FRANK LIESEN

Vol 3:1 2023

Frank R. Liesen *(PhD) currently serves as director of the mission organization Antiochia Teams in Kandern, Germany.*

Evangelical churches around the globe face the challenge of overcoming cultural barriers to engage people with the gospel message and guide them toward biblically faithful discipleship. Each church develops a sub-culture of traditions, behaviors, and beliefs that poses challenges to connecting with outsiders who share the same cultural background but have little prior knowledge of Christianity. This cultural disconnect between the sender and recipient of the good news creates an obstacle in fulfilling Christ's call to "make disciples" among all nations and facilitate conversions (Matt 28:18–20). A careful self-assessment by local congregations regarding their approach to disciple-making will aid in closing the gap between people within and outside the church. In this respect, the Church Discipleship Matrix (CDM) offers a tool to evaluate and recontextualize pathways of transformational conversion. Churches can engage their leaders and church members in a creative, communal exercise of self-reflection to discover how contextualization affects their disciple-making ability. The matrix sheds light on the entire process of gospel diffusion, beginning with the transmission of the Christian faith and moving to the translation of ministry (contextualization), the turnaround experience (conversion), the transformation of converts, and the retransmission of the gospel.

The first section introduces the research project that first applied the CDM to analyze three evangelical church plants that succeeded in gospel diffusion despite their secular context in Germany. The qualitative multi-case study serves as the basis for this article and for utilizing the matrix as a diagnostic instrument for local congregations (Liesen 2022). The second section describes the Church Discipleship Matrix with its five main diffusional patterns and assessment grids. Next, a summary of diffusional patterns shared by the German church plants and their positive effects on life-changing conversions may spark new ideas for local retranslations. The final section discloses the benefits of the Church Discipleship Matrix for Christian leaders and offers instructions on implementing the matrix in a congregational exercise of self-reflection. In the end,

the Church Discipleship Matrix can assist churches in determining culture-specific and biblically faithful methods for facilitating conversions in their pursuit of the Great Commission.

The Research Project

The Church Discipleship Matrix served as the analytical framework for a multi-case study of three evangelical churches in Germany that started their ministry between 2010 and 2020 (Liesen 2022). The primary question of what factors contributed to conversion in the diffusion of the Christian message motivated this qualitative study that drew on personal interviews of converts and church leaders as the main data sources. The relevance of the diffusional patterns becomes apparent when considering that church plants are unusual cases due to their high conversion growth despite Germany's adverse, secular context. Moreover, the significant theological and cultural diversity across churches strengthens the credibility of the research findings that emerged from the case studies (Yin 2018, 49–61; Patton 2002, 235).

Hope Center in Berlin (HCB), an independent Pentecostal church led by a second-generation Ghanaian migrant, represents the phenomenon of reverse mission in Europe through mission endeavors originating in the global South. ConnectKirche Erfurt (CKE), which belongs to Germany's largest Pentecostal denomination, is one of many new Pentecostal churches displaying the latest trends in missional engagement. Finally, the Reformed Gospel Church Munich (GCM), which belongs to the Redeemer City to City church planting network (CtC), is an example of influential American mission efforts that operate through globally active church planting organizations. Thus, each church signifies a unique evangelical movement that bears hope for re-evangelizing secular Germany (Liesen 2022, 59–88).

Each case study church pursued the Great Commission in the Federal Republic of Germany, which can be designated as a post-Christian nation. Religious pluralism, a decrease in ethical and religious convictions originating in Christianity, individualism, and secularization make up some of the cultural influences in Germany (Paas 2011, 11). Mainline churches have suffered from a drastic decline in membership for several decades and expect to lose half of their members by 2060 (Frerk 2022; Bingener 2019). The average growth of membership in evangelical denominations has been minimal. For example, the four major evangelical denominations only grew by about 20,000 members from 2002 to 2012. Philipp Bartholomä (2017, 218–236) describes this as a crisis of mission in present-day Germany.

Consequently, evangelical leaders of German denominations yearn to counter this negative missional trend by initiating a church-planting movement (NC2P 2018). Each church plant in the multi-case study offers insights about spreading the gospel despite a challenging secular context. Intriguingly, the qualitative research revealed that all three churches adhered to an evangelical view of the gospel, conversion, and transformation in discipleship. Salient diffusional patterns emerged that enabled each church to move individuals from first hearing the gospel to fully devoting their lives to Christian discipleship.

The Analytical Grid: The Church Discipleship Matrix

The central purpose of the Church Discipleship Matrix for the German research project was to identify how and why individuals experienced life-changing conversions due to the patterns of gospel diffusion (see fig. 1). A *matrix* displays "something within or from which something else originates, develops, or takes form" (Merriam-Webster n.d.). Thus, the Church Discipleship Matrix traces the progression of conversion that develops within the patterns of gospel diffusion. Correspondingly, the structural framework of the matrix relates the conversion process to the missionary activity of Christian ministries. Gospel diffusion and the response of transformational conversion weave together in a dynamic interaction between churches that spread the gospel and converts who apply the Christian message within their cultural framework. The intertwining arrows in the center of the matrix display this interactive progression in the experience of mission work.

