



Preparing Leaders to Reach America's Unreached Peoples

GOAL: Prepared missionary leaders who will join God in training disciples until a vibrant family of Jesus Christ is in close reach—culturally and geographically—of every North American.

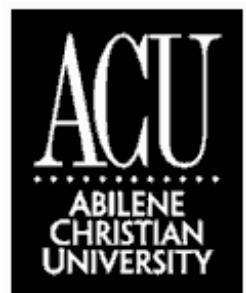
The Need: The call of Jesus to train disciples among all the peoples still applies to North America. In that light, several questions face his followers in our time:

- How do unreached North Americans become followers of Jesus?
- What are missional churches actually like, and how are they established?
- What does it take to prepare people for the kinds of leadership such churches require?

These questions challenge us to move beyond conventional thinking. From a Kingdom perspective, for example, it is not enough to have a “growing” church when that growth mostly represents membership transfers. Nor have we fulfilled our task when converts are made but not led to mature Christian lifestyles.

300 million residents of the United States along with 106 million Mexicans and 33 million Canadians comprise one of the largest unreached populations in the world. Combined these people form a mosaic of ethnicities and subcultures across the continent and in each city.

If we are to train disciples among all the North American peoples, we will need multiplying church movements where unreached people may come to know Christ and become like him. To see this happen we will need fresh vision: for the church and for the training of its future leadership.



Overview: ACU's Missionary Residency for North America (MRNA) is a new initiative to address these needs. MRNA is a graduate residency in missional living and church planting. The program brings together the academic resources of ACU's Graduate School of Theology with the missionary training experience of the Halbert Institute for Missions. Designed for domestic church planters, MRNA reflects a commitment to holistic, in-depth theological education by addressing these important objectives:



- ***Spiritual Formation:*** Resident interns are challenged and given opportunity to develop the sane, God-focused lifestyles vital for effective Kingdom work.
- ***Missionary Training:*** Missionary students leave with proven competencies in sharing faith and forming spiritual families that will be foundational for their ministries.
- ***Team Development:*** The residency focuses on preparing at least one new domestic church-planting team per year.
- ***Field Selection:*** Interns learn to bring discipline and spiritual attention to the process of discerning their future bases of work.
- ***Church Support:*** The combination of early field selection and team formation provides time for teams to develop solid working relationships with supporters.
- ***Leadership Replication:*** The residency gives interns experience with learning/teaching models that they can replicate on the mission field.
- ***Movement Initiation:*** True North American church planting movements become possible as students learn to train next generation leaders in ways they in turn can use to train others.



Interns learn through a variety of experiences including regular tutorials, lectures, seminars, and travel, balanced with a strong emphasis on practice and reflection. Up to 27 hours of graduate credit is available in the first year to qualified interns. Coming out of the residency, students receive ongoing support in team formation, leadership development and field preparation.

Coaching support continues as the team leaves to begin the new work.

Precedent: This approach to developing Christian leaders is not new. Though it represents a model many theological educators are now endorsing, the precedent for such training in Christian history is deep and long. Early church history is filled with examples, from the training communities of Jesus and Paul, through the residential training practiced by church fathers such as Augustine, Basil, and Jerome. Residential training was standard procedure for the Celtic Christians as they re-evangelized pagan Europe beginning in the sixth century.



Since that time, from the Anabaptists to Wesley's preachers, from Bonhoeffer's underground seminary to burgeoning movements in the developing world, the life-to-life formation of this approach has been blessed by God. In our time, both need and opportunity call us to reclaim this powerful means to prepare kingdom leaders for North America.

Theological Foundations: God is a self-revealing, self-expressing God. Christians believe God's self-expression reached its apex when "the Word became human and made his home among us." In the Incarnation, God reveals most clearly who God is, and who we are to be. God reveals his mission and ours.

Balanced missionary training is shaped by three dimensions of this process:

- ***The Word:*** Effective North American missionaries will be deeply informed by, and competent carriers of the ***Incarnational Message***.
- ***Became Human:*** Effective North American missionaries will embody the message they carry in an ***Incarnational Lifestyle***.
- ***Made His Home Among Us:*** Effective North American missionaries will understand and invest themselves in an ***Incarnational Context***.

Learning Model: The call for more missionally-based, community-centered and experientially-grounded training is coming from many fronts. Typical of many theological educators would be:

“ministerial training as currently conceived is still far too much training for the pastoral care of existing congregations, and far too little oriented toward the missionary calling to claim the whole of public life for Christ and his kingdom.” --Leslie Newbigin

“[Theological education] should orient itself primarily around “in service” ministry activities within which intellectual, spiritual, and practical concerns form a seamless whole.” --Robert Banks

“[In a post-Christian society] Pastors, teachers, evangelists, church planters are all involved in a missionary enterprise. They need to be trained for mission, not for maintenance.” --Stuart Murray



On another front, learning theoreticians are increasingly pointing to the significance of “communities of practice” as a prime context for our deepest learning:

“engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn and so become who we are. The primary unit of analysis is neither the individual nor social institutions but rather the informal “communities of practice” that people form as they pursue shared enterprises over time.” --Etienne Wenger

The Missionary Residency for North America is a focused effort to take these calls for more effective training seriously. The residency is piloting an approach to training church planters that combines the best of our current resources with hands-on practice in the context of a supportive, learning community.

For More Information:

Dr. P. Kent Smith
Missions Coordinator For North America
Abilene Christian University
ACU Box 29410
Abilene, Texas 79699
Phone: 325.674.3755
Email: smithpk@acu.edu

