation as Divine Impetus for Witness in the Early Church," in Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 25.

(e) more affordable transportation, and (f) increased global media consumption."[27] The Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team listed additional factors for global migration not listed by George: (1) economic inequalities, (2) higher demand for skilled workers, (3) higher demand for workers to care for aging populations, (4) urbanization, and (5) population growth.[28]

International migration also generates a movement of ideas and religious beliefs as immigrants carry their culture, beliefs, and practices with them to their host country. Interestingly, not only does this create cultural diversity, but it also changes the cultural practices of the immigrants themselves as they adapt to their new home. In the United States, immigration has shaped the religious landscape and religious diversity while also forcing the adaptation of the practices of the world religions in the United States.[29] The contextualization of any religion naturally demands change in a new context, even if that change is not intentional.

For example, the practice of Hinduism by South Asian immigrants in the United States proves this adaptation to be significant.[30] First, Hindus in the United States tend to be more involved in their religion than they were in India, which is especially noticeable in their participation in the temple-building process and the development of

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[27] Samuel George, "Diaspora: A Hidden Link to 'from Everywhere to Everywhere' Missiology," *Missiology* 39, no. 1 (January 2011): 47.

[28] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Diasporas and International Students: The New People Next Door*, Lausanne Occasional Paper 55 (Pattaya, Thailand: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005), n.p., http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/871-lop-55.html.

[29] Hanciles, "Migration and Mission," 146.

[30] See Prema A. Kurien, *A Place at the Multicultural Table: The Development of an American Hinduism* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

religious education classes for children.[31] Second, they are more unified.[32] Third, they are more congregational than they were in India.[33] A variety of reasons might be suggested for religious adaptations among diaspora groups, but two common factors were consistently cited for South Asian Hindus in the United States.

The first reason for the changes in Hinduism is the immigrant's desire to maintain their Indian cultural identity, which includes religious and ethnic identity. Kurien notes the significance of religion in maintaining immigrant identity across ethnic groups: "The literature on immigrant religion indicates that religious organizations become the means of maintaining and expressing ethnic identity not just for non-Christians like the Hindus but also for groups such as Chinese Christians . . . Korean Christians . . . and Maya Catholics."[34] She adds that this cultural and ethnic maintenance is heightened because many immigrants arrive from well-defined countries; they have not come to the United States to "become American."[35] While maintenance of a religion as a reason for its adaptation might seem counterintuitive, the changes are a necessary part of its survival in a non-Hindu country. In India, Hinduism pervades every cultural institution, and it is natural to "be Hindu." Hinduism is "'in the air' in India, a living,

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[31] Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, "Hindu Temple Building in Southern California: A Study of Immigrant Religion," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 20, no. 2 (2006): 43–57, http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.fhu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=b3939eef-0e45-4e7c-afe0-25a4b354987e%40sessionmgr4007; Kurien, *A Place at the Multicultural Table*, 8.

[32] Raymond Brady Williams, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," in *Religious Reconstruction in the South Asian Diasporas: From One Generation to Another*, ed. John R. Hinnells (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 144; John Stratton Hawley, "Global Hinduism in Gotham," in *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries*, ed. Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 115.

[33] Chad Mullet Bauman and Jennifer B. Saunders, "Out of India: Immigrant Hindus and South Asian Hinduism in the USA," *Religion Compass* 3, no. 1 (January 2009): 120, http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/79; Jeffery D. Long, "Diaspora and Indigenous Hinduism in North America," in *Contemporary Hinduism*, ed. P. Pratap Kumar (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2013), 22.

[34] Kurien, *A Place at the Multicultural Table*, 6–7.

[35] Kurien, *A Place at the Multicultural Table*, 5.

breathing tradition."[36] In the United States, on the other hand, intentional effort must be made to maintain Hindu cultural identity. Rangaswamy notes, "Because they represent a minority religion in a new setting, they function in a very different way than they do in the homeland."[37]

The second and possibly stronger reason for the adaptation of Hinduism in the United States is the desire of American Hindus not only to maintain their Indian culture but also to effectively pass it on to their children. In India, as previously mentioned, Hinduism is in the air; no serious intentional effort is needed to pass faith on to children, as it will happen naturally. In the United States, however, non-Hindus and a plethora of non-Hindu religious and cultural concepts surround Hindu children. If Hinduism is to be passed on to the next generation, they will not learn it from their surroundings as they would in India; parents must pass it on deliberately. Mann, Numrich, and Williams acknowledge, "Many parents say that they have found themselves to be more religious in the United States than they were in India, partly because they have to organize all religious functions themselves and to provide all religious instruction for their children."[38] Eck agrees, reporting that Hindu immigrants "realized that their children would have no cultural or religious roots at all unless they began to plant the seeds."[39] Surrounded by American values and customs, immigrant parents, regardless of religious or cultural background, will be forced to be more intentional and sometimes adapt in

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[36] Padma Rangaswamy, *Namasté America: Indian Immigrants in an American Metropolis* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 246.

[37] Rangaswamy, *Namasté America*.

[38] Gurinder Singh Mann, Paul David Numrich, and Raymond Brady Williams, *Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America*, Religion in American Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95.

[39] Diana L. Eck, "Negotiating Hindu Identities in America," in *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*, ed. Harold G. Coward, John R. Hinnells, and Raymond Brady Williams, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 227.

order to transfer the cultural and religious background to their children. These adaptations are examples of the complicated diversity that is created through immigration, which compounds the complexities of ministering to the diaspora.

In light of migration and the diversity it creates, the implications of global migration are significant. The field of diaspora missiology itself is a product of global migration. Further, as Remigio notes, global migration challenges missiologists to rethink the way the missions organizations attempt to reach unreached people groups. He notes, "Previous missionary strategies that exclusively focused on reaching UPGs in Asia, Africa, and Latin America will now have to be re-evaluated, rethought, accordingly reoriented, and redirected in the light of the new demographic realities posed by the scattering of ethnic groups and peoples from the originating countries of international migrants towards the First World and the other countries that are their destinations."[40] Examples of this sort of restructuring can be seen in the language of "Affinity Groups" that are not designated by region, but by origin, language, and culture.[41]

Diaspora Missiology Defined

In the previous chapter, the definition of diaspora missiology used by the Lausanne Diaspora Educators Consultation in the Seoul Declaration was utilized: "a missiological framework for understanding and participating in God's redemptive mission among people living outside their place of origin."[42] The previous chapter also noted that diaspora missiology includes theory and strategy for ministry *to*, *through*, and *beyond* the diaspora. This section will explore the definition of diaspora missiology and

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[40] Remigio, "Globalization, Diasporas, Urbanization," 36.

[41] "Global Engagement," *International Mission Board*, accessed March 25, 2019, https://www.imb.org/teams-global-engagement/.

[42] "The Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology," *Lausanne Movement*, November 14, 2009, https://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/the-seoul-declaration-on-diaspora-missiology.

the "to, through, and beyond" framework more thoroughly.

Im and Casiño accurately define diaspora missiology as "the study of geographic or demographic mobility of people in various parts of the globe viewed through the lens of God's redemptive plan for 'all nations' (*panta ta ethne)*. It also refers to the exploration of how the body of Christ can participate in this redemptive purpose and work."[43] This definition includes the necessary components of the field, including the participation factor which Wan defines as "diaspora ministry."[44] Wan provides a helpful addendum to a definition of diaspora missiology by noting that it is "glocal" in nature, and as such, it is both global and local, borderless and international, "de-territorialized," multicultural, mobile, and flexible.[45]

Diaspora missiology provides a framework to do missions to, through, and beyond the diaspora. The goal of missions "to" the diaspora is to evangelize, but also to equip diaspora peoples to participate in missions "through" and "beyond" the diaspora. As diaspora people groups arrive in new locations ready to receive the gospel, missions to the diaspora becomes the task of the church of the host country. Once evangelized, diaspora groups should be "motivated and mobilized both in 'missions through the diaspora' (from diaspora to their kinsmen in their homeland or elsewhere) and 'missions beyond the diaspora' (i.e., cross culturally to the host society and other ethnic groups within their geographic context)."[46]

Missions "to" the diaspora involves the church of a host country seizing the

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[43] Im and Casiño, introduction to *Global Diasporas and Mission*, 3.

[44] Wan, introduction to *Diaspora Missiology*, 6.

[45] Enoch Wan, "Diaspora Missiology–A Contemporary Paradigm for the 21st Century," in Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 123-28.

[46] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather: Embracing the Global Trend of Diaspora* (Manila, Philippines: LifeChange Publishing, 2010), 31, https://www.ncdcma.org/enews/1112/Scattered-to-Gather.pdf.

opportunity to serve immigrants, proclaim the gospel, and disciple them as growing Christians as members of local churches. The focus of this dissertation is mission "to" the diaspora, specifically the Asian American diaspora in non-urban areas of Tennessee. While many American churches, especially non-urban churches, need to be awakened to this need, diaspora missiology does not end here.

Missions "through" the diaspora equips diaspora believers to share the Gospel with their own people in their host country, their home country, and other countries. Because of their "networks of friendship and kinship,"[47] diaspora communities "become an effective bridge and vehicle both for reaching their own people back home as well as elsewhere."[48] Missions "beyond" the diaspora takes this outreach one step further by equipping diaspora believers "for cross-cultural missions to other ethnic groups in their host countries, homelands, and abroad."[49] Chong Kim, a Korean immigrant to the United States, depicts the "cycle" of diaspora missions:

> One can imagine a specific people proceeding through a full cycle, starting with mission to diaspora and finally resulting in mission from diaspora. Some mission agencies and some US churches have recognized the need and have begun to field teams to certain American cities and neighborhoods. They hope that these new disciples will in turn reach out to their own peoples who are still considered unreached back home. Yemeni Arabs in central California, Somalis in the Twin Cities, and the huge Muslim presence in Dearborn, Michigan all represent great potential case studies in how the vision and development of mission to diaspora might lead to mission from diaspora. . . . Mission to the Korean American diaspora flourished to the point that they became more Christianized (percentagewise) than the Koreans in Korea. . . . One major difference between the Korean Americans and other diaspora communities (who were still considered unreached) was that the Korean Americans did not go back to their homeland; they went elsewhere.[50]

As another example of missions beyond the diaspora, in his essay about diaspora

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[47] Wan, introduction to *Diaspora Missiology*, 6.

[48] Chong H. Kim, "Mission from the Diaspora," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 30, no. 3 (July 2013): 100.

[49] Wan, introduction to *Diaspora Missiology*, 6.

[50] Kim, "Mission from the Diaspora," 100.

churches in New York City, Chin Wang demonstrates that Chinese, Hispanic, Ghanaian, and Nigerian churches are effectively reaching New Yorkers who are not from the dominant ethnicity of their church.[51] In summary, diaspora missiology seeks to develop a strategy to evangelize the diaspora and equip the diaspora to evangelize their own people and those outside their own ethnic group.

A History of Diaspora Missiology

As missiologists in the twentieth century grappled with the reality of immigration and its implications, the seeds of diaspora missiology as an academic discipline were planted that began to grow in the early twenty-first century. Though credited with coining the term "diaspora missiology," Tira acknowledges that it is not a new field, but rather "a contemporary label given to the field of study that seeks to comprehensively and systematically gather up the multiple strands of migration and missions in order to effectively equip workers to respond to divinely-determined population movements."[52] The Lausanne Movement has been at the center of the development of diaspora missiology, and the following will trace this development over the past fifteen years.

In June 2002, the American Missiological Society hosted its annual conference with the title, "Migration: Challenge and Avenue for Christian Mission." In January of 2003, the Society published an issue of the journal *Missiology* with the same theme.[53] The conference and journal issue are considered groundbreaking moments in the field of diaspora missiology.[54]

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[51] Chin. T. Wang, "Mission by the Immigrant Churches: What are They Doing?," in *Reflecting God's Glory Together: Diversity in Evangelical Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau and Beth Snodderly (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2011), 27.

[52] Tira, preface to *Scattered and Gathered*, 1.

[53] Terry C. Muck, ed., *Missiology* 31, no. 1 (January 2003): 1–127.

[54] Sadiri Joy Tira, "Diaspora Missiology and the Lausanne Movement at the Dawn of the

Diaspora missiology gained even more traction in 2004 through two significant events and two publications. In April 2004, Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology in Seoul, South Korea, hosted the Filipino Diaspora and Missions Consultation and then published *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence*, which they then distributed at the Lausanne Forum in October.[55] This volume made significant early contributions to the theology of diaspora missiology. At the Lausanne Forum for World Evangelism in Pattaya, Thailand, in October of 2004, a "Diaspora Issue Group" met for the first time and produced the Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 55, *Diasporas and International Students: The New People Next Door*.[56] Though brief (less than sixty pages), the editors took a sweeping overview of diasporas and how churches might approach opportunities to reach them.

In January of 2006, the Filipino Theological Educators' Consultation adopted diaspora missions as its theme. In 2007, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism for the first time appointed a Senior Associate for Diasporas, Sadiri Joy Tira, who was and has continued to be one of the premiere voices in the field.[57] Further, under the leadership of Enoch Wan, another premiere voice in the field, the Institute of Diaspora Studies was launched at Western Seminary. Its mission still today is "to carry out the Great Commission by practicing glocal missions, i.e., globally serving diaspora communities abroad and locally engaging in ministering to the diaspora within the North American context."[58]

Twenty-First Century," in Im and Yong, *Global Diasporas and Mission*, 217–18.

[55] Luis L. Pantoja, Sadiri Joy Tira, and Enoch Wan, eds., *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence* (Manila, Philippines: LifeChange Publishing, 2004).

[56] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Diasporas and International Students*, n.p.

[57] Tira, "Diaspora Missiology and the Lausanne Movement," 218.

[58] Western Seminary, "Institute of Diaspora Studies (IDS)," accessed April 1, 2019, https://www.westernseminary.edu/outreach/institute-of-diaspora-studies.

The Lausanne Movement continued its momentum in diaspora missiology in 2008 with the formation of the Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team. The team was tasked with the formation of an evangelical theology of diaspora missiology which would be presented at the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2010. The team included scholar practitioners Elias Medeiros, Greg Paek, Vergil Schmidt, T. V. Thomas, Enoch Wan, Sadiri Joy Tira, and Ted Yamamori.[59]

In 2009, two meetings were held by the Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team for the purpose of gathering information from scholars and practitioners across the globe on diaspora missiology. The Lausanne Diaspora Strategy Consultation was held in May 2009 in Manila, Philippines, and the Lausanne Diaspora Educators Consultation was hosted by the team in November 2009 in Seoul, South Korea.[60] In Seoul, participants created "The Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology," which is cited often in the literature as "The Seoul Declaration."[61] This document, published in early 2010, acknowledges the sovereignty of God "in the gathering and scattering of peoples across the earth," and that the church "is the principal means through which God is at work in different ways around the globe."[62] The declaration presents a definition of diaspora missiology that has already been cited in this chapter. Further, the declaration affirms that any practice of mission "must be informed by, integrated with, and conformed to biblical and theological foundations."[63] The declaration appealed to churches, mission agencies, and the academy to "mobilize, train, deploy, support, work together with, and empower

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[59] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 9.

[60] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, 10.

[61] Tira, "Diaspora Missiology and the Lausanne Movement," 219.

[62] "The Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology."

[63] "The Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology."

'diaspora kingdom workers' for the diaspora ripe for harvest."[64]

In October 2010, diaspora missions was highlighted at the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town, South Africa, in what *Christianity Today* called "the most diverse gathering ever."[65] At the Congress, participants were given a copy of the Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team's booklet *Scattered to Gather: Embracing the Global Trend of Diaspora*, further advancing diaspora missiology.[66] Lausanne representatives also hosted regional meetings for diaspora educators in England and the United States.[67]

With diaspora missiology now firmly established, Tira started the Global Diaspora Network in 2012 as an affiliate of the Lausanne Movement with the purpose of creating a permanent and sustainable replacement for the Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team.[68] The vision of the Global Diaspora Network is "to see the global Church empowered and responding effectively to the missional opportunities presented by global migration and diaspora communities. Further, we envision leading seminaries and learning institutions across the globe providing focused training in diaspora missiology that will produce leaders who are equipped for Spirit-filled engagement in mission to, through, and beyond the people on the move."[69]

Since 2014, diaspora missiologists have published three significant collections of essays that not only address theological and strategic foundations of diaspora

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[64] "The Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology."

[65] John W. Kennedy, "The Most Diverse Gathering Ever," *Christianity Today* (September 2010), https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/september/34.66.html.

[66] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 3.

[67] Tira, "Diaspora Missiology and the Lausanne Movement," 220.

[68] Tira, "Diaspora Missiology and the Lausanne Movement," 220–21.

[69] "About Us," *Global Diaspora Network*, accessed April 1, 2019, https://www.global-diaspora.com/about-us/.

missiology, but also explore current methods through case studies. *Global Diasporas and Mission*, published in 2014, is a collection of essays from a diverse group of authors from thirteen different nations and includes evangelical, ecumenical, and Catholic authors. The content, therefore, is more diverse in its understanding of both theological and legal issues.[70] The Evangelical Missiological Society's 2015 book publication was dedicated to diaspora missions. It is a collection of essays from scholars and practitioners in the field of diaspora missiology. The editors do not intend for *Diaspora Missiology* to be comprehensive, but rather "a selection of key issues which should aid us in understanding and interacting ministerially with the scattered peoples of the world."[71] In 2016, the Global Diaspora Network was responsible for developing *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*.[72] It is a wide-ranging collection of essays from scholars and practitioners from across the globe in the field of diaspora missiology. It includes entire sections on the phenomenological issues of global diaspora, theological foundations, strategic directions, the mission of the church in diaspora, ministry models, and case studies. *Scattered and Gathered* is currently the seminal resource on diaspora missiology.

Theological Foundations of Diaspora Missiology

As the field of diaspora missiology developed, the Lausanne Movement and other prominent researchers in the field carefully delineated the biblical foundations that supported diaspora missiology. These experts generally agreed, but as would be expected,

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[70] Chandler H. Im and Amos Yong, eds., *Global Diasporas and Mission*. Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 23 (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014).

[71] Michael Pocock, introduction to *Diaspora Missiology: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World*, ed. Michael Pocock and Enoch Wan, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 23 (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2015), xviii.

[72] Sadiri Joy Tira and Tetsunao Yamamori, eds., *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016).

emphasized different themes as they developed a theology of diaspora missiology. In the literature on diaspora missiology, I have identified nine major theological themes, some of which overlap, that represent the theological foundations of diaspora missiology.[73] In the following section, I will describe each of these themes after first describing the theological foundations of missiology that must serve as a precursor to the theology of any particular subfield of missiology, such as diaspora missiology.

Theological Foundations of Missiology

The glory of God, *Missio Dei*, the mission of the church, and the models of Jesus and Paul serve as theological foundations for missiology. The tendency of some diaspora missiologists is to lean toward holism rather than prioritism.[74] Explanations of the theological foundations listed above are included here in order to provide a perspective that promotes spiritual priorities in missions, while still recognizing the importance of meeting physical, emotional, and social needs as well.

First, while fear of hell and the lost state of humanity once were the primary factors that motivated missionaries to cross cultures and proclaim the gospel, the "glory of God" has now rightly replaced these important but secondary motives as the primary motivator to foreign missions.[75] John Stott's sentiment has often been quoted: "The

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[73] Lorance identifies eight motifs in the literature. Of his list, four of his motifs have been adopted, and the other four have been redistributed into different categories more representative of the literature. Cody C. Lorance, "Case Study 4: Reflections of a Church Planter among Diaspora Groups in Metro-Chicago: Pursuing Cruciformity in Diaspora Missions," in Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 266-67.

[74] A fuller discussion of holism and prioritism will be provided in chapter 6. See Brian E. Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma, eds., *Holistic Mission: God's Plan for God's People* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010). Wonsuk Ma is also one of the editors of a significant diaspora missions volume. Sŭng-hun Kim and Wonsuk Ma, eds., *Korean Diaspora and Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011). Traditional prioritism is described by Hesselgrave as the position that comprehends both the necessity and value of ministries that meet the vast number of physical, emotional, and intellectual needs of our world, but that sustains "the time-honored distinction between the primary mission of the church and secondary or supporting ministries." David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), 121.

[75] Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 161–

highest of missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing . . . but rather zeal–burning and passionate zeal–for the glory of Jesus Christ."[76] Paul's highest motive for missions among the Gentiles was the glory of God: "Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake" (Rom 1:5 ESV) Throughout Scripture, God's passion for his own glory is evident.[77] Therefore, while one might find motivation in love for the lost, compassion, or fear, the ultimate motivation is the glory of God and the goal is that the nations glorify God.[78]

Second, the primary theme of the metanarrative of Scripture is *Missio Dei*. As George Peters asserted over forty-five years ago, "It is my impression that the Bible is not a book about theology as such, but rather, a record of theology in mission–God in action on behalf of the salvation of mankind."[79] Although fraught with various meanings,[80] the Mission of God–when understood as the story of mission in the biblical narrative through creation, the fall, redemption, and future hope–serves as a foundation for missions.[81] The

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63. All of chap. 6 of *The Changing Face of World Missions* addresses this theme.

[76] John Stott, *Romans*: *God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 53.

[77] Isa 48:9–11, 43:6–7; Matt 5:16; John 7:18; Eph 1:4–6; Rom 15:7; 1 Cor 10:31; 1 Pet 4:11.

[78] John Piper writes, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God." John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 15.

[79] George Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 9, Kindle.

[80] For an exploration of the history of the meanings of the phrase *Missio Dei*, see Wilhelm Richebacher, "Missio Dei: The Basis of Mission Theology or a Wrong Path," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (October 2003): 588–605.

[81] Bruce Ashford, "The Story of Mission: The Grand Biblical Narrative," in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Ashford (Nashville: B&H Academic,

Mission of God is evident through the whole narrative of Scripture and the ultimate goal of the mission of God is his glory, but, as Zane Pratt argues, "The proximal goal of the mission of God is redemption. That must be the goal of the people of God as well."[82] If God's mission is to redeem sinful human beings, then redemption of sinful human beings must be at the center (only secondary to God's glory) of our missions efforts.

Third, while the mission of God as seen in the metanarrative of Scripture is central, it is not necessarily equivalent to the mission of the church. As DeYoung and Gilbert argue, "What if our mission is not identical with God's mission? . . . In fact, there are certain things that God intends to do one day that we are to have no part in, and certainly not in this age. The slaying of the wicked comes to mind!"[83] If the church cannot and should not do everything that God does, then what is the mission of the church? While Christians should be deeply concerned about meeting physical and social needs in the world around them, based on the mission of God in the metanarrative of Scripture and the clear commands of the Great Commission, the central mission of the church is to glorify God by proclaiming the good news and making disciples in all of the world.

Fourth, the life of Jesus as revealed in Scripture stands as a theological pillar and model for missions, specifically his incarnation, suffering, and resurrection. Like Jesus, Christians live incarnationally by intentionally choosing to live among the people they serve and "pitching their tents" in places that they might not consider home.[84] While

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2011), 6-7. Cf., Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), Kindle.

[82] Zane Pratt, "The Heart of Mission: Redemption," in Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 59.

[83] Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 42, Kindle.

[84] See John 1:14.

Christians are unable to "incarnate" just as Jesus did,[85] they can leave home and face discomfort for the sake of knowing and understanding the unchurched. George G. Hunter describes this type of lifestyle as seen in the Celtic missionaries, and concludes, "The gulf between church people and unchurched people is vast, but if we pay the price to understand the unchurched, we will usually know what to say and what to do. If they know and feel we understand them, by the tens of millions they will risk opening their hearts to the God who understands them."[86] Though Hunter's predictions are lofty, incarnational ministry will help Christians to more fully understand the unchurched.

Additionally, Christians share in the fellowship of Christ's suffering, as Pratt describes, "not in the work of atonement but in the experience of the world's opposition to his holiness and love."[87] Missionaries especially must be willing to share in Christ's suffering for his glory and in recognition that suffering might serve as a witness to Christ's suffering. Finally, when Christians "know him and the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:10), they have the confidence to move past fear of suffering and sacrifice. The confidence one needs to live incarnationally and sacrificially like Jesus is only possible through the power of his resurrection.

Fifth, the ministry of Paul as revealed in Scripture undergirds a sound theology of mission. If, as stated above, the mission of the church is to make disciples, based on

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[85] DeYoung and Gilbert belabor this point in response to those who emphasize incarnational ministry as being sent by Jesus to primarily serve and meet physical needs. Living among the people we evangelize as we bear witness to all that Jesus did is, though, a form of incarnational ministry. DeYoung and Gilbert are correct in noting that "we cannot re-embody Christ's incarnational ministry any more than we can repeat his atonement. Our role is to bear witness to what Christ has already done. We are not new incarnations of Christ but his representatives offering life in his name, proclaiming his gospel, imploring others to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20)." DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church*?, 57.

[86] George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 130, Kindle.

[87] Zane Pratt, "Mission and Suffering," in Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Missions*, 215. See also Phil 3:10; 2 Cor 1:5; 1 Pet 4:13.

the implications and testimony of the New Testament's description of the mission work of Paul, planting churches is the obvious outgrowth of such a mission. Based on the record of the New Testament, missions expert David Hesselgrave argues, "If there is a biblical model of the best way to go about the task of evangelizing populations and planting Christian congregations all around the world, it is to be found in the ministry of the apostle Paul."[88] Paul, far more than any other biblical character, provides an example of church planting in his ministry.[89]

While determining whether the narrative sections in Acts are normative or descriptive is a difficult task, the sheer mass of information about Paul's missionary methods compels evangelicals to drink deeply from the well of Paul's experience and wisdom. In the early twentieth century, Roland Allen, in his classic *Missionary Methods*, argued, "It is impossible but that the account so carefully given by St. Luke of the planting of churches in the Four Provinces should have something more than a mere archaeological and historical interest."[90] Allen discusses the antecedent conditions in which Paul worked and concludes that these conditions were not the deciding factor that led to Paul's success.[91] This conclusion is important because if one concludes the opposite, then the premise of Allen's book–that Paul's methods can be imitated today to achieve success–is rendered false. If the conditions of the Roman world ultimately created a perfect storm for Paul's success, then his methods are ancillary. But, his

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[88] David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 42.

[89] Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 208, Kindle.

[90] Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 4.

[91] Allen, *Missionary Methods,* 37.

methods are not ancillary. Why would we ignore the biblical precedents set by Paul? Hesselgrave reasons,

> There seems to be little to indicate that the Holy Spirit expects us to slavishly follow every Pauline procedure in our evangelistic outreach. On the other hand, there is explicit teaching in the Epistles which directs us to carry on the same activities in a similar way–namely, to go where people are, preach the gospel, gain converts, gather them in to churches, instruct them in the faith, choose leaders, and commend believers to the grace of God. And where could we find a pattern for these activities that is less likely to lead us into blind alleys than is the apostle Paul's missionary work.[92]

Therefore, in order to avoid unnecessary "blind alleys," following Paul's model of missions builds a strong foundation for missions theology and practice.[93]

Each of these theological foundations is vital to the practice of diaspora missions. Diaspora missiology must be motivated by the glory of God. Redemption as the *Missio Dei* provides the primary thrust of the mission of the church, which will then guide strategic decisions. If redemption and making disciples are at the forefront of the mission partnered with Paul's clear emphasis on evangelism and church planting, then diaspora missiology will prioritize spiritual redemption, discipleship, evangelism, and church planting. Finally, following the model of Jesus will require prioritizing the spiritual needs of the diaspora while wholeheartedly recognizing the vital importance of ministering to the whole person.

Nine Major Themes of Diaspora Missions Theology

With these foundations in place, the following will now explain the nine major

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[92] Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, 46. Michael Pocock, in reference to narrative passages, agrees: "They may not be normative in the sense that they should be slavishly replicated, but the patterns and principles derived from scriptural example are definitely meant to guide our practice in contemporary ministry. Moreover, the general principles and patterns of Paul's work pragmatically and spiritually apply to our times." Michael Pocock, "Paul's Strategy: Determinative for Today," in *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 159.

[93] Perhaps the most helpful tool, from an organizational perspective, is Hesselgrave's Pauline Cycle of Church Planting, which comprises the bulk of *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*.

themes specific to diaspora missions theology.

The sovereignty of God. Diaspora missiologists are careful to note that immigration is the product of a gracious and sovereign God who is in control of all things, including the movements of people throughout time and throughout the world. God orchestrates these movements, involuntary or voluntary, for his redemptive purposes. God both "desires all people to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4) and desires Christians to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). Through immigration, God orchestrates opportunities for both of his desires to be fulfilled through mission "to" the diaspora. Further, the movement of people under God's sovereignty, like the situation in Acts 8 when "those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4), also creates opportunities for mission "through" or "by" the diaspora.[94]

Biblical characters as models of diaspora mission. As one explores the biblical metanarrative, it provides numerous examples of followers of God who serve as case studies of life in diaspora. Abraham,[95] Joseph,[96] Ruth,[97] Daniel,[98] Jesus,[99] Paul,[100]

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[94] See Jenny Hwang Yang, "Immigrants in the USA: A Missional Opportunity," in Im and Yong, *Global Diasporas and Mission*, 148; Pocock, introduction to *Diaspora Missiology: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World*, xvii; Lorance, "Case Study 4," 266; Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 15.

[95] Sarita D. Gallagher, "Blessing on the Move: The Outpouring of God's Blessing through the Migrant Abraham," *Mission Studies* 30, no. 2 (2013): 147–61; Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 17; M. Daniel Carroll, "Biblical Perspectives on Migration and Mission: Contributions from the Old Testament," *Mission Studies* 30, no. 1 (2013): 12.

[96] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Diasporas and International Students*, n.p.

[97] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Diasporas and International Students*, n.p.; Enoch Wan and Linda Gross, "Christian Missions to Diaspora Groups: A Diachronic General Overview and Synchronic Study of Contemporary USA," *Global Missiology English* 3, no. 5 (March 23, 2010): 4, http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/59.

[98] Adeney, "Colorful Initiatives," 5.

[99] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 15.

[100] Kirk Franklin, "The Apostle Paul, Asian Diaspora and Mission," *Global Missiology English*

Aquila and Priscilla,[101] and others are described as diaspora people through whom God works to accomplish his purposes, fulfilling "their calling to be a vehicle of God's blessing to the world."[102] Lorance notes, "Such examples serve to illustrate the fact that God's people have a rich migratory tradition and that the Church has been diasporic from its inception."[103]

An overview of the biblical narrative in search of diaspora. This is the broadest of the identified themes and encompasses three subthemes. First, some authors explore the New Testament texts that explicitly refer to "diaspora" in an effort to gain insight into the realities of diaspora life during the time. The introductory verses to both James and 1 Peter are the most explicit, both writing to Christians who are "scattered," using the noun form of the word. Three times in Acts, Luke uses the verbal form when he references the scattering of Jewish Christians of a Hellenistic background.[104]

Second, several authors probe the narrative of Scripture looking for examples of diaspora.[105] As seen above, Abraham, Joseph, Paul, and others are found to be exemplaries, but this probing is meant to find as many examples of and laws about

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1, no. 4 (October 8, 2010), 4–5, http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/161; Larry W. Caldwell, "Diaspora Ministry in the Book of Acts: Insights from the Apostle Paul," in *God at the Borders: Globalization, Migration and Diaspora*, ed. Charles R. Ringma, Karen Holleneck Wuest, and Athena O. Gorospe (Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature, 2015), chap. 14, Kindle.

[101] Samuel Escobar, "Migration: Avenue and Challenge to Mission," *Missiology* 31, no. 1 (January 2003): 23.

[102] Carroll, "Biblical Perspectives on Migration and Mission," 5–6.

[103] Lorance, "Case Study 4," 267.

[104] Acts 8:1, 8:4, 11:19; Narry F. Santos, "Diaspora in the New Testament and Its Impact on Christian Mission," *Torch Trinity Journal* 13, no. 1 (2010): 4–6; Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 14; Kim, *Doing Diaspora* Missiology, 110.

