## V. EVANGELISTIC STRATEGIES IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIETIES

In planning evangelistic strategies, we must take into account the social organization of the people to whom we go for this influences significantly the nature of the communication, decision making, and response patterns of the people. It should also be taken into account in developing the organization and leadership patterns in the church in order to make it indigenous to the society.

1. The Social Organization of Tribal Societies.

    Tribal societies tend to share certain basic characteristics.

    1.1 **Simple subsistence technology.** Most tribal societies depend upon, hunting and gatherings, pastoralism or simple agriculture for their food. Their technology is simple and their size tends to be relatively small.

    1.2 **Social organization based on kinship ties.** The basis for social organization is kinship. This finds its expression on several levels: 1) the family and extended family, 2) the lineage and clan, 3) the tribe which is seen as a group of people related by common "blood" or set of kinship ties.


Clan A   Clan B   Clan C   Clan D
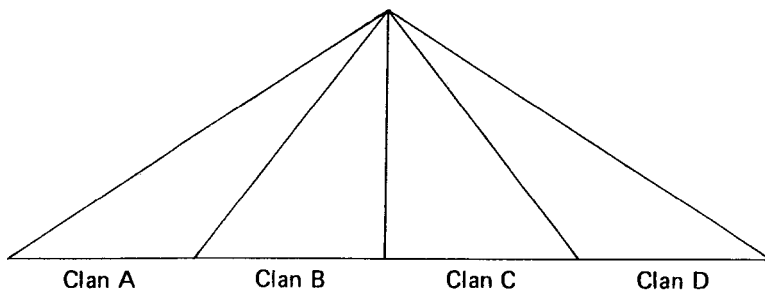
   1.21 Ancestors play an important role in most tribal societies. They are seen as important for several reasons.
    — They are one's ancestors and therefore demand respect. They are the source of one's life.
    — They are thought to have knowledge of the afterlife, and to be able to mediate with other spirit beings. So they are supplicated.
    — They are reputed to have great powers and achievements.
    — They generally remain members of the family so long as they are remembered.

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   — They are thought to reward good and to punish evil among their descendents.
   — They are generally thought to be beneficial to the family, seeking to help it grow and prosper. Sometimes, however, they are feared.
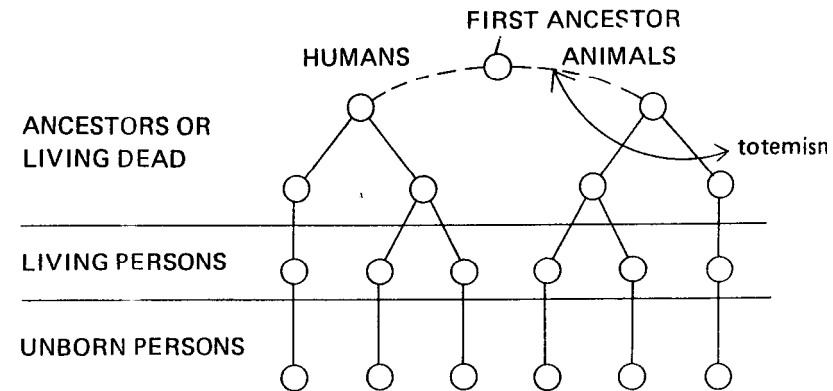
   1.22 Sometimes the idea of kinship ties are extended to include the animal world. We call such cases "totemism." Here humans, animals and plants may be seen as related to each other in large families.

   1.23 Social crises are generally handled by using kinship ties and by substituting other kinsmen when someone dies. This is a common reason for polygamy.

    1.3 **There tends to be a strong group orientation.** Tribal societies place great emphasis on the group and on loyalty to it. An individual without a group is essentially a "nobody." The implications include the following:

    1.31 A strong sense of corporate responsibility. Each person is responsible to the others and for their well being. Hence sharing is often an important value in tribal life.

    1.32 There is less of a sense of individual guilt when one fails, and more a sense of corporate shame.

    1.33 Important decisions are generally made by the leaders of the group (usually kinship group) who seek the support of their followers.

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1.4 Politically there is a simple organization of power.

1.41 There tends to be a minimum of social hierarchy because there is little economic wealth, and that which one has should be shared.