For the analytical purposes of the CDM, *transmission* includes all aspects of communicating the Christian message by missionary entities to the recipient culture, while *retransmission* occurs when converts share their newfound faith locally and cross-culturally. *Translation*, used interchangeably with the term contextualization, refers to the linguistic and conceptual transferal of the Christian faith into a culture. *Turnaround* serves as a synonym for conversion and signifies the process character of the conversion experience. Christian conversion occurs when a person turns around from sin through repentance to place their faith in Christ for salvation. Evangelicals reflect on the dynamics between a point of decision and turnaround processes in genuine conversions (Smith 2010, 1–16). The biblical data and the empirical case studies confirm that converts often may go through decision-making processes.

Notwithstanding, the Scriptures disclose that regeneration occurs at one point in time, and leaders in the early Christian church expected immediate responses to gospel

proclamation (Berkhof 1991, 483–485; Schnabel 2008, 226). *Transformation* denotes the change of individuals and cultures through conversion and applying the Christian faith to all aspects of the human experience. The term comprises the individual's change, often designated as discipleship, but moves beyond personal transformation to its effects on the socio-economic and political context. Andrew Walls (2002, 2–34) uses the term *diffusion* to describe the transmission and appropriation of the Christian message across cultures in history, while the CDM applies the term to the dynamics of diffusing the gospel from Christian sub-cultures into their local contexts.

THE CHURCH DISCIPLESHIP MATRIX (CDM)

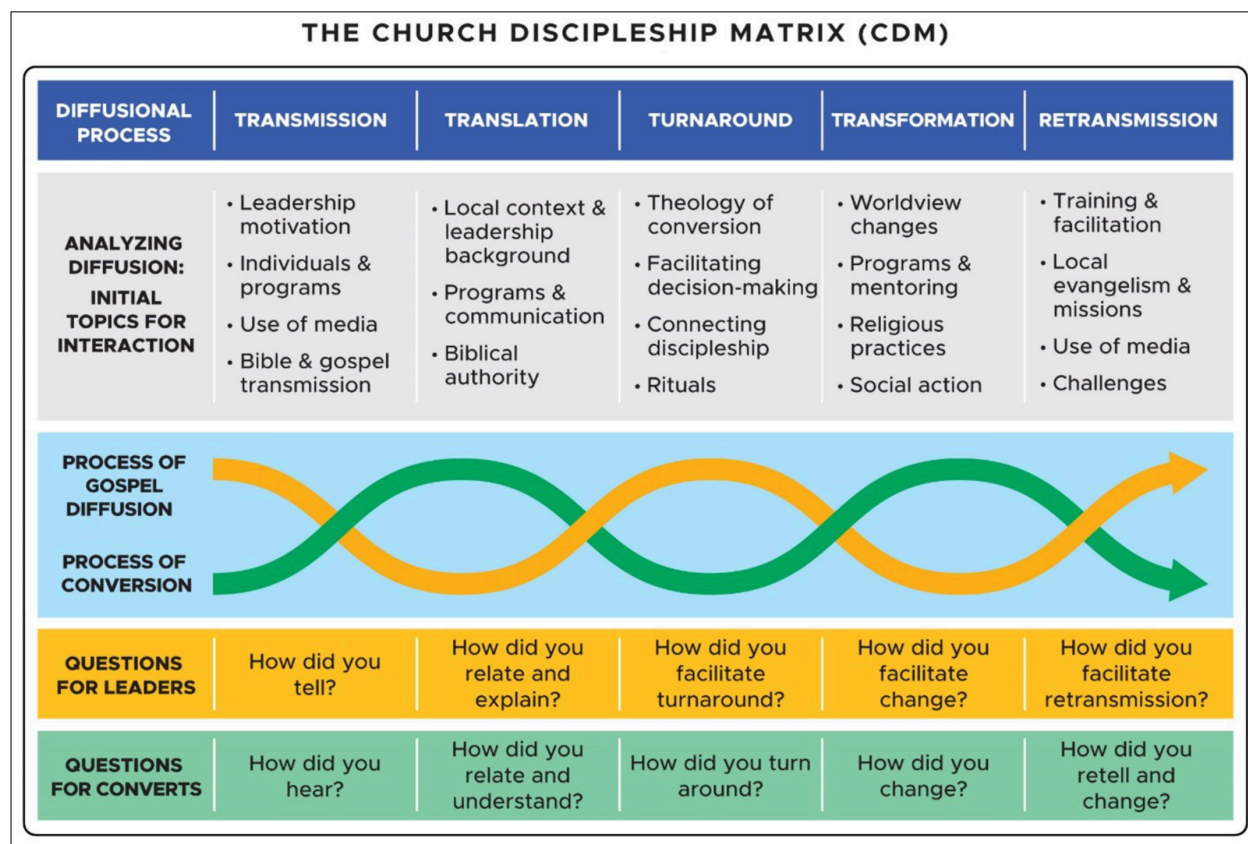| DIFFUSIONAL PROCESS	TRANSMISSION	TRANSLATION	TURNAROUND	TRANSFORMATION	RETRANSMISSION
ANALYZING DIFFUSION: INITIAL TOPICS FOR INTERACTION	• Leadership motivation • Individuals & programs • Use of media • Bible & gospel transmission	• Local context & leadership background • Programs & communication • Biblical authority	• Theology of conversion • Facilitating decision-making • Connecting discipleship • Rituals	• Worldview changes • Programs & mentoring • Religious practices • Social action	• Training & facilitation • Local evangelism & missions • Use of media • Challenges
PROCESS OF GOSPEL DIFFUSION / PROCESS OF CONVERSION					
QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS	How did you tell?	How did you relate and explain?	How did you facilitate turnaround?	How did you facilitate change?	How did you facilitate retransmission?
QUESTIONS FOR CONVERTS	How did you hear?	How did you relate and understand?	How did you turn around?	How did you change?	How did you retell and change?