[105] J. D. Payne, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 68–70; Walls, "Mission and Migration," 19–21; Carroll, "Biblical Perspectives on Migration and Mission," 12–24; Steven S. H. Chang, "From Opportunity to Mission: Scattering for the Gospel in the New Testament Story," in Tira and Yamamori, *Scattered and Gathered*, 118–31.

diaspora as is possible. Before moving through all of Scripture to illustrate, Kim argues that diaspora is *the* core theme of biblical theology. He writes:

> For doing diaspora missiology, it is necessary to investigate its concept in the Bible; it is essential to understand its meaning through the whole text of the Bible. The word diaspora as the scattered began along with the fall of man in the garden of Eden; human beings were banished from God's presence due to his judgment over sin and scattered outside the Eden. The Old Testament is the written history of scattered humankind, culminated in the exile of Babylon. However, in the New Testament, the scattered by God's judgment accepted Jesus Christ as savior, were saved and gathered in his church, and were scattered to preach the gospel. "The scattered" is the core theme of biblical theology, relating to that of the covenant and fulfillment of salvation.[106]

While this might be overstating the case, diaspora is seen throughout all of Scripture, and, as Andrew Walls notes, "If we take all the stories together, we have examples of almost every known form of migration, voluntary and involuntary."[107] M. Daniel Carroll's treatment of diaspora in the Old and New Testaments across three chapters of *Christians at the Border* is among the most thorough on the subject.[108]

Third, in the context of the biblical narrative, some authors pay special attention to the development of the Jewish diaspora, noting that exemplaries like Esther, Daniel, and Paul were part of this diaspora.[109] As Santos notes, the implications of the Jewish Diaspora on Christian missions in the New Testament were significant. The activity of the Jewish diaspora served as a "precursor to Christian missions" and its scope allowed for, by God's sovereignty, a more successful expanse of Christianity in its infancy.[110] Chang eloquently describes the impact of the Jewish diaspora:

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[106] Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology*, 83.

[107] Walls, "Mission and Migration," 19.

[108] M. Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 43–128.

[109] Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 65–70; Casiño, "Why People Move," 51; Santos, "Diaspora in the New Testament," 6–17.

[110] Santos, "Diaspora in the New Testament," 14–17.

> The New Testament story began with the scattering of the Jews centuries before Christ. God had prepared the world with the Jewish diaspora for the coming of the Messiah. In the fertile soil of diaspora Jews gathered in Jerusalem, the gospel was planted and the church was born. These same diaspora Jews transformed by the gospel with a new identity, unity, and purpose, became the first missionaries, taking the gospel back into the diaspora setting and bearing witness to Gentiles. Their scattering, both voluntary and involuntary became the basis for the mission of the earliest church. Thus, in the New Testament story, God was raising up a new diaspora for Christ out of the old Jewish diaspora who move not merely for opportunity but for mission.[111]

The Jewish diaspora, then, is seen as an example of how a sovereign God works both for the evangelization of diaspora groups and through diaspora groups for evangelistic purposes.

Diaspora as both punitive and redemptive. A common theme in the theology of diaspora missiology is the description of God's usage of "scattering" as a punishment. Adam and Eve, the people of Babel, and the Babylonian exile represent moments when, instead of destroying, God scatters those who are disobedient as a form of judgment.[112] In contrast, God sometimes scatters his people for redemptive purposes. For example, God calls Abraham into a state of diaspora in Genesis 12 for redemptive purposes.[113] Walls delineates the difference as punitive versus redemptive, or as "Adamic" versus "Abrahamic." He also confirms that "the two sometimes overlap, of course, because within the divine economy, disaster itself may have a redemptive purpose."[114] As was noted above, the Jewish diaspora was used for redemptive purposes though it originally was the result of God's punishment on disobedient Israel.

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[111] Chang, "From Opportunity to Mission," 131.

[112] Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology*, 85; Casiño, "Why People Move," 50–51; Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 16–17.

[113] Walls, "Mission and Migration," 21.

[114] Walls, "Mission and Migration."

The church in Acts as an example of diaspora missions. The New Testament book of Acts consistently and vividly demonstrates missions both "to" and "through" the diaspora. Werner Kahl argues that "it is not a coincidence" that, for the most part, the evangelists of Acts are not the initial and monocultural followers of Jesus from Galilee, but the "migrant diaspora Jews from Hellenized Mediterranean cities of the Roman Empire that provide the backbone for a successful communication of the gospel to various peoples."[115] In Acts 2, Jews from across the Roman Empire travel to Jerusalem and become followers of Jesus. These new Christians depart from Jerusalem at different times, but Acts 8:4 specifically describes their scattering and ensuing preaching.[116] The consequences of this scattering are felt in Acts 8 when Philip preaches in Samaria and in Acts 11 when the church is planted in Antioch by Jewish diaspora Christians.[117] Ott points to both Cornelius in Acts 10 and Apollos in Acts 18 as examples of those who came into contact with the gospel because of living in diaspora.[118] Priscilla and Aquila, also in Acts 18, are examples of missions "through" the diaspora.

Much of the conversation of diaspora missions in Acts, though, centers on the work of Paul as a bi-cultural diaspora person who uses his cultural experiences to effectively minister to people in diaspora.[119] Diaspora people often become bi-cultural people and are equipped to more effectively interact in different cultures. They are "at home with more than one culture and have some experience traversing cultural gaps. . . .

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[115] Werner Kahl, "Migrants as Instruments of Evangelization: In Early Christianity and in Contemporary Christianity," in Im and Yong, *Global Diasporas and Mission*, 82.

[116] Wan and Gross, "Christian Missions to Diaspora Groups," 3.

[117] Ott, "Diaspora and Relocation," 90-91.

[118] Ott, "Diaspora and Relocation," 91-98.

[119] Caldwell, "Diaspora Ministry in the Book of Acts," chap. 14; Santos, "Diaspora in the New Testament," 11–13; Franklin, "The Apostle Paul, Asian Diaspora and Mission," 1–10; Ott, "Diaspora and Relocation," 103-6.

Paul himself, being from Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3), is an extraordinary example of a diaspora Jew who, after being exposed to both Jewish and Greek cultures, was positioned to serve as a bridge for the gospel from the Jewish world to the Gentile world."[120] Paul consistently preaches in the synagogue as his first method of evangelism in the cities he visits, thereby making diaspora Jews his first target in these cities. The New Testament book of Acts serves as an example of migration being used by God as an opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel to the nations.

The "fill the earth" mandate. The Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team indicated that God's command to fill the earth after the creation and after the flood[121] was a part of God's sovereign plan to populate the earth with his image-bearers and that these mandates "imply voluntary 'diaspora.'"[122] A call to "fill the earth" is a call to migrate throughout it.[123] As human beings filled the earth, they naturally created diaspora situations.

Diaspora as a model of the Christian Life. For Kim, diaspora people live a life that all Christians are called to model.[124] Diaspora people like Daniel were forced to live in the tension of diaspora in a "conflicting coexistence of the city of god and the city of the world."[125] Christians too are called to live in the conflicting coexistence of citizens of this world but "sojourners and exiles" (1 Pet 2:11) in this world. Therefore, Kim states, "The Diaspora is not just a specific group, who appeared and disappeared in a historically

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[120] Ott, "Diaspora and Relocation," 103-4.

[121] Gen 1:28; 9:1, 8.

[122] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 16.

[123] Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology*, 84.

[124] Kim, 120–22.

[125] Kim, 122.

given time, indicating the pattern of ideal Christian life. . . . This means that all Christians are Diaspora. . . . Their life is a transcendental pilgrimage toward the city of heaven."[126]

The doctrine of the Trinity. The Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team began the theological section of their foundational *Scattered to Gather* by pointing to the nature of the Trinity.[127] The Team pointed to the sovereignty of God (which was mentioned above), the incarnation of Jesus, and the empowerment of all believers by the Holy Spirit as evidence of "diaspora" being central to the very nature of God. Scripture "attests that 'Diaspora' is intrinsically related to redemptive history and sovereignly planned and executed by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[128] Diaspora is seen most vividly, though, in the arrival of Jesus on earth as a "stranger" who chooses to live away from his home in a sort of diaspora life and through his sacrificial death which brought "strangers to the covenants of promise . . . near by the blood of Christ."[129]

The teachings of Scripture on the treatment of immigrants. In a discussion of diaspora missiology, an examination of the teachings of Scripture on the treatment of diaspora people is a necessary reminder to non-diaspora Christians who might shy away from their responsibilities to minister to immigrants. M. Daniel Carroll has been especially influential in his exposition of Old Testament texts that call for the just treatment of foreigners.[130] In addition to the Old Testament law's call to the just

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[126] Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology*.

[127] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 15. See also Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology*, 124–29.

[128] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 15.

[129] Eph 2:12–13; see also Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology*, 125–27.

[130] M. Daniel Carroll, "Biblical Perspectives on Migration and Mission," 9–26; Carroll, *Christians at the Border*; "Diaspora and Mission in the Old Testament," in Tira and Yamamori, *Scattered and Gathered*, 100–117; Carroll, "Welcoming the Stranger: Toward a Theology of Immigration in Deuteronomy," in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner (Winona Lake, IN:

treatment of the foreigner, Carroll writes, "The creation of all persons in the image of God must be the most basic conviction for Christians as they approach the challenges of immigration today."[131] In addition, Jesus' treatment of those who were marginalized (like immigrants), his words in Matthew 25:31–46, and his parable of the Good Samaritan all make it abundantly clear that Jesus expects his followers to treat the diaspora person with respect, love, and compassion.[132]

In conclusion, and related to the previous section, the evangelical view of Scripture is ultimately the guiding factor to a development of a diaspora missiology and the treatment of immigrants. A first concern for the evangelization of the diaspora is based on the evangelical's high view of Scripture that leads him to place disciple making as the first priority of the church. Further, though, the evangelical's commitment to the authority of Scripture demands that "we should love, welcome, and care for immigrants. . . . The Bible speaks clearly and repeatedly to God's concern for the immigrant, guiding the Christ-follower toward principles that we believe should inform both the interpersonal ways that we interact with our immigrant neighbors and the public policies that we support."[133] The theological foundations for diaspora missiology and Christian concern for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the immigrant are robust.

Diaspora Missiology Theories

Diaspora missions recognizes that unreached people groups are now accessible

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Eisenbrauns, 2013), 441–61; see also James K. Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009); Athena O. Gorospe, "What Does the Bible Say about Migration? Three Approaches to the Biblical Text," in Ringma, Wuest, and Gorospe, *God at the Borders*, chap. 7.

[131] Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 47.

[132] Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 103–16.

[133] Michael Pocock, "Global Migration: Where do We Stand?," in Pocock and Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 18.

because of the global flows of migration. The Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team points out that people in transition, like international migrants, "are more receptive to socio-cultural change thus also become more receptive to the gospel. . . . When God is moving the diasporas spiritually, the Church should seize this golden opportunity and practice 'missions to the diaspora' diligently and faithfully for fruitfulness."[134] Diaspora missiologists have written extensively describing how diaspora missiology functions, both in contrast to traditional missions and pragmatically. Previously in this chapter, diaspora missiology was defined and explored through the "to," "through," and "beyond" framework. This section will further explore the theories by major proponents of diaspora missiology.

Traditional Missiology Vs. Diaspora Missiology

Sadiri Joy Tira has been careful to note that that diaspora missiology is not in competition with traditional missiology but complementary to it. As he clearly states, "diaspora missiology should not be perceived as a usurper to traditional missiology. They must go hand in hand."[135] But, both Tira and Enoch Wan are quick to point out the differences they perceive between traditional missiology and diaspora missiology. These perceived differences, whether or not one agrees with them, help to further clarify diaspora missiology strategies.

Tira suggests that diaspora missiology is focused on "every person outside the kingdom, everywhere," in contrast to traditional missiology being "land-locked and geographically focused."[136] Wan argues that traditional missiology is "territorial," while

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[134] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 28.

[135] Sadiri Joy Tira. "A Diaspora Mission Strategy for Local Churches," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (January 2017): n.p., https://missionexus.org/a-diaspora-mission-strategy-for-local-churches/.

[136] Tira, "A Diaspora Mission Strategy for Local Churches," n.p.

diaspora missiology is marked by "deterritorialization" and is "borderless."[137] Sam George describes diaspora missions as "everywhere to everywhere" missions.[138] While it is true that diaspora missions allows one to conceptualize "everywhere to everywhere" missions more easily, this sort of conceptualization of missions has been more common than these authors acknowledge. Samuel Escobar published *New Global Mission: The Gospel From Everywhere to Everyone* several years before the previous statements were made about diaspora missiology.[139] Further, though the writer of this dissertation comes from a very traditional missiological circle, the concept of *Missio Dei* and the church's participation in *Missio Dei* from "everywhere to everywhere" is a commonly understood theme in this circle.

Additionally, Wan distinguishes traditional missiology from diaspora missiology by arguing that traditional missiology polarizes too many areas, "with separation between 'saving souls' and the 'social gospel'; 'church planting' and Christian charity'; 'paternalism' and 'indigenization'; 'long-term missions' and 'short-term missions'; 'career missionaries' and 'tent-makers.'"[140] In contrast, he argues that diaspora missiology places its focus "on holistic missions and contextualization, integrating evangelism and social concern. For example, Christian workers cannot just start a local church among refugees without also addressing their physical needs and becoming their advocate."[141]

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[137] Wan, "Diaspora Missiology–A Contemporary Paradigm," 128.

[138] George, "Diaspora," 53.

[139] Samuel Escobar, *New Global Mission: The Gospel From Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

[140] Enoch Wan, "Diaspora Missiology–A Different Paradigm for the 21st Century," in *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*, ed. Enoch Wan, ed. (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2011), chap. 7, para. 5, Kindle. These descriptions come from Wan's first edition of *Diaspora Missiology* and he avoids some of this direct polarizing language in the second edition.

[141] Wan, "Diaspora Missiology–A Different Paradigm."

In this particular example, Wan has perhaps overstated his case. In the second edition of *Diaspora Missiology*, he seems to acknowledge this overstatement by using the term "managerial" to describe what he previously described as "traditional" missiology. He also uses less-polarizing words to describe the differences between managerial and diaspora missiology, but his major emphases remain the same. For example, when comparing diaspora missiology with managerial missiology, he describes diaspora missiology as "holistic Christianity with strong integration of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, evangelism with Christian charity," implying that the more traditional, managerial missiology has neglected holistic ministry.[142] Though missiologists need to continue to wrestle with the tension between evangelism and social action, the developments in missiological circles over the past fifty years have led to a definitive shift from evangelism to holistic missions, which is concerned with meeting both the earthly and eternal needs of humans. To argue that traditional or managerial missiology has neglected "holistic missions" in contrast to diaspora missions is to ignore these developments.

Similarly, to argue that diaspora missions focuses on contextualization in contrast to traditional missiology also ignores the developments of the past few decades. Again, though his language is much weaker in the second edition, he still implies that diaspora missiology is a contextualized missiology and that managerial missiology is not.[143] Over twenty years ago, Whiteman rightly described contextualization as "one of the most important issues in missions today."[144] Eugene Nida, Charles Kraft, Paul Hiebert, David Hesselgrave, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Ed Stetzer, among other leading

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[142] Wan, "Diaspora Missiology–A Contemporary Paradigm," 128.

[143] Wan, "Diaspora Missiology–A Contemporary Paradigm."

[144] Darrell L. Whiteman, "Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21, no. 1 (January 1997): 2, http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/1997-01/1997-01-002-whiteman.pdf.

missiologists, have placed contextualization at the center of scholarly missiological debate for many years.[145]

Perhaps a more balanced way of viewing diaspora missiology in light of traditional missiology would be helpful. Diaspora missiology brings several distinctive emphases to the table out of necessity simply because it is focused on "people on the move." This reality does not imply that traditional missiology has neglected these distinctives; rather, as a "complementary" subfield of traditional missiology, diaspora missiology provides new perspectives and research in these distinctive areas. These contrasts may have been overstated in an unnecessary effort to validate the need for diaspora missiology.[146] This effort is unnecessary because the realities of migration sufficiently validate the need.

Summarizing Enoch Wan

Enoch Wan, professor at Western Seminary, has written extensively on diaspora missiology. While his writings have been cited throughout this chapter, two other areas of significance should be summarized here. The first of these two areas are the seven missiological implications for which he argues, based on the phenomenon of diaspora, that are the foundation of the rest of his work.

1. The diaspora phenomenon demands a new paradigm of missiology, distinct from traditional missiology.

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[145] Eugene A. Nida, *Message and Mission: The Communication of the Christian Faith*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1990); Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979); Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985); David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989); Gailyn Van Rheenen, ed., *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2006); David Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer, eds., *MissionShift* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), Kindle.

[146] See Matthew Krabill and Allison Norton, "New Wine in Old Wineskins: A Critical Appraisal of Diaspora Missiology," *Missiology* 43, no. 4 (2015): 445–46.

2. Diaspora people are more open to spiritual change because of "being on the move."

3. "Diaspora people have been, and will increasingly be, the primary vehicle of missions in this century."

4. The church must "actively engage" in ministering to diaspora people and equipping them for mission.

5. Because Westerners lack in "relational reality," a new paradigm that focuses on developing relationships must be at the center of diaspora missiology.

6. Immigration has created new opportunities to reach previously unreached people groups in the post-Christian west.

7. Because of the decline in membership and resources in Western churches, they must partner strategically with churches in the majority world in diaspora missions.[147]

The second area to be summarized is Wan's proposed "relational paradigm." He argues that Westerners lack "relational reality" and that diaspora missions will only be effective if Westerners rediscover the ability to have healthy relationships both in ministry to diaspora people and partnership with diaspora Christians.[148] He provides nine reasons why "the relational paradigm is deemed the most appropriate choice in the practice of diaspora missions in the 21st century."[149]

> Firstly, the rediscovery of "relationalship" in Christian faith and practice is desperately needed. . . . Secondly, it is an excellent Christian response to the cry for relationship from people of the twenty-first century. Thirdly, it is a practical way to rediscover 'relationship' which is the essence of Christian faith and practice. Fourthly, it has been proven to be effective in ministering to diaspora communities and individuals in need of Christian charity. . . . Fifthly, it is a paradigm that enables the synthesizing of diaspora missiology and diaspora missions. Sixthly, it is transculturally relevant to societies in the majority world which are highly relational. Seventhly, it nurtures a Kingdom orientation and strategically fulfills the Great Commission (a vertical relationship with the Sovereign Lord), and a working relationship with fellow "Kingdom Workers" (horizontally with one and other). Eighthly, it enables the practice of "strategic stewardship" and "relational accountability." Ninthly, in light of the various approaches in diaspora missions, (e.g. to, through, by/beyond, and with) which are all "relational" in nature. . . . Lastly, in light of the shift of Christendom's center from the West to the majority

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[147] Enoch Wan, "The Phenomenon of Diaspora," in Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 18-19.

[148] Enoch Wan, "Relational Paradigm for Practicing Diaspora Missions in the 21st Century," in Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 192.

[149] Wan, "Relational Paradigm." Though he states that there are ten reasons, a careful reading of his words indicates nine reasons.

> world, strategic partnership and synergy require the practice of relational paradigm; instead of the popular managerial tendency and entrepreneurship of the West.[150]

Though a call to stronger relational abilities is relatively basic, it is a necessary call; and as will be shown in chapter 6 of this dissertation, building strong relationships with diaspora people is viewed as a strategically important way to minister to people on the move.

Bi-Cultural People

Missions "through" and "beyond" the diaspora is not only vital because of the call to all Christians to be engaged in evangelism, but also because diaspora people are better equipped to evangelize their own people groups and to cross cultures. Kim describes bi-cultural diaspora people as those who have a high level of ethnic identity *and* a high level of assimilation. According to Kim, bicultural people have a bicultural perspective in friendship patterns and membership in organizations, easily move "back and forth between" their ethnic culture and their host culture, possess a strong interest in keeping their ethnic heritage alive, and "can serve as bridge between cultures."[151] David Boyd's argument in his book *You Don't Have to Cross the Ocean to Reach the World* is that immigrants who are bi-cultural people are the key to reaching the world with the gospel. While Boyd overstates his argument, he is right that diaspora people will be an effective and important force in missions. If we are able to reach bi-cultural immigrants, they are capable of returning to their home culture and evangelizing successfully because they do not have to learn a new culture.[152]

Adeney notes the stress of experiencing two cultures, but adds, "While the experience of dual identity may add stress, it also can nurture strengths. Liminal people's

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[150] Wan, "Relational Paradigm."

[151] Kim, "Mission from the Diaspora," 100.

[152] David Boyd, *You Don't Have to Cross the Ocean to Reach the World: The Power of Local Cross-Cultural Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008).

extensive practice making connections across borders can build competencies. What is important for our topic is that these strengths may blossom in mission."[153] Chong Kim suggests, though, that immigrants are often unaware of their strengths as bi-cultural people, and therefore need to be made aware of their strengths and become secure enough with their identity that they use that identity to win others to Jesus.[154] The second generation, though, may be the key. Experts in the Korean American church have argued this case:

> All the research agrees, however, that if the second generation could be properly equipped, motivated, and directed to join in mission, their contribution would be phenomenal. The second generation has a bi-cultural identity that uniquely equips them, so that while they possess all the great qualities of the North American missionaries, they also know how to thrive as a minority in a foreign land. They not only speak English fluently, but their bi-cultural qualities will connect them to the global mission community as well. With the added spiritual heritage of a fervently praying spirit, handed down from the first generation, they have the potential to thrive in missional settings.[155]

Unfortunately, the authors note that "up to 95 percent of immigrant, post high-school churchgoers are projected to leave their ethnic churches."[156]

Diaspora Missiology in Practice

Though practical ideas for effectively reaching Asian Americans in non-urban areas of Tennessee will be discussed extensively in the final chapter of this dissertation, a literature review on diaspora missiology would not be complete without mentioning a suggested strategy. *Scattered to Gather* suggests a seven-step strategy for churches that, in principle, is found throughout the literature. Each step is supplemented by an average

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[153] Adeney, "Colorful Initiatives," 6. Adeney describes bi-cultural people as "dual culture people" who feel "dual identity."

[154] Kim, "Mission from the Diaspora," 100.

[155] Daniel Shinjong Baeq et al., "Mission from Migrant Church to Ethnic Minorities: A Brief Assessment of the Korean American Church in Mission," *Missiology* 39, no. 1 (January 2011): 31.

[156] Baeq et al., "Mission from Migrant Church to Ethnic Minorities," 31.

of ten questions or specific suggestions to help with its implementation.[157] The combined expertise of the team that wrote this document establishes the validity and the breadth of this seven-step strategy. Further, the strategic suggestions made by other significant resources on diaspora missiology fall under the umbrella of these steps, which will be revisited throughout the sixth chapter.

First, the strategy begins with embracing the vision of diaspora missiology in light of migration and the great commission. Second, congregations must ensure that their members have attitudes about race, ethnicity, and immigration that reflect Christlikeness and hospitality. Third, the local church must explore its neighborhood with the goal of diagnosing the surrounding diaspora realities. Fourth, the church should participate in holistic ministry to diaspora people. Nine suggestions are offered here that represent the many ways suggested in the literature to minister to diaspora people. Fifth, members of the local church should be equipped through awareness and training to effectively minister cross-culturally, even providing language-learning resources. Sixth, the church should challenge its members to build genuine relationships with diaspora people in the community. Seventh, once this ministry is implemented and diaspora people are brought to Christ, these new disciples should be empowered for mission among their own people, other immigrants, and other cultures.[158]

Rural Diaspora Missiology

Very little has been written about diaspora missiology in non-urban settings in the United States. In a search of the databases of Southern Seminary's library, which includes resources not available at the library, a variety of search combinations were used, implementing variations on the words diaspora, missions, and rural. These searches

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[157] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 32–38.

[158] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*.

produced one result, an article about Catholic priests from India living in rural Montana written by a women's studies professor.[159] This lack of resources is likely the result of the obvious patterns of immigration in the United States that lead the vast majority of immigrants to urban centers.[160] Understandably so, discussions about missions to the diaspora in the United States focus on locations where significant ministry can be accomplished.[161] This dissertation, in a small way, hopes to help in filling this gap in the literature.

Conclusion

Over the past twenty years diaspora missiology has risen to significance as a necessary field of study because of the statistical realities of immigration. The geographic, cultural, and linguistic hurdles in missions have been lessened to some extent by the phenomenon of diaspora. As Baxter states, "Diaspora missions is a God thing. We did not create the global diaspora. Our focus should simply be where God is working, and we should be ready to come alongside."[162] The church in the United States must be prepared to come alongside what God is doing through the opportunities that he has given it through diaspora. Diaspora missiology provides the theological and strategic resources for the church to do so. Supported by the literature and connected to the results discovered from the interviews, the sixth chapter will explore specific strategies that non-urban churches can adopt in order to participate in God's mission to the Asian American

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[159] Sonja Thomas, "Cowboys and Indians: Indian Priests in Rural Montana," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2019): 110–31.

[160] Georgiou, "Transnational Crossroads for Media and Diaspora," 20; Gary Gumpert and Susan J. Drucker, "Diaspora: An Urban Communication Paradigm," in Bailey, Georgiou, and Harindranath, *Transnational Lives and the Media*, 195.

[161] Thomas Alan Harvey, "Diaspora: A Passage to Mission," *Transformation* 28, no. 1 (January 2011): 48.

[162] "Western Agency, Meet the Diaspora: A Conversation with John Baxter," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 30, no. 3 (July 2013): 122.

diaspora.

CHAPTER 3

HEARING THE STORY OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN RURAL CONTEXTS

Introduction

Data collection occurred through qualitative interviews, which, as noted in chapter 1, are the primary data collection method for grounded theory.[1] As Rubin and Rubin describe, I attempted to "gently guide" the "conversational partner in an extended discussion."[2] Twenty-three individuals agreed to be interviewed for my research. The group consisted of 3 Filipino Americans, 1 Vietnamese American, 7 Chinese Americans, 4 Korean Americans, 4 South Asian Americans, 1 Japanese American, 2 Lao Americans, and 1 Thai American. Fifteen of the interviewees are foreign-born, while 8 were born in the United States. For 4 of the interviewees, their mothers are Asian American, and their fathers are Caucasian, while 1 interviewee's father is Asian American, and his mother is Caucasian. Three of the interviewees are adoptees.[3] All 23 identify as Asian American.

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[1] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 56.

[2] Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 4.

[3] Though adoptees face a different set of challenges from traditional immigrants, they commonly identify themselves as immigrants and as part of the diaspora from the country in which they were born. For this research, their ethnicity and self-identification, the US government's designation of "Immigration through Adoption" as a form of immigration, and the literature that supports their inclusion as part of the diaspora justifies the inclusion of adoptees as a part of this research. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Immigration through Adoption," August 2011, https://www.uscis.gov/adoption/immigration-through-adoption; Richard M. Lee, "Overlooked Asian Americans: The Diaspora of Chinese Adoptees," *Asian Journal of Counselling* 13, no. 1 (2006): 51–61; Karen Miller-Loessi and Zeynep Kilic, "A Unique Diaspora? The Case of Adopted Girls from the People's Republic of China," *Diaspora* 10, no. 2 (2001): 243–60; Catherine Ceniza Choy, "The Adopted Diaspora's Return to Korea," *From the Square: NYU Press Blog*, August 16, 2016, https://www.fromthesquare.org/adopted-diasporas-return-korea/#.XUEI3S2ZNo5.

Adam

Adam[4] was born in Thailand, where his parents were brought to Christ from Buddhism when he was around six years of age. His father became an evangelist, and Adam later came to the United States to study Bible at the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies. During his time of study in the United States, he contacted the missionaries that had shared the gospel with his parents. He later connected with the missionaries' daughter who was working as a teacher at an English school in Bangkok. They married in 2008 and worked in Thailand until 2015. In 2015, they moved to a small town in Tennessee so their children could attend school and they could care for Adam's father-in-law. Adam travels back to Thailand at least twice a year, and depending on the circumstances, stays up to three months. Therefore, he lives in a mostly rural county in Tennessee more than half of the year. I met Adam and his wife in a local coffee shop. The atmosphere was calm and quiet, and Adam seemed relaxed and very open as he shared his story.

Adam's experience has been positive, though most of his interactions are in church settings. As an evangelist in Thailand, he spends many Sundays visiting churches to raise support for his ministry. He stated, "So, most of the time I will say I have been around the brothers from church. So, I think it's a good environment. People just love each other and talk to each other nicely. So, it made me think also, what it would be if I would be among unbelievers, here in the States. Is it going to be the same? You know, I have wondered about that."[5] Outside of church settings, he has not developed any deep relationships, but wants to be more intentional about that. Most of the relationships outside of church settings are at his daughters' school or their activities.

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[4] By mutual agreement, all interviews were confidential. The names of interviewees have been changed and will appear alphabetically in this chapter. I have chosen to use names common in American culture because only three of the interviewees commonly use names from Asian culture.

[5] Adam, interview by author, November 29, 2019. For the purpose of accuracy, all quotations in this chapter are verbatim, even when the interviewee's grammar or sentence structure is not correct.

Reflecting on his visits to Walmart in light of his ethnicity, he noted, "One thing I see that is different, over here people kind of accept it. I'm accepted. They don't look at me strangely over here. But when my wife was there in Thailand, people didn't look at her in a negative view, but 'Oh, this is American!' Usually they'll give you honor, you know? . . . Over here people just look at you and let you go."[6] Though Adam doesn't view this negatively, this points to the lack of "relational reality" that Wan identifies in Westerners that hinders diaspora missions.[7] On the other hand, Adam has been impressed by the kindness of the Christians where he attends church regularly when he is not traveling. He says, "People are very friendly and nice. You know, encourage, pretty much. Ask me, 'How's the work going? Are you doing okay?'"[8] Because of Adam's experience with missions, he had several suggestions for more effective evangelism of Asian Americans, which will be shared in the sixth chapter.

Bonnie

Bonnie came to a small town in Middle Tennessee over twenty years ago from the Philippines when she married an American man that she met through letter correspondence. She arrived in Tennessee with a small child from a previous relationship. Of her life in the Philippines, she reflected, "I was going to a Catholic Church and working at an insurance company. My life was work, taking care of my son, and worship on Saturdays. That was my routine."[9]

Learning American culture and the English language has been difficult for

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[6]Adam, interview.

[7] Enoch Wan, "Relational Paradigm for Practicing Diaspora Missions in the 21st Century," in *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*, ed. Enoch Wan, 2nd ed. (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2014), 192.

[8]Adam, interview.

[9] Bonnie, interview by author, December 5, 2018.

Bonnie. She noted, "The adjustment of American culture has been very hard for me. Not only that, but especially the language. Learning the language was a big adjustment. My husband and children are very supportive. And it became easier when I found a church."[10] When asked about her experience in the small town where she lives, the mistreatment she has faced has not been "direct, face-to-face mistreatment."[11] Instead, she recounts situations like this: "I went to the dry-cleaner one time with my boys, and this person, the lady up front, didn't even look at me when I asked her a question. It felt like she looked at me different because of what I looked like on the outside. I just left."[12] When asked if this type of experience was common or rare, she said, "I would say common."

She became a member of an evangelical church in her small town because her son started attending an after-school program that led to him attending church when he was in seventh grade. Her description of the process that led her to becoming a baptized member of this church is informative:

> He would tell me, "Mother, I am going to ride a bus and go to the church today." I would agree and just let him go. One summer I told him that I wanted to go to a Catholic church, which is a little farther away. But he kept saying that he wanted to go to church "up the hill." I wasn't fully comfortable with the different church. But, I took him anyway. One time on a Wednesday, we have services for everybody at 6:30, and not just the youth, as I was dropping him off, I got so curious I actually went inside. I sat in the back row. And the preacher was talking and his words struck me. He made me think. Around that time, I decided that me and my two boys would go to church there together again. He was just pumped up. He was always excited about going to church. They would sit in the front and me in the back. I said, "Wow! This is why he was always so happy being here." He was so involved and excited about everything. The ministers there even got him excited about reading his Bible. I walked into his room once to bring him dinner and he was sitting down, reading. I was touched. I hadn't even read the entire Bible myself then. They had a children's Bible hour at the time. And he was very invested. He was really good at it. So I thought, "He actually likes to go to church and this church is actually helping

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[10] Bonnie, interview.

[11] Bonnie, interview.

[12] Bonnie, interview.

him." And I wanted what's best for my child.[13]

Attending with her son, she later made a profession of faith and was baptized. She is now "very more engaged"[14] in this church.

When asked if she has been welcomed and treated well in this church, she admitted that this has not always been the case. She reported, "I would say fifty-fifty. I couldn't say one hundred percent. . . . One time, I was probably a week into coming to church. It was raining. I was sitting with this lady. And I said, 'Hi, how are you doing?' And I felt like she didn't really want to be sitting next to me. So she stood up and left. That kind of stuff. You see that in every church."[15] On the other hand, though, she views her church as her family, especially since she has not visited the Philippines in fourteen years. She elaborated, "If I didn't have my church family, the way they showed their love to me, I don't think I would have survived. Because, in this church, I get all kinds of people. All ages, who are like family. My friends are all old folks. I attended Bible class as soon as I started coming to church. And I instantly was attached to them since they also attended."[16]

My interview with Bonnie occurred along with her youth minister at a restaurant in her town. Though friendly and open about her experiences, she at first appeared to be backed up nervously into the corner of the booth, almost as if she felt threatened. As the conversation continued, she relaxed, and though she consented to the interview, I never perceived that she was entirely comfortable being interviewed.

