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Journal

The Alignment of the
Church and Agency

Missionary Mobilization Journal

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Contents

editorial

Bridesmaid for the Church

David J. Wilson
Associate Editor

If the Church is the bride of Christ... then what should be the posture of a missionary sending agency?

Throughout Scripture, the collective nature of God's design for His people is evident. The gathering of saints for a common purpose has taken many different manifestations over the millennia, but the intimate nature of a Bride being prepared for her Groom is quite unique in the New Testament.

This "Bride of Christ" (Church) is an assembly where people are saved, disciples are discipled, baptisms are publicly professing faith in Christ, communion is practiced, Scripture is taught, and Elders govern the work of the Gospel. It is also the vehicle by which the Great Commission is to be accomplished.

There are many para-church organizations which are necessary to support the work of the Church such as seminaries, training organizations, missionary agencies, etc. Our faith often requires additional areas of expertise to equip believers for ministry. And through boundless enthusiasm, these groups can easily overstep their responsibilities by usurping the authority that was given to the Church by Christ. This is why it's important for these entities to acknowledge the Church as the Bride and embrace their own role as a faithful bridesmaid.

A bridesmaid offers assistance to the bride and keeps her on mission for the upcoming wedding. They take care of some of the more mundane details which frees the bride to focus on the most important parts of the wedding. Bridesmaids can help make decisions, but there are clear roles established to avoid confusion. The wedding is all about the Bride and the Groom uniting, so a good bridesmaid will serve strategically behind the scenes to make the Bride shine with radiance and glory for her Groom.

The articles in this edition of the *Missionary Mobilization Journal* come from authors who have a high view of the role of the Church in the Great Commission. If you work for an agency, here are some questions for you to ponder as you read these perspectives:

How can we as agency mobilizers and leaders remind our churches about their role as the Bride of Christ?

How can we fulfill our roles as bridesmaids to support the Bride in her mission?

Dave

David J. Wilson (DMin.)
Associate Editor

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Churches vs. Agencies: What Posture Will You Take?

Denny Spitters

There are many distractions and means that have taken us away from Jesus' Great Commission mandate. In *Gospel Meditations for Missions*, J.D. Crowley says this regarding the Great Commission: "It would be disastrous if we messed up our marching orders from Jesus. But how could we go wrong when the orders are so simple?"[1] One of the ways we mess up is in the sphere of church/agency relationships. Trust is imperative in any good relationship or partnership, and it is not simple to get there. Why is it often missing between churches and sending agencies?

In August of 1973, Dr. Ralph Winter presented the concept of modalities (the structure of the ecclesiastical New Testament Church) and sodalities (the structure of missionary bands or societies) which form God's two "redemptive structures" as present in every human society throughout history. His thesis directly implied that, "We must accept both structures, represented in the Christian church today by the local church and the mission society, as legitimate and necessary, and as part of 'God's People, the Church.'"[2]

Dr. Winter further articulated, "This article has been in no sense an attempt to decry or criticize the organized church. It is our attempt here to help church leaders and others to understand the legitimacy of both structures, and the necessity for both structures *not only to exist but to work together harmoniously for the fulfillment of the Great Commission and for the fulfillment of all that God desires for our own time.*"[3] (italics added).

No matter what your beliefs and convictions are about the validity of modalities and sodalities, Dr. Winter makes a key point regarding working together in the task of the Great Commission: *Posture is so important!* Our demeanor, bearing, and the attitude that we have toward one another—whether we are a modality (churches) or a sodality (missions agencies/organizations)—is

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[1] Chris Anderson, J.D. Crowley, et al. *Gospel Meditations for Missions* (Churchworksmedia, 2012), day 18.

[2] Ralph D. Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission,"*Missiology: An International Review* 2, no. 1 (January 1974): 121-139, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F009182967400200109.

[3] Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," 121-139.

often the intersection where we mess up! Allow me to fully disclose that I work with a team of people at a missions sending agency (Pioneers), whose main function is bridging what can be a significant divide.

How is this evident with agencies? I have sometimes heard expressions of aversion from the lips of "Missions Inc." personnel toward local churches who "just don't get it." Because the church is hesitant, slow, or unresponsive, they have decided to advance in ministry without the partnership of local churches. They see the local church as an impediment to their processes and timing. I have observed communication as just "give us your people, give us your money, and get out of the way," or in some cases telling their candidates to avoid the local church altogether in the sending equation. This can be very dangerous ground and conveys independence.

We can easily create an undercurrent where our posture exhibits an "us vs. them" – or "they serve us" mentality. When agencies carry this disposition they intentionally (even *unintentionally*) write local churches out of God's mission, and forget local churches are also recipients of the Great Commission. This is a trust buster for Gospel advancement! If missions is reduced to individuals sent by an agency and local churches "are just along for the ride," we will never achieve the understanding and partnership necessary for the task. Churches will lose ownership and gradually abdicate their role – or go it alone.

> **If missions is reduced to individuals sent by an agency and local churches "are just along for the ride," we will never achieve the understanding and partnership necessary for the task.**

For the modalities (churches) side of the equation, I have seen postures and attitudes toward agencies tinged with an "exclusive ownership rights" expression. Allow me to also disclose that I am also a churchman at heart, having served many years in multiple church staff roles. However, I have heard it begrudgingly stated (actually said it myself a few times!), "the Great Commission is the exclusive mandate of the local church;" or, that missions organizations are no more than "illegitimate squatters in the *missio Dei (mission of God);"* or, that missions organizations should be disbanded and taken back by the church!

Even when unexpressed, our postures and disposition toward each other are a central threat to the harmony Dr. Winter advocated. It affects the Church on both a local and global scale. So what healthy paradigm should we embrace together in order to "make disciples of all nations" with mutual trust and respect? How can we find the unity and harmony needed and avoid duplication of efforts?

Steve Beirn in *Well Sent* says,

> The church is to be the sender of missionaries, and the agency is to be the facilitator. The church has most (but not all) of the resources, and the agency has most (but not all) of the

expertise. It makes sense to bring these parties together for productive ministry. It is important to know that 'going it alone' often results in a duplication of efforts and a lack of expertise. When attempting to bring the church and the agency together, it is important to understand their intended roles. An inadequate view of the church's place in missions will diminish its sense of ownership and will create an inaccurate partnership with the agency.[4]

I contend that to view and posture ourselves as separated, independent, or competing with each other over who is "the real church" is disastrous! What can we do to understand our roles better?

Agencies need to be aware that churches who attempt to function without us are often influenced by what they see as agency processes that are bulky, burdensome, or devoid of inclusion. Agencies must wake up to the reality of more decentralized and flexible structures that welcome churches who seek greater ownership and engagement (Praise God!) in the sending process. They must communicate the high value of the local church which includes good posture AND a true appreciation for how important churches are as partners in the sending process.

> Churches need to embrace the legitimacy of agencies as *worthy partners who are also part of the church.*

Churches need to embrace the legitimacy of agencies as *worthy partners who are also part of the church*. Most often, they are an extended arm of the church that provides avenues and networks for churches to partner together in gospel advancement beyond themselves. Isn't it interesting that not only denominational mission agencies, but many non-denominational ones were started out of churches with a passion for missions beyond their context - and they even have the pedigree to prove it! Please note Steve Beirn's comment above about "going it alone." My experience reveals that most churches going down this path duplicate efforts and reinvent wheels, as the resources and lives of those they sent on their own are dashed on the rocks of "what they didn't know."

Healthy partnership between churches (modalities) and agencies (sodalities) is paramount for the advancement of Great Commission obedience in our time. We need each other more than ever! When more churches and agencies respect each other's intended roles, and grow in collaboration, partnership, and interdependency, we will reflect the oneness that Jesus prayed for in John 17 which is so needed within the mandate: Go and make disciples of all nations!

So, with all that's at stake, what posture will you take? ✳

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[4] Steve Beirn and George W. Murray, *Well Sent: Reimagining the Church's Missionary-Sending Process* (Fort Washington: CLC Publications, 2015), 109.

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An Emerging Strategy of Missiology in the Local Church:
The Shift from Sending to With-ing

Randy Jumper

At a recent missions gathering, two conversations left me perplexed. In the first conversation, a group of pastors shared their increasing frustration with missionaries who were less and less relevant to their missions strategy. They struggled to find missionaries who "added value" to their church. In the second conversation, a group of missionaries shared their increasing frustration with pastors who are unable to understand their work. They struggled to find churches willing to support their activities. The pastors felt missionaries were ambivalent to the church's missions strategy, and the missionaries felt the American church no longer cared for the lost around the world. My frustration was that good people, at the same event, couldn't seem to find each other.

These interactions illustrate an emerging missiological shift in churches. In this shift, churches have moved from sending missionaries as representatives to viewing missionaries as extensions of the church's ministry. The church views itself as a "with-ing" partner rather than a sending partner. Below, I explain this missiological shift, discuss two developmental factors, and finally delineate opportunities and implications for sending organizations, missionaries, and church leaders.

At the outset, I offer the following qualifiers. First, my experience is with the denominational missions sending organization called, Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM). Secondly, I am a Missions Pastor of a 107-year-old church with multiple campuses. These campuses vary in size and are in both urban and rural contexts. While I feel my observations have greater implications than my native denomination, they are especially true of Assemblies of God churches and AGWM missions.

The Shift from Sending to With-ing

Historically, Assemblies of God church leaders depended upon denominational initiatives to provide missionary missiology and organization. The impetus for missiological development was the organization itself. After all, one of the contributing factors to the organization of the Assemblies of God

was the desire for collaborative missionary work.[1] AGWM (or whatever moniker it was known by at that time) vetted, assigned, and trained missionaries. These missionaries traveled from church to church to raise prayer and financial support. Missionary "heroes" were then sent out by the church to the world.[2] Through this process, AGWM inculcated missiological strategies into church leaders whether programmatically or fortuitously. As a result, missiological strategy was fairly uniform across churches.

