

BACK *to the* drawing board

Eliminating barriers to ministry effectiveness



Have you experienced that sensation of growth, of getting too big for something that once fit perfectly? Perhaps a new addition to your family has caused you to go back to the blueprints, pondering whether you can afford an addition. Or maybe the car that served you well in one stage of your life just doesn't accommodate the places you now go, the people you now need to fit into it. Maybe your office or church staff has expanded a bit beyond the organizational chart that worked so well in the past, and you need to take it down to the bare bones and start over.

So you head back to the drawing board. You reconsider *why* what worked so well in the past just isn't quite sufficient anymore. It might be hampering your lifestyle, your ministry, your forward progress. Sometimes you can tweak it just a bit and keep moving. Other times, you need to start over and reconsider everything afresh, in light of new life demands and ministry realities.

This happens with churches too. The structure, the leadership style, the programs we relied on in the past need to be continually evaluated in light of our vision and our growth. That's what this issue is about: Recognizing those barriers to ministry effectiveness and recognizing what needs to change. Hear from other EFCA leaders what *they* were willing to tackle, in order to continue growing as healthy churches. Get out your blueprints and be willing to start over from scratch. ■

Illustrations by Tom Collicott



PILOT *error* or design flaw?

By George Klippenes

What to consider when your church doesn't take off

Whenever a plane crashes, the investigators ask, “Was it pilot error or was it design flaw?” But whenever a church crashes—or, more commonly, whenever a church doesn’t take off—we automatically assume it is the incompetence of the pastor-pilot.

There is no question that the pastor-pilot does play a major role in the growth potential of the church. But according to author Lyle Schaller in *From Geography to Affinity*, the vast majority of new churches in America are designed to be small. Our ministry design is a result of our ministry choices—whether intentional or unintentional. Consider these choices:

MISSIONAL CHOICE: SINGLE FOCUS OR BALANCED

Have you designed your church to have a balanced ministry of winning the lost, building the believers, equipping the workers and multiplying the leaders? According to the research of Sonlife’s Dan Spader, the vast majority of America’s churches have geared their ministry programming to the middle part of the Great Commission: building the believers.¹ Most churches ignore both the front end of the Great Commission (evangelism) and the back end (leadership development).

It is easy to check out the missional design of your church. Take a piece of paper, make four columns (winning, building, equipping, multiplying) and list all of your programs in one of those four columns. Do you have a balanced mission? What missional choices have you made? If you have a single focus rather than a balanced one, you are (perhaps unintentionally?) designed to be small.

MINISTRY CHOICE: 20 PERCENT OR 80 PERCENT

In the vast majority of churches, 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work and give 80 percent of the money. They even have a name for this: the Pareto Principle.²

Many churches have catchy slogans such as “All members are ministers.” But you can evaluate this by taking your membership list and asking what percentage of people are actually involved in a ministry, either inside or outside the church.

More importantly, church leaders need to ask, “Do we have an intentional disciple-making pathway that moves people from membership to maturity to ministry to mission? Do we have a ministry design to help people discover, develop and deploy their spiritual gifts?”

Overall, what design changes do you need to make to mobilize the other 80 percent of your members into ministry? Otherwise, your ministry design, however unintentional, is to remain small.

LEADERSHIP CHOICE: SOLO OR TEAM

How has your church designed the role of its leaders? Is the leadership expectation primarily that of a ministry performer or of a ministry equipper? Jesus ministered in a team of 12. Paul ministered in a variety of missionary teams. The reformers fought for the “priesthood of all believers.” Ephesians 4 teaches the importance of the leader’s equipping role.

But how many leadership roles in your church are designed for solo performers? Do you expect your pastor to do the hospital visitation, or do you expect him to train people with the gift of mercy to do so? Do you expect the youth pastor to do the youth ministry, or do you expect him to train lay volunteers?

Do you expect your small-group leaders to conduct Bible studies or to develop apprentices? Do you hold any of your ministry leaders responsible for developing ministry teams, or are you content for them just to do the ministry? These are ministry design choices.

CELL CHOICE: SINGLE OR MULTIPLE

The vast majority of churches in America have designed their church to be a single-cell church. This is why the average-size church is 87. This is the size of one, big, happy, extended family. How do you “design” a single-cell church?