Caleb

Caleb was born in South Korea and moved to a small town in Tennessee when

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[13] Bonnie, interview.

[14] Bonnie, interview.

[15] Bonnie, interview.

[16] Bonnie, interview.

he was seven years old. This town is home to one of the campuses in the University of Tennessee system; but it is still small, and the county is classified as mostly rural. His father studied in the university there for five years before moving the family to mostly urban locations in Mississippi and Georgia. Caleb has now lived for two years in another mostly rural county in Tennessee.

When describing his experiences in a small town, Caleb never felt as if he was the direct recipient of racism, but consistently felt reminded that he was different than everyone else. He noticed this especially during the holidays. He explained, "It can make you lonely, if you dwell on it too much. During the holidays, when people are talking about meeting their families for Thanksgiving and seeing their grandmothers, and my grandmother lives an ocean away. In times like that, you're reminded of the reality that maybe you live somewhere else than where you belong. Maybe where you belong isn't here, but somewhere else."[17] Like other interviewees have indicated, Caleb has been the recipient of "little jests and jabs here and there,"[18] but he views these moments as the result of ignorance rather than racism. He elaborated, "as a foreigner who lives in a different country for a long time, you learn to just set that aside and label it as ignorance. They probably don't know any better. They may mean it as a friendly joke. Because obviously, they don't know my experiences and my thoughts and what's in my heart. I guess forgiveness is a big part of it."[19]

Caleb's family came to Churches of Christ out of Pentecostalism in the first town in which they lived in Tennessee, and Caleb has been active in church since that time. While he described the Christians he has been involved with as "hospitable" and "nice," his complaint against Christians in mostly rural areas is their lack of

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[17] Caleb, interview by author, December 8, 2019.

[18] Caleb, interview.

[19] Caleb, interview.

understanding. He lamented, "A common theme that I've observed in our time dealing with the Christians in America . . . is just a general lack of understanding in terms of the plights and generally shared experiences of the migrant people. Especially people who have immigrated to the United States."[20]

In response, I said, "So just a lot of ignorance?"

He replied, "I hate using that term. It seems harsh. But that is what it is. A lack of knowledge. Just because of the fact that they haven't been exposed to a lot of people like us. Lack of exposure. Lack of experience. They don't have a template to go by. They just default to how they treat everyone else. Problem is, that can be translated to, 'Oh, they just don't respect our culture.' There's a lack of dialogue."[21] He specifically referenced the "joking, older, male church member who always talks in idioms"[22] as the kind of person who, because of a lack of understanding, was friendly but completely unaccommodating by the way he communicated, which then resulted in more feelings of isolation.

David and Emily

David and Emily are a married couple in their late fifties that came to the United States from Laos, in Southeast Asia. They have lived in the United States for thirty-five years and have one grown child that lives in an urban center in the southern United States with his spouse and children. They frequently travel to this urban center to visit their grandchildren. Linguistically, they speak with a moderate accent, though they are relatively easy to understand if one listens closely. They have lived in a mostly rural county in Tennessee for approximately eight years. Prior to this, they lived in an urban

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[20] Caleb, interview.

[21] Caleb, interview.

[22] Caleb, interview.

area of Minnesota. When asked why they came to a small town, they stated that they lived in a rural part of Laos and simply preferred the slower, calmer lifestyle. They own a small, specialty restaurant that is highly regarded by locals.[23] Interestingly, David learned to cook from French soldiers who were stationed near where he lived in Laos.

When I visited their restaurant, I was hoping to schedule a more formal interview at a later time. But, the restaurant was empty and they said, "We will tell you now," and immediately began to tell me the story of their lives, frequently interrupting each other to clarify details.[24] I did not have a recorder with me, but because of their willingness to talk in that moment, I took handwritten notes.[25] Much like the owners of the Chinese restaurant discussed later in this chapter, their responses about their experience in a small, southern town were simple and extremely positive. They had nothing negative to say. David and Emily both stated that everyone was "very nice."[26] They claimed to have had no negative experiences connected with their ethnicity. They identify as Buddhists; and when asked how they perceived the Christians in the community, they again were very positive. They took pride in the fact that their restaurant provided refreshments for several churches in town, especially on Sunday mornings. For this reason, when asked if the Christians in town had invited them to church, they affirmed that they had been invited to church, but their work schedule on Sundays prevented them from attending.

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[23] Because this restaurant is well known, I will not be more specific as to the type of food they serve. This would make it easy to identify for anyone from the county where they live.

[24] David and Emily, interview by author, November 30, 2018.

[25] I have returned on three other occasions with a recorder to further our conversation, but they have been too busy to talk. When asked about scheduling another visit, they simply tell me to return sometime during business hours when they are not busy. I have yet to find them at such a moment. A lack of recording, of course, limits longer quotes with thick description. Protocol for consent and anonymity were followed and confirmed verbally.

[26] David and Emily, interview by author.

As will be noted of the owners of the Chinese restaurant, I suspect that they were not fully transparent with me. Though no serious incidents of racism have been reported to me after interviewing twenty-one other individuals, David and Emily seemed overly positive. Though I promised full anonymity in every interview, I suspect that they fear losing business by saying something negative about the people in their community.

Frank

Frank's grandparents and parents, all immigrants from China, started a Chinese restaurant in a mostly rural county in Tennessee approximately thirty years ago, about five years before he was born. He has spent his entire life in the small town where he now lives with his Caucasian wife and works as a car salesman. Though he "hated this place growing up," he later discovered that "this town's a lot better than you would expect."[27] When presented with a business opportunity in New York City, he chose to stay in this mostly rural county because of the love he developed for the area. He noted, "That was kind of a turning point in my life."[28] His grandparents still operate the Chinese restaurant, but he is not affiliated with it at all. He worked in the restaurant from the time he was ten years old until he was twenty years old. He felt like an "indentured servant" and therefore commented, "I don't want anything to do with it."[29]

His family loosely practiced Buddhism when he was growing up, but he began to question its credibility in his early teenage years. He reflected:

> So, pretty early on, I kind of kept asking my family why we believe in Buddha. And like I was saying, I kept asking and asking, but they never gave me a legitimate reason. So, when I started to just go to Wednesday night worship, you know, midweek worship here, my mom would always try to tell me bad things like, "You don't need to do this," or "You don't need to do that." But it was never a good reason. It was just a, "I worship Buddha." And I actually questioned her at one

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[27] Frank, interview by author, February 24, 2019.

[28] Frank, interview.

[29] Frank, interview.

> point, "Do you really? Because I don't see it very often." . . . The more I dug into it, I mean they still couldn't give me a reason, so I just kind of, I don't know. It didn't sit with me correctly, because I was thinking that there's gotta be a reason why we do this. But there was never a reason that they gave me. . . . I just kind of believed there's gotta be something else. There's gotta be something more reasonable than this.[30]

He became a Christian in his late teenage years after being brought to faith by his girlfriend (now his wife) and others from her church. I met Frank at a Cracker Barrel just off of the interstate in his hometown. Though this was one of the noisier atmospheres in which I had conducted an interview, Frank was the proverbial "open book" who was ready and willing to share his experience.

Frank states that he has not experienced any mistreatment because of his ethnicity. Older people, especially in his wife's family, acted a little "distant" toward him. "I don't think they're racist. They just kind of don't know how to take me, and after a little bit they're like, 'Oh okay, he's pretty cool guy.' . . . You just have to get used to it a little bit. It's a little different. But I've never felt any hostile. No, nothing like that."[31] Because he grew up in the United States, he does not have a heavy accent, and he noted that this has probably helped him to face less criticism, describing himself as an "ABC," or American-Born Chinese. He remembered, though, that occasionally his friends made fun of the way his mother spoke.

His Christian faith has created distance between him and his family, and he has little positive to say about his family. His family, he said, has intensely questioned the reasons he would ever contribute financially to his church. This comes, according to Frank, from a heavy focus on business and money by Chinese Americans. Specifically of his parents, he observed, "If there's nothing in their eyes, like, 'He's not making any money from this by giving,' then they're one hundred percent against it. . . . They'll bring up occasionally, 'Oh yeah, he just attends church and gives his money away for nothing.'

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[30] Frank, interview.

[31] Frank, interview.

. . . As much as I hate to say it, every family that I've ever come into contact with, it's always greed. That's the real answer. If you don't make money, they don't care."[32] Any resistance he has felt in his mostly rural context has come from his physical family, not his spiritual family.

His experience with his church was only described in positive terms. At church meetings, "People would literally come up to me and introduce themselves, and they wanted to know who I was. And they were generally interested in me. . . . I think they were really interested in trying to make sure I would become of the faith or something, you know? . . . When I asked a question about believing in God and everything, they were perfectly fine. They were like, 'Yeah, we'll tell you, no big deal. Let's study.'"[33] Though Frank's relationship with his family is cordial, he now feels closer and more connected with his church family, and his values are drastically different from the values he learned from his family as a child.

Gavin

Gavin came to the United States from Japan three years ago as a high school exchange student and enjoyed his experience so much that he decided to stay for college. The university he attends is in a mostly rural county in Tennessee, where he has completed one full academic year of studies. He grew up in a family that was not religious. When he moved to a mostly urban county in Tennessee, he attended a Christian high school and became a Christian. Because of the nonreligious nature of his family, they were neutral about his becoming a Christian. Gavin commented, "They're fine with it, you know, they're pretty chill. They're just like, 'Whatever you believe in, whatever

[32] Frank, interview.

[33] Frank, interview.

you think.’”[34] Gavin spoke with a strong accent, and he is the only Japanese person that is a student at his college.

Moving to a mostly rural county after growing up in an urban area of Japan and living in an urban area of Tennessee was a difficult transition for Gavin. He acknowledged, “Everything is not convenient, you know? It's small and it's far away from everything and I kind of feel like I'm slowly dying. . . . It was shocking when I first came here. There’s nothing here.”[35] He would add, though, “I don’t mind it too much. I’m kind of used to it.”[36]

Gavin was more revelatory than most about perceived mistreatments. He remarked that he was treated “pretty fairly,” but then conceded that he felt that Christians were “kind of closed.” He continued, “You know, I feel like they're welcoming when like they’re the same race or something, but, like, when this, like, random guy from foreign country came to their church, like I don't think they really know what to do with them or anything.”[37] Gavin is from the island of Okinawa, so when older people in churches discover this, he feels an extra level of tension. He has been asked several times, “How do you feel about the war?” His Christian friends at the university have joked with him about World War II, but he lamented, “Yeah, like some people are joking, some people are not, and some people go too far, you know, like, ‘We dropped the bomb twice,’ and stuff.” Further, in an intramural game, an opposing player became angry and made the slanted-eyes gesture at Gavin. Word spread about this incident and, fortunately, many students on campus were upset about it. Outside of churches and on campus, Gavin reported having no incidents of racism or mistreatment in the small town where he lives.

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[34] Gavin, interview by author, April 24, 2019.

[35] Gavin, interview.

[36] Gavin, interview.

[37] Gavin, interview.

He stated his desire that Christians specifically be less judgmental toward him, listen to him, and not assume he is good at math or science.

Heather

Heather is a second generation Asian American. Her mother came to the United States from Taiwan in her early twenties, attended college, and married a Caucasian man. Her mother was brought to Christ by missionaries in Taiwan, and Heather was raised in a devout Christian home. She identifies herself as Asian American and grew up practicing several Chinese traditions. "I definitely want to hold on to those things. I love those traditions," she explained.[38] Heather grew up in a mostly urban county, but she has attended college and been active in a small church for three years in a mostly rural county. Humorously, because her ethnicity was listed as Chinese when she entered kindergarten, she was placed in an ESL class for two weeks even though English was the only language that she knew.

Heather did not feel as if she had experienced any racism in the small town where she attends college. She elaborated, "I have never felt that different. My friends often make jokes. But I don't take that personally. Sometimes, people make fun of my mom's accent and that I take personally. That can be annoying. But other than that, not really. . . . It's only my friends that make fun of me, so no real problems."[39] She has also never experienced any racism at church. The only experiences, as mentioned above, are related to her mother and took place in a mostly urban county. "Only one thing has ever really bothered me. In high school, my mom worked in the cafeteria at our school, and some people would make jokes about that, and I hated that. People are already mean to

[38] Heather, interview by author, April 24, 2019.

[39] Heather, interview.

cafeteria ladies, and them saying nasty stuff was hurtful."[40]

Heather noted that the churches in the mostly rural county where she spends nine months each year are "full of white people." She added, "You think to yourself, 'Okay, we need some diversity here.'"[41] While Heather has never sensed any racist overtones from Christians, her mother has, primarily from the older generation. She explained, "My mom says that she was only mistreated by older people. But I guess that's just their generation. So not to target the old people, but reminding people that these were old stereotypes that need to be put away with is important."[42] Because Heather grew up in a Christian household that was actively evangelistic, she passionately shared several ideas for churches in mostly rural counties to more effectively reach Asian Americans.

Isabella

Isabella was born in China and adopted by an American family when she was four years old. Her memories of China are vague, though she remembers the hot climate and the spankings she received in the orphanage where she lived. Her family in the United States had two other adoptees from China and seven from Ethiopia. "So, I know a little bit about culture," she quipped. Her adoption situation was abusive, and Isabella and her siblings were taken away from her adoptive parents when she was thirteen and placed in foster care. She was eventually adopted again at age sixteen, along with one of her Chinese siblings. She grew up in a nominally Christian home, and she became a Christian when she was eighteen. She currently is married to a Caucasian man and has lived in a mostly rural county in Tennessee for three years. She spent her teenage years in a mostly

[40] Heather, interview.

[41] Heather, interview.

[42] Heather, interview.

rural county in Missouri.

Isabella does not struggle with being mistreated; rather, she struggles with being treated differently because of her ethnicity. She role-played with me a common conversation she has with someone she has just met. She took the role of a Caucasian and I used my own background to play the role that she often experiences.

Isabella began, "Let's say you and I don't know each other, right? Hi. I just want to know where are you from?"

I replied, "I'm from West Virginia."

"No, where are you really from, originally from?"

"West Virginia."

"Do you remember anything about it?"

"Yeah, I do."

"So, did you come here on your own or were your parents immigrants or did your grandparents come over?"

"Yes, I came on my own."

"So, are you like, are you like, Irish or are you like, British?"

"Actually, I think I do have some Irish in me."

"Yeah, that's cool. If I actually knew any Irish I would probably try to say like an Irish greeting. Anyway, so do you remember anything about West Virginia? I'm not sure if I asked you that already."

"Oh, yeah, I remember the food. West Virginia food is actually really good."

"Oh, by the way, my name's Isabella." She then sarcastically stated, "Really?"[43] She believes to pry into a stranger's personal information within minutes of meeting that person is rude, and this experience has been common for Isabella.

In reference to being the target of racism, she noted that she received racist

[43] Isabella, interview by author, April 28, 2019.

comments in high school in Missouri and while she was working in a Chinese restaurant as a teenager. In Tennessee, though, she has not had any negative experiences. In Tennessee, she is a member of a church in a very small and rural community. Even there, she has not felt mistreated because of her ethnicity. She added, though, "I think you know how there's racism with like the Blacks and Hispanics. You don't really get a whole lot of that from my perspective or my experience based on my experience. There's not a whole lot of that towards Asians."[44] When pressed for a reason that Asians might not face racism, she proposed, "I really don't know. I think, I don't know, maybe if it had been a different decade during like the Vietnam War, there would have been."[45]

As an adopted woman of Asian ethnicity, she admits, like others, that she has struggled with identity. Culturally, she is white. Ethnically, she is Asian. A white person once described her as a banana: white on the inside and yellow on the outside. Though she was first offended by this description, she has grown to appreciate the accuracy with which it describes the tension she feels with her identity.

Janet

Janet is part of the adopted Asian diaspora. She was adopted from South Korea when she was three months old. Though she recognizes that she was raised as a cultural American, she is proud of her Korean background. She is partially able to read the Korean language, watches Korean television programs, and said, "I'm interested in all things Korean."[46] She grew up in an urban area of Oklahoma, but for the past seventeen years has lived in a mostly rural county in Tennessee. After meeting her husband in college, they considered moving to an urban area, but decided that the community where

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[44] Isabella, interview.

[45] Isabella, interview.

[46] Janet, interview by author, April 26, 2019.

they now live would be a good place to raise a family. Her husband is a school administrator, and their family is well-known and well-respected in the community and their church.

Though Janet stated that she is treated well, on the rare occasion that she is treated differently, she is awakened to her ethnicity. She remarked, "I don't feel like I get treated any different usually and when I do it's like a shock. Like, 'Oh, yeah, I'm Korean. I'm different than you,' and I know that every day. . . . I'm not interested in the same things as my friends are, you know. While they're watching all the shows on Netflix that are, you know, are popular, I'm watching, like K-Drama. So that's different, but I'm not usually treated differently."[47] In the moments when she is treated differently, she conceded that "you learn to take things with a grain of salt."[48]

Recently, though, Janet experienced a frightening moment like none other she has before. In a grocery store in the small town where she lives, two poor, older white men with missing teeth confronted her in an aisle in a grocery store. They jokingly pretended like they were going to block her way through, then moved past her and she heard them talking about her being Asian and that they thought she was Japanese. She recalled, "It was the way they were looking at me. It was just that . . . being a girl, but also just like, 'I wonder if she speaks Japanese,' you know, 'we need to get her to speak Japanese.' Just stuff that made me uncomfortable. . . . I kept meeting them in the store. And so finally I just decided they were in the checkout line and I just went to the very back of the store and peered around waiting for them to leave and they caught my eye."[49] After having a store employee walk her to her car, she did not see the men again.

Her daughter has also faced some awkward moments at school. Janet discussed

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[47] Janet, interview.

[48] Janet, interview.

[49] Janet, interview.

these moments: “I'll go to my daughter’s school, and the kids will be like, ‘Oh,’ you know, ‘Your mom is Chinese. . . . do you speak Chinese?’ And, sometimes I'll see little kids . . . you know, just like pulling their eyes up.”[50] Janet worries about teaching her daughters to respond in appropriate ways to childish gestures. She stated, “I grew up with things like that. I worry more now that my daughters, and teaching them how to react to things and how not to really get upset. Just kind of let things roll off their back and maybe, maybe, that's not the right way that they should handle it. . . . I think if you can handle things with humor and just let things slide you're less likely to be just taken down by it.”[51] Though it saddens Janet that her children have had to learn to deal with their ethnic identity at an early age, she is emboldened by the strength it will build in them.

Janet has always felt accepted by churches she attended. Occasionally, a socially awkward member has said something offensive, but this type of person unwittingly says offensive things to others as well. She recalled one instance in which an older church member asked Janet’s husband how he conducted the search for a “mail order bride” in order to marry Janet. Another time, Janet and her husband were visiting another rural church and they assumed Janet could not understand them. So, they spoke slowly to her, saying “We are your friends” and “Our countries are friends,” referencing South Korea as the “good” Korea and North Korea as the “bad” Korea.[52] Though she is “a little shocked” at such conversations, she has “learned just to laugh.”[53]

Ken

Ken’s family is a part of the South Asian diaspora that originally settled in

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[50] Janet, interview.

[51] Janet, interview.

[52] Janet, interview.

[53] Janet, interview.

Trinidad and Tobago in the mid-1800s. Ethnically, he is South Asian. Culturally, his family practices both South Asian and Caribbean customs. Nationally, he is proudly from Trinidad and Tobago. The mix of these cultures creates an inner tension for Ken, especially while living in a mostly rural county in Tennessee that is not culturally diverse. He has lived in this mostly rural county in Tennessee for one year.

Ken's father's family practiced Hinduism until his father began to explore Christianity when he was nineteen years old, and shortly thereafter he became a follower of Jesus. Ken's mother came from a Muslim family, though Ken described the family as "modern Muslims . . . they kind of believe the stuff but they weren't really strict. You didn't really do anything."[54] Ken's great-aunt was brought to Christ while visiting Jamaica; and when she returned to Trinidad and Tobago, she began taking Ken's mother to church with her. Ken's mother became a Christian when she was sixteen years old.

Ken's family moved to the United States when he was ten years old. He has lived in North Carolina, Florida, Tennessee, Ohio, and now Tennessee again. The story of the push factor that brought them to the United States is fascinating and sad. Ken shared:

> So how we actually came to the US was at that time my dad . . . he was an insurance salesman and my mom was a professional counselor. And so, like one day my dad was like, he just randomly picked up me and my sister from school early that day. We were like, "That's weird," you know. . . . So, he told us that he was at work and there are these two big Muslim men that came up to him and told him, "Hey if you don't pay such and such amount of money by this time tonight, like around six o'clock, we're going to kidnap . . . either your wife, you, or your children." And then they began to list off where we went to school and where my mom went and what time we would get home from work and school and stuff. And so my dad, you know, he was legitimately scared and he called the police and the police system in Trinidad is not, it's not good. And so, they were like, "Oh we can't do anything until something is actually happening," and my dad was like "I'm not going to let that happen." So we went, he picked us up and we went home and we packed up as much as we could in just into our suitcases in a space of two hours. And so we had probably like six or seven suitcases with us and we stayed by my great uncle's house that night and the next day we arranged a flight to the US.[55]

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[54] Ken, interview by author, April 29, 2019.

[55] Ken, interview.

After arriving in the United States, they stayed with friends while they made other arrangements. Ken's father became a student to obtain a visa so his family could stay until further documentation could be obtained.

Ken has had two periods of his life interacting in rural counties in Tennessee. When he was a teenager, his father was the minister for a church in a completely rural county in Tennessee and, as mentioned above, Ken currently lives in a mostly rural county. Recalling one incident when he was a teenager in the completely rural county, he said, "One time we went into a KFC which was in the town. And as soon as we walked in, there was, I mean, my family's four of us. So we walked in, everybody stopped and stared at us because they, like seriously, had never seen anybody. My dad said he really wanted to go, 'Boo,' and see what would happen. And so, it was funny, but it was one of the first times I was like, 'Oh, this is . . . a weird feeling.'"[56] In the small town where Ken currently lives, he has not had any negative experiences other than an occasional stare. "Usually most people are nice or most people just don't see a difference," he remarked.[57] His experience in church has been similar, in that he has never been mistreated because of his ethnicity. He does find it hurtful, though, when older people he attends church with post negatively about immigrants on social media, "Like all these things about, 'Immigrants are terrible for society.'"[58] In spite of his diverse ethnic, cultural, and national identity, Ken appears to enjoy life in a southern small town and he has adapted well.

Laura

Laura is a second-generation Filipino American in her mid-twenties. Her

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[56] Ken, interview.

[57] Ken, interview.

[58] Ken, interview.

mother is Filipino, and she met her Irish American father while he was serving in the military in the Philippines. She strongly identifies as Asian American and is proud of her Filipino heritage. She grew up with many cultural practices from the Philippines and plans to implement them as a part of her family's traditions. She remarked, "I really take pride with being half-Filipino because . . . I'm not the same as everybody else. Everybody's the same, obviously, but I experienced a lot of different things that just separates me from everybody else."[59] This pride was instilled in her by her mother at an early age. After an incident in elementary school in which Laura was embarrassed by a teacher for her ethnicity, she described the interaction she had with her mother: "I was embarrassed and she said, 'Don't be embarrassed for who you are. . . . You're so beautiful and I believe that you couldn't be that beautiful without being Filipino. . . . They pick on you because they're jealous. They wish that they could do things like you.'"[60] Unfortunately, difficult and embarrassing moments would be common for Laura in her early years. She grew up in a mostly rural county in West Virginia and was often bullied about her ethnicity. Having grown up in an adjacent county in West Virginia myself, this does not surprise me. Her mom, though, taught her to stand up for herself.

She has lived in a mostly rural county in Tennessee for seven years, working several jobs in retail while intermittently continuing her college education. Though she often experienced moments of racism in West Virginia, she maintained that she has not ever experienced an incident of racism in Tennessee. When I asked her why she thought this was the case, she explained that she believes that the heavier conservative Christian presence causes people to be kinder. Her mother loves to visit her small town in Tennessee because of how friendly the residents are. Because her father has an Irish

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[59] Laura, interview by author, May 30, 2019.

[60] Laura, interview.

background, Laura describes herself as unique because she is an "Asian with freckles."[61] Because of her unique appearance, she has been questioned several times in public about her ethnicity, but she believes others ask because they are "honestly just interested."[62] Laura is nominally Christian, attending church occasionally. In church, she has never had any negative experiences and has been treated normally.

Maria

Maria was born in Vietnam, the daughter of a Vietnamese woman and an American member of the military. She moved to Tennessee when she was a baby, grew up in a mostly rural county, lived in an urban area early in her career, and for fifteen years she has lived in another mostly rural Tennessee county. Maria works as an engineer, is married, and her children are young adults.

She spoke of her life in rural areas with a careful distinction between her experience as a child and her experience as an adult. She stated plainly, "My experience growing up is completely different than my experience now."[63] She vividly described her experience as a child in a rural county:

> I was called names, especially like riding the school bus. Like, older kids would like, throw stuff at me and called me names or, and I kind of compare it to and maybe it's not a great comparison. Maybe it is, but I kind of compare it to being, let's say Middle Eastern now, you know. We went to war with the Middle East. There are a lot of people here, you know, they look at a Middle Easterner. They hate terrorists. When I was a kid, they'd look at an Asian or person from Vietnam especially, and think, "Communists." I mean I was called a Communist I don't know how many times, five- and six-year-old. I didn't even know what a Communist was. So yeah, as a kid, definitely called names, picked on, bullied, didn't really want to be Asian. I did everything I could to not be seen with my mother, and that's terrible. If we go to the store in town, if she, you know, there happened to be one other Asian at one point in town, and she would somehow find them in the store and they start speaking Vietnamese, and I would just be mortified and you know, just go to another aisle and hide out until she was done, but didn't want to . . . identify with

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[61] Laura, interview.

[62] Laura, interview.

[63] Maria, interview by author, June 16, 2019.

> that part of my upbringing. It just . . . wasn't good, it wasn't great. But you know, and I was talking to somebody at work yesterday or last week about it, and it's just different now.[64]

She later asserted, "It's just, I think the world's different. Now I tell people now, 'Oh, yeah, I'm Vietnamese.' Somebody was asking about it today, and nobody thinks anything about it. It's just different. . . . Honestly, I just think it's a different world."[65] Her experience as an adult living in a mostly rural county has been "fairly positive."[66] While she has seen and heard racism toward the Hispanic population, she has not experienced or witnessed any negative words or actions toward the Asian American population.

Maria is a Christian and has never had a negative experience in a church setting. Even growing up, she was often invited to church and attended with friends. Though she was mistreated at school and in public, she always felt welcome at the different denominations she visited as a child. The most impactful relationship her family had as a child was with a Caucasian family. She elaborated:

> We did have, kind of funny, when I was very, very little, I had adopted grandparents that we met at a convenience store. Really, there was a convenience store down from where we were living and they thought I was cute and so, they're like, "Oh, let me hold your baby," and, you know, just got to talking. They invited us over and became lifelong friends. I mean, they were like my adopted grandparents because my grandparents weren't here. They were the best people, I mean, just, such good people, and we would go over to their house on the weekend. And, I mean, these were white people that grew up in the United States, as American as can be, having my mom and dad and little Asian kids coming over on the weekends to eat dinner and hang out. And then my dad's father died and they kept me while my dad went to the funeral. They were like our family.[67]

She noted this story as evidence that hospitality shown to immigrants has the power to create lasting, life-changing relationships.

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[64] Maria, interview.

[65] Maria, interview.

[66] Maria, interview.

[67] Maria, interview.

Natalie

Both of Natalie's parents moved to Florida in the early 1990s from the Philippines and met while both worked in Orlando as physical therapists. Natalie was born in the mid-nineties and grew up with her parents, her grandmother, and sisters. Her family spoke Tagalog in the home, practiced Filipino cultural customs, and ate Filipino food. Because of this, Natalie identifies as more Filipino than American on what she described as the Filipino American spectrum. She pointed out, "My parents grew up talking to me in Tagalog and because my grandma lived with us, I grew up eating the food, like only Filipino food, pretty much my whole life. . . . Whenever I ate at home, we always had Filipino food. So, I was very used to that. We had the Filipino channel at my house just like going 24/7. So yeah, I feel like I'm pretty Filipino."[68] Natalie's father came to the United States as an evangelical Christian, and her mother was Catholic. When Natalie was five years old, her mother professed her faith, was baptized, and has been an evangelical Christian since that time. Natalie grew up in a strong Christian environment. She grew up in Orlando, Florida, and then she lived in a mostly rural town in West Tennessee for four years as a college student. Similar to Frank, Natalie was excited to share her story in an effort to help. Her stories would often flow uninterrupted, often answering my questions before I could even ask.

Moving to a small town in Tennessee from Orlando was "a culture shock."[69] She reflected on the two dimensions of her residence in Tennessee, on the university campus and off of the campus. On campus, she was treated well. When asked if she ever experienced racism, she responded, "The only thing I can think of is the smallest thing. I mean those like tiny Asian jokes that people make."[70] She played the role of Snow White

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[68] Natalie, interview by author, June 24, 2019.

[69] Natalie, interview.

[70] Natalie, interview.

in a musical production on campus and was referred to as "Snow Yellow" instead of "Snow White." This seemed offensive to me and when I expressed this, she said, "No, it wasn't too offensive. Everyone thought it was funny. It wasn't like, offensive. But I mean it was like, 'Yes. I am Asian. I understand.' . . . Maybe because they're my friends. Yeah, it didn't feel too offensive, but it was just like, 'I understand that I'm Asian.'"[71] She said that she could not think of one incident that caused her to feel "really hurt" by insensitivity on campus.

Off campus in this mostly rural county, her experience was similar, if not better because jokes were not being made by her friends. The only experience related to her ethnicity was related to her hair. She recalled, "The only thing I can think of is like, when people would comment on how I used to have really, really, long hair. . . . People will comment, just strangers, about how long and like, beautifully straight my hair was and then like, 'Never cut that hair. It's so beautiful.' And they're like, 'Where are you from?' 'I'm Filipino,' stuff like that. In the community, Natalie was a member at a predominantly African American congregation. She noted about this church, "They were only ever welcoming and only ever so, so, so sweet." She described a time when she was not at church because she was traveling, and her boyfriend requested prayers for her travels. One of the older men prayed for her by name and said, "Lord, please be with the small, Asian girl." Natalie commented on this moment, "I'm so thankful that they prayed for me. That is just hilarious, though. Like, he knew who I was because he said 'Natalie,' but he had referred to me as the small, Asian girl."[72] She also felt welcomed in this church because of the hospitality of its members. She remembered encountering one member in a local restaurant that paid for her meal and then offered any financial help she needed because of her situation as a college student.

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[71] Natalie, interview.

[72] Natalie, interview.

I asked Natalie if it was surprising that she never received any negative treatment as an Asian American in a small, southern town. She responded, "Yeah, it is. . . . I feel like that's counterintuitive. Like, you wouldn't think that it would be like that but in the moment, I wasn't thinking that at all. . . . Yeah, definitely, just people are generally good and I feel like gone are the days . . . where people are just outwardly, outwardly unsolicited like, racist." This sentiment was expressed by other interviewees as well.

Owen and Phoebe

Owen and Phoebe are the more outgoing members of a family of Chinese Americans that owns and operates a Chinese restaurant in the small town and county seat of a mostly rural Tennessee county. Owen is the patriarch of the family and immigrated to the United States from China over thirty years ago. Phoebe is his eighteen-year-old daughter. They met me in the seating area of their restaurant while Owen's wife and two younger children remained in the kitchen. Owen's English is broken, but Phoebe speaks almost flawlessly, having just graduated from the local high school. They moved to Tennessee approximately eight years ago because the weather was too cold in Wisconsin, according to Owen. Interestingly, Owen was very inquisitive, often leading the conversation to questions about me, my age, job, income, and education. Though this distracted some from the conversation, it permitted me to ask personal questions of him about his age and the success of his business.