Over the last few decades, dependency upon denominational authorities for missiological development has decreased. Denominational loyalty in general has waned. External missiologists and missions organizations have grown in influence. Now, the necessity of a centralized sending agency no longer exists. These factors, and more discussed below, have led churches to shift from sending to with-ing.

Church leaders, dissatisfied with only sending out missionaries, see themselves as partners going with missionaries. Missionaries are part of the church's ministry, not representatives supported at a distance.

Church leaders, dissatisfied with only sending out missionaries, see themselves as partners going with missionaries. Missionaries are part of the church's ministry, not representatives supported at a distance. In this vein, I communicate to our supported missionaries, "You are not 'a' missionary on the field. You are 'us' on the field. We are there because you are 'us.'" This language embodies with-ing.

It is a mistake to view this as only a shift in terminology or trendy pragmatism by church leaders. This shift flows from a change in perception of the local church's role in world missions. This is missiological thinking as well as missions praxis, and has significant implications for all parties involved. Rather than lamenting the change or attempting to revert to prior modalities, it is wiser to embrace the shift and determine the best ways to move forward. After all, church leaders and missionaries are following the same biblical mandate. They are on the same mission, and in some cases, they are at the same conference!

Significant Factors to this Shift

The shift to with-ing has been influenced by numerous factors. Space does not allow for a full discussion of all of them. For the purposes of our discussion, I focus on two: globalization and

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[1] Darrin Rodgers, "Fully Committed: 100 Year of the Assemblies of God," *Assemblies of God Heritage Magazine* 34 (2014), 4.

[2] I concede this is a broad summary of decades of missionary mobilization. For a more detailed analysis, see Paul Lewis and Byron Klaus' *All the Gospel to All the World: 100 Years of Assemblies of God Missiology*; Gary McGee's *This Gospel Shall Be Preached*; or Everett Wilsons's *Strategy of the Spirit and the Growth of the Assemblies of God Worldwide 1960-1990.*

aggressive marketing by para-missions agencies. Examining these leads to better understanding between churches and missionaries.[3]

When missionaries Walker and Nell Hall left California for China in 1936, the journey took twenty-four days. Today, a flight from San Francisco to Beijing takes eleven hours. Their written correspondence took months to arrive, while workers today exchange text messages in seconds. Globalization is the term used to describe the compression of the world and the resulting intensification of world conscience, increasing interdependence, and valuing of all on the globe.[4] Of special note in this definition is the phrase "valuing of all on the globe."

Globalization is not just access to the world but an increased appreciation for others and their culture. In a survey of young adults, "seventy-seven percent of young adults say events around the world matter to them."[5] Why do they matter to them? Because they actually know people of other cultures. Previously, individuals had little to no contact outside their geographic location, while today, intercultural access is a given. Social media enables international connections of all kinds. International travel is more accessible and more affordable. Missions trips, formerly once-in-a-lifetime opportunities, are now common.[6] Additionally, the world has come to America. Immigrants from around the world populate our schools, churches, and neighborhoods. We are no longer dependent upon missionaries to tell us about people groups across the ocean. We only have to go across the aisle or open Facebook Messenger. The world speaks for itself.

> Church leaders, with less need for denominational structures, have found others to help them in their with-ing missions approach. Paramissions agencies have filled in the gap and are aggressively marketing their missions products to church leaders.

Church leaders' missiology and strategies are more influenced by this interconnectedness than denominational structures. The result is an increased church-focused missiology over a mission-field focused missiology. This view posits the local church as the center of missions strategy as opposed to being field-driven. Rather than adapting, missionaries

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[3] Future studies should address the impact of changes in ministerial training, the increased presence of stateside missionaries, and divergent definitions of missiological terms like *unreached people*, *apostolic ministry*, and *missionary*.

[4] This definition was influenced by Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1992), 8.

[5] Barna, *The Connected Generation: How Christian Leaders Around the World Can Strengthen Faith and Well-Being Among 18-35-Year-Olds* (Ventura: Barna Group, 2019), 18.

[6] In the last five years, young adults from our church traveled to Comoros, China, India, Maldives, Spain, Bolivia, the United Kingdom, France, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tanzania for missions work, often independent of AGWM.

have responded correctively or simply ignored it in hopes that it will change. While understandable, these responses have exacerbated the problem.

Church leaders, with less need for denominational structures, have found others to help them in their with-ing missions approach. Para*missions* agencies have filled in the gap and are aggressively marketing their missions products to church leaders. Para*church* organizations assist churches across denominational lines and are not new. Some, which I label para*missions* agencies, specifically facilitate missions work outside denominational infrastructure.[7] This is not to be confused with missionary sending organizations such as CRU or Wycliffe, but groups designed to facilitate intermittent missionary engagement for local churches. They curate missions experiences for churches so that church leaders do not have to organize them.[8] Many act as missions travel agents. Often these groups offer sponsorships for missions projects as alternatives to denominational programs. Their marketing materials are well put together. They typically look more professional and more appealing than an individual missionary's materials. The church is a customer, not a supporter. By design, para*missions* are church-focused more than mission field-focused. Typically, their programs are simpler to understand and easier for church leaders to implement. They promise – and deliver – easy to use, plug and play missions opportunities through aggressive marketing tactics. They do more than facilitate trips, however. They codify the local church's focus on missions. They underscore the with-ing imperative that participation in missions is more than giving; it is the church itself going.

> The purpose of this article is to explain this emerging shift to with-ing and discuss the opportunities it provides and implications to consider.

Opportunities for Denominational Sending Agencies

The purpose of this article is to explain this emerging shift to with-ing and discuss the opportunities it provides and implications to consider. In the following section, I offer these for denominational sending agencies, individual missionaries, and local church leaders.[9] It is one thing to identify and deconstruct; it is another to extrapolate and build. I attempt to do so here.

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[7] Interestingly, some denominational groups are acting more like paramissions agencies and are becoming more independent of AGWM structures. Their increased activity supports this premise, even if still loosely housed inside AGWM.

[8] Examples include Samaritan's Purse, Youth with a Mission, Reliant, Send International, and Group Missions Trips.

[9] Each of these could be a separate article in and of itself. They would best be written in concert with practitioners of each designation. I hope others will engage in fuller discussion than my brief summary comments.

So what is AGWM to do? It no longer has its former influence nor access to church leaders. Though its influence is diminished, its influence is not gone. AGWM has a valuable part to play in the future. While I've worked with many at AGWM in varying capacities, I acknowledge this is the weakest part of this article. It is easy for someone on the outside to tell people what they should be doing. To those leaders, I humbly offer these ideas as suggestions to consider.

1. *Reconsider existing training pathways*

In addition to the cross-cultural training offered to missionaries, better training on the church context itself would benefit missionaries. This is more than "tips for raising money better." This is about understanding the local church and reestablishing missiological imperatives during itineration. I've watched as itineration coaches have focused new missionaries away from church fundraising to individual support. I understand the reasons for this, but it is causing long-term damage. The result will be even less interactions with churches.

2. *Offer reentry training and support for workers*

Missionary adjustment and reentry support is a given for missionaries. Current reentry support should be augmented with reentry training to church cultures as well. Mike, a worker in Northern Asia, shared with me his most challenging adjustment upon his return was attending the American church. It had changed so much since he left and was so different from the underground, deconstructed approach on the field, it left him unfulfilled. Church culture changes at unprecedented speeds. AGWM could provide church culture training for returning missionaries. Albeit this training would, by its very nature, have to be updated regularly.

3. *Enhance church partnerships and relationships at an institutional level*

Recently, AGWM began this process with the creation of the Partnership Development Division to replace US Relations. This area of the sending agency must be on the cutting edge of missiological implementation. It should be working closely with all partners to create the best interaction possible. It is this department that could reestablish the lost missiological influence of the denomination.

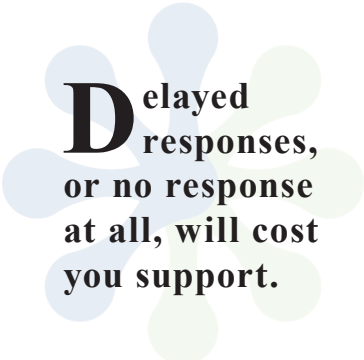**Opportunities for Individual Missionaries**

So, what is a missionary to do? You raised your money, went to the field, and now you return to a different setting altogether. During your last itineration cycle, you felt like you had it figured out, and now it is different, again. It must be difficult. But if anyone can maneuver changing cultures, it is you. You can do this! Realizing you are once again cross-culturally communicating is the first step forward. To manage this transition let me suggest the following:

1. *Shift from "Help me get to the field!" to "How can I help your missions strategy?"*

This was the challenge of my friends at the missions conference. They approached the same situation from different starting points. If you want the local church's involvement, you are going to have to change your perspective on the local church. Use "with-ing" language rather than sending language. You will have to treat churches like partners and customers more than contributors. As an extension of the church, provide value back to it. It was missionaries to Turkey who helped me share Jesus with our Turkish community. Latin American missionaries coached our Latino ministry. "How can I help you?" is a great question to ask before you speak somewhere. This approach feels more like a partnership.