You resist multiple worship services because then you wouldn’t “know everybody.” You resist dividing your small groups because fellowship is a higher value than outreach. You resist multiple options in your youth, women’s or men’s programming because you want to “keep everybody together.” Family values always trump missional values.

By making these cell choices, you seriously affect your church’s growth potential. Natural Church Development research with churches all over the world has discovered that continuous multiplication of small groups is a universal church-growth principle and the one they consider most important.³

Every year *Outreach* magazine reports the 100 largest and the 100 fastest-growing churches in America. In a recent survey, they reported that small groups are the engines driving a great deal of this growth.⁴ What design choices have you made for your church in this area?

FOCUS CHOICE: INWARD OR OUTWARD

This design problem is as old as the church, because it’s part of human nature to turn inward. As Rick Warren wrote in *The Purpose Driven Life*, “It’s not about you.”

Yet Jesus’ last words to His disciples were: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The geographical implications of the mission could not be clearer. Yet many years later in Acts 8, the church was still hunkered down in Jerusalem; it took persecution to propel it outward.

Check out the ministry design choices you have made in this area by taking out another sheet of paper. This time make three columns with the headings “Jerusalem,” “Judea-Samaria” and “Global.” Evaluate your programming, your budget and your church calendar by placing them in one of the three columns. What focus choices are you making?

Willow Creek Community Church builds its ministry on five purposes. Bill Hybels said he used to believe that a balanced church meant equal attention to each purpose. So Willow Creek divided the ministry pie into 20-percent slices, allocating equal budget, staffing and ministry programming to each.

After several years, however, church leaders discovered that evangelism—the very thing they had become known for—had greatly suffered. In order to maintain an outward focus, they had to make an unbalanced-priorities decision and give four of the areas 15-percent attention and devote 40 percent of their efforts and resources toward evangelism. That is the nature of this ministry design choice.

Every day we make ministry choices. Some are intentional and thoughtful; many are made simply because “we have always done it this way.” My question to you is: Are you designing your church to soar or to never get off the ground? ■

¹“Creating a Movement of Multiplication,” by Dan Spader, *www.sonlifeafrica.com* (under “resource”). ²Vifredo Pareto was an Italian economist who first codified this principle, in 1897. (“Wealth Happens,” by Mark Buchanan, *Harvard Business Review*, April 1, 2002.) ³Natural Church Development, by Christian A. Schwarz, *ChurchSmart Resources*, 1996, p. 32. ⁴“Mission Critical Trends for the 21st Century,” by Dr. John N. Vaughan, *Outreach magazine*, May-June 2004, p. 44.

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CRASHING

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

by *Chris Holck, senior pastor*
Faith EFC, Spirit Lake, Iowa
Average Sunday attendance: 350

"If it's not broken, don't fix it," they say. Well, what if it *is* broken?

In 2003, we were in the midst of church renewal, but the church bylaws and formal organizational structure were a barrier to efficient change. Of our church board, at least two-thirds of the 26 people were eager to move through a series of changes that would make the church more responsive to the needs of our community. The other third seemed to want to debate every move; we couldn't even put a visitor-parking sign in the ground without some resistance.



I thought the visitor-parking sign was a no-brainer, but we also had weightier issues to address. For example, we talked of starting a small-group ministry and of empowering me to lead my staff, but we got delayed by a board discussion on whether we should have Sunday-school teachers pay for their own palm branches on Palm Sunday.

Clearly, something was wrong with our system of "doing church," and unless we fixed it, the advancement of the gospel was being jeopardized.

At the time, our church was 53 years old and had carried with it the same organizational structure since the beginning. This structure had worked quite well for many years: 26 elected positions, 55 appointed positions, for a total of 81 spots to fill. When I arrived in 2002, however, we had only 92 active members. That was an obvious problem. And there were others.

The greatest challenge was that our deacons—charged with shepherding the flock and offering vision for the future—were handcuffed by the trustees, who controlled the finances and the property. Visionary ideas that required spending money or altering the property were inevitably challenged by a group that was more concerned about the

mess from moving a wall than they were about creating a coffee shop that would make our church more hospitable.