Owen chose to move his family to a small town because he prefers the "quieter" and "safer" lifestyle of a small town over the busyness and potential dangers of a city.[73] Owen's experience in a small, Tennessee town has been "very good." He

[73] Owen, interview by author, June 29, 2019. Owen and Phoebe were uncomfortable with recording, so I did not record this interview. Notes were recorded manually, and therefore long quotes are unavailable.

described, with Phoebe nodding, that the people are "very nice."[74] He said that he has not experienced any specific instances of being mistreated, and that most are not racist. According to Owen, "Racism is worse in the big city."[75] When pressed for a reason, he stated that the greater diversity creates more racism between the ethnicities. Phoebe also stated that she had never experienced racism. She noted that racism was far worse when they lived in Wisconsin.[76] Owen identified he and his wife as Buddhists. When asked how he had been treated by Christians in this town, he simply said, "Good."[77] Phoebe agreed, and they noted that the Christians that they know have been "nice."[78] Owen and Phoebe portrayed such a positive attitude toward the community that it created in me some doubt as to their authenticity. As stated previously about David and Emily, fear of losing business by speaking poorly about citizens of their county may have prevented Owen and Phoebe from speaking openly, even though I promised them anonymity.

Quincy

Quincy is eighteen years old and will leave home to join the Marines in August 2019. His mother is from South Korea and his father is Caucasian. They met while his father was serving in the military. He has lived in a mostly rural county in Tennessee for his entire life, specifically in one of the most rural parts of the county. Quincy's father is Catholic; and because of a Buddhist tradition, his mother believes that it would be a bad omen to have two religions practiced in their house. Therefore, she gave up Buddhism and is now non-religious. Quincy identifies as Catholic. Quincy's mother did not bring

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[74] Owen, interview.

[75] Owen, interview.

[76] Phoebe, interview by author, June 29, 2019.

[77] Owen, interview.

[78] Owen and Phoebe, interview.

any Korean cultural practices into their home, though she often cooks Korean food.

Quincy recently graduated from the county's only high school. When I asked him if he had experienced any mistreatment because of his ethnicity, he responded, "Really, truly, it's been a good experience here. The people here are, they aren't mean. They aren't racist about anything."[79] He noted that they often assumed he was Chinese, and added, "Even real country folk here, the real rednecks, I would say they aren't racist at all towards me. Actually, very nice."[80] Quincy could, however, think of two sources of racism that he had experienced. First, he experienced racism in an adjacent county that is mostly urban. His mother owns a hair product store for African Americans and Quincy observed that both he and his mother had been mistreated there because of their ethnicity. Second, he identified one teenage male that he had played football with as racist, but he explained that he demonstrated negative behavior toward everyone. Quincy described him as a "detriment to society."[81]

When asked about how he felt Christians have treated him in this community, he was positive. He stated, "They haven't done me wrong. I mean besides joke making. Everyone has jokes; you have jokes right back for them too."[82] Interestingly, like others I have interviewed, jokes about ethnicity do not seem to bother Quincy. Quincy was an impressive and driven young man.

Rachel

Rachel was born and raised in Seoul, South Korea, and came to Tennessee as a part of an exchange program with a university. She was an evangelical Christian when

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[79] Quincy, interview by author, June 26, 2019.

[80] Quincy, interview.

[81] Quincy, interview.

[82] Quincy, interview.

she came and obtained graduate degrees in ministry and education. During her graduate studies, she met and married a man from a mostly rural county in Tennessee. She moved back to the unincorporated, rural community where he is from, and they have now lived there for six years. She does substitute teaching in the county school system, but has been unsuccessful finding a full-time teaching job, even with a graduate degree.

Moving from Seoul to rural Tennessee has created disequilibrium for Rachel. She commented, "It's really different. I'm a city folk and these are country folks and they greet to each other. We don't greet. We don't even look at each other. Here, more people are more kind or more friendly in some way."[83] Though she has struggled to adjust to rural life, she now enjoys it, admitting, "I think I'm lucky and a little bit boring . . . but also, I love the country in some ways. . . . There are some people who was not willing to move to the countryside. I'm kind of enjoying being country."[84] Rachel lamented that she sometimes struggles to communicate because of a "language barrier," though she believes that she has improved in this area.[85] After speaking with her for over an hour, I found Rachel to be very understandable if I was focusing on hearing and understanding her, in spite of her accent. Connected to this, she noted that some simply refuse to make the effort to understand her. She elaborated, "Sometimes people, I know they can understand me, but I think . . . to understand, you have to really pay attention. And sometimes ask more. . . . Sometimes people are trying not to understand. I kind of think they kind of don't take the time. That is kind of frustrating."[86] In her substitute teaching, sometimes the children make the slant-eyes gesture, but this does not affect her because she recognizes the immaturity of the children. In Rachel's estimation, she has never

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[83] Rachel, interview, June 29, 2019.

[84] Rachel, interview.

[85] Rachel, interview.

[86] Rachel, interview.

experienced any racism, and based on her reading of American history, racism is currently far less of a problem.

As a Christian, Rachel has much experience in church and she describes that experience as "good."[87] She noted that some of the women are "unapproachable" in the rural church of about 180 members that she has attended for six years.[88] Because Asians tend to be more reserved, Rachel reasoned, church members could help them by intentionally making an effort, reaching out, and communicating with them. Though she loves her church family, she admitted that she sometimes feels lonely in church assemblies.

Sophia

Sophia was adopted from China when she was three years old. She strongly identifies as Chinese American, recognizing that she does not possess some of the cultural identity because she was adopted. She explained, "So, I would consider myself Chinese American, for sure. . . . If someone asks me my ethnicity, I would say 'Chinese,' and everything, but culturally, like because I was raised by Caucasian parents, I don't have a lot of the Chinese culture like, as part of my identity."[89] She grew up in a mostly rural county in the Midwest, but then lived in a mostly rural county in Tennessee for four years.

Her experience in this rural setting in Tennessee was "very positive." Like others, she noted that "racist jokes" were often made:

> I had . . . friends and we make like, racist jokes, but that's always like, that's always fine and everything. And I did have some people, who I wouldn't have considered like, close enough to me to be comfortable with them making racist jokes, who would make racist jokes sometimes and that was, that was frustrating sometimes,

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[87] Rachel, interview.

[88] Rachel, interview.

[89] Sophia, interview by author, July 5, 2019.

> but again, that didn't happen a lot. It was just occasional . . . that got really frustrating every now and then, but I wouldn't say anything like, that just felt like, terrible, mistreatment or anything.[90]

In the interviews, others have also indicated that jokes about ethnicity did not upset them excessively. I asked Sophia for a reason, and her response was revealing. She indicated that most of the jokes directed toward Asian Americans do not have severely negative connotations. For example, Sophia explained, some make comments about the appearance of an Asian's eyes or about their intelligence. Her African American friends, however, hear comments about avoiding the police or gangs. She said, "I think that the difference is like the stereotypes for Asians are not nearly as severe or negative as stereotypes for African Americans."[91] For Asian Americans, according to Rachel, the comments are not nearly as "abrasive."[92] She concluded, "If I let every Asian stereotype get to me, I would always be offended. It just gets to a point where you can't take them all as, 'Oh, wow, can't believe you're stereotyping me like that.'"[93]

Her experience in Tennessee was not that much different from her experience during her teenage years in the Midwest, she explained. Though she lived in a small town in a mostly rural county in Tennessee, she attended church in an even more rural area of the county. Again, one would expect Sophia to have experienced mistreatment in a rural church, but she did not. She stated, "No, definitely not mistreated or anything. I did get Asian jokes . . . the stereotypical. . . . Never felt weird or looked down on."[94] She was approached by "a couple people" in churches that assumed she was "fresh off the boat

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[90] Sophia, interview.

[91] Sophia, interview.

[92] Sophia, interview.

[93] Sophia interview.

[94] Sophia, interview.

from China," but otherwise described her experience positively.[95]

Todd

Todd's father, who is Chinese, met his Caucasian mother in Malaysia in the 1960s while she was in the Peace Corps. They married in Malaysia and moved to the United States while she was pregnant with Todd so that he could be born as a citizen of the United States. Todd is in his early fifties, and is married to a Swiss Canadian with dual citizenship in Canada and the United States. He has three children who are in high school and college. He is proud of his Chinese heritage, has given all three of his children Chinese names, and is very involved in Chinese culture.

He spent the first ten years of his life in a rural county in the Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee. His mother's ancestors were from an area that is now part of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. For this reason, his family moved to this rural part of Tennessee. Because of his ethnicity, his father had difficulty securing work and his family lived in poverty. One can envision the situation clearly. A Chinese American man, his Caucasian wife, and three children of mixed ethnicity live in poverty in the mountains of Tennessee. One would assume that racism was prevalent. Todd, however, said that the experience as a Chinese American in a rural area of Tennessee was mostly positive. He was teased for his Chinese name on a couple of occasions, but this was just "joking around. It wasn't extreme."[96] He remembered that the few times he was teased, a friend would stick up for him. His mother also instilled in him and his siblings the value of seeing their differences as assets. He added, "So, I had really good experiences for the most part in that way. Any stereotypes that we encountered were folks saying, 'Oh, you're Chinese. Chinese people are smart, right?' So, in some of that there was . . . some

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[95] Sophia, interview.

[96] Todd, interview by author, July 15, 2019.

mild condescension at times."[97] Other than his father, all of the family he spent time with as a child was Caucasian, and, realizing the potential rarity of this, he did not remember "negativity from anybody in family with regard to race."[98] Concluding his discussion of his childhood, he summarized, "Again, the overt racism just fortunately has not been a hallmark of my growing up."[99]

More recently, Todd lived for three years in another rural Tennessee county with his wife and children, who were then in middle and elementary school. This particular county has the distinction of being the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan, again leading to the assumption that a minority would face discrimination. Todd worked as an engineer in a manufacturing facility with mostly blue-collar workers. He simply stated, "I did not observe any of what somebody might expect from a town with that history. In fact, it was kind of opposite. . . . I don't think I experienced a single thing."[100] The same was true of the experience his children had in public schools. He explained, "Race was not a factor in any of the interactions that they had. . . . We've been very, very blessed from that standpoint, for sure."[101]

Todd grew up in church and has been a Christian since childhood. In reference to his experience in churches in rural counties in Tennessee during his childhood and more recently, he repeatedly asserted that he had no negative experiences related to ethnicity. He said, "I am trying and I can't recall a single time where race was ever an issue negatively or even was a significant issue. . . . It was just a non-issue . . . felt no less welcomed than anybody else. . . . I don't recall a single time in church where there was

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[97] Todd, interview.

[98] Todd, interview.

[99] Todd, interview.

[100] Todd, interview.

[101] Todd, interview.

any comment negatively made with regard to race for either me or my kids or because my wife is a Canadian citizen not a US citizen."[102] When I asked him if was surprised by the lack of negative experiences, he responded, "With the stereotypes, you would think somewhere along the way somebody would have let something slip that would be some sort of a negative comment to the degree that it would at least stand out in memory, and it doesn't. So, either it was so traumatic I buried it deep in my unconscious or it just wasn't there and we were just so blessed because people were living out their faith."[103] Todd is passionate about evangelizing Asian Americans and shared several ideas which will be mentioned in chapter 6.

Todd recalled only two times when he was the victim of racism, and both occurred in urban areas rather than rural areas. He was mistreated by other Chinese people in an urban Chinatown, and he believes this occurred because his wife is not Chinese. The other instance occurred when the leader of a local chapter of the NAACP excluded Todd and another student from an awards ceremony.

Victor, Wanda, and Xavier

I met Victor, Wanda, and Xavier through a mutual friend. When I asked if we could meet and told them that I would be happy to take them out to eat, they immediately responded by inviting me to their home for an Indian meal. The meal was delicious, and they seemed genuinely excited to share a small portion of their culture with me. Victor and Wanda came to the United States from India more than thirty years ago. Xavier is the younger of their two sons and is in pharmacy school in an urban area. Victor and Wanda moved to a mostly rural county in Tennessee twenty-five years ago when Wanda was pregnant with Xavier and they have lived in the same place since then. They have owned

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[102] Todd, interview.

[103] Todd, interview.

and operated a small budget hotel during the entire twenty-five years. They were excited to share their story and were so eager that they often interrupted one another.

Victor and Wanda came to the United States in the mid-1980s, lived in New York City for about a year, and then they lived in the Los Angeles area for several years before moving to Tennessee. I asked them why they moved to a southern, rural context from an urban area like Los Angeles and the answer was economically driven. They had been saving their money to buy a motel, but the prices were too high in the Los Angeles area. Victor had an uncle living in Tennessee at the time, and he informed them of a motel that was for sale. They visited, liked the motel, and purchased it. Their decision to move to rural Tennessee was driven by the desire to raise a family in an economically stable situation, and the opportunity to buy the motel was an opportunity they felt they had to seize. When they moved to Tennessee in the winter of 1994, not a single person walked through the doors of the motel lobby for the first week, but they have slowly built a reputable and successful business.

As they reflected on their experience in this small town, they noted that a change has occurred over the twenty-five years that they have lived there. When they first arrived, some individuals were rude and made racist remarks. Wanda recalled, "When they saw you in the front desk, and was like, 'Oh, I'm not staying at this place.' People just say right in front of you . . . not so nice. . . . They will tell you what's on their mind; they won't be holding back."[104] Xavier agreed that individuals said "racist, hurtful words, kind of like, 'Go back,' or that sort of thing" and that "times were rough for my parents in the beginning."[105] Wanda specifically recalled a man telling her and a South Asian friend to go back to India when he heard them speaking a language other than English.

Currently, though, Victor, Wanda, and Xavier all adamantly agreed that they do

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[104] Wanda, interview by author, July 29, 2019.

[105] Xavier, interview by author, July 29, 2019.

not experience any type of racism. Victor, who was the quietest of the family, spoke strongly of this, "Twenty-five years ago, it's definitely like that. Yeah, but now, no, nobody is rude like that.[106] Currently, Wanda believes that others look at them in a more scrutinizing way when they walk into a public place, but that the time when others would make openly racist remarks has mostly come to an end. They agreed that this shift from unveiled racist behavior occurred about five years after Victor, Wanda, and Xavier arrived in this rural context. Unfortunately, the events of September 11, 2001 increased the mistreatment that this family faced, but this mistreatment faded over time. Xavier described his experience in public schools in this rural county as "positive," with no recollection of mistreatment because of his ethnicity. He also described what it is like to go into public in a predominantly white, rural town. "Whenever I, like, sometimes go to a restaurant, I'm like the only colored person walking in there, you know. I do get some looks . . . like I don't really care about that. I'll laugh it off, but I still get some looks."[107]

Because they have had a positive experience, they are thankful for the opportunity to live in a small town. Each of the three made their case that life in a small town is superior to life in an urban context. Wanda enjoys the neighborly atmosphere of a small town compared to an urban area. Victor noted the lack of gang activity and described everyone in a small town as "good friends." Xavier was simply thankful for the way this small town had shaped their lives. He said, "It's been definitely a lot more of a blessing being here than I think would have been in a bigger city. . . . This town has really shaped how our lives are. . . . It really shaped how we live our lives. . . . The small town has really like, been a blessing to us."[108]

Victor and Wanda both identify as Hindus. I assumed that Xavier was either

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[106] Victor, interview by author, July 29, 2019.

[107] Xavier, interview.

[108] Xavier, interview.

Hindu or non-religious. When I asked how their experience with Christians had been, they all acknowledged that it had been positive and that all of their friends are Christians. Victor noted that they had been invited to church, but said, "We don't have time to go to church because we have to clean the rooms."[109] Then came the surprise. Xavier's own words are best utilized here:

> My brother and I are actually both Christians as well. . . . We grew up Hindu and then, as we were growing older, we got invited to church by some friends and then . . . through the connection with friends . . . we converted from Hinduism to Christianity, which it really was tough for them. My parents didn't accept in the very beginning and then, kind of like over time, our youth pastor would kind of like come here while we were at school and like, just talked to my parents and kind of give them more of an understanding of what Christianity is all about as well. Yeah, and just kind of love on them. Show them a little bit of Jesus. It's kind of like, "Can you let them know and just show them that, you know, Christian's aren't bad." Like it's not a bad religion.

Victor and Wanda had little to say about their experience with Christians after this revelation, other than generalities about Christians being their friends and not having any problems with them. The youth pastor that visited Victor and Wanda later became a full-time missionary to India. Victor, though Hindu, was proud that the youth pastor visited his home village in India. My interview and time with Victor, Wanda, and Xavier was a delightful learning experience.

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[109] Victor, interview.

CHAPTER 4

THE INTERVIEWS: DATA ANALYSIS

Chapter 3 described the interviewees and their experiences. Chapter 4 describes the data analysis process that the author undertook during and after the interview process. Following the procedures for developing grounded theory described by Strauss and Corbin and Creswell, this project developed the primary theories through open, axial, and selective coding.[1] This process involves "developing categories of information (open coding), interconnecting the categories (axial coding), building a 'story' that connects the categories (selective coding), and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions."[2] This chapter will describe the categories developed in open coding and how they were connected in axial coding. Chapter 5 will narrate the story built during selective coding.

By way of introduction to this chapter, two matters should be mentioned. First, the computer software NVivo was used for the gathering of data into categories. Computer software used for coding in qualitative research has long been accepted as a best practice.[3] Second, the categories that were identified during the coding process were

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[1] Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 55–217; John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 56–57, 150–51.

[2] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 150.

[3] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 161; Nancy L. Leech and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, "Beyond Constant Comparison Qualitative Data Analysis: Using NVivo," *School Psychology Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (March 2011): 70; David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by Step*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 70–84. Though NVivo has many options for analysis, it was used for this project only for the gathering of data into categories and the comparison of those categories.

a direct result of the following four open-ended questions that were asked in each interview. Those questions were as follows:

1. What factors led you to a rural community instead of an urban center?
2. How would you describe your experience in this community?
3. How have you been treated by the Christians here?
4. What has your interaction with Christians and churches been like?

For the interviewees that were Christians, the following question was often added to the interview: In your opinion, what could churches in non-urban counties of Tennessee do to better reach the Asian Americans in their community?

Open Coding

Open coding requires the researcher to analyze the data in search of major categories under which blocks of data may be categorized because "they share common characteristics or related meanings."[4] In these categories, several subcategories or "properties" are designated, "representing multiple perspectives about the categories."[5] My interview questions led to the discovery of five major categories: (1) treatment in rural counties, (2) reasons for living in rural counties, (3) Asian American identity, (4) experience with Christians and churches in rural counties, and (5) methods for reaching Asian Americans with the gospel. Below I will describe the properties in each of these categories and the data that was gathered in each.

Treatment in Rural Counties

The treatment of the Asian Americans in the rural communities where they lived was one of the major themes I was pursuing, so naturally this became one of the major categories. Two major subcategories were quickly discovered, and again, these

[4] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 103.

[5] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 151.

were obvious. The interviewees had positive and negative experiences. I divided the negative experiences into six additional subcategories that describe the nature of the experience.

First, 2 of the interviewees specifically mentioned that those in the community did not understand them. Neither of these felt as if they had been mistreated, but that little effort was made by others to understand their situation as an Asian American.[6] Second, 2 of the interviewees believed that their Asian American ethnicity affected a personal job search or the job search of a family member. Todd stated, "I do know that my dad felt strongly, and probably accurately, felt that he was declined, turned down, or overlooked for positions and felt that was, in part, due to ethnicity."[7] Third, 3 interviewees described what I categorized as "a few isolated moments" of negative interactions in their rural community. Two of the 3 specifically stated that these came from interactions with elderly individuals. Speaking of negative interactions because of his ethnicity, Frank explained, "I may have encountered one or two. They're usually people like in their eighties and stuff. . . . I don't think they're racist. They just kind of don't know how to take me, and after a little bit, they're like, 'Oh, okay. He's a pretty cool guy.' . . . You just have to get used to it a little bit. It's a little different. But, I've never felt anything hostile."[8]

Fourth, 13 of the interviewees mentioned being made fun of for their ethnicity. Seven of these 13 specifically said that this occurred in their childhood and teenage years. They either reasoned that this occurred because children are immature or because American attitudes about ethnicity and race were different when they were children. Three of the 13 said that they were hurt by the mocking, but 7 said that they were

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[6] Rachel, interview by author, June 29, 2019; Natalie, interview by author, June 24, 2019.

[7] Todd, interview by author, July 15, 2019; see also Rachel, interview.

[8] Frank, interview by author, February 24, 2019.

unaffected and that they had learned to not let these comments bother them. Five of them referred to the comments as mere jokes. Quincy quipped, "Everyone has jokes. You have jokes right back for them, too." He then pointed at his former football coach who had introduced us and sat in on the interview, and added that he would make jokes "about him being half-crippled or half-white trash."[9]

Fifth, the word *racism* was surprisingly only used to describe the interviewees' experience by 3 individuals, all from the same family, and it was immediately after I had used the word in a question.[10] Another interviewee described an incident that classifies as racism, though she did not use the word. Bonnie said, "I went to the dry cleaner one time with my boys, and this person, the lady up front, didn't even look at me when I asked her a question. It felt like she looked at me different because of what I looked like on the outside."[11]

On the contrary, some interviewees explicitly denied that they had experienced racism or did not feel like it was the appropriate word to describe their experience. Isabella noted, "I think you know how there's racism with like, the blacks and Hispanics. You don't really get a whole lot of that from my perspective.[12] Describing his experience, Quincy said, "The people here . . . they aren't mean. They aren't racist about anything." Todd added, "But again, the overt racism just fortunately has not been a hallmark of my growing up."[13] In response to a question about racism, Caleb stated, "No, not really. No real significant racism or anything like that."[14] I was surprised that such a small number

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[9] Quincy, interview by author, June 26, 2019.

[10] Victor, Wanda, and Xavier, interview by author, July 29, 2019.

[11] Bonnie, interview by author, December 5, 2018.

[12] Isabella, interview by author, April 28, 2019.

[13] Todd, interview.

[14] Caleb, interview by author, December 8, 2019.

of the interviewees believed that they had experienced racism. As Sophia noted in her interview, she has difficulty viewing herself as a victim of racism because the types of remarks made about Asian Americans are far less abrasive than the remarks made to African Americans. She was sensitive to this reality because she grew up with adopted siblings who were African American.[15] Also notable is that four of the interviewees said they had experienced racism in urban places or outside of the southern region of the United States.[16]

Sixth, and finally, three individuals observed that they had been mistreated in a previous era in rural Tennessee, but that the culture had changed and that they no longer are mistreated. Maria elaborated, "Well, I would say my experience growing up is completely different than my experience now. . . . As a kid, definitely called names, picked on, bullied. . . . It's just different now. It's just, I think the world's different. Now I tell people, 'Oh yeah, I'm Vietnamese,' . . . and nobody thinks anything about it."[17] After his wife described their experience when they first moved to a mostly rural county in Tennessee, Victor remarked, "Yeah, twenty-five years ago it's definitely like that. Yeah, but now, no, nobody is rude like that. . . . Now everybody's friendly." Wanda and Xavier agreed with him.[18]

The second major subcategory of "Treatment in Rural Counties" was positive. This property required no further subcategories. Twenty-two of the twenty-three interviewees described their treatment in mostly rural counties in Tennessee in positive

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[15] Sophia, interview by author, July 5, 2019.

[16] I feel a significant amount of tension here. I do not want to minimize the reality of racism that exists in the United States, especially the southern United States, and especially as a white male. I am simply pointing out the results of the interviews. I am not originally from the South, so there was a part of me that had anticipated finding more overt racism toward Asian Americans that I could point out and then rebuke. Surprisingly and fortunately, my research indicated far less than I anticipated.

[17] Maria, interview by author, June 16, 2019.

[18] Victor, Wanda, and Xavier, interview.

terms. When I pressed them to describe something negative, most of the interviewees responded that there had been only minor negative issues or no negative issues, and that they would describe their experience as generally, mostly, fairly, or very positive. I have detailed much from these parts of the interviews in the previous chapter.

The positive response by the majority of the interviewees surprised me. As this trend developed, I began to express my surprise to the interviewees, especially how it went against the stereotypes of the rural South. I asked several of the interviewees if it surprised them. Sophia and Janet both admitted that they were not surprised. Frank admitted that he had never thought about it and Natalie admitted that she hadn't pondered it until the moment I asked her, but that now it was surprising to her. She added, "It is like, reflecting on it now. I feel like that's counterintuitive, like you wouldn't think that it would be like that. But in the moment, I wasn't thinking that at all."[19] Quincy, rather directly, agreed that it was surprising, "Yeah, it is actually. I mean you would totally believe you would experience racism very often because we got white trash."[20] Todd also agreed that he had never considered it, but that it was surprising to reflect on his time in rural settings and view it positively. He remarked, "And I think it does surprise. But yeah, it kind of does because I would think, you know, after fifty-one years and being in some sort of rural setting that something would have stood out."[21] In summary, under the category of "Treatment in Rural Counties," the Asian Americans interviewed for this study acknowledged some mistreatment, but nearly unanimously described the treatment they received as positive.

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[19] Natalie, interview; Frank, interview.

[20] Quincy, interview.

[21] Todd, interview.

Reasons for Living in a Mostly Rural County

In the United States, the foreign-born in urban counties is 14.8 percent, while mostly rural counties have a foreign-born population of 2.6 percent, and completely rural counties have a 2.3 percent foreign-born population.[22] Because the majority of the foreign-born live in urban areas, it leads one to explore the reasons a foreign-born person would choose to live in a rural area where their minority status would be more noticeable. As was stated in the demographic information in chapter 3, 15 of the 23 interviewees were not born in the United States. The other 8 were born to first-generation immigrants. The interviewees gave several reasons for living in a non-urban area.

Five individuals married a Caucasian person who was originally from a rural county. Frank, a Chinese American, grew up in a small town, married a Caucasian from the same town, and they have settled there. Three had one parent that was Asian and one parent that was Caucasian, and they lived in rural counties during their childhood because their Caucasian parent was from a rural county. One family (Victor, Wanda, and Xavier) lived in a rural county because an uncle from India was already living there and helped them purchase a business. David and Emily chose a non-urban county because of a business opportunity, but also because David grew up in a rural area of Southeast Asia. Owen's family moved to a rural area to take advantage of a business opportunity and because he does not like urban areas. Maria lives in a rural area because of her husband's work, Ken because of his parents' work, and Todd (previously) because of work. Caleb originally moved to the United States from South Korea and lived in a non-urban county because his parents were studying in a university. Janet and Laura both moved to a small town to attend a university, and then stayed in the small town following their studies. Five interviewees currently live or used to live in a mostly rural county for educational

[22] Thomas Gryn, "The Foreign-Born by Urban-Rural Status of Counties: 2011–2015," The United States Census Bureau, December 8, 2016, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2016/12/the_foreign-bornby.html.

purposes. Quincy, who recently graduated high school, does not know why his parents chose to live in a mostly rural county.

Asian American Identity

Though I did not intend on asking about Asian American identity, this issue came up with eight interviewees, notably those who have only one parent who is ethnically Asian and the three adoptees. Those with one ethnically Asian parent and one Caucasian parent were firm in their identification as Asian Americans. Although Maria was ashamed of her background as a teenager, in her mid-twenties she became proud of her Vietnamese American heritage. Laura said, "I really take pride with being half Filipino . . . because I'm not the same as everybody else."[23] Todd, whose father is Chinese and mother is Caucasian, fully embraces his Chinese heritage. He said, "We have completely embraced it, and I think I speak for my kids as well. . . . We've carried on the Chinese name tradition . . . each generation in our family has the same first name."[24] Quincy, on the other hand, said that he knows he is Asian American but that he does not think about it much. The three adoptees, Janet, Isabella, and Sophia all adamantly identified as Asian American, though they know that they did not experience Asian culture being raised by Caucasian parents. Isabella is drawn to the culture of South Korea, where she was born, and has made an effort to learn Korean and adopt cultural practices in her home and with her children.

Interestingly, both of the interviewees who were born in the United States but whose parents were born in the Philippines were passionate in both their Asian American identity and their desire to carry on cultural traditions from the Philippines. Though born and raised in the United States, Natalie considers herself more Filipino than American.

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[23] Laura, interview by author, May 30, 2019.

[24] Todd, interview.

She said, as quoted in chapter 3, "My parents grew up talking to me in Tagalog and because my grandma lived with us, I grew up eating the food, like only Filipino food, pretty much my whole life. . . . whenever I ate at home, we always had Filipino food. So I was very used to that. We had the Filipino channel at my house just like going 24/7. So yeah, I feel like I'm pretty Filipino."[25] Laura stated that she intends for her future family to celebrate Filipino holidays and use Filipino terms of endearment for relatives. Heather, though she identifies herself as Asian American, does not always feel as if she should because she is half Chinese and half Caucasian. Such confusion is not surprising because, as Choi points out, some second-generation immigrants struggle with their identity, and sometimes face "serious confusion regarding identity."[26] Heather's struggle with identity seemed to be the strongest of the interviewees.

Experience with Christians and Churches in Rural Counties

Separate from experience in a rural community, I asked the interviewees to reflect on their experience with Christians and in churches. Sixteen of the interviewees were Christians, so their responses focused on how they had been treated as Asian Americans in churches in small towns. For the seven who were not evangelical Christians (one is Catholic), they focused on their interactions with Christians in communities in which evangelical Christianity is a dominant force. Tennessee has the highest percentage of evangelicals in the United States,[27] and the percentage of evangelicals in rural areas of Tennessee is likely higher. Similar to the category, "Treatment in Rural Counties," the category, "Experience with Christians and Churches in Rural Counties," naturally divided

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[25] Natalie, interview.

[26] Sungho Choi, "Identity Crisis for the Diaspora Community," in *Korean Diaspora and Christian Mission*, ed. Sŭng-hun Kim and Wonsuk Ma (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 33.

[27] Pew Forum, "Religious Landscape Study: Evangelical Protestants," *Pew Research Center*, May 11, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.

into two subcategories: negative and positive experiences. In the interviews, I specifically asked if their experiences had been positive, negative, or both, and to share those experiences.

Of the 23 interviewees, only 7 shared negative experiences, and all 7 of those were evangelical Christians. Interestingly, the non-Christians who were interviewed did not communicate anything negative about Christians and their interactions with Christians. All of them knew that I was a Christian, which may have shaded their answers. The negative experiences could be further categorized into three subcategories.

First, about their experiences in church, 4 of the interviewees experienced distance from fellow churchgoers as if they did not know how to act toward an Asian American. Bonnie, who was brought to Christ through and is a member of the small-town church she was describing, said, "People look at you different when you come from a different culture. This is very true. People just don't know what to do or say, or how to act around people who are different."[28] Gavin explained his experience, "I feel like the church or Christian people in particular, I feel like they're kind of closed. You know, I feel like they're welcoming when like, they're the same race or something, but, like, when this . . . random guy from foreign country came to their church, like I don't think they really know what to do with them or anything."[29] Rachel described some of the ladies at the rural church where she is a member as "unapproachable."[30]

Second, 4 of the interviewees described their experience in negative terms because Christians exhibited a lack of understanding and sensitivity. For Janet, she viewed these moments as humorous stories (both of which were briefly shared in chapter 3). Caleb, however, had evidently thought through this lack of understanding and had

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[28] Bonnie, interview.

[29] Gavin, interview by author, April 24, 2019.

[30] Rachel, interview.

much to say about it. About his negative experiences in churches, he said, "So, if I had to summarize to one thing, it would be the lack of understanding. That is the main drive behind, I guess, what I would call the negative experience I've and my family has had with the American Christians." He explained:

> A common theme we've noticed in our experience . . . is just a general lack of understanding in terms of the plights and generally shared experiences of the migrant people. . . . I hate using the word ignorance, because it seems harsh, but I mean, that is what it is. It's just a lack of knowledge, and just because of the fact that they haven't been exposed to a lot of people like us . . . especially in rural settings. So that lack of exposure also translates into lack of experience. So they don't have a template to go by when dealing with people like us. They just default to how they treat everyone else. Problem is sometimes that can, especially when there's a language barrier, that can sometimes be translated to, "Oh, they just don't respect our culture," or, "they're not trying to understand." . . . If the person who lacks understanding recognizes that lack of understanding, then most likely that person will take the initiative to fill that, right? But a lot of times they lack both. So they don't know and they don't know that they don't know. So it like, creates some frustrating situations.[31]

Rachel also believed that church members did not make the effort to try to understand her.

Third, 4 of the interviewees believed they had been specifically mistreated. When I asked Bonnie if she had been welcomed and treated well at her church, she responded, "I would say fifty-fifty. I couldn't say one hundred percent. . . . One time, I was probably a week into coming to church. It was raining. I was sitting with this lady. And I said, 'Hi, how are you doing?' And I felt like she didn't really want to be sitting next to me. So she stood up and left. That kind of stuff. You see that in every church."[32] Heather recalled that her Christian Caucasian grandmother said something cruel to her Chinese mother about her motives for marrying Heather's father. Heather lamented, "I know that really affected her and her relationship with my grandma. That's kind of an example of the older generation just talking like that. They make snap judgments. These

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[31] Caleb, interview.