2.   Teach positive biblical missiology

No doubt you are doing this in your itineration messages. Yet, preaching is not enough. You need to seed conversations with good missiology.[10] Present the importance of apostolic, resident missionaries to church leaders. Remember, they may have no other source for this information. With the rise of non-traditional ministerial training methods, church leaders no longer receive comprehensive missiological preparation. It's going to be up to you and your fellow missionaries to fill in the gap. Don't give up your God-given calling. Don't concede biblical mandates to keep the peace. Adapt to the current landscape but bring with you the foundational missiological principles.

Delayed responses, or no response at all, will cost you support.

3.   Improve digital communications

We are in a digital world. Your communications must become digital and punctual. This is not optional. Delayed responses, or no response at all, will cost you support. In the past, you could send one generic newsletter to hundreds of people. Today, you must individually connect with supporting churches. These communications can be short but must be personal. You will need to build it into your missionary schedule.

4.   Gracefully interact with church leaders

I know we frustrate you. I know we make mistakes. I know we are unreasonable. Give us grace. Graciously take us on a journey of understanding your assignment. Forgive us often, and pray for us more.

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[10] I am grateful for dialogue partners like Greg Beggs, John Easter, Scott Hanson, Dick Brogden, Jim Bennet, Mark Hausfeld, Joil Marbut, Ron Maddux, and David and Beth Grant for doing this with me.

Opportunities for Church Leaders

As a fellow church leader, I have shifted from sending to with-ing. However, we can't ignore the negative implications of this shift and make sure we work through them. I offer the following suggestions to integrate into your missions thinking:

1. Reexamine missiological imperatives

I'm excited about the shift from sending to with-ing, but I'm cautious about church-focused instead of field-focused missions. If we aren't careful, we move from an others-focused biblical imperative to a self-focused initiative. Church leaders should thoughtfully engage missiologists to inform their approaches.[11] We want to advance the Kingdom of God, not facilitate missio-tourism. Dialogue with missionaries and other church leaders to develop your missiological approach that is biblical and practical. Resist the temptation to only do what is best for you.

> I'm excited about the shift from sending to with-ing, but I'm cautious about church-focused instead of field-focused missions.

2. Elevate stewardship as a missions metric

Stewardship of missions-giving should be at the forefront of our minds. Church leaders are entrusted with the resources of God's people for God's purpose. Mission trips, while beneficial and important, must be carefully evaluated. Spending $60,000 to send thirty individuals on a ten-day trip versus investing it in a field-based missionary is a stewardship conversation. Teaching church members to use their missions-giving to fund their personal travel has long-term consequences. Granted, there are important missional results of missions trips, but a good steward evaluates all the implications.

3. Establish realistic expectations of supported missionaries

We need realistic expectations of our missionaries. They are engaged with important work – on the field. Communication and individual interactions with the over 150 supporters are a distraction from their primary mission. Of course, US-based *paramissions* organizations have better marketing pieces as they exist for this purpose. Expecting them to market to us creates a loss of focus on the field. This is antithetical to their assignment.

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[11] There are numerous resources to recommend. Here are a few: *Apostolic Function* by Alan Johnson, *Global Church Planting* by Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, and *Vision, Mission, Values Volume 1* by AGWM.

4. Include missionary support in your missions strategy

Boots on the ground missionaries are the most effective missions strategy. A high percentage of a church's missions budget should support resident missionaries on the field. This does not preclude with-ing missiology. In fact, supported missionaries, when included correctly, embody this.

5. Gracefully interact with missionaries

Missionaries are in the difficult position of having to be effective both on the field and back at home. If we have to choose, they should be better on the field than back at home. Give grace to your missionaries when they don't have the systems in place to meet your expectations. Forgive them and help them achieve what God has called them to do.

Conclusion

Church leaders see their role as creating global, missional Christians more than, or as much as, simply supporting missionary projects. They have shifted their missiology from sending to with-ing. Partnership is valued more than representation. Missionaries traversing this new landscape must learn new ways to interact with church leaders. Rather than disparaging each other, sending agencies, missionaries, and church leaders should go with each other to advance the Kingdom. ✳

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Convergence as Mission Innovation: Keys to Unlocking Synergistic Partnerships

Sonji Y. Pass

This article is a transcription of a workshop presented at the Missio Nexus Mission Leaders Conference, Innovate 2021, which took place September 22-24 in Dallas, TX, USA. Printed by permission.

It is exciting for me to be here to talk about synergistic partnerships. We have a very robust agenda for you today. These are the things I pray that we will accomplish on some level, some on deeper levels than others. We will identify five key strategies that can be implemented, which I have learned has been valuable for maximum agency and church cohesion. I will briefly examine cultural and universal language to deepen partnerships for missional engagement, and we will also explore how cohorts cultivate healthy relationships and deepen trust for partnerships. Then at the end of our time today, we will discuss four key shifts that should be made.

This workshop is not one that will just spit out a lot of information for you. One of the things that I have learned as I have gone through mission workshops is that the big gap is when I get home. How do I apply this? So, I want to give us an opportunity to literally experience some of the principles and concepts that I'm going to talk about and then give you some to take home with you. At the very end, we'll have one thing that we will not complete. It is in the plan not to complete it.

The first question that I would love for you to think about is this: If money, people, and time were not a question, what would the ideal ministry look like for you within your ministerial context? Please jot some notes down. You may be surprised that the Lord might even speak to you during this time.

As I have the privilege of walking alongside coaches, pastors, and churches all over the United States, and even workers and other individuals who work for agencies, I realize we all have an ideal of what ministry would look like. We all have something that we are working towards. Based on my experiences, I would like to show you a picture of what I typically see when organizations want to do ministry together. Please pay attention to the wording.
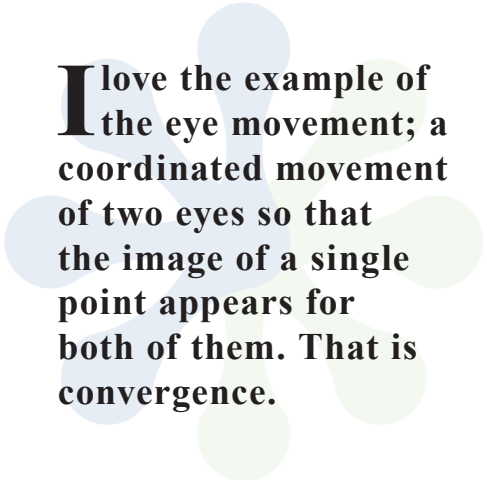
Imagine with me a picture of the Gulf of Alaska. It is a beautiful example of what I have witnessed over and over again, whether I have been doing ministry

in the States or whether it has been in Kenya, or wherever it has been in the world. We see two bodies of water (melting glaciers producing fresh water mixing with the ocean, made of salt water) and they are both moving. But for some reason, the makeup of one makes it impossible for them to merge together. And so in partnership, oftentimes that is what we find; two groups that are unable to merge together. We have the same goal, right? The goal is that the nations will come to know the Lord, and then all men will be reconciled back to the Lord Himself—that we can all get to Revelation 7:9. That is our goal. We are all moving, and there is a key to creating partnership that moves in such a way that it energizes both groups. This makes it possible for the end result to come. That is what I want to talk to you about for a little bit, to hear what I have experienced.

Power of the Three C's

Converging, that is what we are emphasizing here. We are talking about convergence and synergy. Here is a very inflated example of the definition of convergence: the act of converging is moving toward a union or uniformity. I love the example of the eye movement; a coordinated movement of two eyes so that the image of a single point appears for both of them. That is convergence. It is where we are moving together and ending at one place. When have you seen this done well?

I want to mention three specific ways that I have seen powerful partnerships come to fruition. I am going to give you a very high-level view of these three. We are looking at the three C's: 1) convergence, 2) coaching, and 3) cohorts. And I love the verse Matthew 18:19 (AMP). It says, "Again, I say to you that if two brothers on earth agree (that is, of one mind, in harmony) about anything that they ask (within the will of God), it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." This is a beautiful portion of Scripture that points to *convergence*, and how it is possible for us to do that.
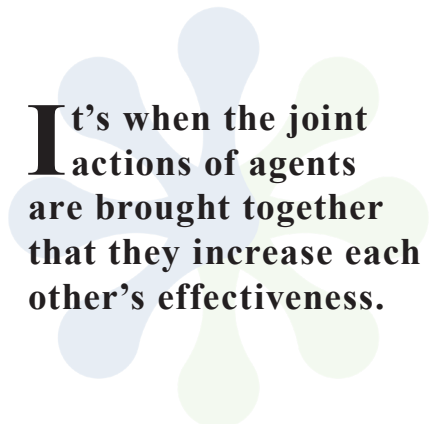
> **I** love the example of the eye movement; a coordinated movement of two eyes so that the image of a single point appears for both of them. That is convergence.

I want to mention *coaching*, and Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name (meeting together as my followers), I am there among them." And then *cohorts*, which is a very powerful tool. I use a verse here that may be unusual, and that's Matthew 11:28. These words are actually from the Message translation, which is quite different from the other translations, but I love what he says here. It says, "Are you tired, burned out on religion?" And then he says, "Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest." And please, in your leisure time, go to that Scripture passage in the Message translation, and go all the way down to verse 30. At one point in the passage, it talks about learning the unforced rhythms of grace. "Watch how I do it. Come away with me, come with me." And that is what I believe the cohort model is about—pausing and getting away with the Father, watching how He does it, listening to Him, and then jumping back out in it.