1.42 Power is exercized by elders with ostracism as the chief punishment. Decisions are based on consensus rather than voting.

1.5 Tribal societies are generally oral societies. They often do not have writing, but depend upon other means for storing their cultural information. Some of these methods include the following:

1.51 Memory: the use of poetry, songs, riddles, and proverbs.

1.52 Symbols: the use of color, art, paintings, carvings, symbols.

1.53 Stories: the use of stories, dramas, and narrative dances.

1.54 Rituals: rituals are the enactments of their fundamental beliefs and speak of their ideas through actions.

1.6 Tribal societies generally take an organic view of the universe. They tend to see everything as alive including the earth itself. Consequently for them most actions are moral actions. Moreover, they they are deeply conscious of the relationships and obligations to other people, animals, plants, mountains, rocks, earth, etc. These obligations are expressed in the taboos they have.

1.7 Tribal societies tend to be wholistic in their approach to life.

1.71 They tend to see religion as the center of society.
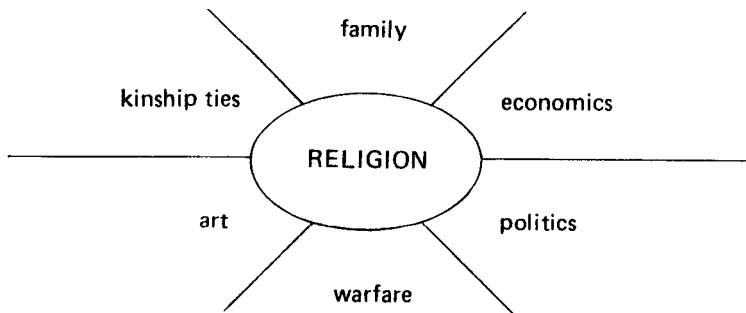
1.72 They do not make a sharp distinction between the NATURAL WORLD and the SUPERNATURAL WORLD as does modern man.

1.73 Socially, they do not divide society into specialized occupations or roles or specialized institutions.

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2. Evangelizing Tribal Societies

Tribal societies have been most responsive to the Gospel and much of the Church today is a product of the growth in tribal societies. Some of the methods that have been most effective are:

2.1 **Resident witness.** The resident missionary who strays long enough to identify with the people and earn their trust has often been the key to evangelism. The "instant" methods of evangelism have not worked.

— the missionary needs to learn the people's culture and identify with them.

— the missionary needs to stay long enough to start a church and to help it develop its own leadership. He or she should turn over the work to local leaders as rapidly as possible, but maintain a spiritual relationship with the people. Paternalism should be avoided.

— the missionary should move on to plant new churches once a church has been planted in one area. There is always work for him or her to do.

2.2 **Oral methods.** The evangelist should make use of oral means of storing and transmitting information.

— songs: for many villagers, their theology is found in their songs in what Carmen calls their "lyric theology."

— stories. Christ used parables, we need to use stories.

— drama. This multimedia in its approach and is a most powerful method in tribal societies.

— rituals. Leaders who are literate need to be careful to guard against a pro-literate bias and an antiritual bias. Rituals are to oral societies what books are to literate ones. We need good, new creative Christian rituals (see below).

2.3 **Kinship webs.** The gospel is often "gossipped" along the lines of kinship ties. Thus people are talking about it widely. This should be encouraged.

2.4 **Multi-individual decisions.** People should be encouraged to come as parts of groups. This begins with husband-wife coming together for baptism. In many cases it is useful to encourage whole families to come together. Individual believers should be encouraged to wait for baptism until others in the family come as well. Group decisions provide new believers with a community within which they

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can live. Isolated from such a community, they are often unable to stand in their new faith.

2.5 Wholistic Evangelism. In tribal societies ministry to the whole person is particularly important. Integrated programs of preaching, teaching, development and health are often effective in reaching the people.

2.6 Evangelism by invitation. In a number of areas where the Gospel has made a significant impact on part of a tribal community, others begin to invite evangelists to come, and may assist in their support.

2.7 People movements. These are particularly common in tribal societies when whole sections of a tribe decide to become Christian at once. Such multi-individual decisions may not represent strictly individualistic decisions for Christianity, but they do open the door for further teaching and preaching. Follow-up becomes crucial to evangelism in such settings.