[32] Bonnie, interview.

are Christian people who grew up in the church and they said that."[33] Ken felt that he had been mistreated by Christians because of their harsh social media posts about immigration and their aspiration for immigrants to return to their countries of origin.

When asked about their experiences with the church and Christians in rural counties, to my surprise, all but one of the interviewees viewed the church and Christians positively, creating a rather large subcategory of positive experiences.[34] This subcategory is filled with many general statements and therefore could not be categorized more specifically. A sampling of the positive statements about church experiences are provided below. Bonnie, though she was open about her negative experiences with the church, was also open about the positive. She was complimentary of the youth ministry that engaged her son and ultimately attracted her. She was also thankful for the family that the church became to her. She said, "They really were like family to us. If I didn't have my church family, the way they showed their love to me, I don't think I would have survived."[35] Maria felt that she has been "treated the same as everybody else" in church and from childhood has always felt welcome in churches of various denominations.[36] Laura described rural churches in Tennessee as "super accepting" compared to her experience in a rural church in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.[37]

Sophia characterized her experience with rural churches in Tennessee as "mostly positive . . . definitely not mistreated or anything."[38] Ken stated, "Most of the

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[33] Heather, interview.

[34] Gavin said nothing positive about the rural churches he had attended, but the interview turned negative quickly after I asked him if he had experienced anything negative. Had I asked him about the positive, perhaps he would have shared some positive experiences.

[35] Bonnie, interview.

[36] Maria, interview.

[37] Laura, interview.

[38] Sophia, interview.

time it's positive. Most people are loving and caring, compassionate."[39] Todd thought carefully about his experiences, and then affirmed of his years in rural churches both as a child and as an adult, "I am trying and I can't recall a single time where race was ever an issue negatively. . . . It was just a non-issue. . . . felt no less welcomed than anybody else. . . . I'm trying now because I've never thought about it. I cannot think of a single instance at church where there was any kind of even hint of impugning or negative comment because of race."[40] Frank agreed that his race has never created a problem for him at church. He remarked, "Never been a problem. Never. . . . Never had anyone, when I walked by, 'I don't think that guy likes me being here.' Never had that."[41] Natalie attended a rural African American church and described the experience as "good, very positive."[42] Isabella, who is a member of a church in an especially rural part of a mostly rural county, commented, "They treated me like just any other American." There is a strong consensus among the interviewees that their experience in churches in rural counties has been positive.[43]

Notably, the interviewees that were not evangelical Christians unanimously spoke positively of the Christians in the communities where they live. Owen and Phoebe agreed that the Christians in their small town are "fine," and are not "mean" or "racist."[44] David and Emily agreed that Christians have been kind to them and have often invited

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[39] Ken, interview.

[40] Todd, interview.

[41] Frank, interview.

[42] Natalie, interview.

[43] I would like to note at this point that I am uncomfortable with the resounding positivity being expressed here. I am not highlighting the positive and ignoring the negative. If anything, I have taken pains to include most of the negative and highlight only some of the positive. I began this research expecting less of a positive estimation of the church by the interviewees.

[44] Owen and Phoebe, interview.

them to church. Quincy, a Catholic in a county with no Catholic churches, said that Christians have treated him well and "haven't done me wrong."[45] Victor and Wanda both spoke well of Christians. Even though both of their sons were converted to Christianity from Hinduism in the small town where they lived, they bore no hard feelings toward Christians.

Methods for Reaching Asian Americans with the Gospel

An unexpected part of this research was the number of Asian American evangelical Christians who were interested in interviewing. In fact, many were excited to participate in a project that might help the rural church to more effectively reach Asian Americans. As stated above, if the interviewee was a Christian, I asked something like, "What do you think the rural church should do to more effectively reach Asian Americans in their community?" While the question caused the interviewees to pause and struggle to develop an answer more than the other questions, most of them shared at least one idea. The answers were helpful and will contribute to the missiological implications drawn in chapter 6. During open coding, methods for reaching Asian Americans with the gospel became an obvious category to include.

Though several general ideas were given, four subcategories arose from the category of methods for reaching Asian Americans. First, and mentioned more than any other, was the importance of getting to know Asian Americans and building friendships with them. Stressing the importance of getting to know Asian Americans, Quincy said, "You probably need to have more interaction with them. See who they really are for themselves."[46] Natalie agreed that church members who showed interest in her and her

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[45] Quincy, interview.

[46] Quincy, interview.

culture were appealing to her. Bonnie asserted, "Get to know them. Don't judge."[47] When Frank became a Christian while a teenager, he was especially impressed by Christians who were interested in him. He revealed, "A big thing that also helped me was . . . I'd be attending worship, and when I was done, people would literally come up to me and introduce themselves and they wanted to know who I was. And they were generally interested in me."[48] Connected to this, the interviewees noted the importance of developing friendships as an important tool in evangelism. Ken suggested, "It would involve like a family becoming friends with them and more on a personal level . . . actually becoming friends with them and then being able to relate to them in some way."[49] Rachel also emphasized the importance of developing friendships with Asian Americans as a means of evangelism.

Second, and connected to the first suggestion, the interviewees emphasized the importance of not being distant or fearful of Asian Americans, especially because some Asians are more reserved. After her husband helped her to think of the word, "reserved," Rachel remarked on this theme, "Asians are more like this, not going to everyone and talk. . . . I think really we more like reserved . . . and kind of wait until someone."[50] Todd shared that his father never felt like he "fit in" at church. He then suggested that Christians should do "whatever we can do to make sure that people feel included and belonging. . . . It may be . . . actively reaching out and specifically saying, 'How do we connect with these folks?'"[51]

Third, three of the interviewees recognized the importance of a youth ministry

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[47] Bonnie, interview.

[48] Frank, interview.

[49] Ken, interview.

[50] Rachel, interview.

[51] Todd, interview.

that reaches the children of Asian Americans as a way to reach their parents. Bonnie mentioned the importance of this in her own faith development, in spite of feeling somewhat mistreated by church members. I asked her why she stayed motivated in spite of this mistreatment. She responded, "My kiddo! Seeing my child caring about church and youth group and spiritual growth motivated me. Seeing him engaged and active, it was encouraging. . . . Watching him grow up and be so smart about the Bible, that was motivating."[52] Rachel argued for the importance of programs for children because "Asians are usually really focused on their kids and education."[53] Frank, who came to faith as a teenager, also noted the importance of youth ministries.

Fourth, hospitality, both in homes and in the context of church gatherings, was mentioned by several as an important tool for evangelism. Maria commented, "Yeah, I mean inviting people into your homes. My mother always liked to be invited. She didn't get invited a ton, but yeah, if somebody invited her she . . . almost feels obligated to go."[54] Maria specifically mentioned the impact that a hospitable family had on her family when she was a child growing up in a rural county in Tennessee. Of this Caucasian family they met in a convenient store, as mentioned previously, she said, "They invited us over and became lifelong friends. I mean, they were like my adopted grandparents. . . . They were the best people . . . and we would go over to their house on the weekend. And, I mean, these were white people that grew up in the United States, as American as can be, having my mom and dad and little Asian kids coming over on the weekends to eat dinner and hang out. . . . They were like our family." When Ken's family came to the United States when he was ten years old, they had no place to say and only had the belongings that were in their suitcases. Impacted by the hospitality shown to his family, he

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[52] Bonnie, interview.

[53] Rachel, interview.

[54] Maria, interview.

recounted, "It's like without the church, we would have been lost, would have been on the streets."[55] Natalie also mentioned hospitality as an important evangelistic tool and lamented that she did not experience much hospitality in the small town where she lived. Two interviewees emphasized the importance of hospitality in the settings of church gatherings. Janet said, "When they're at church . . . not letting them sit alone . . . because I can imagine it'd be pretty lonely to come here without your family."[56] Todd also passionately spoke on the importance of being welcoming and hospitable to church guests.

Axial Coding

As Strauss and Corbin note, axial coding is not necessarily a sequential step that follows open coding. Though axial coding cannot begin until some categories have been identified, "often a sense of how categories relate begins to emerge during open coding."[57] This connecting of categories and subcategories is the goal of axial coding. The process, as Creswell describes, focuses on discovering the "causal conditions" that affect the main categories.[58] Axial coding looks "for answers to questions such as why or how come, where, when, how and with what results, and in so doing they uncover relationships among categories."[59] Based on the amount of data collected that focused on the experience of Asian Americans in their rural communities and with churches and Christians, these two categories rose above other categories. Though the category "Reasons for Living Rural" was a natural outgrowth of the research questions, it does not

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[55] Ken, interview.

[56] Janet, interview.

[57] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 124.

[58] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 151.

[59] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 127.

contribute to the development of a theory describing the treatment of Asian Americans. Further, though the category of "Identity" arose for several of the interviewees, it was not mentioned by all of the interviewees, as some of them were unaffected by the issue. The other major category, "Methods for Reaching Out to Asian Americans," though beneficial for addressing missiological implications, was also a natural byproduct of interviewing several Christians. The non-Christians were not asked about this category, and some of the Christians had difficulty reflecting on this, perhaps because of a lack of Christian maturity. Therefore, axial coding occurred around the two main categories that developed in the interviews, "Experiences with Churches and Christians in Rural Counties" and "Treatment in Rural Counties." Specifically, as the word "axial" suggests, a concept map was created with pen and paper for this stage of the coding, "because coding occurs around the axis of a category."[60]

Treatment in Rural Counties

Beginning with treatment in rural counties, the data was gathered around the center axis of negative treatment with the goal of discovering the factors that led to mistreatment. Three factors leading to negative treatment were identified, and one factor that led to a positive response to negative treatment was discovered.

First, a consistent factor that affected negative treatment was the age of the person who was mistreating the Asian American. The person guilty of mistreatment was often either a child or an elderly adult. Seven of the interviewees mentioned being made fun of as a child, and six of the seven did not point out any instance of mistreatment after childhood. Isabella specifically thought that this mocking was the result of teenage immaturity. Rachel, who has a heavy accent and serves as a substitute teacher, has been mocked by children in her classes, but she also credits this to the immaturity of children.

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[60] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 123.

Todd, whose given name is distinctly Asian, remembered the childish mocking of his name as well. Laura described the consistent bullying she experienced as a child (not in Tennessee), but said that this has not happened as an adult because "people are just a little bit more reasonable." Comparing her adolescence in West Virginia and her adulthood in Tennessee, she said, "So it has been a lot easier here just because I'm around older more mature people."[61] Two of those who were mistreated as children grew up in the 1970s, and one connected the bullying she experienced to the different era in which she was a child. Maria asserted, "I was called names. . . . Older kids would like, throw stuff at me. . . . When I was a kid they'd look at an Asian or person from Vietnam especially, and think, 'Communists.' I mean, I was called a Communist I don't know how many times. . . . But, you know . . . it's just different now. It's just, I think the world's different."[62] The mocking that these interviewees experienced came at the hands of children or teenagers.

Also, negative experiences came from interactions with the elderly. Janet, though she found the occasions humorous, mentioned two times that older Caucasians treated her in insensitive ways. As mentioned previously, an older church member asked Janet's husband how he conducted the search for a "mail order bride" in order to marry Janet. On another occasion, Janet and her husband were visiting another rural church and older members assumed Janet could not understand them because of her ethnicity. So, they spoke slowly to her in a patronizing manner. Though she is "a little shocked" at such conversations, she has "learned just to laugh."[63] When asked if he had ever experienced anyone with racist tendencies, Frank recalled, "I may have encountered one or two.

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[61] Laura, interview.

[62] Maria, interview.

[63] Janet, interview.

They're usually people like in their eighties and stuff."[64] Gavin and Sophia also mentioned that older people who were familiar with the Second World War were more likely to speak insensitively to Asian Americans. Axial coding allowed for the discovery that a consistent factor that affected negative treatment was the age of the person who was mistreating the Asian American. Children, teenagers, and the elderly were mentioned.

Connected to insensitivity of some elderly individuals toward Asian Americans, three of those who had been mistreated connected the mistreatment to a different era in American history when racial mistreatment was more common. Though mentioned previously as a subcategory produced in open coding, this showed up in three other subcategories. Todd mentioned his father's inability to find a job, which occurred in the 1970s. Both Todd and Maria were mistreated as children, which also occurred in the 1970s. Though difficult to describe the 1990s as a different era of American history, Victor and Wanda both described the mistreatment they experienced then as different than their current experience in the same rural county.

Axial coding also led to the discovery that those who had stronger accents when they spoke English were more likely to describe difficult moments of mistreatment. Nine of the interviewees spoke with strong accents, and five of these said they have been mistreated. Three of these, Bonnie, Gavin, and Rachel, were the most negative among the interviewees in describing the way they had been treated. The other two, Victor and Wanda, were positive of their current experience, but experienced negative treatment in the past.

Finally, in consideration of negative treatment in rural counties, one factor that led to a positive response to negative treatment was revealed. As mentioned previously, seven of the thirteen interviewees who had been made fun of said that they had learned to

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[64] Frank, interview.

not let these comments bother them and five of these seven referred to the comments as mere jokes. Interestingly, of the seven, all of them are Christians and six of the seven are from the millennial generation. The one interviewee from these seven that is not a millennial, Todd, reflected on how his family dealt with mistreatment in the context of their faith:

> The response was, "Okay. Well, this happened. How did you feel? So what do you do about that? Let's talk about how you deal with that kind of thing when it occurs." What was not a part of the culture, environment, training, or thought process . . . it wasn't a mindset of any kind of an activism or entitlement. . . . It was simply a matter of, "Okay. So, this occurred. How do you respond?" And, for us it was within the context of faith. What do you do to bear fruit, the right kind of fruit as you go through that? And, yep, you can be a Christian without being a doormat. I mean, you know, being poor in spirit doesn't mean you're a masochist, right? . . . "Okay, how does God want you to respond?" And I really think that's part of the key.[65]

One's faith, and perhaps one's age, could be factors in whether one responds positively to mistreatment.

In summary, in connection to negative treatment of Asian Americans in rural settings, the interviewees were more likely to be mistreated by those who were younger or older, and they made a connection to mistreatment occurring more regularly in a previous era. Also, those who had a stronger accent when speaking English were treated more harshly than those who did not speak with an accent. Finally, those who were Christians and millennials were more likely to mention that they were not bothered by mocking they might receive.

Because the subcategory of positive treatment did not have any further subcategories, axial coding around this subcategory did not produce any results. A concept map was developed around the center axis of "positive treatment," but because the data was so similar, nothing new was accomplished. As stated previously, twenty-two of the twenty-three interviewees viewed their experience in mostly rural counties positively.

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[65] Todd, interview.

Experiences with Churches and Christians in Rural Counties

Surrounding the central axis of "Experiences with Churches and Christians in Rural Areas" were two subcategories, positive and negative. As stated above, all but one of the interviewees spoke positively of their experiences with churches and Christians. After examining the data, the positive experiences were generally stated and axial coding did not produce any further results. The seven who are not evangelical Christians all spoke positively of their experiences with Christians. This includes two Buddhists, two Hindus, two that did not speak of religion, and one Roman Catholic that did not speak of a connection with a local Catholic church. Fifteen of the sixteen evangelical Christians spoke positively of their experience in churches.

Seven interviewees, however, spoke of negative experiences with churches. All seven of these were evangelical Christians. None of those who were not evangelical Christians spoke negatively about the church or Christians. These negative experiences were categorized in open coding into three subcategories: distance from other church goers, a lack of understanding, and general mistreatment. Of these seven who spoke negatively, two of them spoke of non-direct experiences. Ken felt mistreated through social media posts that spoke negatively of immigration. Heather shared a negative incident that occurred between her Asian American mother and Caucasian grandmother. One of the seven spoke of two incidents that she found to be humorous moments of a lack of understanding. The four remaining who shared negative experiences spoke of incidents in which they experienced it directly and did not view the incidents as humorous.

At this point, axial coding brought the experiences of these four interviewees into focus. All four of these interviewees speak with accented English to differing degrees. Gavin and Rachel both struggle to communicate at times, Bonnie communicates well but speaks with an obvious accent, and Caleb's accent is only slightly noticeable. He, however, spoke of incidents when the linguistic abilities of him and his family were

not as strong. The only other Christian that spoke with an accent, Adam, did not share any negative experiences, but he spends most of his time in churches attempting to raise money and often views himself as a visitor in churches. The others who spoke with obvious accents were not Christians. So, four out of the five Christians who spoke with an accent had negative experiences in churches. All four of these are also foreign-born. Other than Adam, these four were the only foreign-born Christians that were neither adoptees nor English speakers when they arrived in the United States. This is a telling discovery that illustrates both the importance of compassionate listening, the importance of communication, and the challenge that those who speak English as a second language face in an English-speaking congregation.

In connection with the three subcategories created under negative experiences, all four of these interviewees experienced distance from other church goers, three experienced a lack of understanding, and two of them described general mistreatment. Both distance and lack of understanding connect with one's lack of ability to communicate well, especially with those in a rural location who have little experience communicating with those who speak English as a second language. Rachel experienced this distance in that she viewed some of the other women in her congregation as "unapproachable."[66] Both Gavin and Bonnie felt as if others did not know how to respond to them in churches. Caleb agreed, and specifically mentioned that language barriers create distance.

Also significant, three of these four described a lack of understanding as part of their negative experience in churches. Caleb was quoted extensively above, but he gave another example of a lack of understanding and how it connects with linguistic ability:

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[66] Rachel, interview.

> It's like the most basic and somewhat linguistic, too. We would always have that kind of joking, older, male church member who always talks in idioms, right? As people who are learning the language, we can't detect idioms. So when we have conversations with people like that, well of course now we can, but I'm talking about when we first, you know, fresh off the boat, learning the English language, when we're trying to have conversations with people like that, we have no idea what the person is saying. Because he would be talking about squirrels and some random things that has nothing to do with what we think are being talked about. So we're just trying, and I think it's things like that. And it might seem small, but if the person aware of our struggles as an immigrant trying to learn a new language, at least in my case, I would be more articulate and clear. Use more elementary vocabulary to maybe accommodate for that person who is trying to learn a new language. Of course, obviously, that person didn't mean any harm. But once again, I mentioned earlier . . . it's that kind of stuff, that kind of experience adds on to the loneliness and the feeling of that gap.[67]

Rachel also recognized that she struggles linguistically but has not felt that others make much of an effort to understand her. As quoted above, she elaborated, "Sometimes people, I know they can understand me, but I think . . . to understand, you have to really pay attention. And sometimes ask more. . . . Sometimes people are trying not to understand. I kind of think they kind of don't take the time. That is kind of frustrating."[68] Both Caleb and Rachel stated their desire that Christians be more intentional about their communication with those who are still learning to speak English clearly.

Open and axial coding demonstrated that most of the interviewees felt positively about their experiences in rural counties, in churches in rural counties, and with Christians in rural counties. As one would expect, several shared negative experiences and coding demonstrated that those negative experiences were more likely to be associated with a child, teenager, or elderly person, and those negative experiences have become less regular through the years. Also, Christian millennials were more likely to not allow the mocking of others to bother them. Finally, those who speak with an accent were more likely to describe negative experiences both in rural counties and churches in rural counties.

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[67] Caleb, interview.

[68] Rachel, interview.

CHAPTER 5

THEORIES DISCOVERED THROUGH THE INTERVIEWS

Having complied and coded the data gathered through qualitative interviews with twenty-three individuals, five theories have been developed. These theories are a result of selective coding, which Creswell defines as, "building a story that connects the categories."[1] This chapter will tell that story by explaining each of the theories, understanding that each of the theories is a hypothesis based on the information provided by the interviewees and that the data could be interpreted differently by other researchers.[2] These theories come directly from the data exhibited in the previous two chapters, and the data will not be repeated in this chapter, though it directly supports these theories. With each of the theories, a missiological implication will be stated and briefly explained. In the next chapter, each of these missiological implications will be fully explained, analyzed, and supported by the literature on diaspora missiology. Though these implications could be neglected in this chapter, they will be briefly included here because this dissertation's focus is diaspora missiology, and the implications are central to the scope of the entire dissertation. From the outset, the goal has been to help equip evangelical churches in rural counties to more effectively reach Asian Americans.

Though the five theories will be explained separately in the following pages, the theories, when put together in a series of sentences, form the "story" of what the

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[1] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 150.

[2] This is a common limitation of qualitative research. See John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 111.

research has shown. Those five theories are summarized in the following: Prior to approximately twenty years ago, Asian Americans in rural counties of Tennessee felt as if mistreatment was more common because of their ethnicity. Currently, they mostly feel positive about their experience in rural counties, though small-scale mistreatment occurs. Asian Americans in rural counties also feel positively about churches and Christians, though a minority have had negative experiences.

Theory 1: Asian Americans Sensed Mistreatment in Rural Areas in the Past

Prior to approximately twenty years ago, Asian Americans in rural counties of Tennessee felt as if mistreatment was more common because of their ethnicity. Victor, Wanda, and Maria experienced this mistreatment; and each noted that a change had occurred and mistreatment is less common and less severe in 2019. Todd also described a certain level of mistreatment that he endured as a child in the 1970s, but noted that he has experienced no level of mistreatment as an adult in the rural county in which he lived. Some from the millennial generation that were interviewed also seemed to realize that a previous generation endured more mistreatment than their own generation. This realization that things were at one time worse than they are now, though perhaps an assumption that most Americans would make, still became a relevant theme in the interviews.

As will be done with each of the theories, a missiological implication will be listed and briefly explained, followed by a full treatment in the next chapter. In connection with this first theory, the rural church should come to terms with the reality of its community's sins, and perhaps its own sins in a previous generation. For a predominantly white church to acknowledge that other groups of people have been mistreated in their community and church could be a means to becoming more welcoming to minorities in their community. As will be seen below, Asian Americans already view the church positively; a humble acknowledgment like this not only

demonstrates a spirit of repentance and Christlike humility, but also should help to enhance that positive image.

Theory 2: Asian Americans Mostly Feel Positive about Treatment in Rural Counties in Tennessee

In spite of the rural South's reputation for racism, and connected to the first theory, Asian Americans mostly feel positive about the way they are currently treated in rural counties in Tennessee. Twenty-two of the twenty-three individuals interviewed for this research described their treatment in positive terms. They seemed to be genuinely thankful for their experience, their place in the community, and their home in rural areas. This theory was surprising to me, and as the interviewees reflected on the reality of what they were describing, they were surprised as well. In the prospectus of this dissertation, I expressed a fear that I would discover that the research population was consistently mistreated in rural areas. That fear proved to be unfounded.

If it is true that Asian Americans feel positively about the way they have been treated in rural counties and the small towns in those counties, then Christians could be more effective in their evangelistic efforts by being more intentional about developing relationships with Asian Americans. If Asian Americans have been treated fairly well, then they may be open to closer relationships with Christians. Rural southerners have been known for their hospitality. Reaching out to Asian Americans in rural Tennessee will provide Christians the opportunity to put this reputation into practice in an even more biblical form of hospitality.

Theory 3: Small-Scale Mistreatment of Asian Americans Is Still a Reality

Though the research population was positive in their description of how they have been treated, several acknowledged some small-scale mistreatment.[3] The

[3] While no mistreatment is "small," most of the interviewees attempted to minimize the type of

mistreatment they experienced was more likely to be caused by children, teenagers, or the elderly.[4] Further, foreign-born Asian Americans who speak English with an accent are more likely to experience mistreatment than those who do not speak with an accent. Also, Christian millennials were more likely to say that they were not bothered by what they described as "joking" about their ethnicity.

If some Asian Americans are mistreated for their ethnicity in rural counties, then Christians and churches should intentionally teach about Christian values that would minimize these experiences, with a special focus on teaching children, teenagers, and the elderly the importance of Christlike compassion that leads to sensitivity. Further, Christians in rural areas should be looking for opportunities to understand and minister to immigrants for whom English is a second language. Perhaps providing ESL classes would help to connect Asian Americans with church members and serve to meet a felt-need of the foreign-born population. Also, churches that provide counseling services might look for ways to minister to those minorities who have been mistreated.

Theory 4: Asian Americans Feel Positively about Churches and Christians in Rural Counties

The interviews strongly indicated that Asian Americans in rural counties of Tennessee feel positively about churches and Christians in rural counties. Twenty-two of the twenty-three interviewees viewed the church and Christians in a positive light. Several of those who spoke positively about their experience with churches tried intently to think of something negative and were unable. Those who were not evangelical Christians unanimously viewed Christians positively. Additionally, those who were not

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mistreatment they experienced. As detailed in chapter 4, this was partially because they believed other minority groups experienced worse treatment.

[4] Admittedly, the term "elderly" will be found abrasive by some, but no better word could be supplied. Linton Weeks strikes at how the use of the word is debated. Linton Weeks, "An Age-Old Problem: Who is 'Elderly'?" *NPR*, March 14, 2013, https://www.npr.org/2013/03/12/174124992/an-age-old-problem-who-is-elderly.

evangelical Christians had nothing negative to say about the Christians in their communities.

For the rural church, this is good news. If churches are viewed in a positive light by Asian Americans, then they should be more confident and less fearful in their outreach efforts. Further, Asian American Christians should take ownership of evangelistic efforts to reach their fellow Asian Americans. Their cultural understanding allows Asian American Christians to more effectively contextualize the gospel. Stan Downes, organizational leadership expert and longtime missionary, writes, "My hope is that diaspora believers around the world will come to realize that their new homes are mission fields and that they have an opportunity and the responsibility to make a difference there–and will do so."[5] Like all Christians, Asian American Christians should feel confident about reaching other Asian Americans because of the positive way they view Christians in rural settings.

Theory 5: Some Have Negative Experiences in Rural Churches

Though the majority spoke positively about their experience with the church, a minority described negative experiences. Seven of the interviewees, all evangelical Christians, described negative experiences with churches. As described in chapter 4, only four were both direct recipients of these negative experiences and took them seriously. All four of these were foreign-born and speak English with some level of an accent, therefore adding the causal condition to Theory 5 that the foreign-born who speak with an accent were more likely to have had negative experiences.

The fact that some Asian Americans still have negative experiences in

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[5] Stan Downes, "Mission by and beyond the Diaspora: Partnering with Diaspora Believers to Reach Other Immigrants and the Local People," in *Diaspora Missions: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World*, ed. Michael Pocock and Enoch Wan, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 23 (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2015), 79.

evangelical churches should cause churches to collectively self-analyze. Special attention should be given to ensure that Asian Americans are welcomed, shown hospitality, and that those who speak English as a second language are shown an extra measure of Christlike compassion and graciousness. Further, special attention should be given to ensure that all church members feel valued and that church leaders are communicating effectively to them.

CHAPTER 6

MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this dissertation is not simply to gather information about the experiences of Asian Americans in rural areas. The data gathered is intended to help evangelical churches in rural areas to be better equipped to reach Asian Americans with the gospel. In light of the five theories that developed from the interviews, this chapter will discuss the missiological implications of each of those theories. These implications will be focused on the practice of diaspora missions and ministry in evangelical churches in rural counties. The structure of this chapter will follow the order of the five theories, providing ideas for diaspora missions and ministry connected to each theory.

Before exploring the implications, two matters should be noted. First, because of the diversity of Asian Americans, some missiological strategies may not apply to every Asian American nationality. Even among specific subgroups of Asian Americans, significant diversity exists. For example, South Asians in the United States are not homogenous. Specifically of South Asian Hindus, Aghamka describes them as "multi-lingual and fragmented," and writes, "When considering Hindus in North America, one must remember that these are not one homogenous people, though most of them have their origin and roots in India. India has thousands of castes, tribes, and ethnic groups with different languages and religions and only a segment of these are represented in North America."[1] Asian American Buddhists represent an even greater diversity in

[1] Atul Y. Aghamka, "Partnership in Witnessing to the Hindu Diaspora in North America," *Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* 22 (2007): 27–28.

nationality, religious practice, and education.[2] Speaking specifically of Asian American Buddhists, Mann, Numrich, and Williams note, "The first immigrant wave after the 1965 act included many professionals and highly educated people. Later waves brought some less-skilled and less-educated immigrants, as well as many refugees from war-torn Buddhist countries in Southeast Asia."[3] Recognizing this diversity, the specificity required to reach specific subgroups of Asian Americans, and the spectrum of nationalities represented by the interviewees in rural counties in this research, this chapter attempts to present strategies that are broad enough to include the diversity of Asian Americans.

Second, while missiologists debate whether diaspora strategy should aim to plant culturally specific congregations or multicultural congregations,[4] because of the small population of Asian Americans in rural counties, most rural churches will need to integrate Asian Americans into the existing and, hopefully, increasingly multicultural congregation. This situation will likely align with what McIntosh and McMahan describe as an assimilationist approach, which "affirms the traditional method of integrating ethnic peoples . . . into churches of a dominant culture."[5] Unless the Asian American population in rural counties grows, integration will likely be the only option.

Missiological Implications of Theory 1

The first theory discovered from the interviews is that prior to approximately

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[2] Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 313–14.

[3] Gurinder Singh Mann, Paul David Numrich, and Raymond Brady Williams, *Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 32.

[4] Brian M. Howell, "Multiculturalism, Immigration and the North American Church: Rethinking Contextualization," *Missiology* 39, no. 1 (January 2011): 79; Gary McIntosh and Alan McMahan, *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community: Why It Matters and How It Works* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012), 80.

[5] McIntosh and McMahan, *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community*, 80.

twenty years ago, Asian Americans in rural counties of Tennessee felt that mistreatment was more common because of their ethnicity. In connection with this theory, churches might respond in four ways.

Acknowledge Racism

First, instead of ignoring the past, the rural church must acknowledge any racism that has occurred and may still be occurring in its community and in the church. Because Asian Americans mostly view the church positively, this acknowledgment could be seen as an affirming and welcoming gesture that demonstrates the biblical value of repentance, and the Christlike virtue of humility. It also could enhance the positive image that Asian Americans already have of the rural church. The Southern Baptist Convention has passed resolutions acknowledging the sin of racism and offering apologies to African Americans "for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our life time; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously or unconsciously."[6] Similar acknowledgements and apologies in rural churches is recommended.

Teach on Racism

Second, not only should the church acknowledge racism that has occurred in the past, it should firmly condemn any form of racial prejudice that still exists in the community and the church and regularly include the subject of racism in its teaching. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization describes the negative impact that racial prejudice had on diaspora groups in the past. "Often the church's attitudes of racial and religious prejudice hinder sharing of the gospel. Black Christians from the Caribbean found coldness instead of welcome when they came to Britain. East African Christians

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[6] "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention," *Southern Baptist Convention*, 1995, http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899/resolution-on-racial-reconciliation-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-southern-baptist-convention.

never thought that Asians could follow Christ and so they did not witness to them for many years. . . . Walls were built instead of being torn down."[7] As a means of teaching on racism, The Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team identifies "Ensure the Right Attitudes" as one of its seven steps to begin reaching out to diaspora groups and provides probing questions to help a church overcome racism and develop the right attitudes. It suggests asking, "(1) Do you have a patronizing attitude toward other cultures, races, and ethnic groups? (2) Are you racially prejudiced or ethnocentric? (3) Has the influx of people from other cultures, races, and ethnic groups paralyzed you or excited you to evangelize them?"[8] These questions and consistent teaching will help to root out the racism that will prevent ministry to diaspora groups.

Educate on Diversity

Third, in order to prevent racism and promote ministry, rural churches could educate their members on the ethnic and religious diversity of the United States and the growing diversity of its community. Multiple sources emphasize the vital nature of education in this regard, noting that a lack of knowledge often leads to fear and racism. Johnson and Bellofato state, "A first step for Christian mission is more thorough education on world religions. It is difficult to live compassionately toward one's neighbors (never mind approach them with the message of Jesus) if little is known about their worldviews, traditions, and beliefs."[9] Soerens and Hwang add, "Churches will more readily heed the biblical call to care for immigrants–regardless of legal status–only with a

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[7] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Diasporas and International Students: The New People Next Door*, Lausanne Occasional Paper 55 (Pattaya, Thailand: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005), n.p., http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/871-lop-55.html.

[8] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather: Embracing the Global Trend of Diaspora* (Manila, Philippines: LifeChange Publishing, 2010), 33–34, https://www.ncdcma.org/enews/1112/Scattered-to-Gather.pdf.

[9] Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Bellofatto. "Migration, Religious Diasporas, and Religious Diversity: A Global Survey," *Mission Studies* 29, no. 1 (2012): 21.

substantial increase of education and awareness among individual followers of Christ."[10] This education can include education on the biblical teaching on diaspora and immigration. More politically conservative Christians need to be reminded that the Christian's first allegiance is not to a political party or political stance on immigration, but to Jesus Christ, who demands love for neighbor.