Synergy in Strategy

The Scripture that I want to use today for *synergy* is found in Romans 15:5-6. "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Jesus Christ, that together, you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the nucleus of the synergy in which we are looking for in partnership. Because the energy, the synergy, and the nucleus of all of it comes from our Father. It is coming alongside, agreeing and cooperating with Him. As we see in the Gospels, when the demoniac came to Jesus and agreed with him, what happened? When the woman with the issue of blood encountered Jesus and agreed with him, what happened? We see in these verses this whole notion of synergy, which is coming alongside and agreeing and cooperating with the Father; that is the nucleus. And then, for our response to that, I want to walk us through the five steps. But before we do that, there's another question. As we talk about this type of partnership, we must place emphasis on synergy, which is defined as the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or agents, to produce a combined effort greater than the sum of its separate efforts. It's when the joint actions of agents are brought together that they increase each other's effectiveness. What might be challenging with that? Because I think that is the reality of where some of us live. What's challenging about this? We have the same goal. We have the same desire. We are seeking to accomplish the same thing. What is challenging? It could be pride; this whole sense of, "I really don't need you to accomplish this." Another challenge could be disagreeing on the strategies or not communicating well. So, with these strategies that I want to introduce, though they are very simple, I pray you will find value in them.

> **It's when the joint actions of agents are brought together that they increase each other's effectiveness.**

Five Strategies for Maximum Cohesion

The first strategy is *listening deliberately*. That sounds simple. But this is about two things: it is about posture, and it is about poise. As an example for you ladies, I know you can connect immediately with poise if you had or have a mom like I do. Beginning at about age six or seven, I had to sit with my dress over my knees. That is poise; it is how you present yourself. What does this have to do with how we develop synergistic partnerships? First, the posture is a posture of prayer. That is what we do. We talk to our Father, and have an intentional posture of prayer. It is so easy for us to get caught up in the responsibilities and the day-to-day tasks, of which I myself am sometimes guilty of; I will be transparent. I forget to pray. I look at my calendar and I say, "Okay, I have a coaching call at this time. I have to go do this." I do this and I get to the end of the day, and something didn't quite go the way I thought it should. And then I remember; I was so ready to get started, but did not take time to pray. We must deliberately have a posture of prayer, not just praying for ourselves, but for

the leading and guiding of the Lord. This is so important, because poise is how you present yourself to your ministry partner—the entity, agency, individual, or church that you want to partner with. Let me give you an example of what I mean. What I have learned and seen is that we are oftentimes very excited about what God has called us to, and we cannot wait to share it. So when we step into a meeting, or we step into a room, we immediately begin talking. We might say, "Let me share with you how wonderful this thing is that I have, and you need it." But, the foundation for a synergistic partnership is to walk into the room and *listen*. How do you do that? Listen by asking questions. That is the best way to begin laying the foundation for this partnership. One of the first questions that I ask is the question I have already asked you. So you have the first question, and it is a bridge builder: "What does the ideal ministry look like for you?" Here are other questions you could possibly ask: "How is God working in your world? What is happening in and around the context of your ministry?" The whole point is to get people talking about their heart for their ministry. Our role in developing that partnership is listening.

When people are seen and heard, that develops a stronger foundation than you can ever imagine.

The second strategy is *methodically learning*. What is "methodically learning?" We teach our workers at TMS Global to go as learners. Going as a learner does not begin with our mouth. It does not begin with our head or our degrees. It begins with our eyes, our ears, and our heart; what you see and what you hear, filter it through your heart. I pray that the Word of God would rest in your heart before words come out of your mouth. When people are seen and heard, that develops a stronger foundation than you can ever imagine. I am sorry for those of you who are looking for metrics and formulas. We have been looking for these things for a long time. If you think about the condition of the nation and the world in which we live in, relationships are the foundation for the shift and the change that we need to see. That requires us to pause, to listen, to watch, to pray, ask more questions, and then respond.

The third strategy is *latitude*. We all know what latitude is. It is the lines around the center of the earth that are parallel to the equator. What I want you to grasp is this concept of parallel posture. This parallel posture is really about vision and values. If you stop, pray, listen, and ask more questions, then in that process, you are going to hear the vision and the values for that organization or that person. This will immediately help you know if their vision and values align with your own. Someone might question, "Does it align? Is it strategic? What is the strategy? How does it align? Where do we go from here?" This is a process that lends to being able to develop a foundation that builds synergistic partnerships. What I am praying you are hearing is that the beginning of a partnership is pausing, listening, and building a relationship. If there is a goal to complete a certain task or a mission that the Lord has given you and you have aligned your vision and your values, then ask yourselves, "Who has the greater influence in this area? Who has the greater resources in this area?" Follow this by having the conversation about how we move forward, and then collaboratively launch. We know this work is about gathering and sending. As you are working together in tandem in building this partnership, then
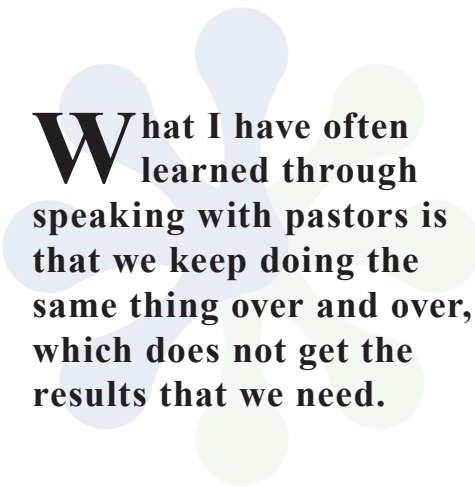
you will begin to recognize the rhythms of the ministry and the advantages that you have. Listening and learning will help to fill out the vision and the value alignment.

The last two strategies are *leveraging sway* and *collaboratively launching*. It is time-consuming work. We have goals, and I know we need to reach them. But I have to ask, if our goal is to reach the nations and reconcile all men and women back to Christ, by being a vehicle or conduit for the Lord to use, my question is, "How bad do you want it?" If that is indeed our goal and greatest desire, and if it means pausing to listen before speaking, then it will not be as hard as it otherwise would be. So how bad do we want it?

Application of The Three C's

Now, I would like to discuss the process we use at TMS Global. The first is *coaching*. This coaching process is powerful, and it begins with listening. Consider in Exodus 17 when the Israelites go to war against the Amalekites; as long as Moses kept his arms up in the air, they were winning. But what happened whenever his arms came down? He was fainting and they were losing. So in this model, what we see is the church and the agency working together to help hold up the worker that is going to be on the front lines. It is the church's responsibility to raise up and send workers, but the agency is there to hold up the arms and provide GPS, resourcing, and networking, and to enable the church to mobilize better. And that conversation between the church and agency helps our workers.

Second, we utilize *cohorts*. In this cohort model, community is the first place to start. There is a scriptural foundation for this and how we spur each other on. Community involves sharing ideas and coming together, which influences and shapes our worldview. This is an important element of our cohort model. In the process of deepening partnerships, there is investment in a particular cohort. For example, we have one for senior pastors. As the worldview is expanded, then the pastor is better able to impart, grow, and pour into the congregation. This leads to strategy. As that worldview develops, our strategy increases. I love the relevance of the Scripture in John 21, because what I have often learned through speaking with pastors is that we keep doing the same thing over and over, which does not get the results that we need. Jesus told the disciples, "Go back out there, but cast your net on the other side." So this cohort is a model that helps pastors dig into that concept. Let me give you an example. In our current cohort, we started talking about community and we helped pastors begin to look at what the opportunities for ministry are in their local communities. At the same time, we began to speak about worldview. At one point in the cohort, we had a pastor that came up and said, "You know, there are some people who I have identified as being challenges in my church body. But

> **What I have often learned through speaking with pastors is that we keep doing the same thing over and over, which does not get the results that we need.**

now my worldview has expanded, and I am learning that they may be looking through a different lens. In reality, they are not the problem. The problem is we need to learn to do things differently and respond to the needs that are within our churches." Cohorts build relationships. Those same pastors are now sending individuals to the agency to be trained so that they can be sent from their churches. It is about building relationships.

We want to *reframe* the expectation of ministry and the intersection of discipleship and missions.

Third is *convergence*. Convergence is this whole movement, consisting of four shifts: *reframing, relating, reorienting,* and *reacting*. We want to *reframe* the expectation of ministry and the intersection of discipleship and missions. When we do this, we are better positioned to understand how we *relate,* which changes how we see ourselves in the mission of God. The process then follows with *reorienting* and *reacting*.
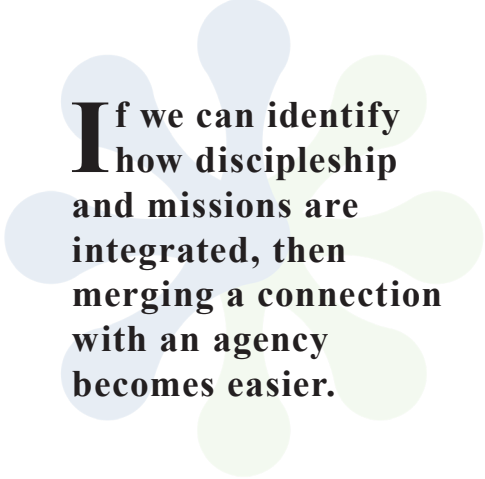
How many of you would agree with the following statement: missions is the mission of the church and the mission of the church matters? Here's another question: what characteristics define a mature believer? One characteristic could be evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their life, expressed through both word and deed. The ability to make a disciple is another characteristic of a mature believer. Begin thinking about what a mature believer looks like, because while we are creating synergistic partnerships with agencies and churches in order to form support for our workers, the other synergistic partnership that should be happening is within the walls of our churches to form mature believers.

How is it that we have come to recognize certain company's logos? We associate their logo with their passions and values, but why is that? It is because the company has been consistent and repetitive in their marketing over a long period of time. We are talking about form and meaning. For some companies, the meaning is the same for what they do and why they exist. But how they present themselves is different. So my question for you, my brothers and sisters, is how do you recognize a mature believer? We are talking about Christian branding. And if our world is indeed going to change, there has to be some consistency in what they are seeing in us believers.

