

Title:**Networks to the Nations: Christian Communities, Relational Networks and Mission.**

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Abstract:

Christian communities typically affirm their need to participate in God's mission both locally and internationally. This is particularly true of evangelical churches which are driven by their commitment to participation in the *missio Dei* and the spread of the gospel to all nations (Ott, 2019). Yet a recent survey of evangelical churches in Australia has revealed significant differences in mission involvement between churches. Though related to the size and/or wealth of the church, these factors alone do not explain the diversity. Follow up interviews with leaders and members of key churches has identified a range of potential causes, yet one that has significant explanatory power is relational networks. This paper will report on these findings and explore the influence of relational networks and social capital on a Christian community's missional engagement (Dunaetz, 2017; Putnam, 2000). It is argued that churches with rich relational networks of missionary workers and organisations that extend beyond their local community are more fully engaged in missional activities both locally and overseas. In this way the witnessing purpose of the church is aided by these unifying connections (Van Engen, 1991). This paper concludes that Christian communities seeking to participate effectively in missional activities benefit greatly from rich, reciprocal relational networks. This requires them to embrace their limitations and accept their need for deep partnerships with cross-cultural workers and other missional entities.

Study Group:

Christian Communities and Mission