We began to clearly see that the old system was broken. As a result, several key leaders favored a rewrite of the bylaws—a necessary move in order to shrink the board from 26 to 9 and put financial and property responsibility in the hands of the vision group.

Still, we needed some outside help. The executive director of EFCA's Ministry Advancement department offered his expertise and his ear. At one point, he asked us to visualize driving in traffic and trying to reach our destination quickly, yet having to stop at numerous tollbooths and regularly sit in line. We found this to be a good analogy for our church: We were trying to implement changes yet were deterred by "structure" tollbooths that brought forward progress to a frustrating halt.

When asked to respond to the tollbooth analogy, one board member stated, "What I don't like is when they don't stop at *my* tollbooth."

Can you spell *tension*?

With outside help, our leaders courageously led us through a rewrite of our bylaws and a downsizing of our governing board. We tore down most of the tollbooths, and decisions are moving right along these days.

BREAKING 70

by *Jun Sabate, pastor*
Harvest Community Fellowship of Tracy, Calif.
Average Sunday attendance: 60-75

On our church's first anniversary, with 20 adults, we started to intentionally plant churches. Our church has 70 people now; we have planted one church here and are in the process of planting one in the Philippines and two more here. Our mission statement is "to be a healthy church that will plant healthy churches."

As we grow again after planting a daughter church, this is what I have learned about the Filipino church in the United States: 30, 70 and 100 are the growth barriers. At [an attendance level of] 30, a Filipino church is a family-oriented church. We are very close; we know who bought a television set. It's a nice feeling. But it's also a barrier,



through barriers

because we have a tendency to be complacent—not inviting people or changing the way we do things.

The barrier to breaking 70 is two-fold: finding a good facility and hiring a second full-time worker or associate pastor. After three years, Harvest Community Fellowship had reached the maximum number of people in our first building, so we moved to a bigger facility. Now, because we gave birth to a daughter church, we still haven't broken the 70 barrier, but we are growing in terms of relationships, maturity and ministry.



To break the 100 barrier in a Filipino church, you need to mobilize all your people to do ministry. Right now, we have only 80 percent of our people involved in the ministry.

Also, Filipino churches in America don't tend to reach 100 unless they are located

in a major city. Ours is not.

As we look to pass the 70 barrier, we have re-engineered our ministry and come up with a more detailed vision. Before, our vision was, "Let's grow and plant churches." Now we have come up with a target of 10 areas of our ministry where we need to grow.

The obstacle to claiming the future for God's glory is your past success. The danger lies in becoming complacent. So almost every year we evaluate our ministry, asking, "What are effective and not-effective ways of doing things?"

RESOLVING CONFLICT

by Jacqueline Arneson, Christian education director
Evangelical Free Church of Norman County, Ada, Minn.
Average Sunday attendance: 85

In our rural area, it's typical for people to move in and out. So we've not grown much in numbers over the years, but we have had a lot of new members. As a result, we've recognized the need to equip people to serve in their giftedness.

We planted this church in 1994, and our second pastor, Patrick McCarty, arrived in February 2003. He must have seen that, as a close-knit church plant, we had a lot of willing, loving souls who were all just pitching in and doing whatever it took. So he's been working hard to build leadership by helping us identify our strengths.

It's as if God is saying, "OK, tune your instruments; we're here in the orchestra and we need to make this sound sweet."

As a result, I have grown a lot in the area of leadership. I can see it in my husband too. God has put us in positions to really stretch us. When that stretching happens across the whole church, though, a lot of conflict can arise. And unresolved conflict can serve as a barrier to growth.



In a small church, you can't hide conflict or sweep it under the carpet. And because we are the only evangelical church in the county, if someone leaves, many notice; and it could be a negative message to the cause of Jesus Christ. We don't want to bring any negative attention to Christ or the EFCA.

Also, if we wear someone out and frustrate them due to unresolved feelings or lack of volunteer training, we will lose more and more willing servants. There isn't going to be a line of volunteers waiting in the wings. This motivates us to pursue peace and understanding rather than let things slide.

We really need each other to keep things going. We rely on each other to reach the goals of a big ministry for God.