This is foundational if we are hoping to create synergy between churches and agencies. As we are developing partnerships, casting vision, and creating and responding to values, we need to effectively prepare our congregants to receive and to go out. If we can identify how discipleship and missions are integrated, then merging a connection with an agency becomes easier.

So, as you think about branding, and what branding means, ask yourself, "How does the world recognize a mature believer?" And whether you are a part of a church, or whether you are part of a missions agency, let us consider the opportunities for unbelievers to know Christ that exist in your

ministry. What are you offering? What are the activities you are doing? What are the trainings you are doing? Who are the churches and agencies you are connecting with? Think about this lifeline of discipleship that exists within your particular ministry. What are the opportunities for unbelievers to meet Christ in the context of your work? What exists that helps individuals deepen their faith and what are the experiences that help them grow in maturity? Once this is determined, the agency and the church can then identify the pathways of integration. As you map out this pathway of helping to develop mature believers who are prepared to go on mission with the Father, walking through this process will help you identify opportunities for partnership.

If we can identify how discipleship and missions are integrated, then merging a connection with an agency becomes easier.

The final step is working together to deepen faith and to identify your vision and your values. Creating opportunities to walk alongside each other in partnership starts with listening and asking the right questions. It is my prayer that as you leave and return home, you will carve out time to begin to really look at pathways of integrating mission and discipleship together.

To learn more about how TMS Global integrates mission and discipleship through cohorts, visit https://www.tms-global.org/churches. ✳

Rev. Sonji Y. Pass is Regional Director of Church Culture for TMS Global, a Christian nonprofit organization that sends people to share the love and message of Jesus cross-culturally and equips Christ followers to better engage their neighbors. She brings the unique combination of experiences having served as a missionary, on staff at a church, and inside mission agencies as she helps awaken congregations to their important role in missions.

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The Sodalities and the Contemporary Church

Jocelyn S. Wong

This article is an excerpt from Dr. Wong's DMin dissertation titled, "Developing an Integrated Foundational Training of Missions Mobilizers for OMF Philippine Home Council." Reprinted by permission.

God's global work of missions, as many in the missions enterprise would agree, is not something that can be done without partnerships. God Himself modelled partnership throughout Scripture. Everything He did was in partnership with His people or should as I say, with communities of believers: not just Moses, but the nation of Israel. Not just Paul, but the Antioch Church, and so on.

In the same way, sodalities (mission agencies) have been in the forefront of missions work globally but their work could not have been sustained without the partnership of modalities or churches, had they not benefited from the church's resources—both personnel and financial. On the surface, this seems like an ideal complementary relationship where both use their strengths for missions. In reality, the relationship between mission agencies and churches is not always smooth-sailing. The Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) 24 on "Cooperating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-Church Relationships" was written in response to this and called for open dialogue to thresh out differences for the sake of world evangelization. The hindrances in the church/parachurch relationships identified in the LOP are reflected in today's sodality/modality partnerships. It may interest the reader to know that the paper was written back in 1983. This in itself is sadly revealing. George Miley talks about two unhelpful viewpoints that must be avoided in both the sodalities and the modalities:

> The first is that the local church does not need the mission organization. "If the church had been doing its job all along, we would not need mission organizations" is the kind of statement that is heard at times. The second is that the mission organization does not need the local church. "The church should just send us (mission organizations) its people and money and leave the rest of the job to us mission professionals. What does the church know about missions?" would represent this viewpoint. Neither of these viewpoints is correct or

helpful. They are disrespectful to both the local church and the mission organization. They fuel unkindness. They sow seeds of disunity within Christ's body. They do not honor our Lord or advance his kingdom.[1]

So what could the sodalities, on their part, do to bridge the gap with the churches, especially those churches who still have not fully realized their missionary responsibility?

Mobilizing the Community, Not Just the Individual

The tendency of sodalities is to focus on recruiting workers and raising funds as these two are key to sustained missions work. This somehow works well with the church's tendency to outsource the work of missions. However, this is not reflective of true partnership where both are equal owners of the work under God. If the churches do not understand their missionary responsibility, will they even release their resources to missions work? Steve Beirn related an incident when some mission agencies were discussing the issue of dwindling numbers of missionary recruits and realized a gap in their work on the sending context,

> With concern in their voices, several shared that the quality and quantity of potential missionaries was decreasing. Then I asked the question: How many agencies are equipping the local church to recruit their own missionaries? After a long pause, one person admitted that he'd never thought of approaching recruiting that way before. Others acknowledged that they weren't sure what it would look like to equip churches. No one had ever searched for any local church ministry models that pursued this approach.[2]

Sodalities need to also expand their focus from "solely mobilizing individuals to become potential missionaries" to including mobilizing the church as a potential sending community. Beirn observed that the recent trend in the missions sending process is centered on the individual, while at other times it is the agency at the center. Beirn proposes placing the local church at the center of the sending process.[3]

What could have caused this mobilization gap, this focus on mobilizing/recruiting individuals with little regard for the church of which they are a part? Joseph Hellerman observes the pervasiveness of radical individualism in American churches where one person's personal goals and happiness takes precedence over that of the community. He believes that this radical individualism has affected the

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[1] George Miley, *Loving the Church, Blessing the Nations: Pursuing the Role of Local Churches in Global Mission* (Waynesboro, GA: Gabriel Pub. 2003), 141.
[2] Steve Beirn, *Well-Sent: Reimagining the Missionary-Sending Process* (Fort Washington: PA, 2015), Chapter 1, Kindle.
[3] Beirn, *Well-Sent*, Introduction.

way Christians view their faith.[4] Has this also affected how individuals view the "missionary call"? Beirn has also observed that it has become a common assumption that the missionary call only pertains to the individual,

> The history of the Church in missions has primarily been a history of great personalities or missionary societies. Only in exceptional cases has it been the Church in missions. Believers often perceived that mission was the responsibility of individuals rather than the mandate of the Church. George W. Peters states, "This unfortunate and abnormal historical development has produced autonomous missionless churches on the one hand and autonomous churchless missionary societies on the other hand."[5]

It could be that the common assumption that individuals must make personal decisions to follow Christ is also reflected in one's decision to follow God's call to missions. It would then be unsurprising that in the area of missions involvement, the focus is also on the individual's decision rather than the community's. But what would be the negative aspect to this? In the first place, as Hellerman says, individualism runs contrary to the high view Scripture places on community—the church:

Consistent with Scripture, mission agencies would do well to process the individual's missionary journey with the church.

> The New Testament picture of the church as a family flies in the face of our individualistic cultural orientation. God's intention is not to become the feel-good Father of a myriad of isolated individuals who appropriate the Christian faith as yet another avenue toward personal enlightenment.[6]

Consistent with Scripture, mission agencies would do well to process the individual's missionary journey with the church. Biblical wisdom shows itself in the long-term benefits that come when this stance is taken: (1) This helps build trust as the church realizes that the mission agency is not simply out to "steal" its personnel— which is one of the accusations made in LOP 24;[7] (2) this can be an opportunity to train the church in the area of missions sending—what their part can be in the would-be missionary's life during preparation, while on the field, and after their term of service; (3) this provides the church with an opportunity to meaningfully partner with the work—they will

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[4] Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2009), 4-6.

[5] Steve Beirn, "Building the Church/Agency Relationship," *Missio Nexus,* October 2009, https://missionexus.org/building-the-church-agency-relationship/.

[6] Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family,* 7.

[7] Lausanne Movement, "Cooperating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-Church Relationships (LOP 24)."

be able to realize that there is so much more to the church's missions involvement than simply giving money and sending the missionary to the field; (4) for churches that are new to the idea of missions involvement, this could help deepen their interest in missions and influence them towards further involvement.

This change of focus from individual to church may also mean missions agencies should be ready to train the churches on how to mobilize its members, how to send well and not just specialize in preparing individual missionary candidates for missions service. Ultimately, this is simply not about ensuring that the church sends good missionary candidates to mission agencies but about partnering in sending and sustaining missionaries well. As Beirn notes, "...sending well takes work! It is a ministry-long process that demands the church, the missionary and the agency to collaborate consistently. Good sending starts years before the missionary's appointment. And if the worker has extended service, it may involve passing the 'sending baton' from one generation of church leaders to the next."[8]

But what if the church is unwilling to send the individual? As discussed earlier, there are churches that tend to be more inward-looking, prioritizing resources (both personnel and finances) for internal church ministries. What if the individual interested in missions comes from such a church? How can the agencies journey with the individual in this situation without resorting to what Hellerman calls, *radical individualism*, where personal fulfillment is more important than staying connected and growing together as a community? If the biblical value of community over individualism is applied in this situation, then the individual would remain in the church, maintaining relationships and helping mobilize the church towards a burden for missions from the inside and journey together towards missions involvement. This may be a longer process and may even seem futile, especially in the light of the urgent needs of the field. Ultimately, if the biblical view is to be taken into consideration, then the call to missions should be viewed as a corporate call rather than a personal call.

> **Missions agencies should be ready to train the churches on how to mobilize its members, how to send well and not just specialize in preparing individual missionary candidates for missions service.**

In an ideal world, the church would at some point realize its missionary call and send this individual (and many more) to the field. In a not-so-ideal world, journeying with the church is still worth pursuing and if at some point it becomes painfully clear that the individual must find an alternative community and prepare to leave for the mission field, at least he will have given the church an opportunity to consider its role in missions.

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[8] Beirn, *Well-Sent,* Foreword.