Figure 1. *The Church Discipleship Matrix (Frank Liesen) is called the Diffusional Matrix of Conversion in the original research project.*

The sequential ordering and understanding of transmission, translation, transformation, and retransmission as primary aspects of gospel diffusion originate from lectures in World Christian Studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The matrix adds turnaround as a separate analytical theme of diffusion, thereby disclosing conversion as pivotal in spreading the gospel across cultures. Congruently, Walls's literature discloses conversion as a complementary dynamic to translation in which converts "appropriate (i.e. make their own) the translated Word" toward the

culture-specific transformation of themselves and their Christian communities (Burrows 2011, 123). Hence, the CDM incorporates translation and turnaround as vital and integral analytical elements of how churches shape conversion in light of their particular approaches to gospel diffusion and how converts respond with their unique embodiments of faith.

It is noteworthy that the CDM follows a logical sequence but does not presume a fixed chronological progression of either diffusion or conversion. For example, even though the missionary impulse of gospel transmission initiates the diffusional process (Matt 28:18–20), translation may precede transmission and affects all diffusional areas. Retransmission may occur at an early stage of conversion. In comparison, Everett Rogers (2003) developed a similar five-step diffusional model to trace the innovation-decision process, outlining a Knowledge Stage, Persuasion Stage, Decision Stage, Implementation Stage, and Confirmation Stage. On the one hand, the CDM also places the point of decision in the middle of the diffusional process. On the other hand, the Church Discipleship Matrix differentiates from Rogers's model aside from its particular focus on Christian conversion rather than on the general acceptance of innovations. For example, the CDM integrates the confirmation of conversion in the turnaround and transformation stages while placing retransmission as the final phase of diffusion. The intriguing similarities between how people adopt innovations and how individuals respond to the gospel warrant further academic explorations.

Furthermore, the Church Discipleship Matrix features an initial list of research topics and basic questions for the analytical inquiry. The diverse topics for each diffusional phase can guide group discussions and individual interviews with converts and church leaders. Interactions with new believers may reveal unexpected caveats of interest about the local diffusion of the gospel. For example, a surprise in the case study research was the report of converts about the critical role of formal and informal mentors in practical discipleship. In that respect, the interview questions ensure hearing the voices of both church leaders and converts as they contemplate gospel diffusion and conversion from their viewpoint. New believers may confirm, contradict, or add to the explanations of ministry leaders about how and why conversions and transformative changes became possible in their Christian community. Engaging both propagators and recipients of the Christian message in applying the CDM strengthens the soundness of research findings and stimulates the discovery of new pathways of gospel diffusion.

The CDM differentiates from other analytical frameworks of conversion in that it uses the missionary activity of Christian ministries as the primary analytical grid and relates the diffusional process to conversion. This approach of viewing conversion primarily from a church ministry perspective offers significant advantages. First, the CDM allows for a natural integration of translation or contextualization in the analytical scheme with its vital role in how churches shape each aspect of gospel diffusion and conversion. Secondly, the facilitation of the turnaround experience itself through such factors as rituals or decision-making opportunities finds a principal place in the analytical scheme. Thirdly, the CDM highlights retransmission and engaging converts to recommunicate the gospel as indispensable aspects of Great Commission ministries and gospel diffusion across cultures.