HEALTHY BARRIER-BREAKING

by H. Henry Williams, senior pastor
Five Oaks Community Church, Woodbury, Minn.
Average Sunday attendance: 1,000

Many of aviation's early attempts to break the sound barrier ended tragically when a pilot was too loopy to recognize that his plane was

CRITICAL OVERLOAD

by an anonymous EFCA leader

breaking apart or losing control under tremendous speed. Similar dangers face the pastor and church that set out to break growth barriers. Sometimes the barrier breaks the church or the leader instead. Here is one of many lessons we are learning in the process of initiating the changes that break growth barriers:

Yes, lead pastors in barrier-breaking churches must be strategic and cast a bold vision, but strategy and vision should not trump relationship.

Of the 34 talent themes identified in the Gallup StrengthsFinder

assessment, eight are highly relational in nature. *None* of my five “signature themes” are relational! I do not struggle with implementing the changes needed for growth, but I am learning the hard way that my neglect of the emotional side of conceiving and implementing change needs to be addressed.

One of my mentors recently challenged me, “Henry, you have a definite way of making decisions. You consult with several people, you do research and then you decide. What you need to do is get those



who will be most affected by the change involved *earlier* in your decision-making process whenever possible.

“People who know you know when you’re asking for input after you’ve already made up your mind,” he added. “They feel devalued no matter how logical the decision is.”

As a result of his input, last month I literally stopped a conversation midstream that I was having about an important tactical change for the fall. I wanted to keep my mind open to input from some of the folks who would be affected most by the change.

My guess is that many churches that are breaking growth barriers are led by pastors with my relational maladies. I cringe now every time I think of my mantra in my yearly “state of the church” message.

After casting the vision I would ask, “Is this the church you are looking for? If not, maybe you need to find a church whose vision and process you can support, whether you are new to Five Oaks or a charter member. It will be good for you and good for the kingdom.”

OK, that makes sense in our membership class, but it simply grates on the long-term member who has served sacrificially for years and has deep relational roots in the church. It will neither win someone over nor convince people to find a church whose vision resonates well with them. Besides, what good is a church’s vision if relationships are not at the core?

Yes, when you are strategic and cast a bold vision, some people will leave. But occasionally, people just need time.

Valuing relational matters when we set strategy and cast a bold vision helps us break through seemingly impenetrable growth barriers without losing our bearings or falling apart.

In the early days of our church plant, we needed all the help we could get. When two young seminary grads approached me, dying to get out in the ministry world, it seemed like a match made in heaven.

The church grew slowly but steadily with some periodic exciting bursts. It was a place of grace, a safe place for sinners to struggle together to know Jesus. It was also becoming a place where people asked big questions of themselves, with some even considering a life of missions and service for the kingdom.

For the everyday visitor, the only visible challenges involved systems failures in the services and meetings that had to be held in hallways. For me, though, the challenges rolled around every week at staff meeting, by way of my two young staff members and their comments:

- » “Jimmy hasn’t been in small group for two weeks. I think we need to discipline him.”
- » “I can’t believe that person is not reading his Bible; is he even saved?”
- » “Your sermons have been weak on sin. You do not seem to have a passion for holiness.”

Sometimes their criticisms were accurate, and we needed to take action. With these guys, however, criticism was a lifestyle—the questioning of motives, their lifeblood. Each week, somebody in the church had done something they were not pleased with, the victim’s heart was often in question and they were convinced that certain ruin would occur if the actions were left unchecked.

The end came when one of these young men falsely accused a member of sin, refused to be corrected or swayed by me and the elders, began a campaign to put this person on trial, and was eventually fired.

All of this occurred at a time the church was growing both in number and influence in the community for Christ. That growth died immediately. But worse, the atmosphere deteriorated into a tangled mess of blame and sin speculation. Like cancer, a critical spirit spread over the body. The integrity of elders was in question as people held secret meetings and small groups turned into gripe sessions.

In a matter of two months, our church stopped outreach completely and focused on internal war. There were no new families for five months and many people left, including ministry leaders. Our atmosphere of grace became a poisoned air of judgment.