Educating Christians will lead to the development of what Park calls "World Christians," which he defines as those who are "able to understand the global dimension of the gospel with local sensitivity, living out his or her Christian identity more sensitively in this global age and multicultural world."[11] A "World Christian" will recognize his role as a participant in the global *Missio Dei* to reconcile sinful human beings to God. Emphasizing the importance of every Christian becoming "missional," Park adds, "We are not merely the objects of God's salvation and blessings; we are rather participants of God's glorious work."[12]

Scattered to Gather provides several strategies and exploratory methods that would serve as educational tools for a rural church. In the third step for engaging in diaspora missions, churches are challenged to explore their neighborhoods: "Increasingly, diaspora people are moving into all kinds of environments. Often people are unaware of the changes taking place in their everyday world."[13] The authors then provide fifteen questions to help with the exploration of the neighborhood. In a rural county, these questions might need to be adapted somewhat, but could include questions like: Who are the diaspora people in our town and county? What are their lands of origin? What is their

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[10] Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 180.

[11] Hyung Jin Park, "The Journey of the Gospel and Being a World Christian," *Torch Trinity Journal* 13, no. 1 (2010): 84.

[12] Park, "The Journey of the Gospel and Being a World Christian," 98.

[13] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 34.

mother tongue? What are their religious affiliations and do they travel to other areas with places of worship? Are some of them Christians? What needs might they have?[14] Connected with the exploration of neighborhoods, Tira adds, "We need to educate our congregations to be effectively relational in our 'global neighborhood.' We need to try the new Somalian restaurant (for example) and then invite our friends there to expose them to the culture of our new neighbors. It is important for Christians to build cultural awareness that will result to authentic relationships making them credible witnesses for Jesus Christ."[15] In relation to Asian Americans in small towns, frequenting the businesses of Asian Americans will assist in building cultural awareness that can lead to authentic relationships.

Educate on the Opportunity That Diversity Provides

Finally, when church leaders have intentionally provided educational opportunities on diversity, a natural result should be a discussion on the opportunity that the local church has to reach the nations for Christ, even in rural areas. Even though diversity in urban areas is greater, some level of diversity exists in rural areas. Global missions, therefore, can occur in a rural church's "backyard" as it reaches out to diaspora people in its community. While foreign missions must still be passionately supported, excitement for foreign missions can be developed as a church ministers to representatives of the nations in its own community. Though Johnson and Zurlo did not likely have a rural audience in mind, their words could excite and mobilize Christians in non-urban areas:

> From a Christian perspective, the data illustrates a need for a new outlook on the global mission movement. No longer does presenting a Buddhist with the

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[14] See Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, 34–35.

[15] Sadiri Joy Tira, "Diasporas: People on the Move," *Lausanne Movement*, August 28, 2009, https://www.lausanne.org/about/blog/diasporas-people-on-the-move.

> gospel necessarily mean taking a life-threatening trip across the sea to an unknown land. Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims are now the neighbors, coworkers, and friends of Christians around the world. The increase of religious diversity via migration means Christians in the West are increasingly likely to have friends, and even family members, who are members of the world's religions.[16]

While urban Christians are more aware of the diversity that surrounds them, when a rural Christian is awakened to the opportunities around them, excitement can develop quickly.

Further, churches can be inspired to engage in diaspora missions opportunities through a recognition that by reaching diaspora people in their community, the family and friends of these diaspora people could be reached in other nations. Because many immigrants remain in contact with family and friends in their country of origin and other diaspora locations, the gospel can move naturally across international borders through the relationships maintained by diaspora people in the United States.[17] Though true with all Asian Americans, Timothy Paul vividly describes the opportunities to reach Hindus in India by reaching American Hindus, which is intriguing because many of them come from higher caste families. As Christianity spreads in India, the church has experienced much success with lower castes, but "the higher caste people groups, however, remain almost totally untouched with the gospel."[18] Paul eloquently describes the opportunity God has given the American church:

> This is perhaps the reason why God is sending thousands and thousands of higher caste Hindus out of India to North America. . . . a typical high caste married couple residing in the United States is connected to approximately 132 other people in their family (up to first cousin), many of whom still live in India. What this means is that the growing high caste Hindu community in North America is still strongly connected to millions of people in India. If North American Christ followers can

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[16] Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, "Global Christianity and Global Diasporas," in *Global Diasporas and Mission*, ed. Chandler H. Im and Amos Yong, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 23 (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 55.

[17] J. D. Payne, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 128. I had read Timothy Paul's article (next citation) long before I read Payne and found it interesting that Payne illustrated with Paul's article.

[18] Timothy Paul, "Impacting the Hindu Diaspora in North America," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 130, http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/26_3_PDFs/26_3Paul.pdf.

> enter into authentic, sustainable faith-sharing relationships with the high caste Hindu people who live around them, they have the opportunity to enter into relationship with a huge proportion of India's vastly unevangelized high caste Hindu population.[19]

The opportunity to impact Hindus in the United States and, by extension, their unreached families in India generates a valuable God-given opportunity for American Christians. Rural Christians with little knowledge of the Asian American community that lives among them could be influenced to be more deeply involved in diaspora ministry with this type of information.

Rural churches also could be motivated by the increased receptivity that occurs among diaspora people. Often, "People are more open when they leave countries that are resistant to the gospel. Language and geographical barriers to the gospel are also removed."[20] This receptivity potentially could be increased in rural areas if Asian Americans are further removed from the cultural and religious influences of their home country that might be more prevalent in an urban area with a higher concentration of Asian Americans.

Educating churches in rural counties on the opportunities provided by the diversity that diaspora people bring helps to accomplish the first step in engaging in diaspora missions according to *Scattered to Gather*, "Embrace the Vision for the Diaspora Peoples."[21] Once the vision for diaspora missions is embraced, a church must be intentional to act on the information they have gained. J. D. Payne writes, "Without intentionality, rarely does anything get accomplished. A church needs to have a person to catch the vision for such missionary activity. And while the leaders of your church may not be the first to catch this vision, the Lord may very well want to use you to lead in this new area for the congregation. Without an intentional plan to reach the strangers next

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[19] Paul, "Impacting the Hindu Diaspora."

[20] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Diasporas and International Students*, n.p.

[21] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 33.

door, it is unlikely that they will be reached in your community." Educating churches could provide the impetus needed for some to develop a passion that leads to intentionality in diaspora missions in a rural county.

Missiological Implications of Theory 2

Connected to the first theory, the second theory is that Asian Americans mostly feel positively about the way they are currently treated in rural counties in Tennessee. Though this was a surprising discovery, twenty-two out of the twenty-three interviewees described their experience in rural counties in positive terms, and many expressed gratefulness for their experience and place in the community. If it is true that Asian Americans feel positively about the way they have been treated in rural counties and the small towns in those counties, then Christians could be more effective in their evangelistic efforts by being more intentional about developing relationships with Asian Americans. If Asian Americans have been treated fairly well, then they may be open to closer relationships with Christians. Rural southerners have been known for their friendliness and hospitality. Reaching out to Asian Americans in rural Tennessee will provide Christians the opportunity to put this reputation into practice. In the following section, relationship building and hospitality will be discussed as direct responses that Christians and churches in rural counties should have to the second theory.

Relationship Building

Because Asian Americans feel positively about their experiences in rural counties, Christians should be more intentional about building relationships with them. Unfortunately, Christians have not always been effective in this area. On an international scale, Johnson and Zurlo note that 86 percent of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus "do not personally know a Christian."[22] While it is likely that most rural Asian Americans will

[22] Johnson and Zurlo, "Global Christianity and Global Diasporas," 55.

know a Christian, they may not know many well. Because a "relational emphasis permeates their lives," if an Asian American connects with a church, Lee suggests, this connection will occur because of relationships, not traditional marketing. She expounds:

> For today's Asian American Christians this relational emphasis permeates their lives and, by extension, their choices and preferences with regard to their church. They look for churches that demonstrate the importance of community, whose members assist one another in tangible, concrete ways and, more importantly, whose relationships reflect healthy attitudes and practices. . . . For most Asian American churches, effective marketing usually has nothing to do with traditional business methods. . . . In other words, effective marketing occurs through the Asian American grapevine, a very community-oriented approach befitting the target audience's cultural tendencies.[23]

One may infer, then, that although an "Asian American grapevine" is a less likely reality in a rural area, traditional church marketing through social media and attractive graphics will not be the key to reaching Asian Americans. Relationships will be the key.

In Western culture, though, Wan observes "a lack of 'relational reality.'"[24] He explains that this lack of relational reality can be seen in the "high mobility in general and high density of population in urban centers," the abundance of dysfunctional families, "the prevalence of virtual relationship over actual personal interaction," the church's emphasis on programs over relationships, and the popularity of prosperity theology.[25] Because Westerners are increasingly less relational, Western Christians must be intentional about relationship building instead of falling into the non-relational habits of western culture.

Challenging the development of relationships with Asian Americans is their struggle to integrate with their host culture. Specifically, in relationship to South Asians,

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[23] Helen Lee, "Hospitable Households: Evangelism," in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches: Ministry Insights from Groundbreaking Congregations*, ed. Peter Cha, Steve Kang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 125.

[24] Enoch Wan, "Relational Paradigm for Practicing Diaspora Missions in the 21st Century," in *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*, ed. Enoch Wan, 2nd ed. (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2014), 192.

[25] Wan, "Relational Paradigm."

Chandran writes:

> The foremost challenge of the worldwide diaspora is integrating with the native community. To preserve cultural and social identity, South Asians keep their social and religious traditions and faithfully practice them in the host environment. Parents in the South Asian diaspora, for example, not only arrange their children's marriages, but also arrange them within their own caste. Often they look for a spouse for their son or daughter in the place of their origin. Clinging to their traditions at the expense of openness to the host culture can hinder their integration with the host community. This is often aggravated by the lack of receptivity, let alone hospitality, of the host community, which may view immigrants with suspicion. This results in ethnic ghettos, division and animosity between the host community and the diaspora.[26]

This tendency will be lessened somewhat for Asian Americans in rural counties where there are fewer opportunities to engage with others in religious and cultural traditions from their home culture.

Additionally, Anush John notes that second generation Asian Americans often experience a "pervasive loneliness." He elaborates, "They are excluded from their parents' generation as well as from mainstream Americans–double marginalization–on account of ethnicity and generational differences. . . . They overworked, saved, and sacrificed for the sake of their children and were not able to spend time with them. . . . Consequently, they experience loneliness."[27] This loneliness, though unfortunate, may provide a gap for Christians in rural counties to fill in the lives of second-generation Asian Americans.

Get to know Asian Americans. To build relationships with Asian Americans in rural counties, the process begins by simply acquainting oneself with Asian Americans. In a rural setting, this can be done by seeking out the locations where Asian

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[26] Emil P. Chandran, "South Asian Diaspora: Challenges and Opportunities." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2004): n.p., https://missionexus.org/south-asian-diaspora-challenges-and-opportunities/.

[27] Anush John, "Strategies for Evangelism among First- and Second-Generation Hindu Diaspora in America" (DMin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010), 166, Theological Research Exchange Network.

Americans spend time. In a predominantly Caucasian setting, the presence of Asian Americans is more noticeable, which will allow Christians to seek out these locations with greater ease. In the rural county where I live, I know exactly where I could go to speak with Asian Americans. I have seen Asian American families participating with my children in youth sports activities such as soccer, baseball, and basketball. The businesses owned by Asian Americans are well known and easily accessible. Time and a small amount of effort are needed to acquaint oneself with Asian Americans in one's community.

When asked what rural churches could do to more effectively reach Asian Americans, the interviewees for the research conducted in this dissertation also emphasized the importance of getting to know Asian Americans. Bonnie simply said, "Get to know them. Don't judge."[28] Quincy agreed, "You probably need to have more interaction with them. See who they really are for themselves."[29] Because some Asian Americans are more reserved, as Rachel described in her interview, rural Christians may have to take the initiative in acquainting themselves with Asian Americans.

Perhaps this is best illustrated with Asian Americans who are Muslims.[30] Twenty-eight percent of Muslim Americans are Asian, according to The Pew Forum.[31] Further, according to the Pew Forum, about 4 percent of the total Asian American population identifies as Muslim.[32] A 2009 Pew Forum report indicated that Americans

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[28] Bonnie, interview by author, December 5, 2018.

[29] Quincy, interview by author, June 26, 2019.

[30] I did not interview, neither did I find, any Asian American Muslims during my research. The statistics cited in the following sentences of the paragraph, though, justify this paragraph's inclusion as an illustration.

[31] Pew Forum, "Religious Landscape Study: Muslims," *Pew Research Center*, 2014, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/muslim/.

[32] Pew Forum, "Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths," *Pew Research Center*, July 19, 2012, https://www.pewforum.org/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-overview/

who personally know someone who is Muslim are "less likely to see Islam as encouraging violence" and are "most likely to express favorable views of Muslims."[33] Perhaps one of the primary ways that a Christian can eliminate discriminatory feelings and show Christ-like love to Muslims, then, is to simply "get to know" Muslim American neighbors. Richard P. Bailey, who has worked with Muslims in the United States and Pakistan, writes, "Practical expressions of love must be shown to the Muslims living around us, such as speaking to them, being interested in them, inviting them to our social activities and homes, enjoying their company and sharing our hearts with them. This is the only way we will get rid of our prejudices and stereotypes."[34] In my own experience, having lived most of my life completely unexposed to Muslim Americans, becoming acquainted with a small number of Muslim Americans has, more than anything else, helped me to grow in my love for them.

Paul Pathickal and friendship evangelism. Paul Pathickal's book, *Christ and the Hindu Diaspora*, is one of few books focused on reaching diaspora South Asians. Though his focus is on theological responses to Hinduism, his chapter on friendship evangelism serves as an excellent model for building a relationship not only with South Asian Americans, but with all Asian Americans. In the introduction of the chapter, he explains the concept, "As the name suggests, the method of friendship evangelism is simply to make friends with your Hindu neighbors and acquaintances without any ulterior motive but to befriend him because of your genuine love for your brother. The mere fact the Hindu is your neighbor or acquaintance is reason enough to become better acquainted with him, as he is a stranger in a new land and has many felt-needs."[35] Pathickal then lists

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[33] Pew Forum, "Muslims Widely Seen as Facing Discrimination," *Pew Research Center*, September 9, 2009, http://www.pewforum.org/2009/09/09/muslims-widely-seen-as-facing-discrimination/.

[34] Richard P. Bailey, "Islam in the West–USA," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 11 (April 1994): 112, http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/11_2_PDFs/islam%20in%20the%20west.pdf.

[35] Paul Pathickal, *Christ and the Hindu Diaspora* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2012),

seven factors important to developing a friendship that will lead to an opportunity to sharing faith.

First, he suggests that the character of the Christian is vitally important.[36] Elsewhere, he bemoans the fact that Hindus are often attracted to Jesus, but they are disappointed by the behavior of followers of Jesus. Of a typical South Asian American, he writes, "He likes Jesus but not his so-called followers, as he has found only professional jealousy and hatred from his white colleagues. . . . he does not like Christians' way of life and Christianity's morals."[37] He adds, "A typical US Hindu is attracted by the simplicity, erudition, and the miracle-working power of Jesus Christ, but he does not find any of those things in Jesus' so-called followers. Rather, they quite often exhibit the opposite of what Jesus stood for. Rampant materialism, permissiveness, and licentiousness are the order of the day among the whites and blacks in this so-called Christian land."[38] Similarly, in his book on Hindu evangelism, Thirumalai consistently calls Christians to display compassion and patience with Hindus as they develop friendships and share the Gospel.[39]

The rest of his seven factors are practical in nature. Pathickal suggests that the witness must be a good listener, a good speaker, non-condemning of his friend's religion, non-argumentative, loving, and prayerful in order to be effective in friendship evangelism with South Asians.[40] Each of these seven factors would be essential in the development

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133, Kindle.

[36] Paul Pathickal, *Christ and the Hindu Diaspora*.

[37] Pathickal, 118.

[38] Pathickal, 119.

[39] M. S. Thirumalai, *Sharing Your Faith with a Hindu* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 39.

[40] Pathickal, *Christ and the Hindu Diaspora*, 135–44.

of friendships with any Asian American.

Enoch Wan and the relational paradigm. Enoch Wan also emphasizes the importance of building relationships as the most important strategy in diaspora missions. In response to the lack of relational skills of Westerners, Wan argues that "the rediscovery of 'relationalship' in Christian faith and practice is desperately needed."[41] In the practice of diaspora missions, he proposes the relational paradigm. Quoted in chapter two's description of Wan's missiology, he provides nine reasons that the relational paradigm is "the most appropriate choice in the practice of diaspora missions in the twenty-first century." Wan argues that the relational paradigm (1) answers the cry for relationship, (2) helps to rediscover relationships skills, (3) is effective in diaspora ministry, (4) combines theory and strategy, (5) is "transculturally relevant," (6) fulfills the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, (7) allows for financial and relational accountability, (8) fits the various approaches to diaspora missiology, and (9) leans away from Western paternalism.[42] To summarize, Wan asserts that relationship building is a key factor in diaspora missions strategy.

Consistent time and effort. To effectively build relationships with Asian Americans in rural settings, Christians must invest significant time and effort into those relationships, recognizing that the investment may not always produce the desired evangelistic result. In his work on evangelism to Hindus, Pathickal calls Christians to become "profoundly available" to Hindus. He writes, "Very few Christians take the time and make the effort to become profoundly available to a Hindu. However, wherever someone has taken the time and effort, the results have been astonishing. This is the core

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[41] Wan, "Relational Paradigm," 192.

[42] Wan, "Relational Paradigm."

of friendship evangelism."[43] Even in rural counties, Christians have succumbed to the busy Western way of life. Being "profoundly available" will require the sacrifice of one's own scheduled busyness and planned accomplishments. Pathickal adds, "They will not come to us unless we take the initiative to meet them socially. Only by consistent effort will we be able to gain their trust and confidence by going over in Christian love, which is credible and incarnational."[44] This consistent investment of time and effort in demonstrating Christian love is a necessary ingredient for building relationships with Asian Americans.

Other Suggestions for Relationship Building. Multiple suggestions have been given to help in developing relationships with diaspora people. Payne suggests that methods for building relationships will depend on the context. While meeting needs like language or culture acquisition will sometimes provide avenues for building relationships, he adds, "Some peoples will require that we get to know them by eating, drinking, hanging out, and playing sports with them. Obviously, different people must be approached differently."[45]

In light of the loneliness that some second-generation Asian Americans experience (mentioned previously), intentional opportunities for fellowship could provide outlets for relationship building. Speaking specifically of South Asian Americans, Anush John suggests small group ministries as one such outlet.[46] He argues that small groups provide opportunities for both relationship building and evangelism because they provide an avenue for Asian Americans to experience Christian fellowship and values outside of

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[43] Pathickal, *Christ and the Hindu Diaspora*, 120.

[44] Pathickal, *Christ and the Hindu Diaspora*.

[45] Payne, *Strangers Next Door*, 141.

[46] John, "Strategies for Evangelism," 166.

a church setting. He adds, "There should be no pressure from the group members to persuade a person to come to church. Slowly, as they see Christian love and fellowship in action and doctrine lived out, they will be attracted to the gospel. It is a place to 'hang out' with friends and enjoy fellowship."[47] Because many churches already have some sort of small group program, adapting them to create welcoming atmospheres for non-Christians must become a priority.

The Lausanne Diaspora Leadership Team also points to the priority of building relationships with diaspora people. In their seven-step process for engaging in diaspora ministry, the sixth step is, "Encourage Building Genuine Relationships." The Team then makes five suggestions directly relevant to relationship building: "(1) Identify with the people of the Diasporas and get involved with them on a personal level. (2) Take risks and build genuine cross-cultural relationships. (3) Provide loving hospitality to care for their felt and immediate needs. (4) Get to know the Diaspora peoples and their original cultural contexts. (5) Find believers who can communicate with them in their mother tongue or heart language."[48] If rural Christians want to effectively reach Asian Americans with the gospel, they must be willing to step out of their comfort zones and away from their own friend groups to build relationships.

Hospitality

Shockingly, The Immigration Coalition estimates that "eighty-five percent of immigrants to the USA have never been invited into an American home."[49] While many suggestions could be made for effective relationship building, hospitality allows for that

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[47] John, "Strategies for Evangelism," 183.

[48] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 36.

[49] Rondell Treviño, "7 Practical Steps We Can Take to Engage Immigration Issues," *The Immigration Coalition*, January 16, 2018, https://theimmigrationcoalition.com/7-practical-steps-we-can-take-to-engage-immigration-issues/.

relationship to be taken to a higher level. Donna Thomas explains, "Bringing new friends into your home, into your comfort zone, will start the process of moving a new friendship into a relationship. Inviting people into your home communicates that they are special. It tells them that you want to know them better. If your new friends are from another country, they may never have been in a typical US home. Coming to your home could be a . . . new experience for them, one that makes them feel honored."[50] While hospitality could be as simple as inviting an Asian American family into one's home, it could also include providing shelter for an immigrant family in transition. Because Asian Americans feel positively about their experience in rural counties in Tennessee and will, therefore, be open to relationships, the following section will explore how Christian hospitality can be an effective diaspora missions strategy.

A biblical basis for hospitality to diaspora people. As stated in the literature review of diaspora missiology, diaspora missiologists often examine the teachings of Scripture on the treatment of diaspora people. M. Daniel Carroll has been especially influential in his exposition of Old Testament texts that call for the just treatment of foreigners, and this treatment would include hospitality.[51] Further, Jesus' treatment of those who were marginalized (like immigrants), his words in Matthew 25:31–46, and his parable of the Good Samaritan all make it abundantly clear that Jesus expects his

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[50] Donna S. Thomas, *Faces in the Crowd: Reaching Your International Neighbor for Christ* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2011), 138.

[51] M. Daniel Carroll, "Biblical Perspectives on Migration and Mission," 9–26; Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*; Carroll, "Diaspora and Mission in the Old Testament," in *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, ed. Sadiri Joy Tira and Tetsunao Yamamori, Regnum Studies in Mission (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 100–117; Carroll, "Welcoming the Stranger: Toward a Theology of Immigration in Deuteronomy," in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 441–61.

followers to treat the diaspora person with respect, love, and compassion.[52] Love of neighbor would demand the showing of hospitality.

While the New Testament calls followers of Jesus to show hospitality to one another in multiple passages, the specific call to "show hospitality to strangers" appears in Hebrews 13:2. The single word translated in the ESV with the phrase "show hospitality to strangers," *φιλοξενίας*, is a compound word combining the concepts of love and foreigners.[53] Kindness to strangers in this passage reflects Jesus' words elsewhere: "Love of the *xenos* is a special form of love of neighbor, as Jesus shows (1) in the parable of the Good Samaritan and (2) in the parable of judgment in Matthew 25."[54] On this word, Guthrie writes, "The word rendered 'entertain strangers' (*philoxenia*) connotes treating a person, perhaps a stranger, nobly and magnanimously in the context of one's home, joyfully seeking to bring that person refreshment."[55] In a world in which it was expensive and dangerous to stay in an inn, ancient Jewish and Christian values, along with Greco-Roman etiquette, called for showing hospitality in one's home.[56] *Φιλοξενίας* has a direct connection to the treatment of foreigners (or diaspora people), and this passage makes the Christian responsibility and its practical result clear: "Strangeness produces mutual tension between natives and foreigners, but hospitality overcomes the tension and makes of the alien a friend."[57] Hospitality, then, not only is a biblical theme

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[52] Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 103–16.

[53] BDAG, "*Φιλοξενίας*," 1058.

[54] Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 663.

[55] George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 435.

[56] Guthrie, *Hebrews*.

[57] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 662.

and demonstration of Christian love, but also a practical relationship builder. Vimalasekaran, speaking of the refugee diaspora population, notes both the biblical and practical necessity of hospitality, "Most of the refugees are in need of good hosts who practice hospitality for the sake of the gospel. This is something the NT teaches and that we, as Christians, should exercise. . . . Refugees have sometimes faced much trouble and neglect within their countries and therefore, extending our love to those in need by way of an open home has a particular impact on their lives."[58]

Van Rheenen argues that missional churches should practice what he calls "gracious hospitality."[59] He believes that this type of hospitality "forms the character of our communities–both in our worship gathering and in our missional communities." He adds, "Gracious hospitality leads us to invite people into our lives to 'come and see' the presence of God."[60] He bases this "come and see" character on John 1, when Jesus invites two of John's disciples, "Come and you will see" (John 1:39). Two times in the same chapter, new followers of Jesus invite others to "come and see" Jesus (1:41, 46). For Van Rheenen, "'Come and see' is the essence of hospitality. It is inviting people to walk with us–to see if this Christ way is the right way. . . . Hospitality is inviting people into our lives to see Jesus."[61] From the direct passages about hospitality and the implications of the first chapter of John, hospitality is clearly a biblical discipline and must be practiced by Christians.

Unfortunately, though hospitality is a biblical value and a cultural value for

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[58] Peter Vimalasekaran, "Strategies for Reaching Refugees," in Tira and Yamamori, *Scattered and Gathered*, 210.

[59] Gailyn Van Rheenen, "Is Missional a Fad?" *Missio Dei: A Journal of Missional Theology and Praxis* 7 (Summer-Fall 2016): n.p., http://missiodeijournal.com/issues/md-7/authors/md-7-van-rheenen.

[60] Van Rheenen, "Is Missional a Fad," n.p.

[61] Van Rheenen, n.p.

many non-Westerners, hospitality "is not a big part of our culture" and Christians must be reminded of its importance.[62] Though the art of hospitality may not be lost, as former Muslim, Baptist pastor, and author Thabiti Anyabwile observes, "But it does need some resuscitation, to be freshly modeled and taught."[63] If hospitality is biblical, then it must be revived, even if it is counter-cultural.

Advantages of hospitality. Though hospitality is a biblical norm and should be practiced regardless, its practice in diaspora ministry in rural counties has several practical advantages. First, hospitality communicates to the guests that they are special. As Thomas indicates, "Inviting people into your home communicates that they are special. It tells them that you want to know them better. . . . Coming to your home could be a totally new experience for them, one that makes them feel honored."[64]

Second, hospitality does not require special missiological skills. Though understanding the culture of Asian Americans will be helpful, one does not have to be a professionally trained church planter to invite an Asian American family into his or her home. Howell argues that while missiological principles like contextualization are important, biblical hospitality is more effective. He explains:

> Mission outreach to new immigrant groups of North America would do better to foreground biblical virtues of hospitality, justice, and compassion rather than assert principles of 'contextualization' or 'culturally appropriate' missiology. . . . In the context of immigrant groups in North America, I would argue that a better approach to mission work and ministry generally is through biblical virtues practiced by the established North American church, rather than starting with principles of contextualization to be employed by mission specialists.[65]

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[62]Gerhard Wilch, "Organizational Models–Hospitality," in *The Gospel of Islam: Reaching Muslims in North America*, ed. Roy Oksnevad and Dotsey Welliver (Wheaton, IL: Evangelism and Missions Information Service, 2001), 111.

[63]Thabiti Anyabwile, *The Gospel for Muslims: An Encouragement to Share Christ with Confidence* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 121.

[64] Thomas, *Faces in the Crowd*, 138.

[65] Howell, "Multiculturalism, Immigration and the North American Church," 80.

While principles of contextualization are important and will be discussed later in this chapter, Howell's point is especially important in rural contexts. Rural Christians will have less exposure to diversity and Asian American cultural practices. They will likely be unaware of what contextualization even means. Still, they can exhibit hospitality, love and compassion to their Asian American neighbors.

Third, hospitality helps to prevent the creation of barriers that unnecessarily form between people of different races, religions, and cultures. Though the interviewees indicated that their experience has been positive in rural counties, rural residents have less exposure to racial, religious, and cultural diversity and, therefore, are more likely to distance themselves from Asian Americans in small towns. When Christians show hospitality, though, relationships are formed that create peace rather than tension. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization describes a community dinner planned by a Christian leader with the South Asian immigrant community. Racial tension had been growing, but this act of hospitality "broke down walls of suspicion" and led to increased dialogue, trust, and mutual respect. The Committee explains, "When loving hospitality is given and dialogue is present, these barriers can be prevented and potentially a more peaceful community may result."[66] Fourth, hospitality meets the practical needs of the diaspora population. If they are in a period of transition because of recent immigration, these needs are amplified, and hospitality becomes even more important.

The interviewees and hospitality. The interviews conducted for this research also indicated that hospitality would be a useful evangelistic tool for reaching Asian Americans in rural counties. Ken's family had no place to stay when they arrived in the United States and depended on the hospitality of Christians for shelter. Maria was deeply impacted by the Caucasian family in the small town where she was raised that showed

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[66] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Diasporas and International Students*, n.p.

hospitality and became like family to her. Natalie wished that hospitality had been a part of her experience in a rural county and confirmed that it would be an effective evangelistic tool.

Hospitality in action. Fortunately, some writers go beyond simple calls to hospitality and provide concrete ways that churches and Christians can engage in diaspora missiology through hospitality. Gailyn Van Rheenen's description of "gracious hospitality" is helpful. Although his article is calling Churches of Christ to a "missional" existence, what he describes would serve Christians in rural counties well in their attempts to reach Asian Americans. "'Gracious hospitality' forms the character of our communities–both in our worship gathering and in our missional communities. Gracious hospitality leads us to invite people into our lives, to 'come and see' the presence of God."[67] Chandler H. Im agrees. He was born in a South Korean family that had been Buddhist for generations. When he was fifteen years old, his family migrated to the United States. He writes, "Based on my experiences with Buddhists, the most effective way of reaching them with the gospel is demonstration of Christian love in person, on a long-term basis."[68] Many rural Christians will have opportunities to show "gracious hospitality" to Asian Americans if they are aware of their presence in their communities.

For many Asian Americans, family is of utmost importance.[69] Following the apostle Paul's example of focusing on entire family units instead of individuals, evangelistic strategies that are family-centered are most effective with Asian Americans.[70] Hospitality provides a natural method of focusing on entire families, rather

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[67] Van Rheenen, "Is Missional a Fad," n.p.

[68] Chandler H. Im, "Interfaith Interface with Buddhists," *Lausanne World Pulse Archives*, March 2010, https://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles-php/1252/03-2010.

[69] Aghamka, "Partnership in Witnessing," 43.

[70] Aghamka, "Partnership in Witnessing."

than traditional one-on-one evangelism. If this is the case, entire Christian families can participate in acts of hospitality to Asian Americans. Aghamka argues that "the most effective way of reaching Hindu families for Christ is through Christian families," noting that when entire families work together, "Families with women and children could become effective instruments in witnessing to Hindus in the Diaspora."[71] Christian families in rural counties should develop a plan together to show hospitality to their Asian American neighbors. This family-style hospitality can be practiced at what Treviño calls "one of the most misused places God has given us . . . the dinner table."[72]

For Christian families that are interested in hosting diaspora families in their homes, Donna Thomas gives six elements to help these moments of hospitality create stronger relationships. Each of these six are helpful in rural settings. First, Thomas reminds the Christian to demonstrate acceptance. "Accept your new friends for who they are," she writes. "Their clothing may not be like yours, but it doesn't matter. Their language may not be like yours. . . . They may be too loud or quiet for your usual taste, but that's OK too. Take them the way they are."[73] For a rural Christian that has been exposed to less diversity, the ability to be accepting of differences is an especially challenging but important task. Second, she discusses the element of communication and encourages the reader to converse about "the things that matter to you," using family pictures and books in your home as conversation starters.[74] As they see what is important to the host, hopefully the guest will begin to share similarly. Third, she challenges the reader to be understanding. As the host hopes that his guests want to understand him, his culture, and his faith, the host should extend that same courtesy by using the time

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[71] Aghamka, "Partnership in Witnessing."

[72] Treviño, "7 Practical Steps We Can Take."

[73] Thomas, *Faces in the Crowd*, 138.

[74] Thomas, *Faces in the Crowd.*

together to better understand his guests. She explains, "You know that they have taken a risk by coming to your home, and you honor them for it by showing your desire to understand who they are."[75] For a rural Christian who has not spent much time with Asian Americans, seeking to understand provides an opportunity for a rich learning experience.