Without genuine conversion, the Christian faith may quickly turn into *Christopaganism*, a syncretistic form of religiosity that is impotent to change the worldview of converts (Hiebert 2008, 162). Churches need to constantly review their approach to transmitting the gospel into local contexts, facilitating conversions, and ensuring deep Christian discipleship among converts. The CDM offers churches a practical tool to foster a creative and thorough self-assessment procedure for enabling transformational conversions. Additionally, the following research findings may offer new inspiration for recontextualization as they exhibit how three church plants rigorously pursued disciple-making in secular Germany.

Diffusional Patterns in Three Churches

Five main diffusional patterns shaped the conversion process of individuals and guided them from their initial church contact toward transformational conversions: multi-faceted transmission, caring translation, clear turnaround, deep transformation, and continual retransmission. This section reviews the diffusional patterns that emerged from the research and reflects on implications and potential applications in other ministry settings. Remarkably, several converts in this study shared an atheistic background or a deep-seated disinterest in religion prior to their conversion. Their testimonies reflect on a missionary praxis of churches that were able to invite individuals to respond to the gospel and enter into deep discipleship despite an adverse, secular context. Thus, intriguing insights emerge for evangelical leaders who will use the CDM to recontextualize their ministries and pursue fulfilling the Great Commission in their local communities.

Multi-Faceted Transmission

The church plants engaged pre-converts with the multi-faceted transmission of the Christian message. Corporate programs of communicating the gospel relied heavily on individuals who invited non-believers from within their social networks. Engaging potential converts with the biblical message was a core component of transmission, driven by the missionary zeal of pastoral leaders.

All three church plants employed a variety of corporate programs for the sake of transmission, while worship services were the main entry point for converts to hear the gospel message. Corporate events ranged from small groups that organized unique gatherings to interact with non-Christians (CKE), street evangelism campaigns called Revival Weeks (HCB), to musical performances with Broadway musicians (GCM). Gospel Church Munich and ConnectKirche Erfurt also promoted their events through large-scale advertisement campaigns, leading some converts to attend church services initially. In agreement with Ott and Wilson's assessment of effective church planting, church planters used a broad range of corporate programs to "cast the net widely" for transmitting the gospel while not neglecting to encourage individual transmission (2011, 215). Personal invitations were a critical component of attracting non-believers to church functions. Corporate transmission relied on and supplemented individuals who testified to their faith within their social context. Thus, mobilizing the church constituency for transmission was essential for convincing secular people to attend church services or participate in Christian activities, thereby facilitating gospel exposure (Bartholomä 2019, 527).

The reports of converts across church plants about unusual or spiritual experiences that contributed to their resolve in pursuing the Christian faith was a surprising discovery. These accounts add to the mystery of conversion and imply that church planting is not reducible to a business-like leadership approach in establishing new organizations (Gooren 2010, 139–141; Paas 2016, 204). The question of why some people respond positively and others negatively to gospel dissemination ultimately lies outside the control of church leaders. Evidently, traction with new "clients" is not solely determined by missionary zeal but also by God's supernatural work of creating spiritual receptivity and an internal call of salvation (Acts 16:14; Berkhof 1991, 454). In the case study churches, Christian leaders counterbalanced their zealous labor at proclaiming the Christian message with a prayerful attitude and reliance on God's mysterious intervention in the lives of individuals (Col 3:3).

Caring Translation

Church leaders related the Christian faith to converts by carefully translating their church programs and communication styles. All converts in this study reported that contextualization had its intended effect of attracting them to their respective churches and making the Christian message understandable in their language and life experience. Pentecostal practices did not thwart the research participants from moving closer toward conversion.

Intriguingly, the dynamics of a loving community played a crucial role alongside focused contextualization efforts in drawing pre-converts into the church and making them "feel at home." Research findings confirm the validity of Bartholomä's plea (2019, 149–150, 230–232) for evangelical churches to engage in self-reflective contextualization in their quest to evangelize secular people. At the same time, the appeal of loving relationships and Christian unity, even within multicultural communities like Hope Center, cannot be underestimated (Dye 2017, 227–232). Converts spoke about the powerful effect of experiencing unconditional love and unity despite congregational diversity and in contrast to their secular relational network. In harmony with Christ's prayer for the witness of a united church (John 17:21), the local congregations placed a high value on establishing loving communities alongside careful translation.

Moreover, the research findings highlight that contextualizing both language choices and delivery styles in communication was as crucial as adjusting church programs to local conditions. Church leaders found a voice among secular people because they used contemporary terminology and related the Christian message to the everyday experience of their audiences. ConnectKirche Erfurt, for example, conducted extensive surveys to determine how to rephrase Christian terminology for communicating with secular people in Erfurt. Pastor Herla (personal communication, April 2, 2020) explained that he replaced a word like *Reue* (regret) for the biblical term *Buße* (repentance) since the latter term had been trivialized in the German language and lost its meaning. Hesselgrave and Rommen recommend the search for "new supplemental terminology" to ensure a comprehensible gospel presentation (1989, 179). Consequently, Christian leaders face the challenge of choosing and interpreting new terminology sensibly to convey the full meaning of biblical terms to their audiences.

