

## Editorial

Steve Taylor

Welcome to what is the twelfth issue of *Ecclesial Futures*, a journal focused on the mission of God in the world, particularly in local Christian communities and the systems that support them.

In this issue, you will find seven articles that explore the nature of the mission of God. Three of the articles are written by scholars in Global South contexts, three investigate charismatic and Pentecostal churches, while four study the systems that support local Christian communities. These include funding, ecumenical partnerships, diocesan strategies, and digital technologies. Together, these seven articles illuminate the interconnected and interwoven nature of God's mission in the world that God loves.

## Original research

The **first** article, by Mishael Donkor Ampofo and Peter White, studies the funding of mission in denominational systems. They demonstrate through empirical research how the dramatic shift in global Christianity's centre of gravity towards Africa is transforming mission work dynamics, including in the funding of mission. Semi-structured interviews and extensive documentary analysis illuminate how the Assemblies of God in Ghana have combined traditional church giving with modern technological solutions. The denomination sought to finance 3,000 new churches within a five-year period. Strategies included collaborative partnerships, including with technology companies to support automatic mobile micro-giving programs. A feature of the article is the attention paid to indigenous approaches to mission funding. The implementation of robust accountability structures and cultural sensitivity marked an alternative to traditional funding models, which can create unhealthy dependencies.

A **second** article examines the limits and possibilities of missionary church development in the cities of Europe. Given a lack of research into interconfessional unity in contemporary church planting, Thomas Kräuter and Jack Barentsen interview church planters and ministers in Vienna, Austria. They found that ecumenical cooperation is very limited, due to theological assumptions and time constraints. Looking forward, they propose a regional ecumenical church planting hub across confessional

boundaries. In response to the isolation of church planting, a hub would encourage missiological togetherness through relational support, mutual learning, and spiritual community in developing new forms of church.

In a **third** article studying the systems that support local Christian communities, Andrew Dunlop investigates how dioceses as a church system might support innovation. He draws on the term “mixed ecology” which has been used by the Church of England to affirm how traditional and new forms of church can mutually flourish rather than simply co-exist. The article analyses almost every diocesan strategy in the Church of England, along with vision statements and publicly available documentation. Dunlop encourages dioceses to work at “amplification”, where the sharing of stories legitimizes innovation and invites creativity.

A **fourth** article examines another system, that of digital technology. Heidi A. Campbell and Meg Boone develop findings from a three-year study of how Indiana churches utilized and integrated technology to sustain community and spiritual life amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. A central insight is the realization by church leaders that technology is not a peripheral tool pre-pandemic but an essential component. The research also affirms the value of intergenerational collaboration to enrich decision-making around the adoption and adaptation of technology. Older church leaders tended to favour Facebook as a platform, while younger leaders favoured platforms like Instagram and Twitter. Mission challenges remain, including “digital divides” within congregations and among smaller and rural congregations.

In a **fifth** article, Sara Oliva examines faith formation in independent charismatic communities in Perth, Australia. She offers an invaluable insight, first, because of her empirical work on new expressions of independent community churches as an under-researched population. Second, she focuses on the journey of faith as she extends empirical work on recent converts in Australia and applies it in relation to supporting congregants in lifelong spiritual journeys. The article thus has practical relevance for church leaders as it affirms the importance of relational authenticity in nurturing faith during seasons of doubt, crisis and transition. (On a personal note, I was privileged to supervise Sara Oliva in her post-graduate research and to explore with her ways to publish her findings. My thanks to *Ecclesial Futures* co-editor Nigel Rooms for coordinating the double blind peer review of this article).

A **sixth** article examines the growth of African Pentecostalism. Mookgoo Solomon Kgatle defines and develops two theoretical concepts, *missio spiritus* and indigenous provenance. The work of the Holy Spirit – in witness, redemption life and creation – is argued to be central in the development of Indigenous expressions of African Pentecostalism. Thus, Kgatle’s demonstrates that the growth of African Pentecostalism is “informed by the way Africans have embraced the mission of the Spirit”. This challenges how Pentecostal missiologists understand missions, indigeneity, and world Christianity. Equally, Kgatle also challenges African Pentecostalism by outlining how

embracing the role of the Spirit of creation can strengthen engagement in environmental issues.

A **seventh and final** article examines unity and diversity in Pentecostal churches in Ghana. Working with recorded sermons and members' experiences, Eric Manu compares Vida Bethel Prayer Ministry and Believers Worship Centre. The research is important because it rejects generalizations by paying attention to living praxis. Rather than contrast unity and diversity, Manu argues for a coexistence of unity in shared elements and diversity in distinct differences within the Pentecostal practices of these two churches. The article offers fascinating insights into how Pentecostal worship and leadership practices support participants in the challenges of everyday life. Significantly, the research focuses on the emergence of women's leadership in community service and their pioneering role in what has historically been male-dominated communities of faith.

The seven articles are followed by five book reviews. The reviews are evidence of a community of scholars who are reading, thinking, and interacting together about the mission of God in the world in and through Christian communities. We always welcome book reviews, particularly of manuscripts relevant to mission and the future of the church in the Global South.

As always, my thanks to my colleagues Nigel Rooms (co-editor), Patrick Todjeras (editor of book reviews), Christopher Pipe (copy-editor), and the team at Radboud University Press and Open Journals for their skill and care. Because of Diamond Open Access, original research is available free to authors and readers. To receive updates about new articles and developments in *Ecclesial Futures*, please sign up to receive our newsletter at <https://ecclesialfutures.org/>.

## About the Author

Steve Taylor, Director AngelWings Ltd and Research Affiliate, University of Otago | Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka. Contact: [kiwidrsteve@gmail.com](mailto:kiwidrsteve@gmail.com).