Fourth, she emphasizes the importance of developing trust, which will occur over time and multiple encounters of hospitality. This trust, though, is what allows the host to bring faith into the conversation. Fifth, the host must show unconditional, sacrificial love to his diaspora friends. As the relationship develops through hospitality, the Christian will likely become aware of other opportunities to lovingly meet the needs of his friends. These opportunities will provide concrete ways to confirm the trust that has developed and to demonstrate the love that Christians experience from God himself. Finally, forgiveness must be a part of any relationship if is to survive and grow. By being the first to show forgiveness, the host models the Christlikeness. Thomas describes the forgiveness she showed to an immigrant friend:

> My new Palestinian friend offended me twice. After his surgery, I took him a *Reader's Digest* and a Bible in Arabic. He took the magazine, but he threw the Bible back at me, saying he would just throw it out if I didn't take it. A day later, I told him I was praying for him. His response was, "Don't pray for me. I don't want you to do that. I can die and it's no problem. Just keep your prayers to yourself." It was up to me to decide whether to be resentful and hurt or to forgive. What would Jesus do? I knew I must forgive. I did, and I waited. Not long after that, he called me and wanted to talk. Great. I have been moving too fast for him. I had been pushing him instead of listening. I needed to slow down and just be there for him. . . . I was thankful that he called me, because it gave me a new opportunity to continue with our relationship in spite of my error in rushing him.[76]

Showing forgiveness to one's immigrant friends provides an opportunity to demonstrate the forgiveness that the Christian has received from God himself.

In conclusion to this section, because the Asian Americans I interviewed felt

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[75] Thomas, *Faces in the Crowd*, 139.

[76] Thomas, 140.

positively about the way they have been treated, I propose that they will be open to closer relationships with Christians in rural counties of Tennessee. These closer relationships can be developed when Christians are more intentional in building relationships and showing hospitality. Of all of the strategies that might be used to reach Asian Americans in rural counties in Tennessee, hospitality should come the most naturally. "Southern hospitality" is a well-known maxim and assumption. *Southern Living* magazine recently published an article with the subtitle, "Because Southern hospitality isn't just a catchphrase, it's a way of life below the Mason Dixon."[77] Others, like Anthony Szczesiul in his 2017 book published by the University of Georgia, claim that Southern hospitality is a myth that served to advance the social and political ideologies of southern exceptionalism.[78] Regardless of whether Southern hospitality is a reality or a myth, rural Christians in Tennessee have the opportunity to demonstrate the biblical value of hospitality to Asian Americans and all immigrants living in their communities. They have the opportunity to provide affirmative answers to Szczesiul's probing questions, "Can the regional ideal of southern hospitality serve as a meaningful frame of reference for a South and for southerners faced with the demands and pressures of globalization? In other words, can southern hospitality develop . . . into a discursive practice oriented toward the challenges of the future, one that calls for an ethical response to the foreigner, the stranger, and the risk of the unknown?"[79]

Missiological Implications of Theory 3

The interviews pointed to a third theory: Though the research population was

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[77] Michelle Darrisaw, "These Are the 6 Qualities That Really Define Southern Hospitality," *Southern Living*, accessed August 15, 2019, https://www.southernliving.com/culture/southern-hospitality.

[78] Anthony Szczesiul, *The Southern Hospitality Myth: Ethics, Politics, Race, and American Memory*, The New Southern Studies Series (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 2.

[79] Szczesiul, *The Southern Hospitality Myth*, 27.

positive in their description of how they have been treated in rural counties in Tennessee, several acknowledged some small-scale mistreatment. This mistreatment was more likely to come from children, teenagers, or the elderly. In addition, foreign-born Asian Americans who speak English with an accent were more likely to experience mistreatment. Based on this theory, the following will explore potential responses from Christians and churches. These responses include a focus on teaching children, teenagers, and the elderly about Christ-like empathy toward Asian Americans, a ministry for teaching English as a second language, holistic ministry to meet the varying needs of Asian Americans in rural areas and, connected to this, counseling services to help Asian Americans with the emotional needs that are a result of mistreatment, identity issues, and other emotional trauma.

Teaching on Racial Empathy

Included in the implications of the first theory, teaching on racism and diversity in local churches was encouraged. Connected to the third theory, though, this teaching is to be specifically focused on those who the interviewees said were more likely to be responsible for the mistreatment they experienced. In churches, elderly members should be encouraged to develop relationships with minorities. Jonathan Leeman argues that conversations about race should begin in private with minority brothers and sisters. Then, "Once the gospel friendships afforded by a local church are established, the difficult conversations can begin."[80] Preachers and teachers can use their platforms to teach on the importance of racial empathy, perhaps even challenging each age group specifically to show Christ-like compassion to diaspora people.

In a conversation at Capitol Hill Baptist Church addressing police shootings, Isaac Adams, an African American pastor at Capitol Hill, stated, "Now, just as husbands

[80] Jonathan Leeman, "Why the Race Conversation Is So Hard," *9Marks Journal* (Summer 2015): 34, http://www.9marks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/9Marks-Journal-Summer-2015.pdf.

are commanded to live with their wives in an understanding way, I do think a special obligation sits on the shoulders of a statistical majority, on the shoulders of those who have possessed the power, to be the first to listen and to sympathize."[81] This challenge can be offered in rural churches by preachers and elders. Further, minority people should be given the opportunity to speak publicly about their experiences in predominantly white churches. I am part of a men's ministry in a rural county that is made up of predominantly white men. On a regular basis, we invite African American men to share their experiences. To hear a brother in Christ describe the mistreatment he has experienced in the community we share is heartbreaking and unforgettable. A panel discussion could be held in a rural church with a diversity of minorities, including Asian Americans, to facilitate direct conversations about race. Perhaps to directly address the offending groups, these conversations could occur in the context of a senior citizens or youth ministry meeting. If specific elderly members of a church are known for insensitive behavior toward minorities, church leaders should exercise their pastoral role through private conversations with the member.

Teaching children in churches in rural counties about empathy toward Asian Americans and all minority populations ideally should occur between parents and children.[82] Unfortunately, because the ideal is not always achieved, Sunday School classes (still prevalent in many rural churches) can be used to address the issue, but the teachers must be carefully chosen so as to have healthy conversations.

Teaching English as a Second Language

If foreign-born Asian Americans who speak with an accent are more likely to

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[81] Isaac Adams and Jonathan Leeman, "Race, Grace, and the Church," *9Marks*, July 22, 2016, https://www.9marks.org/article/race-grace-and-the-church/.

[82] Trillia Newbell has excellent resources on teaching children about race. She has provided resources for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and The Gospel Coalition. Her personal website is found at http://www.trillianewbell.com.

feel mistreated in a rural area, they may be open to taking conversational English classes for the purpose of improving their language skills. For foreign-born Asian Americans, language acquisition is vital to their success in the United States. As Green states, "A lack of understanding English can be a huge barrier to basic communication within the community, assisting children with schoolwork and communicating with teachers, utilizing public transportation, finding employment, or even paying bills."[83] Though all of the interviewees in this research needed to understand English to participate in this study, several had family members who struggled to understand English.

Churches and missionaries have been using English as an evangelistic tool for multiple decades. The church-planting team of which I was a part in Cusco, Peru, hosted church groups from the United States every summer to teach conversational English classes. Churches in the United States have increasingly seen the value of offering conversational English classes to the immigrants in their communities. Though uncommon in rural areas, churches in small communities could provide conversational English classes for the immigrants in their community, including Asian Americans. Materials like *FriendSpeak* provide curriculum for individuals to follow as they converse in English with their immigrant friend. FriendSpeak describes itself as a ministry that "trains and equips churches to reach out to our international neighbors with English, friendship, and the Word of God. . . . Unlike traditional ESL classes, language missions, or literacy programs, FriendSpeak is conducted in a one-to-one setting with the emphasis on relationships and meaningful conversations based on biblical texts."[84] A one-on-one setting will be especially conducive to rural churches reaching out to Asian Americans because the population is small. This format allows for language teaching to be utilized

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[83] Peter Green, "Church Planting Among Diaspora Refugees for the Purpose of Reaching the Nations" (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 95.

[84] "FriendSpeak," Let's Start Talking, accessed August 16, 2019, http://www.lst.org/friendspeak.

even if the student number is low.

Holistic Ministry

From the early stages of the diaspora missiology movement, Enoch Wan has called for diaspora missions to focus on holistic ministry.[85] Diaspora people face a myriad of problems. These problems, however, can be seen by Christians as opportunities to demonstrate the love of God. Diaspora missiologists have been passionate about the expression of this sentiment. Rogers writes, "The challenges of immigration are open doors of opportunity for the church to step through and help people who need help. Stepping through the door the Lord has opened for us may not be easy, but few worthwhile endeavors are. We need to begin seeing the challenges of immigration as opportunities to serve and make a difference in people's lives, just as Jesus did during his ministry."[86] Though holistic ministry is often referenced in urban ministry, rural churches should see the opportunities in its community as an opportunity to minister to the whole person as well. The mistreatment that Asian Americans experience, though relatively minor in the estimation of the interviewees, is a reminder of this opportunity. The following will explore how holistic ministry can be practiced by churches in rural counties to reach out to Asian Americans in need.

Holistic ministry: The debate. Before a thorough discussion of how churches in rural counties can practice holistic ministry toward the Asian Americans in their communities, the tension surrounding the term *holistic* must be acknowledged and briefly addressed. While evangelicals would agree that the Gospel must be preached, substantial

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[85] Enoch Wan, "The Phenomenon of Diaspora: Missiological Implications for Christian Missions," in *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence*, ed. Luis L. Pantoja, Sadiri Joy Tira, and Enoch Wan (Manila, Philippines: LifeChange Publishing, 2004), 112.

[86] Glenn Rogers, *Evangelizing Immigrants: Outreach and Ministry among Immigrants and Their Children* (Bedford, TX: Mission and Ministry Resources, 2006), 47.

disagreement exists among evangelicals concerning the priority of evangelism compared to the alleviation of humanitarian needs. David J. Bosch describes this tension in *Transforming Mission*, "The relationships between the evangelistic and the societal dimensions of the Christian mission constitutes one of the thorniest areas in the theology and practice of mission."[87] Some suggest that the issue has been settled, but the issue of priority in social action and evangelism must continually be addressed because the conclusion that is reached on the issue will deeply affect the church's strategy in carrying out the Great Commission, and it will impact the way that the church practices ministry to diaspora people.

Though the scope of this dissertation does not permit a description of the history that led to the development of these positions, three primary positions are represented in the literature. Few authors are unbiased enough to represent each in a completely fair manner. David J. Hesselgrave provides the best summary of the three major positions. First, Hesselgrave describes radical liberationism, which equates "the biblical notion of salvation from sin with the struggle of poor and oppressed people for justice."[88] Radical liberationism, though, is not normally associated with conservative evangelical Christianity. In this position, social action is given priority over evangelism.

Second, Hesselgrave describes "holism" as an emphasis on ministering to the whole spiritual, emotional, and physical person in a "partnership of social (and, sometimes, political) action with evangelism in ways that supersede traditional theory and practice."[89] He then divides holism into two camps: revisionist and restrained holism. Revisionist holism does not give priority to either evangelism or social action, but it sees

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[87] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 401.

[88] David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), 120.

[89] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*.

them as "full and equal partners"[90] in the task of missions. A. Scott Moreau refers to this group as the "radical discipleship group" and includes Rene Padilla, Ron Sider, and Samuel Escobar as part of it.[91] James Engel and William Dyrness called evangelicals to this position in their book *Changing the Mind of Missions*. They call their position "partnership" and state that evangelism and social action are "inseparable elements" and that this position "is the only option if we take the reign of Christ and the lessons of church history seriously."[92] The connections of these authors, and especially Dyrness' significance as a longtime professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, have allowed their position to gain a wide following.

Hesselgrave terms the second form of holism, "restrained holism." In this form, social action and evangelism are "more or less equal partners," but a "certain priority is reserved for evangelism."[93] Exact consensus is difficult to determine, but this position tends to follow the lead of John Stott; and, though it gives evangelism a sense of priority, it shies away from creating a dichotomy between evangelism and social action.[94] M. David Sills describes this position as using social ministry as an opportunity to "open doors" for gospel proclamation.[95]

Third, Hesselgrave describes the position that comprehends both the necessity

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[90] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*.

[91] A. Scott Moreau, "Mission and Missions," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 638.

[92] James F. Engel and William A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2000), 93.

[93] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 121.

[94] Moreau, "Mission and Missions," 638. See John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 23; John Stott, *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974–1989* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 24.

[95] M. David Sills, *Changing World, Unchanging Mission: Responding to Global Challenges* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 14.

and value of ministries that meet the vast number of physical, emotional, and intellectual needs of our world, but that sustains "the time-honored distinction between the primary mission of the church and secondary or supporting ministries" as traditional prioritism.[96] This position clearly prioritizes the spiritual needs of individuals that can be met through evangelism over other needs without ignoring the importance of meeting non-spiritual needs.

In reference to Hesselgrave's continuum describing four different views on this issue (radical liberationism, revisionist holism, restrained holism, and prioritism), I propose a fifth option that describes a position between restrained holism and prioritism that might be labeled "prioritized holism." This position wholeheartedly recognizes the priority of evangelism, but also wholeheartedly recognizes the vital importance of ministering to the whole person, to the physical, social, and emotional needs of others. One might suggest that many prioritists would agree with this position and that some restrained holists hold a similar view. This is the reason that a clarified description that includes the best of prioritism *and* holism would be helpful.

One who holds to "prioritized holism" might call the church to recognize the importance of both evangelism and social action, especially when a corrective is needed. When the pendulum between evangelism and social action is not in a biblically balanced position, the prioritized holist can help to bring the pendulum to a balanced position. If the church, in its effort to prioritize evangelism neglects social action, prioritized holism may be used to challenge the church to also meet the needs of the whole person. When, as appears to be the case in today's evangelical church, the pendulum has swung towards the side of social action, prioritized holism can call people back to the priority of evangelism without sounding uncompassionate.

Little, though, argues that a position like prioritized holism violates the

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[96] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 121.

principle of non-contradiction. He writes, "One cannot logically affirm at the same time the statement 'there are priorities in mission' and 'there are no priorities in mission.' One must be true and the other false; there are no other options."[97] But, if one explains a usage of "holism" to reference the importance of ministering to the whole person, then he is not saying, "there are no priorities in mission." He is strongly acknowledging the need for social ministry to the whole person while recognizing that a person's spiritual needs and eternal destiny are ultimately of higher priority.

Many of those who recognize the priority of evangelism also compassionately note the necessity of social action. Sills, for example, asserts, "The question of *whether* believers should be active in ministry among the world's ills is not open for discussion."[98] Coppenger similarly argues for priority while still recognizing the importance of ministering to the whole person. He notes, "Certainly we should avoid equating water purification projects in the third-world to the sharing of the gospel; both are significant, but evangelism is the highest priority, as it was in Paul's ministry. But we also need to avoid acting as though verbal proclamation were the only important aspect of mission."[99] A healthy diaspora missiology will serve both physical needs and spiritual needs.

The church described in history, and as I have experienced it, has practiced both evangelism and social action. Stan Guthrie notes Engel and Dyrness' neglect of what the church has done historically. They describe the "specious dichotomy between

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[97] Christopher R. Little, "The Case for Prioritism," in *Controversies in Mission: Theology, People, and Practice of Mission in the 21st Century*, ed. Rochelle Cathcard Scheuermann and Edward L. Smither, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 24 (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2016), 25.

[98] Sills, *Changing World, Unchanging Mission*, 108.

[99] Jedediah Coppenger, "The Community of Mission: The Church," in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Ashford (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 74.

evangelism (spiritual) and social transformation (physical),"[100] but Guthrie argues that Engel and Dyrness are "overlooking the many hospitals, orphanages, and microenterprise programs founded by missionaries and evangelists down through the centuries. The gospel has been the greatest force for social transformation in the history of the world. It was William Carey . . . who two centuries ago translated the Hindu classics, started India's first newspaper, and stood against the Hindu practice of *sati*, or widow-burning."[101] While the church has not always used modern terms like "holistic" or *Missio Dei* to describe its work, it still has served the world's needs. The church, certainly, has lost its way at times and has needed a corrective. Nevertheless, the Christians that I know, though they do not understand complex theologies of holism or the kingdom, have demonstrated the love of Christ by meeting spiritual and physical needs motivated by love for God and love for neighbor.

In response to the tension between evangelism and social action, a prioritized holism still allows for the priority of evangelism, while acknowledging the importance of social action. Proclamation and demonstration of the love of God must go hand-in-hand while still granting that proclamation is primary. In diaspora missiology, holistic ministry is emphasized heavily, and in the remaining part of this section, the phrase "holistic ministry" will be used to describe the suggested strategies. But, "holistic ministry" will be used with the understanding that "prioritized holism," which wholeheartedly recognizes the priority of evangelism, but also wholeheartedly recognizes the vital importance of ministering to the whole person, is this writer's preferred position.

Holistic ministry in diaspora ministry. The Lausanne Diaspora Leadership Team points clearly to the importance of holistic ministry as a part of diaspora missions.

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[100]Engel and Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions*, 63.

[101] Stan Guthrie, "Reimagining Missions," *Christianity Today* 45, no. 6 (2001): 109, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/april23/32.109.html?start=1.

In its seven steps to engage in diaspora missions, the fifth step is a direct call to "Engage in Holistic Ministry."[102] The team suggests communicating directly with specific ethnic groups to see what needs they might have. The interviews attempted to identify some of these needs, but rural churches can communicate directly with the Asian Americans in their community to see what their needs might be. If an Asian American is already a member of that church, then he or she can serve as both a resource person and a contact person to discern what specific holistic ministries should be initiated. The Team also encourages churches to work closely with Christian-aid agencies in order to "share expertise, materials, personnel, prayer, and resources for training," and to partner with "government and non-governmental agencies whenever possible, where Bible truth and practice are not compromised."[103] Though fewer agencies are located in close physical proximity to rural churches, these churches can still connect with agencies through the Internet to gain resources. Further, after partnering with organizations in urban areas, a rural church that has gained expertise in reaching out to diaspora groups in its community can then share its expertise with local organizations, which may motivate these organizations to action in diaspora ministry. A rural church's involvement in diaspora missions could even motivate local political leaders to be more intentional in assisting immigrants.

The Lausanne Diaspora Leadership Team also encourages churches to be creative and flexible, both of which are especially important and challenging for rural churches that tend to be more traditional. Additionally, the Team suggests that holistic ministries be built on a church's existing ministries. Because of the size and sometimes limited resources of rural churches, this suggestion is especially relevant. If a rural church has ministries geared toward children, teenagers, senior citizens, or benevolence, its

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[102] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 35.

[103] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*.

leadership can explore how these ministries could be used to reach out to the Asian American diaspora.

The opportunities to serve diaspora people fall into several different categories. As Medeiros notes, "The needs of the people on the move are inexhaustible: emotional (they need counselors), social (they need social workers), legal (they need attorneys, judges), physical, financial, clinical (they need health care professionals), and so forth. The local church can 'engage' every professional they have."[104] The following will specifically address ways that rural churches can participate in holistic ministry to Asian Americans through meeting the educational and vocational needs of adults, serving children and teenagers, meeting social needs, and meeting emotional needs.

Meeting the educational and vocational needs of adults. First-generation Asian American immigrants especially will have needs in language learning, cultural acquisition, and driving skills.[105] As mentioned previously, churches can help with language learning, but could also offer assistance with culture and driving. Because of the small number of Asian Americans in rural communities, assistance in these areas will likely need to be offered to individuals as aware Christians see the needs in the lives of their Asian American friends. Official classes in these areas will likely be unsuccessful because of the small population.

Other felt-needs of Asian Americans that are common among immigrant populations include vocational opportunities and financial wellbeing.[106] Churches in rural counties in Tennessee often include members that are very connected in the local government and economy. They will be aware of job opportunities in the community and

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[104] Elias Medeiros, "Local Churches in Missional Diasporas," in Tira and Yamamori, *Scattered and Gathered*, 189.

[105] Payne, *Strangers Next Door*, 141.

[106] Pathickal, *Christ and the Hindu Diaspora*, 114.

can assist Asian Americans in their search for a job. If the Asian American already owns a business, then Christians can be intentional about frequenting the business and helping to spread the word about it in smaller towns where successful marketing can be achieved by word of mouth. For the business owners interviewed for this research, they became acquainted with Christians because those Christians frequented their business.

Serving children and teenagers. When asked about ways that rural churches could more effectively reach Asian Americans, three of the interviewees in this research mentioned the importance of ministering to teens and children. For Frank, who became a Christian when he was a teenager, this was especially important. Bonnie came to faith through an after-school program that her son began attending when he was in seventh grade. Rachel noted the importance of youth ministry because of the focus that Asian Americans place on children and their educational needs.

The children of more recent immigrants may have more significant educational needs as they learn the language. Further, their parents may not be able to help them with homework in English. Additionally, Pathickal notes the need for childcare for diaspora people who do not have other family members in the area.[107] This is exacerbated by the reality that often both Asian American immigrant parents work outside the home, work long hours and multiple shifts, and therefore are forced to leave "the second generation in the care of older siblings, television, or in 'cheap' child care arrangements."[108] The Afterschool Alliance is a non-profit charity in Washington, D.C., that promotes and researches the importance of afterschool programs. They note, "In communities across the country, anxiety and concern are growing among immigrant children and families in response to new immigration policies and efforts currently underway. Afterschool

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[107] Pathickal, *Christ and the Hindu Diaspora*.

[108] Sam George, *Understanding the Coconut Generation: Ministry to the Americanized Asian Indians* (Niles, IL: Mall Publishing, 2006), 115.

programs can play an important role in creating a safe and welcoming environment for immigrant students and families and cultivating a sense of belonging and overall wellbeing."[109] Churches can help to provide these safe and welcoming environments.

Rural churches, then, could serve Asian American children and teenagers through an after-school program that focuses on assisting educationally and socially, which will open doors to assist spiritually. As stated, interviewee Bonnie and her son came to faith in Jesus through the connections made in an after-school program. After-school programs provide church members the opportunity to use their particular talents to serve children as they assist with homework, play with, and take care of the children. A church in a rural county may discover that by starting an after-school program to serve diaspora people that they can also serve many other children in their community through this holistic ministry. These after-school programs could utilize coaches and high school athletes to host regular sports clinics, as well.

Churches in rural counties with daycare or preschool programs could be more intentional in marketing those services to the Asian American diaspora. One of the reasons that Victor and Wanda viewed Christians positively is because their children attended a preschool at a local church in the rural county where they live. Xavier had a food allergy, and they were especially impressed with the way that the Christians at the preschool took special care of him. Through the preschool, they claimed, Christians "showed us love."[110] In order to serve diaspora populations, these preschools could offer special discounts or scholarships to the children of immigrants.

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[109] Afterschool Alliance, "Afterschool Webinar: How Afterschool Programs Can Support Their Immigrant Students, Families, and Community," April 12, 2017, https://afterschoolalliance.org/webinars.cfm?ID=47E5CB62-5056-A82E-7A2D57591326AFA6.

[110] Victor, Wanda, and Xavier, interview by author, July 29, 2019.

Meeting social needs. In addition to building relationships with Asian Americans and sustaining them as one would any other friendship, in his article on ministering to refugees, Vimalasekaran suggests that a church could facilitate cultural events for Asian Americans.[111] Again, without permitting syncretism, a church could open its multipurpose facilities to Asian Americans for such events. In an urban setting, cultural associations and religious organizations host cultural events, but in a rural setting where the Asian American population is small, opportunities to participate in these events are few. With few connections in a rural community, an Asian American family may not know of a place to host birthday parties or other family events. The church could allow these events to be conducted in their facilities, again accruing good will with its Asian American neighbors.

Meeting emotional needs. A consistent theme in the literature on holistic ministry to diaspora people, including to Asian Americans, is the meeting of emotional needs through counseling. As a part of the Lausanne Diaspora Leadership Team's fourth step for engaging in diaspora ministry, "Engage in Holistic Ministry," they purport, "Provide material, emotional and psychological support, and trauma counseling for the vulnerable"[112] Based on the fact that several of the interviewees acknowledged being mistreated because of their ethnicity, the topic of counseling is relevant here. Because of the trauma associated with mistreatment, some Asian Americans could have their emotional needs met through counseling. Other reasons, though, necessitate counseling for diaspora people, possibly including Asian Americans in rural areas. Kim argues that simply being a part of the diaspora is traumatic, "because diaspora are deeply and existentially hurt with scattering and suffering."[113] The very shock of transition, he

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[111] Vimalasekaran, "Strategies for Reaching Refugees," 214.

[112] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 36.

[113] Luther Jeom O. Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology toward "Diaspora Mission Church": The*

writes, causes some of the following symptoms: "Excessive concern over cleanliness, feelings of helplessness and withdrawal, irritability, anger, mood swings, glazed stare, desire for home and old friends, physiological stress reactions, homesickness, boredom, withdrawal, getting 'stuck' on one thing, suicidal or fatalistic thoughts, excessive sleep, compulsive eating/drinking/weight gain, stereotyping host nationals."[114] Taking these experiences and symptoms into account, holistic ministry could seek to help through counseling.

Further, some Asian Americans have arrived in the United States from war-torn countries. Immigrants especially from Southeast Asia may have experienced trauma before they came to the United States or in the process of leaving their homes. Thus, churches could partner with Christian counseling organizations to offer counseling services.[115] Mental health experts have contributed to a growing body of literature on the mental health status and suggested treatment of Southeast Asian American immigrants.[116] Utilizing this literature, Christian counseling can serve as a platform from which the Southeast Asian American population can be served holistically.

Second generation diaspora people sometimes face "serious confusion regarding identity" because they sense that they are neither completely American nor completely Asian.[117] Commenting generally on diaspora populations, Chandran writes,

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Rediscovery of Diaspora for the Renewal of Church and Mission in a Secular Era (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 275.

[114] Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology*, 275–76.

[115] Samaya L. S. Chanthaphavong, "The Laotian and Hmong American Experience: History and Culture," in *Asian American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Huping Ling and Allan W. Austin (New York: Routledge, 2015), 505.

[116] Stanley Sue, Janice Ka Yan Cheng, Carmel S. Saad, and Joyce P. Chu, "Asian American Mental Health: A Call to Action," *American Psychologist* 67, no. 7 (2012): 532–44, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Stanley_Sue/publication/232224389_Asian_American_mental_health_A_call_to_action/links/547667690cf2778985b07ed4.pdf.

[117] Sungho Choi, "Identity Crisis for the Diaspora Community," in *Korean Diaspora and Christian Mission*, ed. Sŭng-hun Kim and Wonsuk Ma (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 33. See also

"Identity is a challenge specific to the second-generation diaspora, born and raised in a host culture. The question each second-generation diaspora person faces is whether he or she is Asian, African, American, British or European."[118] At least four of the individuals interviewed for this research expressed that they or their children struggled with their Asian American identity.

Sam George dedicates a chapter in his book about ministry to South Asian Americans and the struggles they face that might require counseling. As has been mentioned previously, Asian American parents often work excessively resulting in loneliness in their children.[119] Further, families avoid the topic of sex in the South Asian American community. George writes, "Sex is a taboo topic in the Asian Indian community; no one dares to speak openly about it, but everyone is expected to adhere to traditional conservative ways."[120] Because of the casual view of sex in the culture of American youth, many South Asian Americans get deeply involved in sexual sin resulting in deep regrets and emotional difficulties later. George, a South Asian American himself, paints a dark picture of family life. He vividly describes the challenges faced:

> There are many deep hurts–physical, emotional and sexual. . . . Having grown up in dysfunctional family situations, they carry the scars of verbal abuse and emotional hurts from their early years. Alcoholic parents, abusive adults, hurtful sarcasm are all too common in many Indian-American homes. Some have been physically and sexually abused by parents, relatives, cousins or neighbors. Some are struggling with past broken relationships, sexual fantasies, pornography, rape, abortion, etc., and feel too delicate even to broach these struggles with anyone. Some exhibit homosexual tendencies and feel 'weird' about themselves. Most importantly, they suffer the pain all alone, often thinking there is no one to turn to. . . . Many have bad memories of their early childhood, even in cases of normal upbringing that continue to haunt them through adolescent years and well into their adulthood. They suffer neglect and rejection on account of parent's busyness and preoccupation with careers, interests and travels. . . . The traditional Indian-style parenting sometimes

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John, "Strategies for Evangelism," 165.

[118] Chandran, "South Asian Diaspora: Challenges and Opportunities," n.p.

[119] George, *Understanding the Coconut Generation*, 115.

[120] George, 116.

> hurls verbal abuses on young tender Coconuts and physically beat them up in the name of discipline. Growing up in homes where fathers were alcoholic and, under the influence, turn abusive to their wives and children is all too common in Indian American homes. Some have grown up in homes where parents don't get along and habitually quarrel over petty matters. All of which makes the second generation bitter, angry and frustrated. The prolonged internment of these feelings without any help erodes these young people completely over time.[121]

The picture that George paints illustrates the emotional needs of some Asian Americans that might provide cause for churches in rural counties to provide counseling through Christian professionals. Though such counselors are not as prevalent in rural areas, churches can gather a list of counselors in their general area for referral.

In conclusion, the rural church must be aware of the opportunities to participate in holistic ministry to the Asian American diaspora living in their communities. These churches have the resources to serve and share the love of Jesus. Green powerfully describes the ability of the church to serve refugees in comparison to government programs:

> In contrast, the manpower, education, experience, and spiritual gifts found among those sitting in the pews of the local church every Sunday afford the local church the ability to offer these very same services, with the additional benefit of being unhampered by restrictive, governmental non-proselytizing policies. Local church membership consists of English teachers, immigration lawyers, babysitters, soccer coaches, Christian counselors, social workers, tutors, doctors, nurses, friends, and next-door neighbors. If the local church would be willing to mobilize its resources and its manpower, it has the ability to serve as a welcoming committee to incoming refugees and be fully equipped with a gospel presentation and the Word of God to minister to the refugees' pressing spiritual needs, as well.[122]

This is true of rural churches, too. I minister in a rural church with a membership that includes multiple medical professionals, teachers at every level of education, a Christian counselor and social worker, financial professionals, insurance agents, electricians, plumbers, construction workers, speech pathologists, volunteer firefighters, a mayor, a football coach, a college admissions counselor, business owners, an international business broker, and caterers. It is a small church, but its membership could meet nearly

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[121] George, *Understanding the Coconut Generation*, 118-19.

[122] Green, "Church Planting Among Diaspora Refugees," 91.

any need that an immigrant might have; and if the need cannot be met directly, its wide net of influence could be used to find a way to meet the need. Churches in rural counties are equipped by God to participate in holistic ministry to Asian Americans and all diaspora people, for the glory of God.

Missiological Implications of Theory 4

The interviews strongly indicated that Asian Americans in rural counties of Tennessee felt positively about churches and Christians in rural counties. As stated previously, twenty-two of the twenty-three interviews affirmed this positive view. Even after I asked them to try to think of something negative, several tried intently and were unable to think of any negative experiences in churches. Surprisingly, those who were not evangelical Christians unanimously viewed Christians positively, and had nothing negative to share about the Christians in their community.

If it is the case that Asian Americans in rural counties view the churches and Christians in their communities positively, this leads to two proposals for rural churches. First, churches and Christians in rural areas should be bolder and less fearful in their evangelism of Asian Americans in their communities, focusing on effective contextualization of the message and practice of Christianity to their diaspora neighbors. Second, as bi-cultural people who are more adept in contextualizing to their own ethnic people, Asian Americans should take ownership of evangelistic efforts to reach their fellow Asian Americans. In the following, both of these areas will be explained.

Boldness in Evangelism to Asian Americans

While I had imagined that the research for this dissertation would produce results that revealed mostly negative experiences from the interviews, the overall positive view of the Asian Americans I interviewed is good news for the rural church. Both outsiders and insiders, Christians and non-Christians, describe their interactions as mostly

positive. This information should lead the church to be more confident in its ability to interact with and reach Asian Americans. Of course, the power of the gospel, the indwelling of the Spirit, and the providential care of God should be the ultimate sources of confidence for our evangelism. Whether or not Asian Americans "like" the church or not, the church must be confident in her proclamation of good news. God gave Christians "a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim 1:7). But, if Christians find themselves "having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:47), or in this case having favor with Asian Americans, then this should build an even higher level of confidence that positive interactions are possible. Now is the opportune time to take advantage of the positive views and share the message confidently.

Contextualization, Asian Americans, and rural counties. Confidence does not always equate to effectiveness, though. Most cross-cultural missionaries likely recall specific moments of confident and zealous proclamation of the gospel or protracted planning for a project and cringe at how they completely failed in connecting the message or the methods effectively to their host culture. These moments, while they make for humorous stories, represent the source of much consternation not only for cross-cultural missionaries, but also for Christians sharing the message of Jesus in their own culture. When sharing the message in one's own culture to someone who identifies more closely with an Asian culture, the potential for a lack of connection increases.