Relationship-Based Partnerships

The revivals played an important part in Hudson Taylor's mobilization of workers and even in how funds came in to support the work in China. However, other mission societies were also in operation in those days—supporters and advocates of CIM (now OMF) could easily have given to these other mission societies. Two crucial reasons would be the fact that Taylor viewed the individuals he met and the churches he went to as opportunities to minister, and not only to talk about the needs in China. In one letter he wrote during one of his visits to the churches, "...our meetings are evidently a blessing to the church of God, the most grateful testimonies to spiritual refreshment being given at almost every place we visit."[9] His earnest ministerial stance was a crucial factor in his being able to develop relationships that produced field workers, supporters and advocates.

> **T**aylor viewed the individuals he met and the churches he went to as opportunities to minister, and not only to talk about the needs in China.

Going back to LOP 24 where one of the hindrances mentioned to mission agency-church relationships is "strained relationships" caused by negative attitudes, the document quoted George Peters on the primacy of relationships, "Christianity is basically a religion of relationships. Relationships are of deeper significance than organizational structure or identity. The struggle for the preservation of organizational identity must not be permitted to disrupt spiritual relationships, whatever our rights may be."[10]

Church pastor Andy Johnson addressed this important element in partnership with agencies, "This is not a generation that likes institutional, impersonal connections. We like to be personally engaged, community-oriented, and connected. Missions is no exception. Mission leaders today talk about the desire among churches for more direct, personal partnership with international gospel workers."[11]

OMF International regularly runs an in-house training course for missionaries to prepare them for "home assignment," a term better known in mission circles as furlough. This is a time when missionaries reconnect with their churches, family, and supporters. The foundational section of this course is the "Partnership Development" section which emphasizes the importance of personal

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[9] Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: The Growth of a Work of God* (Littleton, CO: Overseas Missionary Fellowship Inc., 2005), 364.

[10] Lausanne Movement, "Cooperating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-Church Relationships (LOP 24)."

[11] Andy Johnson, "Missions Partnerships from the Home Church Perspective," *9 Marks,* February 2010, https://www.9marks.org/article/missions-partnerships-home-churchs-perspective/.

relationships in developing sustained ministry partnerships for mission work. The premise is that those who choose to invest in the work of missions would most likely invest in those who have taken the time and effort to build relationships with them—missionaries who take time to not just report on what is happening in the field (which is important) but also to treat people in their home countries as friends who also need to be ministered to as well.[12] It is a time for them to also "give back" to those who have been faithfully praying and supporting them through the years. Jim Reapsome wrote an opinion piece on how missionaries should treat their sending churches,

> People headed for missionary vocations have been drilled to ask their churches for pledged support, prayer, and special assistance for other needs and projects such as cars and buildings. They have not been trained to think what they can do for their sending churches...This oversight undercuts the biblical pattern of partnership in mission. The church sends, supports, and prays. The church at Philippi served Paul and his mission. He was happy and thankful to be so blessed. As his letter shows, he also did much for the church.[13]

This is applicable to mission agencies, too, as they relate to churches. How can they approach the church with a mindset of serving them instead of asking them for something? This is where the expertise of the agencies in missions can become helpful as they offer to train or advise the churches in their missions journey. It would also strengthen the relationship if the churches realize that the missions agencies do this without any corporate vested interest, instead with an earnest desire to see the church fully live out its missional identity—whether they end up partnering with this particular agency or expand its missions involvement in another direction. If viewed from a pragmatic angle, this may not seem to be a good investment of time for the agencies, but in the long run it benefits the missions enterprise as a whole and oftentimes, the chances of the churches coming back to partner with the said agency would be quite high, because the mobilizer built a solid relationship with them.

How can [mission agencies] approach the church with a mindset of serving them instead of asking them for something?

What makes relationship-building work in partnerships is that it causes each side to view the other as a person and not merely as an entity. It is only as the process of developing partnership is "humanized" that both sides learn to understand, respect, and empathize with one another, building stronger and more sustainable partnerships.

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[12] OMF International, *Pre-Home Assignment Workshop Facilitator's Manual* (Singapore: OMF International, 2013), 18.

[13] Jim Reapsome, "Missionary to the Churches," *World Pulse Newsletter,* 2001.

In *Mission in Motion*, Jay Matenga and Malcolm Gold concluded after conducting a global research on mobilization that the most "potent" accelerant to missions engagement is ultimately relationships. They conclude, "The main takeaway we will leave with you is that friendship is the best way for individuals to influence as an accelerant of mission interest."[14]

Sodalities Actively Work on Trust-Building

One of the important elements in developing relationships is trust. Trust is a very precious but fragile commodity. It has often been said that trust takes years to build, seconds to break, and forever to repair. This is just as true in the context of sodality-church partnership. There are many potential scenarios where trust can be broken in this partnership—many of them are listed in LOP 24: (1) Lack of clear communication—especially in the area of financial reporting—can be a cause for suspicion and misunderstandings; (2) Excluding the sending church from missionary candidate's journey to the field—which may be construed as "personnel-stealing;" (3) Unhealthy fundraising practices.[15]

Trust takes years to build, seconds to break, and forever to repair.

Communicating Regularly, Clearly, and with Sensitivity

Agencies need to review how they are communicating to the churches— especially in light of the earlier discussion on the importance of relationships. Relationships thrive in regular communication. It would not bode well for the agencies to only communicate with the church whenever they are asking for something, nor does it bode well for the agency if the church has to do the follow-up of asking for reports or receipts. Reapsome talks about this unfortunate "habit" that seems to be prevalent even among missionaries themselves and may come off as thankless,

> ...part of it may be administrative foul ups...I really can't say that every (missions) board scrupulously informs their missionaries about gifts received. I don't know how often they issue donor reports. And perhaps missionaries don't pay attention to those reports. I know donors who annually give their missionaries a 5 or 10 percent increase, but most of them do not acknowledge their increases. I know people who give big money at special times, or for special needs, and their gifts are never acknowledged...do they take their partners for granted? Or they presume on their sacrifices? Do they assume their gifts will keep coming even without some acknowledgement? Or is it just plain laziness and lack of personal organization skills?[16]

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[14] Jay Matenga and Malcolm Gold, *Mission in Motion: Speaking Frankly of Mobilization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016), 243.

[15] Lausanne Movement, "Cooperating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-Church Relationships (LOP 24)."

[16] Jim Reapsome, *Final Analysis: A Decade of Commentary on the Church and World Missions* (Wheaton, IL: EMIS 1999), 121–22.

It is not a wonder that churches are stricter now in terms of reporting and have policies like "no report, no support." Stan Guthrie observed this, "...many more congregations that choose to work with mission agencies now ask tougher, more probing questions of their long-time ministry partners than they did. Fading is the old paradigm of agencies simply harvesting the money and manpower of supportive and compliant churches."[17]

This development should not be viewed negatively. In fact, the opportunity to communicate more and communicate clearly may serve as a trust-builder for mission agencies, exhibiting a desire for more transparency and for more meaningful partnerships. These can also serve as an opportunity to provide missions education to the churches, providing them a more in-depth look at what is entailed in sending and sustaining missionaries in this increasingly complex world. In fact, Cindy Judge who serves with Willow Creek Community Church is quoted by Paul Borthwick as saying,

> **J**ust as there is an understanding in frontline missions work of the need to contextualize as they relate to a different culture, so should this be the stance in the sending context.

In my present setting at Willow Creek Community Church, we want to help educate our people and provide synergy between home base and field ministry. We try to do this by making the partnerships mutually beneficial...if an agency chooses to detour this kind of involvement, [it] will miss the opportunity to envision and educate interested lay people and the future involvement with these people.[18]

Another important point about communicating clearly is in the language used. Those who work within the missions enterprise tend to develop their own subculture and the subsequent lingo that those outside would find hard to understand and relate to. Borthwick pleads with agencies to speak in a way that they would be understood by churches and mentions how one pastor turned down an opportunity to partner with an agency simply because he did not understand their presentation and was too embarrassed to admit his ignorance.[19] Just as there is an understanding in frontline missions work of the need to contextualize as they relate to a different culture, so should this be the stance in the sending context. Ultimately, the church would only be willing to partner with what they understand, not with what they don't—that would be irresponsible stewardship on their part.

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[17] Stan Guthrie, "New Paradigms for Churches and Mission Agencies," *Mission Frontiers*, January 2002, https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/new-paradigms-for-churches-and- mission-agencies.

[18] Paul Borthwick, "What Local Churches are Saying to Mission Agencies," *Missio Nexus*, July 1999, https://missionexus.org/what-local-churches-are-saying-to-mission-agencies/.

[19] Borthwick, "What Local Churches are Saying to Mission Agencies."

Journeying with the Missionary and the Church Community

It was mentioned earlier that the call to missions is not simply an individual call that a missionary candidate can process on his or her own, it has to be done together with the community he or she is a part of—whether one understands their corporate responsibility to missions or not. Not only does this reflect the biblical value of community but it also helps to build trust with churches.

Borthwick sees the importance in involving the sending church in the process,

> Local church leaders must be recruited early in the sending process, not after a candidate is screened and oriented and started in support raising. I realize that much of the fault here lies with the local church. Personnel directors try to contact pastors without getting responses. Missions committees see themselves as distributors of money, not counselors of potential missionaries...Nevertheless, the local church usually desires greater input in screening and sending candidates. We need agencies to help us think through what this means. We need agencies to say to us, "If you folks won't rise up and help in this process, then we cannot send this candidate." Churches need agencies to force them to take greater responsibility in sending.[20]

The more the churches know about the complicated world of the missions enterprise, the less chance of them assuming they can do it themselves.

