

Understanding Pentecostalism's global impact

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Donald Miller has observed Pentecostal and charismatic services around the globe. In May 2011, he visited indigenous Pentecostal churches in Quito, Ecuador, where he captured footage of prayer, worship and dance.

Pentecostalism — a religious movement that began in a warehouse on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906 — has emerged as a fast-growing minority religion in the developing world, gaining popularity in the Southern hemisphere and becoming a competitor to traditional denominations.

Led by USC Dornsife's Donald Miller, scholars worldwide are investigating the religion that has captured the attention of citizens throughout the world under the Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative (PCRI). Now in their second year of research, they have reported preliminary findings that provide insight to the movement's

growth and its impact on civil society and politics. PCRI researchers met for the first time this summer in Quito, Ecuador, to share preliminary findings and forge collaborations.

“Pentecostalism increasingly is not an other-worldly sectarian religion, but it’s starting to have genuine political impact in some countries,” said Miller, Leonard K. Firestone Professor of Religion and executive director of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC) in USC Dornsife.

CRCC staff have been responsible for overseeing all aspects of the initiative. From distributing the request for proposals internationally, reading approximately 500 letters of intent and overseeing the evaluation by expert judges of 100 full proposals. Staff also developed subcontracts with 21 institutions around the world and planned the conference in Quito.

“In some ways the fun has only begun,” Miller said. “We will be working with grantees to assist them in disseminating their findings beyond the usual outlets of journal articles and university press books.”

PCRI researchers are helping decipher the movement’s attraction to followers and providing a deeper look at the religion.

“Their worship is extremely vibrant,” Miller said. “One reason these churches are growing is because they are able to integrate mind and body in their religious experiences, and they’re being incredibly creative in responding to the needs of their people.”

Several elements employed by congregations may add to the religion’s appeal, findings revealed. The establishment of social programs meant to alleviate poverty, provide economic development and education and medical care in surrounding communities are potential reasons for the

movement's draw.

Miller hatched the idea to create a grant allowing for scholarly research in 23 countries after his successful research on Pentecostalism with Tetsunao Yamamori of Food for the Hungry, an international aid organization. That effort resulted in a book Miller co-authored with Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (University of California Press, 2007).

Provided by University of Southern California

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