Nevertheless, none of the German pastors saw the need to replace biblical concepts of sin and forgiveness with ambiguous concepts such as social exclusion in their presentation of conversion (Faix 2018). The research findings disclose that the gospel remained translatable with its core theological components of sin and forgiveness, even in a secular context. The study participants responded positively to the gospel's communication with a radical turnaround toward deep transformation (Walls 1996, 27–28; Schnabel 2008, 400; Rom 1:16).

Clear Turnaround

Case study church plants enabled conversions through clear invitations into discipleship. Although church leaders affirmed that conversions could occur as a process rather than a singular decision, they constantly communicated the need to make a clear turnaround from the old life of sin to the new life of following Christ. The practice of frequent calls of decision-making, handled differently by each church, reminded non-believers to make conversion a personal experience rather than a mere process of social integration (Tidball 1999, 190, 208–209). Apparently, urgent and punctiliar calls for decision-making retain their significance in motivating individuals to have a personal turnaround experience (2 Cor 5:20). This is true even in post-Christian Europe, where, according to the former director of City to City Europe, Al Barth (personal communication, June 29, 2019), individuals often go through slow conversion processes.

Furthermore, each church plant presented the meaning of Christian conversion intelligibly. Pastor Lubemba from Berlin articulated the meaning of conversion most distinctly with the two necessary components of turning away from sin through repentance and turning to God by faith (personal communication, November 19, 2019; Erickson 1989, 933–942). Lupemba explained that conversion is the change "from a self-determined life to a God-determined life, a life that was without repentance, . . . to a life of repentance." Pastor Müller in Munich (personal communication, February 21, 2020) believed a genuine sense of man's sinfulness and deep, personal faith in Christ are indispensable aspects of conversion, rather than a superficial faith in historical facts (Berkhof 1991, 504–505). In Erfurt, co-pastor Blum (personal communication, April 2, 2020) shared that their church plant keeps a low conversion threshold by focusing on personal faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. However, church leaders steer converts to repent from specific sins in their lives at the very moment of their decision to convert. Thus, CKE taught new believers the meaning of repentance in "realistic and concrete terms" by addressing personal sin from the outset of their Christian faith (Stott and Wright 2015, 92). Notably, none of the churches in this case study

jeopardized genuine spiritual renewal by omitting a message of "true repentance and conversion" despite their eagerness to see numerical growth. (Paas 2019, 205; Acts 17:30, John 1:12).

Even though converts reported varying degrees of doctrinal knowledge at the time of their conversion, all participants continued their spiritual progression toward discipleship. Clarity about the meaning of repentance from sin and turning toward Christ in faith for salvation laid the groundwork for transformation. Thus, theological clarity on conversion emerged as one crucial aspect of enabling subsequent transformation.

Deep Transformation

Each church guided converts to pursue deep discipleship. Discipling activities occurred at various levels of organizational structure and engagement in social action, while all church plants stressed the importance of biblical instruction in fostering transformation. Simultaneously, spiritual or Pentecostal experiences personalized and intensified transformation even in the reformed, non-charismatic Gospel Church Munich.

The data analysis revealed that biblical formation, rooted in the propositional truth of the Bible, was a critical element in transformational changes and aided new believers in adopting a biblical worldview (Hesselgrave 2018, 240). A profound transition from a secular worldview, indifferent to religion in general (Moon 2019, 119–121), to a biblical worldview was evident among converts. A phenomenon of what Hiebert describes as "deep discipling" toward a cognitive, affective, and evaluative transformation became possible (2008, 319, 312–316). Cognitively, new believers began to accept the Bible as literal truth and absolute authority for moral choices. Anna, a university student in Berlin, determined that the Bible is entirely dependable since "the Word of God remains and is truer than science." Silke at GCM, an optometrist, came to understand the Bible as God's literal Word and concluded that "the Bible is much smarter than we think." The research findings highlight that biblical formation stands at the heart of deep discipleship, especially in the context of liberal tendencies within evangelicalism that question such hallmarks of evangelical faith as the affirmation of biblical authority (Jung 2011, 208–210; 2 Tim 3:16–17).

Correspondingly, the hope of lowering standards of faith so that Christian communities can cross the cultural divide to a secular audience neither harmonizes with the experience of converts in this study nor sociological insights into the

competitiveness of evangelical churches (Stolz et al. 2014, 352–354). The biblical conservatism of the German church plants did not negatively impact the participant's path toward transformational conversion. Instead, the centrality of biblical doctrines and values in discipleship across case-study churches indicates that abandoning biblical conservatism may thwart spiritual formation toward greater Christlikeness. Research findings in this study affirm the conviction of evangelicals that the authoritative Scriptures should remain the filter for culture rather than the reverse. Otherwise, cultural values may supersede biblical mandates and engender syncretistic versions of transformation (Eitel 2012, 66, 72–75).