Though Howell argued that the American church should focus more on hospitality to immigrants rather than contextualization, he still recognizes the value of starting with a study of culture in diaspora missions.[123] Rural Christians may not have been trained in contextualization, but local missions leaders can assist rural church leaders in developing contextualized practices to reach Asian Americans. Luther Kim, a

[123] Howell, "Multiculturalism, Immigration and the North American Church," 80.

Korean American, argues that in a world of globalism, "Now it is time to call for critical contextualization." Even in diaspora ministry in rural areas, contextualization is necessary. Over forty years ago, Hesselgrave wrote, "Contextualization, then, is not simply nice. It is necessary. Without it, God's truth would never have broken out of the Hebrew community and into the larger world. Indeed, without it, God's truth would have remained locked up in His heaven–never communicated to, and never inscriptured for, even His chosen people."[124]

Based on the definitions of several experts in the field, contextualization can be defined in this way: contextualization is the process by which the Word of God is faithfully communicated and obediently put into practice in constantly changing human cultures in ways that are sensitive, understandable, and meaningful to any one culture so that the members of that culture may follow Jesus without leaving their culture.[125] Diaspora realities, however, complicate the process of contextualization. Nida's work on missionary communication models[126] and Hesselgrave's revision of Nida's work, which he called "A Three-Culture Model of Missionary Communication,"[127] described the

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[124] David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 85.

[125] The most helpful definitions that contributed to this definition came from David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 200; Paul G. Hiebert, "Essay 2: The Gospel in Human Contexts, Changing Perceptions of Contextualization," in *MissionShift*, ed. David Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 96, Kindle; Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 321–23; Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 148; Darrell L. Whiteman, "Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21, no. 1 (January 1997): 2, http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/1997-01/1997-01-002-whiteman.pdf; M. David Sills, "Paul and Contextualization," in *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 195.

[126] Eugene A. Nida, *Message and Mission: The Communication of the Christian Faith*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1990), 52–54.

[127] Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 72–75.

tension between three cultures: Scripture, the respondent culture, and the missionary's home culture. Contextualization is necessary as Scripture is communicated by a person from one culture to someone in another culture. In diaspora ministry in a rural setting in the twenty-first century, the situation is even more complicated. Up to five different cultures are present when the gospel is presented. In addition to Scripture, American culture, and the diaspora person's original culture, rural evangelical culture represents its own subculture, and the diaspora person may have mixed American culture with Asian culture to create a unique "Asian American" culture. These dynamics create an even more complicated situation for contextualization, but also illustrate its importance.

The challenges of contextualization for rural churches. Though vital, contextualization will also be challenging because rural churches sometimes struggle to be "sensitive, understandable, and meaningful" in their own cultures. Now, with diaspora ministry, another layer of contextualization has been added. Rural churches sometimes struggle with traditionalism, or what Hiebert calls "minimal contextualization."[128] The definition above also stated that the gospel should be shared and practiced so that a person may follow Jesus without leaving their culture. For a diaspora person that has already, to some extent, left their home culture, adopting a new Christian culture will be challenging. Further, in any discussion of contextualization, the first concern must be faithfulness to God's Word; it must be the first consideration, not the last. As Sills writes, "No consideration of contextualization may overlook the constant vigilance required to remain faithful to the Bible and the unchanging message of the gospel."[129]

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[128] Hiebert, "Essay 2," 84.

[129] Sills, "Paul and Contextualization," 200.

Critical contextualization and diaspora missions. Kim argues that Hiebert's "critical contextualization" must be practiced in diaspora ministry.[130] Hiebert's clearest explanation of "critical contextualization" is found in his classic *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*. The four step process is as follows: (1) exegesis of the culture, (2) exegesis of Scripture, (3) critical response to the issue at hand, and (4) the development of new contextualized practices if the process deems this necessary.[131] After including an entire section of essays responding to an essay from Hiebert in *MissionShift*, Stetzer notes the enormous credibility of Hiebert's model: "For me, they have clarified that Hiebert knew his stuff and that his approach may be the best we can do with the imperfect art of contextualizing the gospel."[132] In ministry to diaspora people, Hiebert's process could be useful for a church that is considering hosting a cultural event for Asian Americans. Ideally, along with Asian Christians from the culture from which the event comes, an exegesis of the cultural event would occur to discover the meaning behind its forms. Secondly, the leaders would compare their findings with the truths of Scripture to determine if hosting the event would violate any biblical teachings. Based on the comparison, the leaders would decide if the event could be hosted. If, through the process, they decided against hosting the event, perhaps a new, contextualized event could be developed that would fill the void of the original, while still honoring the teachings of Scripture.

Hiebert's process would also be helpful in evaluating evangelistic strategies like Timothy Paul's contextualized method for reaching Hindu Americans, which he calls

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[130] Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology,* 185–86.

[131] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985)186–87; see also, Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 88–91.

[132] Ed Stetzer, "Responding to 'The Gospel in Human Contexts: Changing Perceptions of Contextualization,'" in Hesselgrave and Stetzer, *MissionShift*, 163.

the MARG (Making Authentic Relationships Grow) method.[133] *Marg* comes from a Sanskrit word that means "path" or "spiritual journey" and is used to describe the path that a Christ-follower and Hindu travel together in a close relationship, journeying closer to Christ. "MARG is, very simply, Hindus experiencing the truth of the gospel and then having that experience explained, clarified, and deepened for them from God's word. . . . The first part of the journey is *sabandh*, or relationship. The second is *anubhav*, or experience. The third is *bhakti*, or devotion. The fourth is *balidan*, or sacrifice, and the last is *sharanam*, or surrender."[134]

While initial reaction to this method might be positive, Paul's method may border on syncretism and create a debate similar to the C5 contextualization problem among Muslims.[135] Corduan points to the delicacy of contextualization among Hindus: "South Asian culture and its religions are highly intermingled . . . Consequently it is not a good idea to try to contextualize Christianity by using Hindu words for Christian doctrines. . . . worst of all–'Christ *bhakti*.'"[136] Discussing C5 contextualization, Pratt, Sills, and Walters provide four thought-provoking "critical points" concerning contextualization that relate the MARG method: "First, culture is not neutral. Culture is a human product, and it expresses both our creation in the image of God and our fall into sin. It is anything but neutral. Second, the Bible was written in a context of religious pluralism, and it nowhere regards other religions as potential vehicles for worshipping the

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[133] Paul, "Impacting the Hindu Diaspora," 130–32.

[134] Paul, 132.

[135] The C1 to C6 spectrum defines six types of Christian communities in Muslim contexts, from the least contextualized (C1) to the most contextualized (C5), including even secret believers (C6). Most are in agreement that C1-C4 does not stray into the realm of syncretism, but much disagreement exists among scholars and missionaries about C5 contextualization. C5 believers often still attend the mosque and are viewed as Muslims, but mentally and privately worship Jesus while at the mosque. See John Travis, "The C1 to C6 Spectrum," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (October 1998): 407-10, https://missionexus.org/the-c1-to-c6-spectrum/.

[136] Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, 308.

true God."[137] This point is especially relevant in the context of diversity of Hindu practice. They add, "Third, words and practices carry multiple levels of meaning, and it is dishonest to pick the levels we want and to pretend the others aren't there. . . . Fourth, religious words and religious practices carry emotional and spiritual baggage."[138] Without a knowledge of issues surrounding contextualization, methods may be uncritically adopted by rural churches.

Kim focuses heavily on contextualization in diaspora mission contexts. His four-step process is similar to Hiebert's, and he calls it "the contextual theologizing process." He describes, "It starts with (1) the theologizing subject, the church; (2) the church understanding the context–diaspora in globalization; (3) the church interpreting the Bible and applying it to the context from the interdisciplinary perspectives; and finally (4) we confirm the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the theologizing process."[139] This process could be followed in the same situation described above to determine if a contextualized practice is legitimate or syncretistic. Interestingly, after a lengthy discussion of contextualization, Kim describes both hospitality[140] and holistic ministry[141] as effective contextualized practices in diaspora ministry. Contextualization will help to determine if the way hospitality and holistic ministry are practiced is culturally appropriate.

When rural churches are seeking to contextualize their practices to make their message and ministries culturally relevant to Asian Americans, they would be wise to seek the guidance of Asian Americans in the process. Because they are aware of both

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[137] Pratt, Sills, and Walters, *Introduction to Global Mission*, 262.

[138] Pratt, Sills, and Walters, 263.

[139] Kim, *Doing Diaspora Missiology,* 206–7.

[140] Kim, 208.

[141] Kim, 255.

Asian and American cultures, Asian Americans can serve as key resource people in contextualization processes. Unfortunately, many rural churches do not have any Asian Americans as members and will have to seek help from outside their community. The rural churches that do have Asian American members, some of whom were interviewed for this research, are in a unique position to have valuable input from those who best know Asian American culture. This point, though, leads to the second major proposal, based on the fourth theory.

Asian American Ownership of Diaspora Ministries

Based on the theory that Asian Americans view Christians and the church positively in rural counties in Tennessee and the implication that Christians should be confident in their evangelism of Asian Americans and should seek opportunities to contextualize, then Asian Americans should take ownership of evangelistic efforts to reach their fellow Asian Americans. Their understanding of Asian American culture positions them to more effectively contextualize the message. The Pew Forum estimates that 42 percent of Asian Americans are Christians, significantly more than any other religious group, which places them in a position of influence.[142] Even in rural areas where the Asian American population is lower, Asian Americans can use this position to lead churches in reaching out to other Asian Americans. Because the church is viewed positively, Asian American Christians should have a higher level of confidence as they take ownership of reaching their own people.

When "diaspora missions" was defined in chapter 2, missions "through" the diaspora was included.[143] Asian Americans reaching other Asian Americans in their own

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[142] Pew Forum, "Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faith."

[143] Enoch Wan, introduction to *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*, ed. Enoch Wan, 2nd ed. (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2014), 6; Chong H. Kim, "Mission from the Diaspora," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 30, no. 3 (July 2013): 100.

community would be included in missions "through" the diaspora. Though the number of Asian Americans in rural churches in Tennessee is limited, several of the interviewees for this research would be excellent candidates for taking leadership roles in missions "through" the diaspora.

Ethnic minority mission. Sometimes, Asian Americans will have opportunities to share their faith with others with the same nation of origin. Chinese Americans will be most effective in sharing faith with other Chinese Americans. Yeh notes, "No matter how acculturated to a foreign land an ethnic Chinese person becomes, there will always be some ties to the motherland because of genetics and physiology."[144] Chinese American Christians can use these ties as commonalities with other Chinese Americans in evangelism. In rural settings, though, only one or two Chinese American families may live in a specific county. So, Asian Americans in rural contexts may not have many opportunities to share their faith if they are only focused on those with a shared national origin.

Instead of focusing only on those with shared nationality, Baeq, Lee, Hong, and Ro argue specifically that Korean Americans should participate in mission to all minorities, especially those of Asian ethnicity.[145] Their argument would apply to all Asian American subgroups, though. As of 2011, they stated that Korean American churches, though active in sending both long- and short-term missionaries, have not "become aware of a new mission field right here in North America."[146] They explain:

> The US has become a prominent mission field in the sense that it has become a multiethnic, multi-religious and multicultural nation due to globalization and the influx of foreign immigrants, students, and migrant workers, as well as

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[144] Allen Yeh, "The Chinese Diaspora," in Im and Yong, *Global Diasporas and Mission*, 94.

[145] Daniel Shinjong Baeq et al., "Mission from Migrant Church to Ethnic Minorities: A Brief Assessment of the Korean American Church in Mission," *Missiology* 39, no. 1 (January 2011): 25-37.

[146] Baeq et al., "Mission from Migrant Church," 127.

> undocumented aliens. Whereas in the overseas mission, where missionaries *go to* the countries of the unbelievers (centrifugal mission), learn their language and culture, and, through much trial and error in contextualizing, preach the gospel, in Ethnic Minority Mission (EMM), the ethnic minorities *gather* from all over the world to live in the US, to learn English, adapt to this society, and avail themselves to receive the gospel (centripetal mission)![147]

Though this sort of statement is nothing new in a discussion of diaspora missions, the authors believe that Korean American churches have not been participants because they have been "preoccupied with their needs to the extent that they have not noticed the needs of others like them."[148]

Ethnic Minority Missions, however, would allow Korean Americans to use their identity as a minority to connect with other ethnic minorities by serving as hosts. Specifically, they suggest that this mission focus on other Asian Americans: "The wall that hinders the spread of the gospel among ethnic minority groups can be lowered when the reaching group and the receiving group share similar cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. With this insight, the KACs involved in EMM need to target the ethnic minority groups that have cultural, religious, ethnic, and geographical backgrounds similar to theirs, rather than those . . . markedly different."[149] Hindering this outreach, though, is the "negative attitude" held by many first-generation Korean Americans toward Asian Americans of other nationalities.[150] The authors are hopeful that the second generation of Korean Americans can lead in Ethnic Minority Mission, but they are concerned because many of these are leaving their ethnic churches.[151]

The implications of broadening Baeq, Lee, Hong, and Ro's challenge to include all Asian Americans in Ethnic Minority Mission are significant. If all Asian

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[147] Baeq et al., "Mission from Migrant Church."

[148] Baeq et al., 128.

[149] Baeq et al., "Mission from Migrant Church."

[150] Baeq et al., 31–32.

[151] Baeq et al., 31.

American Christians reached out to other Asian Americans, regardless of national origin, the impact could be substantial. Asian Americans in rural areas, if they are to evangelize other Asian Americans, will have no choice but to reach out to all Asian Americans regardless of national origin.

Bi-Cultural people. Asian Americans should also lead in evangelizing other Asian Americans in rural settings because many of them are bi-cultural people who are comfortable in more than one culture and are more adept at interacting across cultures. Someone like the interviewee, Natalie, is a good example of this. Natalie is a second-generation Asian American who grew up speaking Tagalog and practicing Filipino customs. She has, though, lived in a predominantly white, rural area. Her experience interacting in both cultures puts her in a position to more effectively cross any ethnic and cultural barriers that exist between her and a Chinese, Lao, or Korean American. As a bi-cultural person, compared to a Caucasian, she may be able to more effectively reach other Asian Americans in a rural community. As Stan Downes has written, "My hope is that diaspora believers around the world will come to realize that their new homes are mission fields and that they have an opportunity and the responsibility to make a difference there–and will do so."[152]

Equipping Asian Americans for ethnic minority mission. If Asian Americans in rural counties will be more effective in reaching out to fellow Asian Americans, then local churches need to be intentional about equipping them for evangelism. Reflecting on several of the interviewees who are evangelical Christians, they would be excellent candidates for participation and leadership in Ethnic Minority

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[152] Stan Downes, "Mission by and beyond the Diaspora: Partnering with Diaspora Believers to Reach Other Immigrants and the Local People," in *Diaspora Missions: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World*, ed. Michael Pocock and Enoch Wan, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 23 (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2015), 79.

Missions. Their rural church leaders, however, would need to invest in diaspora missions, in general, and then invest in equipping its minority members to participate in diaspora missions. While many suggestions are made for equipping diaspora people for mission, not all of it is applicable to diaspora people living in rural areas. The following includes some suggestions for churches in rural counties to equip Asian American Christians to share their faith with other Asian Americans.

First, church leaders should "present to the diaspora Christians . . . the vision, advantages, and opportunities for mission."[153] Just as it is true that some rural Christians have never considered the possibility of diaspora ministry, some rural Asian American Christians may not have considered that they are positioned to be used by God to reach other rural Asian Americans. This will, of course, require that rural church leaders already have a vision for diaspora missions. Tan believes that diaspora people need to be reminded that their lives have purpose, and that God has a purpose for them in ministering to others in the diaspora.[154] Second, and connected to the first, the Lausanne Diaspora Leadership Team suggests that churches that want to empower diaspora Christians for mission should "instill a missionary vision and foster an environment of mission."[155] This is an extension of the point made previously that rural churches need to be informed on diversity and the opportunity it provides for mission. While Asian Americans will be far more aware of ethnic diversity, they may need church leaders to instill in them an appreciation for the opportunity that diversity provides for mission.

Third, churches should train diaspora Christians in personal evangelism skills. Tan describes this as the ability of "'making conversations count,' transitioning from

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[153] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 37.

[154] Henry H. Tan, "The Necessity of Training the Filipino Diaspora," in Pantoja, Tira, and Wan, *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence*, 178.

[155] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 37.

current events/situations to the gospel presentation."[156] If a church does not already have a method for training its members in personal evangelism, perhaps seeing the need to train people for diaspora mission will motivate it to broaden its evangelistic training and activity. Fourth, diaspora believers, especially newer ones, need to be trained in basic Bible study skills. Similar to the previous point, if a rural church does not already have a way to disciple its members to study Scripture more effectively, this could be a motivator to improve its discipleship methods.

Fifth, if rural Asian Americans are going to participate in holistic ministry, then churches should provide training on "learning to discern needs of the local people and to creatively serve them by helping meet their needs."[157] This too will force a rural church to self-evaluate whether it has prepared its members to discern such needs, and may require the use of an outside resource person to help in the training. Sixth, when equipping diaspora Christians for mission, Payne suggests that churches be intentional in providing accountability.[158] Maria comes to mind. She has a friendly personality, is well educated, and is a faithful Christian. If her church leaders challenged her to be involved in diaspora missions, and then provided accountability, one could easily imagine how God could use her to reach other diaspora people. Expanding beyond her rural context, she has Vietnamese family members in a nearby urban area. The leaders could provide the necessary resources for her to minister to those family members and provide support and accountability for her as she does.

Seventh, in order to equip the Asian American diaspora for ministry in rural contexts, churches should attempt to identify those who have leadership abilities and

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[156] Tan, "The Necessity of Training the Filipino Diaspora," 177.

[157] Tan, 178.

[158] Payne, *Strangers Next Door*, 145.

provide continued leadership training.[159] Reflecting on the interviews for this research, Ken, Adam, Maria, Sophia, Rachel, Frank, and Natalie could be excellent leaders in helping their churches coordinate and implement diaspora ministries. None of them, though, indicated that they participate in diaspora ministry in the churches in which they are members. Again, churches must take initiative to challenge its members to use their talents, resources, and ethnicity to participate in God's mission. Eighth, if a church does not feel that it has adequate resources to provide training for Asian Americans who could be diaspora ministry leaders, it might utilize distance learning via online courses to provide that training.[160] Frank, for example, does not live near an area where any theological training is available in-person, but the sizable church in the county seat of his rural county where he is a member could afford to fund online training in diaspora ministry. In order to serve the church, Christian universities and Bible colleges in rural counties could develop a course especially focused on reaching diaspora people in rural areas and a course especially focused on training students who are part of the diaspora.

Missiological Implications of Theory 5

Though a majority of the interviewees spoke positively about their experience with churches and Christians, seven, all evangelical Christians, described negative experiences in churches or with Christians in rural counties in Tennessee. Only four of these seven described experiences in which they were directly mistreated *and* that they did not find to be humorous. All four of these were not born in the United States and speak English with an accent, which led to the causal condition to this theory that the foreign born who speak English with an accent were more likely to have had negative experiences. If this is the case, then special effort should be made to ensure that rural

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[159] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 37; Payne, *Strangers Next Door*, 142.

[160] Lausanne Diasporas Leadership Team, *Scattered to Gather*, 37.

churches intentionally create genuinely welcoming and hospitable atmospheres in which diaspora people are made to feel welcome, especially those who speak English as a second language. Church leaders need to ensure that communication is clear and that every church member, including Asian Americans, feels valued.

Create Welcoming Atmospheres

All four of the interviewees mentioned above felt as if there was a distance between them and other church members. In its tips for churches in host countries, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization encourages, "Cultivate a friendly atmosphere to welcome members of the diaspora who come to the church."[161] Many churches take pride in the fact that they are a "friendly church." In fact, most churches claim this about themselves, but, not every guest or ethnic outsider experiences this.

When Todd was asked what he thought churches could do to better reach Asian Americans, he specifically mentioned a resource that he thought would be helpful. His estimation of the book was correct. Philip Jenkins, a youth minister at a large church in the Nashville, Tennessee, metropolitan area, wrote *Lunch Ladies: Cultivating an Actsmosphere* to describe a program implemented in his youth ministry intended to create a more welcoming atmosphere. Not only did it succeed in transforming the atmosphere of the youth group, it transformed the entire church's view of welcoming guests. After witnessing the same teenagers associate with the same group during every gathering, and witnessing others consistently sit by themselves, he was motivated to do something to end the "country club culture" that had developed in the church.[162] The goal was to ensure that no one was ever ignored or experienced distance from others.

He formed a group of leaders in the youth group that would be called the

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[161] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Diasporas and International Students*, n.p.

[162] Philip Jenkins, *The Lunch Ladies: Cultivating an Actsmosphere* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Publishing), 11.

Lunch Ladies. In the first meeting of the Lunch Ladies, he explained to the group, "Remember my analogy about the high school cafeteria and how everybody has a specific section that they sit in? Well, if you think about it, the lunch ladies are about the only people inside of the cafeteria that associate with everybody, regardless of who you are or where you sit. They serve anybody and everybody. . . . You can be called the Lunch Ladies."[163] The "Lunch Ladies" changed the culture of the youth group. He wrote, "The Lunch Ladies absolutely owned the room. They spoke to everybody, nobody sat alone, and they worked the entire crowd. . . . In the weeks that would follow, more and more students were following the Lunch Ladies' lead. No longer were students coming straight into a room and looking for a seat. They became people looking for people."[164] In the book, he narrates the story of the development of the ministry, shares stories and testimonies of its impact both in the youth group and the whole church, and then details the steps for beginning a Lunch Ladies ministry.

While multiple methods might be developed for producing the same result, any church that wants to be more welcoming needs "lunch ladies," members who associate with everyone and intentionally help everyone to feel welcome. The mantra of Jenkins' Lunch Ladies is, "We feel awkward so you don't have to!"[165] Rural churches interested in creating atmospheres for those who are ethnic outsiders would do well to follow Jenkins' plan. Though most churches have members who are naturally gifted at making others feel welcome, more "lunch ladies" are needed. The distance experienced by the interviewees who speak English with an accent could be eliminated by churches intentional enough to make sure that members are seeking out those who might feel isolated.

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[163] Jenkins, *The Lunch Ladies*, 56.

[164] Jenkins, 57–58.

[165] Jenkins, 56.

Conclusion

Two final challenges are warranted for churches and Christians in rural counties that want to begin to reach out to their Asian American neighbors. First, they must pray. They must genuinely pray for the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual welfare of their diaspora neighbors. They must pray for opportunities to serve them and for opportunities to share the message of Jesus with them. Payne implores, "Reaching the nations of the world requires that we are people of prayer. . . . From this devotion, we receive wisdom and guidance to understand how best to relate to the strangers next door. Prayer must not be understood as something to do before putting together a strategy; rather, we are to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17). Without prayer, all strategies are impotent. Without prayer, strategic planning is foolishness."[166] Second, churches and Christians must simply take action. Looking back over this chapter, one could be overwhelmed by the number of options available for ministering to diaspora populations. Ministry to the diaspora can begin with small steps. Any step in reaching out to the community is a positive one, and momentum can build as progress is made. Medeiros' challenge is simple. "Just do it," he writes. "Any size church can start a movement towards reaching and working with the people on the move, both believers and unbelievers. Don't wait for things to happen. Jesus has already commanded things to happen and to be done. Things will not happen by chance."[167] God is giving the American church, even the rural church, a unique opportunity in this moment in time to reach the nations of the world by participating in diaspora missions. The time is now for the rural church to embrace this God-given opportunity.

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[166] Payne, *Strangers Next Door*, 140. See also Thirumalai, *Sharing Your Faith with a Hindu*, 17.

[167] Medeiros, "Local Churches in Missional Diasporas," 192.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to explore the experience of Asian Americans in rural, southern, evangelical contexts with the goal of discovering how rural churches can more effectively practice diaspora missions. Specifically, the research focused on the experience of Asian Americans in rural counties in Tennessee, the state with the highest percentage of evangelicals in the United States. Utilizing qualitative interviews as the primary data collection method, twenty-three Asian Americans who have lived in rural counties in Tennessee were interviewed. Four open-ended questions addressed factors that led to living in a rural area, the experience of the interviewees in this rural area, treatment received from Christians, and interaction with Christians and churches. The research was conducted with the assumption that diaspora missiology, "a missiological framework for understanding and participating in God's redemptive mission among people living outside their place of origin,"[1] could be applied not only to urban contexts, but also to rural contexts. The missiological implications section further built on this assumption, providing suggestions for the practice of diaspora missions in rural contexts.

Summary and Results

Chapter 1 introduced the topic and the research question, along with some basic definitions, clarifications, and limitations. My personal interest was described, and this interest increased as research continued and writing ensued. Further, the first chapter

[1] "The Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology," *Lausanne Movement*, November 14, 2009, https://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/the-seoul-declaration-on-diaspora-missiology.

explained qualitative research, provided rationalization for the use of qualitative interviews as the data collection method, and detailed the procedures used during the research.

Chapter 2 revealed the results of a literature review on diaspora missiology. This chapter explored definitions of the term *diaspora*, from both secular and missiological perspectives, noting that evangelical missiologists define the term more inclusively out of a concern for reaching a broader population. After describing the phenomenon of global migration, of which diaspora missiology is a product, diaspora missiology was defined and explained as the framework to do missions to, through, and beyond the diaspora. The history of diaspora missiology was described, followed by the theological foundations of diaspora missiology. Emphasizing the contributions of Tira and Wan, the theories of diaspora missiology were explored, and the chapter concluded with short sections on the practice of diaspora missions and rural diaspora missiology.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 described and explained the data that was collected through qualitative interviewing, the analysis of the data, and the theories that were discovered. Through the employment of thick description, chapter 3 detailed the stories and experiences of the twenty-three interviewees and the information they shared during the interviews. Chapter 4 described the coding processes that occurred during and after the interview process. Five categories were identified during open coding: treatment in rural counties, reasons for living in a rural county, Asian American identity, experience with Christians and churches in rural counties, and methods for reaching Asian Americans with the Gospel. The two most prominent categories, the experience of Asian Americans in rural counties and their experience with Christians and churches, were subjected to axial coding that interconnected the subcategories. This process led to the development of five theories that represent the results of the research.

Chapter 5 briefly explained these five theories, recognizing that they are hypotheses based on the information provided by the interviewees. Summarized, the

results of the research indicate that prior to approximately twenty years ago, Asian Americans in rural counties of Tennessee felt as if mistreatment was more common because of their ethnicity. Currently, they mostly feel positively about their experience in rural counties, though small-scale mistreatment occurs. Asian Americans in rural counties also feel positively about churches and Christians, though a minority have had negative experiences.

To fulfill the goal of equipping churches to participate in diaspora missions, chapter 6 explored the missiological implications of these results. The implications and suggestions were organized around the five theories and focused on providing ideas, supported by the literature on diaspora missiology, for rural churches to utilize in diaspora ministry to Asian Americans. Additionally, suggestions were provided for Asian American Christians in rural contexts to actively engage in diaspora ministry to other Asian Americans.

Significance of the Research and Results

The explosion of literature over the past twenty years on the subject of diaspora missiology is encouraging. Urban churches appear to be investing in the opportunities that God is giving them to reach the nations in the contexts of their own neighborhoods. The Global Diaspora Network sends regular emails, describing meetings that are occurring across the globe, an indication of the momentum that has been building. Significant contributions to the field continue to be made. Since work on this dissertation began, two edited volumes from Sam George and Miriam Adeney have been published.[2] Understandably, these volumes continue the trend of diaspora missiology and its focus on ministry in urban areas, because the patterns of immigration primarily lead

[2] Sam George and Miriam Adeney, eds., *Refugee Diaspora: Missions amid the Greatest Humanitarian Crisis of our Times* (Pasadena: William Carey Publishing, 2018); Sam George, ed., *Diaspora Christianities: Global Scattering and Gathering of South Asian Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018).

immigrants to urban centers. The literature on diaspora missiology continues to neglect rural areas. The literature has especially neglected the small demographic of Asian Americans in the rural, evangelical South.

For this reason, this dissertation could make a small contribution with the hope of beginning to fill this gap in the literature. By engaging in research on the rural diaspora and then utilizing the resources available on diaspora missiology in urban settings, perhaps the findings of this dissertation could serve as a resource for rural churches that are unaware of the larger conversation about diaspora missiology. The findings of this dissertation could perhaps contribute to conversations on rural church growth and revitalization by adding diaspora ministry to potential ministry opportunities. Further, the positive view of Asian Americans toward their rural communities, Christians, and churches should provide a level of hope for the rural church and its potential for kingdom work among minorities.

Recommendations for Future Research

In order to increase knowledge of the research area of rural diaspora missiology, researchers might explore several other avenues related to the findings in this dissertation. First, this research could be repeated with the same methodology in different contexts and with different demographics. Would the results be similar in a neighboring southern state with significant evangelical populations? Would the results be similar in a different region of the country where evangelical Christians represent a smaller portion of the population? Further, would the results be similar in Tennessee if a different diaspora group, like the Arab American diaspora, participated in qualitative interviews? Second, while the Asian Americans interviewed for this research did not feel as if they were victims of racism, future research could be conducted on the experiences of other immigrant groups to gauge their perceptions of racism in the rural South. Would the Arab American or Latino American diaspora describe a different experience of living in rural

counties in Tennessee?

Third, further research could be conducted on the increased occurrence of negative experiences for those who speak English with an accent. Is this confined to Asian Americans? Why do rural citizens have more difficulty with those who speak with an accent? Is a lack of exposure to immigrant populations the cause of this mistreatment? Finally, in general, more research could be done on the rural church and its attitude toward and outreach to diaspora populations. The options for research connected to the findings of this dissertation are numerous.

Final Personal Reflection

As a white male living in the rural South, I admit that conducting the interviews for this research was intimidating. Learning the experiences, joys, and heartaches of my Asian American friends, many of whom were new friends, was a learning process that I will not forget. The Asian Americans I interviewed are resilient and overwhelmingly positive. Learning from them has compelled me to become more compassionate toward all diaspora people and more aware of their desire for acceptance and relationship in rural communities and churches. The research process has challenged me to initiate difficult conversations and be open to hearing truths that challenge my own insensitivity toward minority groups.

At the same time, this research encouraged me concerning the state of rural churches. I am a product of the rural church. Other than my time as a church planter in Peru, I have been a member of churches in rural counties in Tennessee and West Virginia. I have personally witnessed racist attitudes, and I expected to find that rural Christians in Tennessee had failed miserably in their interactions with Asian Americans; then, I would be the one to set them straight. I am thankful, at least in the case of the individuals I interviewed, that I was mostly wrong.

Conclusion

The data gathered from the interviewees in the research conducted for this dissertation points to the potentially significant role that the rural church can have on diaspora populations. The rural church must be prepared to come alongside what God is doing through the opportunities that he has given it through diaspora groups. American churches, both urban and rural, must be aware of the "unprecedented need and opportunity"[3] that global immigration provides. This dissertation has attempted to call attention to one opportunity among many through which the church might point the nations to Jesus, "in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (Rom 15:9).

[3] Miriam Adeney, "Colorful Initiatives: North American Diasporas in Mission," *Missiology* 69, no. 1 (2011): 6.

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ABSTRACT

DIASPORA MISSIONS AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS IN RURAL COUNTIES IN TENNESSEE

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The field of diaspora missiology has erupted over the past fifteen years as a legitimate subfield of missiology. Diaspora missiology studies occur at the intersection of missiology and migration theory with an emphasis on strategies to minister to and through the diaspora populations of the world. While much continues to be written about diaspora peoples in urban centers of the United States, little has been written about the diaspora population in non-urban areas of the United States. Specifically, Asian American populations in small, southern towns, though a small demographic, are neglected in the literature of diaspora missiology and in the literature outside of missiology. In order to make a small contribution to this literature gap, this dissertation explores the experience of Asian American populations in rural counties in Tennessee.

Five primary chapters explore this topic. Chapter 2 provides a full literature review in the field of diaspora missiology. Using qualitative interviews as the primary data collection method, twenty-three Asian Americans who have lived in rural counties in Tennessee were interviewed. Chapters 3 and 4 explore and analyze the information discovered in the interviews. Chapter 3 takes a more narrative approach, describing the interviewees and their stories. Chapter 4 chronicles the discoveries made through the coding process.

Chapter 5 reports the theories that were produced through the coding process. Chapter 6 combines these theories with the best practices of diaspora missiology to form

missiological implications and offers suggestions for diaspora ministry for evangelical churches in rural counties based on the findings of the interviews.

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