3. Strengths in Evangelizing Tribal Societies.

Much of the modern Church has its roots in the evangelization of tribal societies. This is true of the Church in Europe as well as in Africa and Asia. There are certain strengths that appear in tribal movements.

3.1 There is a strong sense of community. This can be continued in the Church. There is less need to build community than in the city.

3.2 Leadership patterns are based on eldership and wise leaders who attract a following. When the Church uses traditional leadership patterns, it often functions smoothly and well.

3.3 There are built-in systems for the care of the needy. These can often continue within the Church.

4. Problems in Evangelizing Tribal Societies.

Certain problems commonly emerge in planting churches in tribal societies.

4.1 One must deal with ancestors. These are part of the kinship systems that dominate the tribal society and so cannot be ignored. Our tendency to get rid of them is not Biblical. We need a theology of ancestors.

4.2 Polygamy must be dealt. In many tribes polygamy serves some important social functions. How does one deal with multiple wives? Should one encourage the divorce of second wives, or allow the system to die out over the generations? And what does one do for widows and orphans who are provided for through the system of polygamy?

5. Dealing with old rituals and myths in tribal churches.

Rituals play a central role in tribal cultures, and the Christians need both to deal with their prechristian rituals and create new Christian rituals How is this to be done? Several strategies have been attempted in the past that have not worked well. A new approach is suggested, namely "dealing with" rituals.

5.1 Reject Old Rituals and Import New ones. This has been one of the main approaches in the past. All old rituals were branded as pagan and unuseable. Consequently they were rejected and new ones imported from without. Given the literary bias of the missionaries, rituals were often rejected and few new ones introduced in their place. The same can be said for the old songs, myths, and customs of the people.

The result of this old approach was twofold. First, the new rituals were foreign and so the Gospel was branded as foreign. Many of the new rituals were imported from the church of the missionary, and were a combination of biblical and cultural customs. Little was done to differentiate between the two sources. The meaning of these rituals was often quite different when interpreted according to the symbolic meanings of the new culture. For example, in the west "white" means purity, in India it is barrenness and widowhood.
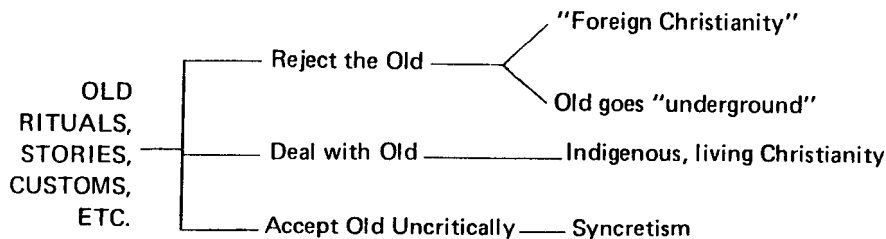
The second consequence of this approach was that old customs went "underground." They were practiced in secret by the people in the absence of the missionary and pastor.

The leadership pattern implicit in this approach was paternalistic and authoritarian. Consequently the people were not involved in the decisions. This did not encourage them to grow, to think or to take leadership for themselves.

5.2 Accept Old Rituals Uncritically. This was a later reaction. Some accepted the widespread adoption of non-Christian rituals and customs into the Church with little or no discrimination.

This acceptance often led to syncretism. A veneer of Christian names was given to old beliefs and customs, but the real content remained pagan. This in the end led to Christopaganism.

Here we have leadership by default. Little leadership is given or encouraged in the Church to deal with the critical issues. It is an approach of "laissez-faire."

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                                          /"Foreign Christianity"
                  ┌──── Reject the Old ──<
   OLD            │                       \Old goes "underground"
   RITUALS,       │
   STORIES,   ────┼──── Deal with Old ──────────Indigenous, living Christianity
   CUSTOMS,       │
   ETC.           └──── Accept Old Uncritically ── Syncretism
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5.3 Deal with the Old Critically. Both of the earlier approaches had weaknesses. We are finding it important to deal with the old customs and rituals critically under Biblical critique. There are several steps involved:

1) Gather information on the old customs and rituals. These should be thoroughly analyzed so that the old is understood. The missionary can lead the people in this collection.