Additionally, the integration into the church community, volunteerism that exposed converts to spiritual growth opportunities, and personal mentoring contributed to ongoing transformational changes. Converts across all three churches emphasized the critical role of formal or informal mentors in their spiritual formation (Tangen 2012, 196–200). The caring attention of mature believers who walk alongside converts in applying biblical values to their life circumstances rather than particular organizational structures became apparent as an indispensable component of deep discipleship (1 Thess 2:7–8).

Continual Retransmission

All three church plants propagated retransmission to converts by communicating the value of evangelistic endeavors and training individuals to share their new faith. In addition, churches offered various activities to enlist and support converts in retransmission, while involvement in foreign missions remained minimal.

Notably, church leaders motivated converts to speak about their faith immediately after their conversion and viewed their enthusiasm and pre-existing friendships with non-believers as invaluable assets in retransmission. Personal invitations to worship services and other church functions accounted for many new visitors to the individual church plants. The implication for outreach-oriented churches is that guiding new believers in evangelism at the beginning rather than the end of progressive transformation is highly preferable (Abraham 2007; Mark 5:19). Pastor Müller, for example, believed that new converts with their inherent enthusiasm and pre-existing relational network in the secular world made them "by far the best evangelists." CKE sought to ignite a passion for evangelism immediately after the converts' decision by asking them to call friends and family members and tell them about their new faith. The pastor explained that this method helped brand-new believers become Christian

witnesses in everyday life. Thus, CKE joined the worldwide Pentecostal movement in its ability to mobilize its congregations for evangelism, "including the very newest Christians" (Tennent 2007, 182–183). Ott and Wilson elucidate that recent converts are effective witnesses because of their contextual sensitivity: "They still speak the language and think in terms of the contemporary culture." (2011, 293).

Nonetheless, sharing the gospel message personally posed a challenge for several converts in this study, while those new believers who took part in street evangelism showed less inhibition to verbal proclamation (Stolz 2014, 220–233). Similarly, converts reported that the ritual act of baptism solidified their Christian profession. This research finding indicates that public confessions of faith may invigorate young believers to share their faith more freely.

Finally, several new believers reported using social media as a primary tool for retransmission. On the one hand, Scott Moreau (2018, 148) highlights the fundamental change in communication in the present time, comparing the significance of cell phones in transmission to the invention of the printing press. On the other hand, David Dunaetz (2019, 138–151) points out hindrances to personal evangelism on social media for the younger generation: The fear of rejection caused by cyberbullying and the *Mum effect*, the avoidance of sharing potentially bad news. Inadvertently, converts in this study followed Dunaetz's advice to focus on relationship building, testify to personal faith practices or experiences, and post invitations to public church services. In this manner, new believers prevented personal ridicule in case their online contacts rejected the gospel as bad news while offering opportunities to hear gospel presentations in less-threatening public settings (Matt 10:16).

Benefits and Applications of the CDM as a Self-Analytical Tool

The Church Discipleship Matrix traces the entire process of gospel diffusion through local churches. Thus, Christian leaders who apply the matrix as a self-evaluation tool can evaluate their approach to contextualizing the Great Commission and enabling transformational conversions. The CDM reveals how the church transmits the Christian faith, translates its ministry for its specific audience, fosters the turnaround experience, facilitates transformational discipleship, and encourages retransmission locally and cross-culturally. By answering how and why new believers experience their conversion, church leaders can discover new pathways for relating the gospel to people within their unique cultural setting.

The diffusional patterns that emerged from the case study research offer intriguing insights about encouraging life-changing conversions. Nonetheless, caution is in place about copying ministry practices too quickly in the hope of reproducing identical results. The multi-case study did not seek to prove or disprove causes for conversion growth. Instead, the qualitative research allowed for a rich description of each unique case and the common diffusional patterns across all three ministries in Germany. External validity, the generalization of research findings, is problematic since the strength of qualitative case studies lies in providing in-depth descriptions rather than generalizations based on substantial amounts of quantitative data (Yin 2018, 45). Likewise, Paas (2016, 203–204) warns of duplicating church models, seeking to produce equivalent results in different contexts while not taking into account case-specific, non-replicable factors. Consequently, each church leader must determine how far principles and practices are transferable and might have a similar impact within their cultural context. Retranslations will be inevitable but may create new and fertile pathways to evangelical gospel diffusion.

In this respect, the Church Discipleship Matrix can serve as an exploratory tool for recontextualization. One benefit of the CDM is that it integrates translation into the analytical scheme for gospel diffusion and conversion. As a result, ministry leaders become aware of the critical influence of contextualization in shaping transformational conversion. A second benefit of the matrix is that it highlights the pivotal role of the turnaround experience itself. An analysis of how churches present the gospel, provide opportunities for decision-making, and view conversion as a point and process will shed light on whether current practices help or hinder culture-specific, evangelical conversions. Leadership teams may also discuss, for example, their current practices of connecting conversion with discipleship and ponder the role of rituals in this transitional phase.