The patient persistence of agencies to partner with churches may also help prevent more churches from deciding to do missions-sending on their own—which has increasingly become a trend. When churches have little training or experience in cross-cultural missions work, especially work in remote areas, this may not bode well for the work of missions. Guthrie describes this trend as growing out of a "can-do entrepreneurial spirit" that exists especially in rich mega churches which also feel that doing the work themselves cuts out having to work with "high-cost" agencies—effectively making missionary sending cheaper. They do all the preparations, strategizing and deploying without any input from agencies, and risk making mistakes the agencies have long ago learned from.[21]

Obviously, mission agencies have no way of intervening with what is already going on in these mega churches. But maybe this could have been prevented early on if agencies had had the foresight to journey with churches intentionally from the beginning—building relationships, teaching them, and equipping them. The more the churches know about the complicated world of the missions enterprise, the less chance of them assuming they can do it themselves. This is another reason why it

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[20] Borthwick, "What Local Churches are Saying to Mission Agencies."
[21] Guthrie, "New Paradigms for Churches and Mission Agencies."

is way more critical in the long run to focus on journeying churches rather than isolated individuals in missions involvement.

Reviewing Partnership Development Practices

One of the sensitive issues raised in LOP 24 on hindrances in the relationship between mission agencies and churches had to do with "questionable fundraising techniques" that mission agencies employ. The list is alarming but does require honest introspection from mission agencies. It is interesting to note that a number of issues here have to do with how agencies communicate their need for funds. A common thread is the idea of manipulating emotions of would-be donors or partners using distorted publicity and dramatic appeals.[22] This public relations strategy is rampant in the secular world—called a "spin." It communicates in a way that induces a desired response from the clients. Even in the secular world, this strategy is viewed as questionable. A secular definition of spin refers to it as a form of propaganda and as such, is often misleading where "relevant truths" may often be omitted.[23]

An integral part of a mission mobilizers' role is to communicate to the churches, to encourage them to participate in the work of God in missions. One can see how easy it is to fall into the trap of "spinning" stories to convince the church to participate. The use of dramatic language or exciting stories to attract prospective partners is not only unbiblical but is also unhelpful when wanting to educate the church. That this is mentioned in LOP 24 also means that the Christian community by and large has "seen through" this questionable strategy and may be one of the reasons for eroding trust in missions organizations. LOP 24 exhorts,

> Once more we would plead with those so engaged to do nothing which is not completely open to the scrutiny of supporting Christians. We need to ceaselessly pray that whatever will most quickly extend God's Kingdom will come about, whatever the effects on our current ministry. Nothing is more likely to win the respect and support of the churches, and thus further the cause of world evangelization.[24]

We have mentioned before how non-communication with donors also affects trust building and ultimately is poor partnership practice. This of course in no way means that those non-communicative missionaries or agencies are bad stewards of the finances given, but it does show a lack of gratitude and accountability. What would make a bad situation worse is if these non-communicative agencies and missionaries should fall on hard times financially and suddenly start communicating with the

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[22] Lausanne Movement, "Cooperating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-Church Relationships (LOP 24)."

[23] Whatis.com, "Spin (PR, marketing)," n.d., accessed 18 July 2019, https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/spin-in-public-relations.

[24] Lausanne Movement, "Cooperating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-Church Relationships (LOP 24). "

churches about money. Doing so after years of no communication will not build trust amongst partners.

Samuel Metcalf who wrote on why certain churches start acting like agencies mentions poor fundraising techniques, bemoaning how "all too often the quality of our written and visual media is bad and full of appeals for more money."[25] Appeals for money is a frequent practice in missions and it could infringe on a donor's free will, says Schmidt. He exhorts agencies to honor the donor's free will and reasons that, "Increasing the frequency of our appeals, the shrillness of our tone, segmenting lists, urgent phone calls, and special delivery letters may not be wrong, but when taken together they inhibit the donor's exercise of his free will."[26]

Money is obviously a real need in missions, but more than money is the realization that it is being used in a ministry that is ultimately under God. This should be a reminder to review partnership development practices against principles set in Scriptures by God. Schmidt's appeal rings true, "In spite of increased difficulties in raising money, and higher costs, we cannot allow our ethical practices to slip even a tiny bit…Ethics is about right relations with God and his people. It is about respect for the giver and the gift. It is about taking care how we ask for money and how we use it."[27]

Mobilizers: Bridging Sodalities and Modalities

The onus of developing better relationships with churches is really on the sodalities. Churches can easily sustain their work without engaging sodalities, but not the other way around. Much of the discussion above represents only the tip of the iceberg. There are still so many different issues that need to be sorted out internally both in churches as well as in mission agencies. In focus here are only matters that can somehow be resolved with the help of proper mobilization. Mobilizers can act as a bridge between sodalities and modalities. The challenge is how they can relate sensitively with churches, understanding their internal cultures and concerns, patiently building relationships and communicating the Great Commission mandate in a way that will help churches realize their roles in missions from a Kingdom perspective and result in healthy partnerships with sodalities.

> We don't have to wait another 40 years for things to change. But this means committing to long-haul, slow-results mobilization.

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[25] Samuel Metcalf, "Why Local Churches Act Like Agencies," *Missio Nexus*, April 1993, https://missionexus.org/when-local-churches-act-like-agencies/.

[26] J. David Schmidt, "When the Pen is Mightier than the Sword," *Missio Nexus*, January 1992, https://missionexus.org/when-the-pen-becomes-mightier-than-the-sword/.

[27] J. David Schmidt, "When the Pen is Mightier than the Sword."

Conclusion

As mentioned in the beginning, the LOP 24 was presented in 1983 and now, almost four decades later, what was written is still sadly relevant. We don't have to wait another 40 years for things to change. But this means committing to long-haul, slow-results mobilization. Ultimately, God's work must be done in God's way and this usually means taking the difficult and long way. Short-cuts and the easy way may produce a lot of instant results but mobilizing God's way produces long-lasting fruits that are worth the sacrifice. ✳

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Selecting a Missions Agency:
Your Church's Search for the Right Sending Partner

Ellen Livingood

This article was initially published by Catalyst Services as the August 2021 issue of their monthly Postings *ezine. Reprinted by permission.*

Identifying the best agency to partner with in sending your global worker plays a huge role in their success. It can mean the difference between a church later reporting, "We went through some tough times with our missionary, but their agency worked closely with us to determine what was best for our workers and the work" in contrast to "Because we didn't ask enough questions up front, our missionaries chose an agency unequipped to serve them and unwilling to work with us as sending church; sadly, it played a big role in their leaving the field."

The agency-selection process should have two prongs. First, getting clear answers to the questions listed in this article will help church leaders find a church/agency fit that will fast-forward a healthy working relationship for sending well. Second, the sending church needs to help each candidate journey through the process of selecting the best agency fit for them as individuals or a family. Here are simple guidelines for both steps.
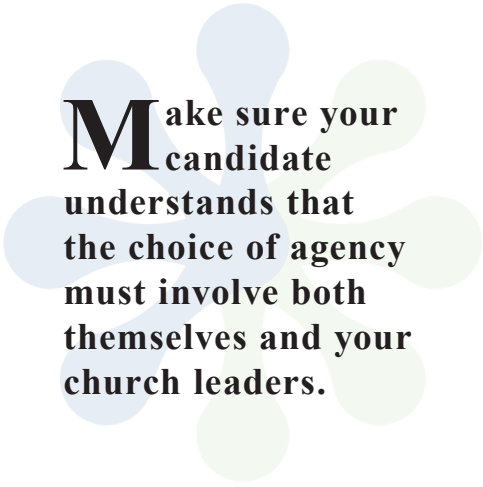
THE PROCESS OF AGENCY SELECTION

The fit for your church

1. **Don't assume.** Remember that all organizations change. Even if you have worked with an agency previously, you will want to carefully evaluate whether they currently are a wise match for your church.

2. **Solicit field worker perspectives.** Ask one or more missionaries who serve with that agency how they evaluate their experience. Ask about policies and their relationships with other personnel from their agency both field workers and headquarters staff. Where are the tension points?

3. **Ask other churches.** Get feedback from at least two or three missions leaders from other churches about their experience with that agency. Choose

churches that are proactive in sending and have had significant history with sending workers with both that organization and others.

4. **Go see them.** If possible, visit the agency's headquarters to meet key people and ask questions (see list later in this article). If the agency doesn't welcome visits or questions your purpose or motives, beware!

5. **Meet key players.** Talk to multiple people within the agency: an executive (if feasible), the personnel director, the church relations director, the member care coordinator, the person who oversees the area of the world where your candidate wishes to serve, and someone in the finance department.

6. **Postpone a final agency selection until the initial orientation process is complete.** In most cases, it is wise to postpone a final approval of the agency until after the candidate has completed the initial interviewing/orientation process. How well was this process conducted? Do you agree with the agency's assessment and prospective plan for moving forward? How does your candidate feel after spending time with them? Are there any red or yellow flags? Is more dialogue needed or are you comfortable with working together in sending this future missionary?

> **M**ake sure your candidate understands that the choice of agency must involve both themselves and your church leaders.
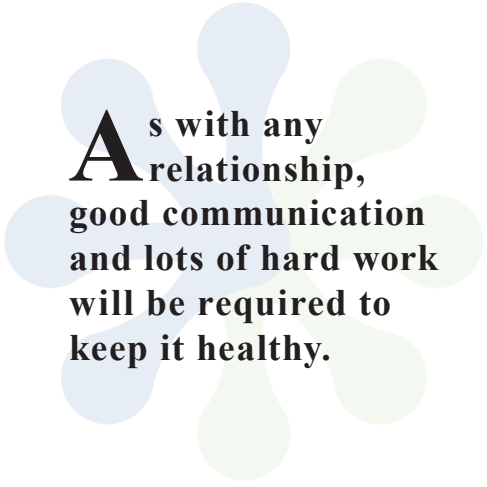
The fit for your prospective worker

1. **Clarify the sending-triangle relationships.** Make sure your candidate understands that the choice of agency must involve both themselves and your church leaders. Present the sending triangle concept, explaining how it will benefit them and also what it will require. Chart a plan to move forward in discerning God's leading in this agency-selection process.