2) Give Biblical teaching on the subject at hand. For example, if the Church is dealing with the question of non-Christian and Christian marriages, Biblical teaching on marriage should be given. Because of his or her training, the missionary is often in a position to contribute significantly here. This sets the basis on which customs will later be evaluated.

3) Critically evaluate the old customs. Each should be evaluated in the light of the Biblical teaching. The decisions will include:
   — acceptance of the old without change (e.g. folk songs).
   — rejection of the old because of its old religious meanings.
   — reinterpretation of the old customs with new Christian meanings. This may involve some modification of the old such as changes in words, etc.
   — substitution for the old. Some of the old customs may be rejected and others imported from outside. But these at least have been consciously accepted and incorporated into the culture and Church.
   — creation of new ritual elements. New songs, stories and ritual elements can be created within a culture in line with forms of symbolism understood within that culture.

4) After the various elements of old culture have been dealt with, new rituals can be created that are both fully indigenous and fully Christian. There is less threat of syncretism because the people have created a new ritual, song or story within their own cultural context.

5) Note on leadership. It is crucial in this process th. .ie missionary assist the people and their leaders in arriving at their own decisions on the matter of evaluating old customs rather than imposing such decisions upon them. It is impossible for an outsider even to fully understand a culture. More important, the process of evaluation is part of the process of growing in spiritual maturity. We want to teach people to think and evaluate their lives Biblically, not just to memorize what we give them. We must allow them the greatest privilege we allow ourselves, namely the right to make mistakes. It is more important that they learn to deal with scriptures than that they always arrive at the right answers.

6. **The Social Organization of Peasant Societies.**

Peasants societies differ from tribal societies in some significant ways and these affect the nature of evangelism and church planting among them. It must be remembered that the distinction between tribal and peasant societies is a continuum and that societies are found in all stages of transition between them.

6.1 **Strong Group Orientation:** Like tribal societies, peasant societies often have strong groups. Consequently many of the dynamics at work in tribal societies are also at work here, such as the need for a person to belong to a group in order to be someone, the value on sharing with others in the group, mutual responsibility for the group, and corporate decision making. Kinship ties remain the primary basis for social organization.

6.2 **Multiple groups:** Unlike tribal societies, peasant societies tend to be divided into more than one group. Often this is on the basis of ethnic differences. Sometimes it is on the basis of status or caste differences. This multigroup nature is what creates the distinctive structure of the village.

6.3 **Hierarchy:** Groups are ranked along a hierarchy of status and power. This may lead to a stress on hierarchy within the groups as well.

6.4 **Intergroup rivalry and hostility.** There are often rivalries between groups and the social organization consists of a structure whereby order between them is structured and maintained. Often witchcraft and witch hunts arise, particularly when there is a strong stress on group conformity and when there are no legitimate ways to express hostility.

6.5 **Literate/Oral societies.** Peasant villages often combine leaders who are literate, such as political leaders and religious priests, with com-

mon folk who are primarily oral in character. This leads to a distinction between "high religion" and "folk religion" and between elite leaders and commoners. Literarcy leads to a stress on rational processes and on formal organization and institutionalization.

6.6 **Communication.** In peasant societies communication between groups tends to be vertical with messages coming from the top down. Within groups it is both vertical and horizontal.
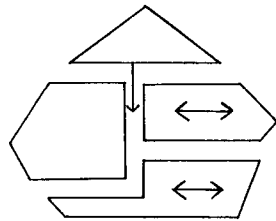
6.7 **Beginning of Specialization.** With the growth in size and complexity, specialization sets in. Some people begin to do specialized tasks. So we get the emergence of specialists such as priests, rulers, police, tailors, barbers, etc.

7. Methods for Evangelizing Peasant Societies:

Methods for evangelizing peasant societies must be adapted to their forms of social organization.

7.1 **Resident work in each group.** As in tribal societies, resident work which the missionary identifies with the people and builds trust relationships is crucial to effective work.

However, this must be done with each group. The church tends to grow within a group, often by mass movements and by multi-individual decision making processes. But when the growth reaches the boundaries of the group, it tends to stop. It does not automatically continue within other groups within the village. New beginnings must be made in each.