A third benefit of applying the Church Discipleship Matrix is that pastors can pre-determine pathways of transformation and the organizational level suitable for their constituency. The case study churches differentiated significantly in their discipleship structures as they adjusted programs according to the needs and limitations of their target group. Nonetheless, deep discipleship occurred among all converts in this study, illuminating such critical factors as personal mentoring in progressive transformation. As churches analyze their ministries with the CDM, surprising discoveries may be at hand about what assists converts most in their progressive journey toward greater Christlikeness.

A fourth benefit of the CDM is the integration of retransmission as a natural component of analyzing the progression of conversion. The diffusional pattern of retransmission reminds church leaders of the convert's critical role in drawing outsiders into the church community and toward gospel exposure. Retransmission also conveys the need for churches to incorporate cross-cultural missions as an indispensable and vital component of biblically faithful discipleship.

Finally, the Church Discipleship Matrix invites both church leaders and converts to participate in translation, stimulating what Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989, 174–175) call cross-fertilization in contextualization. The basic questionnaire of the CDM, along with its initial list of research topics, serves as a springboard toward a rich interaction between propagators and recipients of the gospel about shaping diffusion. The dynamics of *cross-fertilization* will benefit churches in diffusing the blessings of unchanging biblical doctrines in culture-specific manifestations of conversions. Andrew Walls calls this interplay between the Scriptures and culture the pilgrim and indigenous principle, of which one cannot have "too much of one or the other" (1996, 54).

David Allen's Natural Planning Model offers a blueprint for employing the Church Discipleship Matrix as a self-analytical tool in local church settings (Allen 2001, 54–82). First, the leadership discusses the original purpose of the church and the role of the Great Commission in the church's call into the world. Secondly, leaders envision what true success would look like in fulfilling the Great Commission within their context. Thirdly, a phase of information gathering will disclose the church's current practice of facilitating gospel diffusion and the conversion process. This third phase applies the Church Discipleship Matrix as a self-analytical framework and facilitates brainstorming sessions in group settings to cultivate cross-fertilization between leaders and converts. Additionally, this step encompasses focused interviews with converts and church leaders about their experience of the five main diffusional patterns. Fourth, a leadership team analyzes the research findings, determines new or adjusted pathways of gospel diffusion, and organizes the results in sub-projects for implementation. Including new believers in establishing culture-specific applications is vital for this analytical phase. Finally, the church determines the next action steps and a timeline for executing any recontextualizations of diffusional patterns to fulfill their context-specific call of disciple-making.

Conclusion

Creating pathways for transformational conversions is critical in establishing Great Commission ministries. Research in three German church plants with high conversion growth revealed five vital patterns of gospel diffusion: multi-faceted transmission, caring translation, clear turnaround, deep transformation, and continual retransmission. Each of these patterns may spark innovative ideas for recontextualizing diffusional patterns in other ministry settings. In this respect, the Church Discipleship Matrix offers a tool for recontextualizing gospel diffusion to encourage culture-specific, transformational conversions. Engaging both leaders and converts in applying the Church Discipleship Matrix in this self-analytical group activity will ensure the discovery of new insights and applications for gospel diffusion. In the end, evangelicals yearn for God's authoritative Word to guide churches and converts toward an ever-growing Christlikeness, flowing into the continual retransmission of the gospel cross-culturally (Eitel 2015; Eph 4:13; Matt 28:18-29).

Frank R. Liesen *(PhD) currently serves as director of the mission organization Antiochia Teams in Kandern, Germany.*

Bibliography

Abraham, Kumar. 2007. "Evangelism and Discipleship." *Lausanne World Pulse Archives*. May 2017. Online: https://bit.ly/38rqOEi

Allen, David. 2001. *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*. London: Penguin.

Bartholomä, Philipp. 2019. *Freikirche mit Mission: Perspektiven für den freikirchlichen Gemeindebau im nachchristlichen Kontext* [Free Church with a mission: Perspectives of church planting for free churches in a post-Christian context]. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.

_____. Gibt es eine freikirchliche „Krise der Mission?" Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme [Is there an evangelical crisis in mission? A critical assessment]. *Freikirchenforschung, 26*, 218–236.

Berkhof, Louis. 1991. *Systematic Theology.* 4th rev. and enl. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Bingener, Reinhard. 2019. "Studie sieht dramatischen Mitgliederverlust in beiden Kirchen" [Study reveals drastic membership loss in both churches]. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Inland*, May 2, 2019. Online: https://bit.ly/2VnpyrA.

Burrows, William R. 2019. "Conversion: Individual and Cultural." In *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Work of Andrew F. Walls*. Edited by William R. Burrows, Mark R. Gornik, & Janice A. McLean, 109–126. Maryknoll: Orbis.

