



# URBAN CURRENT

## Manila moment

**J**ohnny spent his days on gritty streets dodging jeepneys, suffering from the constant diet of diesel fumes. He sold cigarettes, used drugs, and sniffed glue. Scrabbling for survival, he likely never gave thought to being one of 25 million people in metro Manila, probably never contemplated that he was part of the 70 percent of the population under age 25 ... didn't get up in the morning marveling that in a rapidly urbanizing world, Asia was urbanizing even faster ... may not have known nine of the top ten largest urban areas in the world are Asian.

Massive metropolis! Yet the Gospel came to Johnny. Johnny was saved. Johnny became one of the first students to enroll in the new Baptist Bible College Asia.

It was not some light bulb moment for Greg Lyons. It just seemed obvious. Manila should be the target of major evangelism and church planting efforts. If the first century is a model, namely Paul leveraging the amplification and distribution power of Roman cities to evangelize the world, it seemed reasonable to Greg to target the city where he grew up.

Greg recalls a conversation with 18 fourth-year Bible college students. Over half of them were from Manila. Seventeen said they were leaving the city.

Greg says, "The investment of missions for decades in Metro Manila built a launching pad for cross-cultural church planting in the 21st century. Several factors are currently in play that point to this movement."

He cites five facts:

1. The Gospel has taken root in the Philippines. Mission efforts have been present in Southeast Asia since the time of Judson, but Christian population in the Philippines far outpaces other nations in the region.
2. Filipino culture values assimilation in a host country. Filipinos are found in over 160 nations and have a reputation of fitting into

- the host culture.
3. Linguistically, Filipinos have a high aptitude to learn new languages. Reports of Filipinos living in a foreign country for six months and being conversant and at times fluent in the host language are commonplace.
4. The spiritual fervor of Filipino Christians stands out and a new wave of Filipino missionaries is already present throughout the Southeast Asian nations.
5. The establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economic movement is paving the way for borderless travel for Filipinos to serve in otherwise closed or restricted nations.

The above points to Metro Manila emerging as a significant launching pad for evangelism and church planting, Greg argues. Resourcing ministries there will result in a church planting effort that could sweep through Southeast Asia all the way to Jerusalem.

As a missionary kid, Greg's Manila roots run deep. He arrived when he was five and completed primary and secondary school. Dad and Mom Lyons are 80 and 79 years old, respectively, continuing to serve in Manila. Greg was approved by Baptist Bible Fellowship International in 1985 returning to Manila by 1987 with an urban vision.

Greg's experience in Manila taught him the difficulties of buying property, building buildings, buying buildings, etc. He created the Non-facility Dependent urban church planting strategy (NFD). He believed unburdening the church planter of the traditional idea of building or buying a meeting place would free up the vision and resources, greatly enhancing the new church's survival and growth trajectory.

"At the beginning, we just didn't have

potential church planters," Greg says. "A few years ago, the Rawlings Foundation invested in a camp ministry which is wildly successful in reaching thousands of urban youth. Because we had launched Baptist Bible College Asia, we are able to channel camp converts to the college. Presently, 90 percent of the BBKA students are camp converts. This combination of evangelism, discipling, and ministry training is producing a flow of church planters."

"My vision is 100 churches planted by 2020," Greg explains. "Of the 24 churches launched so far, the mother church is 20 years old. The youngest was launched last May. Twenty-one are in Manila, two are in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. One is in Jhelum, Pakistan. Four new congregations are in incubation. Two of those are in Pakistan."

"Nine of the 24 are at a place where they are self-supporting and able to reproduce." Greg says, "It looks like six years is a reasonable expectation to achieve this. Due to our intentional targeting of youth, it's going to take five to ten years for an 18-year-old to reach some level of economic stability and productivity. This plays to the financial stability of the church."

Johnny struggled in Bible college surviving pneumonia and other health issues resulting from his life before Christ. Graduating, he immersed himself in training driven by a vision to plant a church in the inner-city streets of Manila. Incubating his new work through strategic evangelism, discipleship, and a small group network, Pastor Johnny Royo launched with several hundred in their first service. The congregation is thriving spiritually while struggling financially due to the economic straits of many of its members. Yet, they support missionaries and have sent out a church planting team!

by Charles Lyons, Pastor  
Armitage Baptist Church,  
Chicago, Illinois  
charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org



For more information on NFD Urban Church Planting Strategy scan this code or go to [vimeo.com/64303454](https://vimeo.com/64303454)