7.2 **Team evangelism.** Sending in a team who remain in a village for six months to a year until a church is started and some leaders appointed. This is followed up by continued visitation later.

7.3 **Utilize group dynamics.** People movements play an important part in evangelizing peasant societies. They operate through kinship ties and group loyalties. If people come in sizable numbers it is easier for them to stand in faith. They have a strong sense of community and if the community comes, then its fabric is not torn. People then continue to have a strong support community.

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7.4 **Oral methods.** These are particularly significant for the common people. The use of dramas, stories, proverbs, visual illustrations, music, art and rituals is very important since for oral people these are the methods they use to store and communicate information. More recently oral methods include the use of radio, tape cassettes, and television. Remember, it is not necessary to make people literate in order to evangelize them.

7.5 **Literate methods.** These are significant in reaching the leaders and the elite. Books, tracts, magazines, correspondence courses, formal schools and other literate forms of communication play an important role here.

7.6 **Multi-individual decisions.** Multi-individual decisions open the door for further teaching and follow-up. It is important that these movements not be stopped, but that we utilize them. With follow-up and teaching, the people themselves divide into those who wish to continue in the new faith, and those who are not willing to commit themselves to it. It is here that baptism can be administered.

7.7 **New beginnings in each group.** A church in one group may not be in a position to evangelize another group in the village due to the traditional rivalries and hostilities between the groups. An outsider may find it easier to start a church in the other groups.

8. Strengths in Evangelizing Peasant Societies:

8.1 **Sense of community.** If the people come in larger numbers, then they already have a sense of community, and a support group that can help them in times of persecution and difficulty.

8.2 **Stability over time.** Churches in village communities have low turn over because people are not highly mobile. They tend to stay for long periods of time.

8.4 **Leadership.** Leadership within groups tends to be in the hands of elders and wise leaders. If an indigenous form of leadership is introduced the churches can have good direction.

9. Problems in Evangelizing Peasant Societies:

Several difficult problems in planting churches in peasant societies.

9.1 **Group decisions.** As in the case of tribes, the missionary must be ready to deal with group decisions constructively.

9.2 **Polygamy,** ancestors and other practices associated with kinship groups.

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9.3 Unit and diversity of the church. Evangelism proceeds more rapidly when separate churches are planted in each group. But then what does one do with the unity of the church? How do we continue evangelism in different groups and not end up with churches that reinforce ethnic and social differences rather than leading to unity within the community?

Here Dr McGavran argues for developing churches in each homogeneous group. Others such as Padilla argue that this destroys the unity of the church.

9.4 Justice and Liberation. In peasant societies oppression of the lower groups by higher groups is common. This raises the question of the role of liberation and justice in the work of evangelism and the church. Can the church ignore oppression and poverty?

10. The Social Organization of Urban Societies.

One of the most dramatic changes the world has seen is the growth of cities. In one century the urban population has grown from less than 5% to more than 50%, and the flow of people to the city goes on at an increasing rate. How do we evangelize the cities? The Church has learned much about evangelizing tribal and peasant peoples, but little about urban evangelism.

What is the social organization of the urban setting? The city is a mixture of peasant and urban peoples. There are pockets of peasant type culture and society in which the dynamics of peasant villages are at work. But there are other areas where modern urban individualism has become the basis for the social organization.

10.1 **Individualism.** Urban settings stress individualism to the point that groups are only functional gatherings of individuals for personal purposes. Social organization reinforces this individualism. A strong emphasis is placed on self realization. Decision making is individual.

10.2 **Freedom.** The stress is on freedom. The result is fluid, short term contractual relationships.

10.3 **Mobility.** There is a high rate of social and geographic mobility.

10.4 **Heterogenity and relativism.** The city is characterized by cultural diversity. The result is often a sense of cultural relativism, and people living by their own different standards.

10.5 **There is a bureaucratic organization** of the society and formal policing of the norms. Geography and nationalism replace tribalism as the basis for organizing societies.

10.6 **Voluntary associations** replace kinship groups as the basic method for organizing activities.

10.7 **Networks of friendship** and associational relationships serve as important channels for communication; people tell friends who tell other friends, etc.

10.8 **Literate society.** A significant portion of the society is literate and these people serve as the core for the maintenance of city life.