I learned the hard way how crucial it is that church leaders know how to approach others in grace and mercy. As a result, we have begun to teach our people out of *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande. Through this study, we are all learning the appropriate time to confront and the importance of giving grace to one another that results in peace. The air in the church is now clearing, and we are remembering redemption. In all reality, we are starting over and launching the church anew. People are doing outreach again, and we have even had some visitors, but more than that, our overload of criticism is changing to an overabundance of confession. ■

DIVERSITY *talk*

Exploring how to reflect the diversity of our communities

Some barriers to effective ministry are obvious, “this-has-to-change” realizations. Many more are subtle—like ivy that has grown up and around a historic building and at first glance appears healthy, green, alive. But as time goes on, ivy can eventually break into that building, bringing a slow ruin.

A church that no longer reflects its surrounding community is one such barrier to healthy, effective ministry. Pastors across the EFCA want to reflect the diversity of their communities and root out the creeping strangleholds of racism. But knowing where to start is often the greatest challenge.

In February, pastors in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn., gathered to talk about their churches’ individual efforts and encourage each other in the process. Facilitating the discussion were Dante Upshaw, EFCA director of African-American Ministries, and Glen Kehrein, executive director of Circle Urban Ministries in Chicago.

Both Dante and Glen serve on the EFCA’s Biblical Diversity Task Force. This team of key local pastors, district and national leaders has been meeting since summer 2005, under the direction of EFCA President Bill Hamel. They are working toward transforming EFCA systems and equipping EFCA leaders to take a biblical stand for justice, diversity and racial reconciliation—all so that our churches can better reach “all people.”

The Twin Cities’ pastors were a pilot group for what we hope to see form in other districts across the EFCA—sharing stories and helping develop tools that will move the EFCA forward toward greater diversity.

Participants at the February gathering, pictured above, were: *[front row]* Rick Ensrud, senior pastor, Brooklyn Park (Minn.) EFC; Prince Lee, senior pastor, Riverside EFC (Minneapolis); Larry Willman, senior pastor, Payne Ave EFC (St. Paul); Joel Sutton, senior pastor, First EFC (Minneapolis); *[back row]* David Myles, community outreach pastor, Brooklyn Park EFC; Glen Kehrein; Michael Rice, senior pastor, CrossCultural EFC (St. Paul); Bill Culbertson, senior pastor, Oxboro EFC (Bloomington); Steve Goold, senior pastor, Crystal EFC (New Hope); Dante Upshaw.

Listen in to some of their conversation. . . .



WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM?

GLEN KEHREIN: This discussion is part of a very long journey for the Evangelical Free Church. It's of major significance that a predominantly white organization writes into its mission statement the goal "to multiply healthy churches among all people." I have been part of the EFCA for a long time, but until recently, I have not seen the kind of intentionality regarding diversity that many of us had hoped for. A new day has dawned.

Our country is facing a significant demographic shift. Distinct people groups are no longer moving into the cities as immigrant groups once did. And people of color who *had* moved into the cities are moving out. We need to address the change that's occurring in our neighborhoods and assist pastors and church leaders in that process. Whether or not we as a denomination "multiply healthy churches among all people" will, in large part, depend on what we do with this demographic change.

When Crystal EFC was formed, for example, it was in the outer-ring suburbs of Minneapolis. Now, the suburbs have expanded far beyond. So their choice is: *Do we address the issue of our changing community, or do we move and build a \$50-million building somewhere way out?* All of you guys face that same issue. More churches are seeing the cutting-and-running as morally wrong and not even practical. And so we're talking about it.

WHAT ARE WE FACING?

RICK ENSRUD: In two of the schools near us, 60-70 percent of the students are people of color. Ever since we made a public commitment to be a multi-ethnic, multicultural church—and part of that was bringing David Myles to our staff—God seems to be bringing more leaders of color: Nigerian, Liberian, Hmong, African-American.

DAVID MYLES: One barrier in our church is that some people want change without pain. Some of the people who start this journey [toward diversity] are just not going to finish it. They're going to say, "I didn't really sign up for this," which is one of the barriers: We have a Christian culture that approves and licenses a "racialized" society.

