



Center for United States Missions

## Mission Moments



March 1, 2015

# Neighboring: Three Reasons for Defining an Effective Ministry Area – Part 2

By Gary L Roberts



God, people, and place are inseparably bound to one another in a relational way.

Ask yourself this question, “Have I ever experienced God separate from people and/or place?”

Like you, I have experienced God many times and in many ways (after all, he is ever-present), but I cannot separate my memory of these experiences from the places I was in and the people I was with. God, people, and place go together. This is why it is useful for us to define a geographical place for ministry. Let’s call this place our Effective Ministry Area (EMA) and take a look at some practical reasons for defining it.

### **Neighbors’ Unsurpassable Worth**

Establishing an EMA recognizes that each person in our neighborhood is of unsurpassable worth to God (and therefore to us) and worthy of our time and attention. As God’s image bearers, every person has something to contribute to their

neighborhood's well being. If we ignore any voice or group of voices, our opportunity for community wellness is diminished.

### **Shared Community Experience**

Establishing an EMA provides opportunity to make relationships with neighbors with whom we share common community experience. Together, our neighbors and we share the same community problems and are equally a part of the solution.

I like to write at a coffee shop that is one block from my condo. This past summer the city of Minneapolis did some major roadwork that significantly inconvenienced several thousand neighbors who live in the high-rises in my neighborhood. Mentioning the roadwork at 12th and LaSalle began many of the conversations that I had with neighbors in this coffee shop. I had almost immediate rapport with these

neighbors. Why? Because we share the same space and the same issues inherent in it. People who did not live in our neighborhood could care less. The roadwork affected them very little.

*“Establishing an EMA provides opportunity to make relationships with neighbors with whom we share common community experience.”*

### **Guards Against Ministry Prejudice**

Establishing an EMA that commits us to the well-being of every person who lives within its boundaries helps church leaders not to pre-select those to whom we will listen and minister. It combats the tendency to not listen to people and groups we in some way find offensive or with whom we just plain differ. Yes, this happens. I have worked with church leaders who do not seek out certain groups of people because of bias and prejudice. Committing to every person within our EMA helps avoid this.

For example, a church I worked with in the Twin Cities to establish its EMA located one of its borders effectively excluding an under-resourced apartment complex with many social problems and in need of development. When I challenged them on their reason for excluding that area, they recognized it was a historical problem for the church. It seems that no one in the congregation has ever wanted to go there. To the church's leadership team's credit, they started the process of networking with the city government, neighborhood associations, other churches and community groups, municipal agencies, and residents to transform that part of their neighborhood.

Established churches have a difficult time reevaluating their EMA. They are often stuck

in “the way it has always been.” I cherish and support those churches that want to try. Church planters, however, have a blank canvas. I encourage you to establish your EMA first thing. If you need help I am at your service.

## **Our Progress Thus Far**

Part one of this neighboring series discussed the importance of living in our church’s neighborhood. This post, part two, has focused on the reasons to define your neighborhood geographically. Logically, the next question is how we go about defining our EMA. What criteria and tools do we use? My next post will answer these questions - the “how-to” is coming up.



Gary Roberts is an educator, trainer and coach in community listening. His primary mission is to help churches listen to their communities using missional principles and practices. Gary has served the Church as pastor, nonprofit executive director, seminary professor, and consultant. He is certified by the Christian Community Development Association as a practitioner and trainer of trainers in Christian Community Development. He is also a Community Advancement Coach and board member of Communities First Association, working ecumenically toward neighborhood transformation using the principles of Asset-Based Community Development. Gary facilitates neighborhood listening workshops for churches and other neighborhood groups, and provides coaching to pastors and lay leaders.

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## **Moment Extras**

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### **Questions and Comments for Reflection**

1. What is your theology of “place.” What biblical examples can you recall that shows the inseparability of God, people, and place.
2. I make the claim that every neighbor has something to contribute to your Neighborhood’s wellbeing. What outcomes can you imagine for

your neighborhood's wellness if those contributions were discovered and implemented.

3. This one is hard. Do some prayerful soul searching. Are there people and/or areas in your neighborhood that you or your church avoids because of bias or prejudice? If there are, again prayerfully, contemplate three next steps to include these people and areas in your ministry.

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## Useful Links

Update on [missionalmind.org](http://missionalmind.org)

Since the first of the year I have been in a rebranding process, transitioning from [missionalmind.org](http://missionalmind.org) to [globerts.com](http://globerts.com). My contact info below reflects this change.

Though the web address and look of the site have changed, my mission remains the same: *To educate, train, and coach churches and their lay and professional leadership in community listening skills, equipping them to live in relationship with their communities.* In other words, I help churches listen. The new site simply provides a more functional platform to accomplish my mission.

By the time this blog is published in Mission Moments, [globerts.com](http://globerts.com) should be live. If not, please go to the site and provide your email address and I will send you a notification as soon as it opens. Thanks to all of you who have already visited and requested notification. I know you will find information that will add value to your neighborhood ministry. Don't worry - I hate spam as much as you! Your email address will never be shared.

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The logo for Mission Mind features the words "Mission Mind" in a blue, sans-serif font. The letter "i" in "Mission" is replaced by a circular icon containing a crosshair or target symbol.

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## News From The Center

**C4USM Connections** - C4USM Connections is our e-newsletter sent out periodically. It is designed to keep you informed about the training, research, and resources offered by the Center for U.S. Missions. [Click here to subscribe.](#)

Please pray for these training events in the upcoming months.

**March 4**

Six Pack Conference – Hot Springs, Arkansas

**March 7-8**

Church Planting Introduction – Regional Mission Convocations, Kansas District

**March 13-14**

Churches Planting Churches – Living Word Lutheran Church, Seward Nebraska, Nebraska District

**March 17**

Church Planters Leadership Forum – Missouri District

**March 20-21**

Churches Planting Churches – Christ Victorious Lutheran Church, Chaska, Minnesota – Minnesota South District

**April 11-12**

Church Planting Introduction – Regional Mission Convocations, Kansas District

**April 13**

Planting the Missional Church Cohort Launches – Registration Open until **April 1**

**April 17-18**

Churches Planting Churches – Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, West Des Moines, Iowa - Iowa District West

**April 27-30**

Exponential Church Planters Conference – Tampa, Florida

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