10.9 **Mass media.** Media informs the public, and provides a basis of common knowledge that helps to integrate the society.

10.10 **Specialization.** Specialization is carried out to a high degree. A great many rationalized systems are developed to deal with various urban functions such as schools, churches, water, waste, electricity, transportation, police, food, markets, etc.

Specialization also leads to specialization of roles, and fragmentation of society into special interest groups.
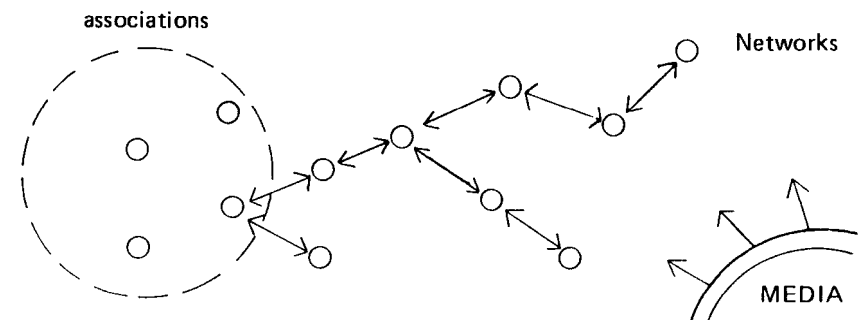
11. Factors that make Evangelism of Urban Societies Difficult:

11.1 The size of modern cities.

11.2 The mobility of the people.

11.3 The spread of individualism and the breakdown of a sense of community. With this come simplex relationships, that often lack depth, endurance and a feeling of personalness.

11.4 Specialization and fragmentation of vocations and personal functions.

11.5 Rise of class hierarchies and of subtle forms of segregation.

11.6 Ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism.

12. Methods for Evangelizing Urban Societies:

12.1 **Mass Media:** Media is good for: creating awareness and providing basis information, and generating interest.

12.2 **Campaigns:** Mass campaigns are good for: creating awareness and providing basic information, providing people a neutral place to examine the Gospel other than the church. They are more likely to go to a campaign than to church. Also good for helping people to make decisions. These serve like pilgrimages in which lasting changes can occur.

They are not good for: helping people to become incorporated into the church.

Campaigns must have follow-up in which people are invited to join in fellowship with a church that helps them grow. Failing this many drop back.

Campaigns may take many forms such as preaching campaigns, musicals, dramas, banquets, etc.

12.3 **Friendship Evangelism:** This makes use of networks of relationships in the city. They are good for: winning people to Christ, discipling them, and bringing them into fellowship of the church. This is the fundamental method for urban evangelism. It can be effectively combined with campaigns such as banquets, etc.

Some ways to develop friendship evangelism are: train a small group of soul winners. Train the rest of the church to refer friends and neighbours to those trained in evangelism. This requires systematic organization.

- Keep a record of visitors and systematically follow them up.

- Introduce visitors at your services and make them *feel at home*. Your church members need to be trained in hospitality evangelism.

- Have a time of sharing in your morning service so that people can share their lives and concerns.

- Follow up those who are missing. Do not use high pressure, but show them they are missed.

- Organize small fellowship and recreation groups in the homes of members. Remember most people like to explore Christianity in a neutral place where they do not feel under pressure or forced to respond. Keep it low key.

12.4 **Form associations:** develop groups that meet specific needs such as fellowships for doctors, lawyers, workers, homemakers, youth, etc. But be careful these do not divide the body.

12.5 **Develop a Wholistic or Integrated Ministry:**

- Minister to the whole range of human needs.

- Develop small support groups in the church but work to keep them from becoming cliques.

- Organize specialized ministries to jails, hospitals, the poor, drug addicts, summer children's programs, etc. This permits many of the church members to be actively involved in outreach.

12.6 **Develop Community Churches.**

- You must build a sense of community in the city. It is not there automatically. This must be developed.

- You may build different types of churches to meet the needs of different peoples, but work towards overall unity. Several congregations may utilize the same facilities.

12.7 **Reach Immigrants to the City.**

- Many Christians moving to the city are lost to the church. A system of referrals and follow-up helps keep them involved.

- New immigrants are more responsive to evangelism than old residents set in their ways. Contact new immigrants and serve their special needs.