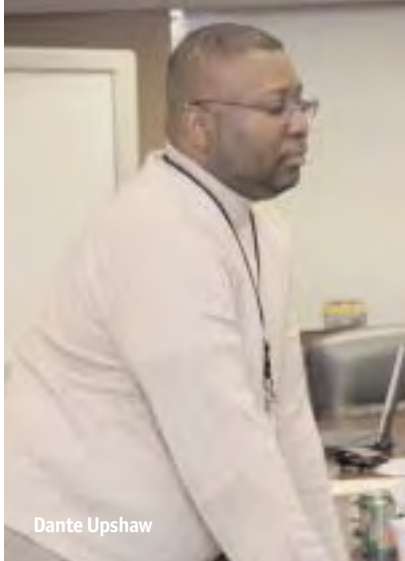
RICK: Yes, there's still a lack of understanding of institutional racism by the Anglos in our church. So change has to start with leadership. Two years ago, I shared with our elders and staff where I stood on this issue, and I asked, "Is this vision something you are committed to? If not, maybe we need to make changes in the senior pastor's role." They all agreed, and so did the majority of our staff. We had a little cleansing of our staff, which helped, actually, and then we became overt about pursuing diversity. I think that's what has attracted some of these different ethnic leaders to our church.



Glen Kehrein and David Myles



Rick Ensrud and Prince Lee



Dante Upshaw

MICHAEL RICE: We're planting our church to reflect the community in which it sits. For example, the core team deliberately called me and a Hmong pastor to share leadership. People are being drawn to our church because of our commitment to being an intercultural church. Now, there's an advantage and a disadvantage to that. People who are being drawn to the church are typically Anglo folks who want to do what we're doing. And that's great. But we're not growing in diversity as quickly as I would like to see.

BILL CULBERTSON: In our church, the economic and cultural diversity is still transient. You get people who seem to be core leaders, and then they move to another part of the country. So, all of a sudden, your diverse leadership is gone. We just have to tell ourselves that it's OK to do transitional ministry.

WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

DAVID: Speaking to my white brothers: Whatever you try in this area, you might have a little push-back, because some African Americans don't want to be just a



sermon illustration for someone who says, "Our church is now doing multiethnic ministry." They're wondering, *Are you really here because you care about me, or am I just another notch in your evangelical belt?*

RICK: Maybe there are some churches in our communities that aren't EFCA but are doing

ministry like this, and we could ask their key leaders to talk with us about what they've learned. One of the weaknesses I find is just a lack of models. Where can I look at churches that are dealing with such ethnic diversity as we have and can help us determine what we need to do?

GLEN: Perhaps the EFCA could facilitate something like that: identify best practices in these different models of church cultures: bi-cultural, multicultural, suburban changing community, old inner-city. The question is: How do you help churches embrace their community?

JOEL SUTTON: We're thinking through the whole staffing piece, so that as we add staff, we are finding staff from different ethnic, racial groups. What's the avenue for finding leadership?

DAVID: You're not finding leadership because you're looking in the wrong networks. The network you know and operate in is Charles Swindoll, Andy Stanley, etc. There are other outlets out there to find leaders from other backgrounds, but most of the time we just don't know what they are.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

GLEN: The stakes are large. And this is a struggle, because whenever we enter the territory formerly held by the enemy, that's what we can expect. The issue of race has been his domain for a very, very long time.

STEVE GOOLD: The power force behind any change is a driving conviction to pursue it, whatever the price. Within the core of your being, you know and understand, *This is right*. What many of us are facing in our churches is a microcosm of what must happen within the Evangelical Free Church of America. Or we will realize our own demise, and that demise could be either a sinking downward or the state of never attaining what God wants us to be. ■

Biblical Diversity Task Force

In August 2005, the EFCA re-activated its Biblical Diversity Task Force, aimed at addressing diversity across the denomination through three channels:

- institutional—to address institutional aspects of racism and homogeneity (such as personnel policies and hiring)
- theological—to articulate a biblical apologetic for diversity and reconciliation
- deliverable—to create tools that will assist our churches in living out biblical principles of unity across racial lines

The Biblical Diversity Task Force is developing tools to help you

strengthen your outreach "among all people." But first we want to know what you think. So, pastors, watch your e-mail for an important survey. If your e-mail address has recently changed, please contact us (along@efca.org) from your new address, type "include me in the survey" in the subject line, and include your name and church in the body of the message.

Also, register now for a Thursday-morning seminar at the Leadership Conference, where Glen, Dante and a panel of EFCA leaders will lead a discussion on "Facing Into the Reality of Changing Communities" (registration code THAM12). For conference information and to register, visit Bthetree.org.