Dunaetz, David R. 2019. "Evangelism, Social Media, and the Mum Effect." *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 43, no. 2: 138–151.

Dye, Stephen. 2017. "Mission in the Diaspora: Multicultural Churches in Urban Germany Initiated by Church Planters from the Global South." PhD diss., Biola University, Ann Arbor. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Eitel, Keith. E. 2012. "Scriptura or Cultura: Is There a Sola in There?" *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 55 no. 1 (October 2012): 63–76.

_____. 2015. "World Christianity." In *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*. Edited by John M. Terry. Nashville: B&H Academic.

Erickson, Millard J. 1989. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapics: Baker Academic.

Faix, Tobias 2018. "Vortrag von Prof. Tobias Faix zum Nachören" [Lecture of Prof. Tobias Faix for listening again]. Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden in Deutschland K.d.ö.R. May 25, 2018. Audio. Online: https://bit.ly/2Ti7yAa.

Frerk, Carsten. 2022. "Trend der Kirchenaustritte 2021" [Trend in church membership withdrawals 2021]. *fowid*, February 25 2022. Online: https://fowid.de/meldung/trend-kirchenaustritte-2021.

Gooren, Henri 2010. *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hesselgrave, David J. 2018. *Paradigms in Conflict: 15 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today*. Edited by Keith E. Eitel. 2nd. exp. and upd. Ed. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic.

Hesselgrave, David J., and Edward Rommen. 1989. *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Hiebert, Paul G. 2008. *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

Jung, Friedhelm. 2011. *Die deutsche evangelikale Bewegung: Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte und Theologie* [The German evangelical movement: Baselines of its history and theology]. 4th ed. Biblia et symbiotica 8. Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft.

Liesen, Frank R. 2022. *Conversion in Germany: An Analysis of Patterns of Diffusion in Evangelical Church Planting (2010-2020)*. Berlin: Peter Lang.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. n.d. "Matrix." Online: https://bit.ly/3rLNiqI.

Moon, W. Jay. 2019. "Evangelism in a Secular Age: Complexities and Opportunities." In *Against the Tide: Mission Amidst the Global Currents of Secularization*. Edited by W. Jay Moon and Craig Ott, 104–129. Evangelical Missiological Society Series, no. 27. Littleton: William Carey Library.

Moreau, A. Scott. 2018. *Contextualizing the Faith: A Holistic Approach*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

NC2P. 2018. "2018 NC2P-Berlin gathering highlights." Created by tomvar.com. February 5–7, 2018. Video, 07:11. Online: http://www.nc2p.org/national-stories.

Ott, Craig, and Gene Wilson. 2011. *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Paas, Stefan. 2016. *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

_____. 2011. "Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-Modern Europe: Towards the Interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences." *Mission Studies*, 28 (1). https://doi.org/ 10.1163/016897811X572168

Patton, Michael Q. 2002. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Schnabel, Eckhard. J. 2008. *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.

Smith, Gordon. T. 2010. *Transforming Conversion: Rethinking the Language and Contours of Christian Initiation.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Stolz, Jörg. 2014. "Hoffnung Weitergeben: Evangelisieren im Evangelisch-Freikirchlichen Milieu [Communicate hope: Evangelism in the evangelical-free church milieu]." In *Phänomen Freikirchen: Analysen eines wettbewerbsstarken Milieus*, edited by Philippe Bornet, Oliver Krüger, Francesca Prescendi, Jens Schlieter, and Christoph Uehlinger, 5:215–241. Culturel. Zürich: Pano.

Stolz, Jörg, Olivier Favre, Caroline Gachet, and Emmanuelle Buchard. 2014. "Das Phänomen Freikirchen in der 'Ich-Gesellschaft'" [The phenomen of free churches in the 'Me-Society']." In *Phänomen Freikirchen: Analysen eines wettbewerbsstarken Milieus*, edited by Philippe Bornet, Oliver Krüger, Jens Schlieter, Christopher Uehlinger, and Francesca Prescendi, 5:347–355. Culturel. Zürich: Pano.

Stott, John R. W., and Christopher J. H. Wright. 2015. *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. Upd. and exp. ed. Downers Grove: IVP Books.

Tangen, Karl Inge. 2012. *Ecclesial Identification Beyond Late Modern Individualism? A Case Study of Life Strategies in Growing Late Modern Churches*. Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies 10. Leiden: Brill.

Tennent, Timothy C. 2007. *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic.

Tidball, Derek J. 1999. *Reizwort evangelikal: Entwicklung einer Frömmigkeitsbewegung [Who are the evangelicals? Tracing the roots of today's movement]*. Edited by Dieter Sackmann. Edition Anker. Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus.

Walls, Andrew F. 1996. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

_____. 2002. *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

Yin, Robert K. 2018. *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.