2. **Research more than one.** It is usually wise to consider at least two agency options in order to be able to compare and contrast their policies, leadership styles, cultures, etc. Help your candidate prayerfully choose the agencies to research that seem likely to be the best fit for them and for you as sending church.

3. **Determine ministry match.** Beyond answering the questions listed below, the applicant will want to make sure that their passions and gifts are a good fit for the agency's purpose and mission. How would the agency support the type of work in which they want to engage?

4. **Visit to evaluate field fit.** Too many churches and prospective missionaries assume that if they

are comfortable with what they see and hear from the agency's headquarters staff, they will also fit well on the field. Not necessarily so! Realize that because of location, history, personalities, etc., every field is unique. Often there is even a great deal of difference among teams on the same field. Therefore, it is very important to send one or two members of your missions team to the field with your candidate to meet field leaders and the prospective team. A previous Postings published by Catalyst Services listed questions to discuss.

DISCERNING GOD'S LEADING

After all of this careful groundwork, your church leaders, your candidate, and the preferred agency should be well prepared to prayerfully make the final decision about moving forward together. As with any relationship, good communication and lots of hard work will be required to keep it healthy. Spiritual attacks and human failures may strain it. The inevitable personnel and policy changes in either agency or church will probably necessitate periodic review and reconfirmation of your partnership.

> As with any relationship, good communication and lots of hard work will be required to keep it healthy.

The good news is that careful assessment before you choose an agency partner means you can be confident that you have begun with a strong, three-strand cord that the writer of Ecclesiastes promises "is not quickly broken," Ecc. 4:12.

QUESTIONS FOR AGENCY SELECTION

DOCTRINE
1. What is your doctrinal statement? On what theological issues is there room for individual variance?
2. What is your practice on collaborating in ministry with individuals or entities outside your agency who hold differing positions?
3. What do you believe is the biblical role of the local church in the sending of missionaries? How is this articulated in your values and guiding principles?

STRUCTURE AND AFFILIATIONS
4. Do you have an independent governing board(s)?
5. What types of decisions are made by your governing board(s)? Your administration? Your field leadership? Your individual field workers?
6. To what affiliating bodies do you belong (for US entities, associations such as the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, Missio Nexus, etc.)?

CHURCH/AGENCY RELATIONSHIP

7. What responsibilities or accountability do you believe missionaries have to their sending church?
8. Are there specific roles and tasks you believe should be the responsibility of the sending church?
9. What responsibilities or accountability do you, as an agency, believe you have to sending churches?
10. What congregations would you point to as models of what you think a church/agency collaboration in sending missionaries should look like? What characteristics make them success stories from your perspective?
11. If our prospective workers serve with your agency, with what agency personnel would we as a church interface and how?

MISSIONARY APPOINTMENT AND PREPARATION

12. How would you envision involving our church in the process of (a) accepting our candidates for service, (b) determining their ministry assignment, (c) choosing their location of ministry, and (d) deciding when they are ready for departure?
13. What are your qualifications and requirements for those you consider for missionary appointment?
14. How do you assist workers in raising their financial support?

MINISTRY ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

15. To whom are field missionaries accountable? What does that accountability look like?
16. Would regular evaluations of our missionaries' work be provided to us as a sending church? If so, would we need to request this information or would it be sent automatically? What information is considered confidential between missionaries and supervisors?
17. What would you define as appropriate field strategy issues into which we as a sending church could/should speak? What are appropriate ways in which you would envision such involvement?
18. What is the involvement of the sending church in discussions of ministry assignment changes?

FAMILY QUESTIONS

19. Is a wife considered a full-fledged missionary or only the husband? If she is considered a missionary, how are expectations defined about the amount of time she is expected to invest in ministry, especially if there are young children in the family?
20. What is your policy and practice regarding women in leadership?
21. Are parents free to choose the educational options they feel best fit their family?

MISSIONARY CARE

22. What care do you provide for missionaries? For their family? How do you collaborate with the sending church to provide quality care?
23. Do you have a crisis response plan? Can we have a copy? Does your agency carry insurance to cover emergency evacuations?

FINANCES AND BENEFITS

24. What health-care coverage (on and off the field) and retirement provisions are provided?
25. How are missionary support requirements determined, and must workers raise the full amount? What items are included in the support structure and which are not? (For example, how is children's education at various levels funded? Where do monies come from for purchasing a vehicle?) What is the administrative deduction?
26. Do you expect all financial contributions for projects to flow through your agency? If so, what administrative deduction is levied?
27. Will you provide us with a copy of your financial reports for the past three years?

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

28. What is your process of on-field conflict resolution? If our missionaries were to have a serious problem, how would their supervisor determine whether to involve our church? What would that involvement look like? What information would you share/not share with us?

HOME ASSIGNMENT

29. How are decisions made concerning the frequency, length, and priorities of missionaries' home assignments? What role and/or responsibility does the sending church have in these matters?

SERVICES TO CHURCHES

30. In what ways could you help us strengthen our missionary-sending skills? ✳

Ellen Livingood founded and directs Catalyst Services, a ministry designed to help churches, mission agencies, and networks more fully engage believers' God-given gifts for global outreach. From a base in suburban Philadelphia, Catalyst serves missions entities across North America and, increasingly, around the world via resources, coaching, and connecting. Her background of ministry on a local-church staff, in university communications/development, and in mission-agency administration nurtured her vision to see the tremendous potential of local churches better engaged to impact the lost world for Christ. Catalyst's extensive resources for church missions mobilization can be found at CatalystServices.org.

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The Future of Church and Agency Partnership

Bradley Bell

Now I can't unsee Star Wars. It started when my wife observed how the futuristic films manage to be simultaneously primitive *and* advanced. I used to have no thought of a hologram suddenly appearing in the midst of scrap-seeking, desert-dwelling Jawas. But now, it's all juxtaposition.

Perhaps it's also because I grew up in rural Kentucky. There I made mud pies for entertainment and presented them to my family when they finished planting a row of tobacco. But if I were a kid there today—if I mud-pied at all—I would probably just Instagram them.

Or maybe it also began when I was serving as a missionary in east Africa. I remember walking through the marketplace and seeing a group of farmers awkwardly clustered around a generator. They had walked hours to town from their villages—just so they could finally recharge their smartphones.

See, it's everywhere!

What does this have to do with local churches and missions agencies? Well, it relates in two ways. First, 21st century missions means entering a strange juxtaposition of the primitive and the advanced. It is an ancient commission with timeless practices, but carried out in a strange context of swelling population, globalization, migration, and technologicalization. It demands that we remain faithful in our aim, but innovative in our approach.

Second, the relationship between local churches and missions agencies is itself a strange juxtaposition of the primitive and the advanced. Originally, the local church held centrality in missions sending. But eventually that became the "old way" of doing things. Over the centuries missions agencies rose and took centerstage. They were a picture of the innovative approach amidst a changing world.

How and why did this happen? And is it the best paradigm moving forward?

History of Missions Agencies

Let's begin answering those questions by taking a brief look at the history of missions agencies.

Unfortunately, the account doesn't begin with a clear scriptural example. The church at Antioch in Acts 13 gives us the first glimpse of a sending entity, but it would be a hermeneutical stretch to give them the label of "missions agency." This pattern of local churches sending missionaries continued throughout the first centuries of Christianity.

The shift came, and came quickly, when the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as the state religion and began forming monastic and sometimes military orders for advancing the faith. During European imperialism, God's mission was often equated with colonization, and missionaries took their orders as much from the king as they did from the church. The Protestant Reformation would later rock the world, but, ultimately, it did more to redefine the church *gathered* than the church *sent*.

> When the passion of the modern missions movement converged with the idea that churches would not facilitate sending, missions agencies as we understand them today were born.

Leading up to the modern missions movement, it was commonly accepted that churches *could not* and *should not* send (insert Dr. Ryland's reply to William Carey, "Young man, sit down; when God is pleased to convert the heathen world, he will do it without your help or mine"[1]). When the passion of the modern missions movement converged with the idea that churches would not facilitate sending, missions agencies as we understand them today were born. By the 1920s, denominational organizations operated like American corporations and could function almost completely separate from churches. The churches, in turn, largely outsourced their commission to them.

Yet vast changes after World War II rearranged missions and missions agencies. Influential missiological voices like those of Roland Allen and Lesslie Newbigin recaptured the belief that the church is the missionary of God and called for its centrality in mission.[2] Spurred on by globalization and denominational discontent, many churches began bypassing missions agencies to initiate and manage their own endeavors. Indeed, there is a growing "sending church" movement that seems to be reorienting churches as central in missions sending. Craig Ott and Stephen Strauss, who provided this helpful history, note that "from 1900 to

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[1] Clifford G. Howell, *The Advanced Guard of Missions* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing, 1912).

[2] See Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: And the Causes That Hinder It* (Eugene, OR: Wifp and Stock Publishers, 1962); and Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

2000 the percentage of North American missionaries sent by mainline mission organizations dropped from 80 percent to only 6 percent."[3]

In light of this swinging pendulum, we must ask ourselves, is the day of the missions agency coming to an end?
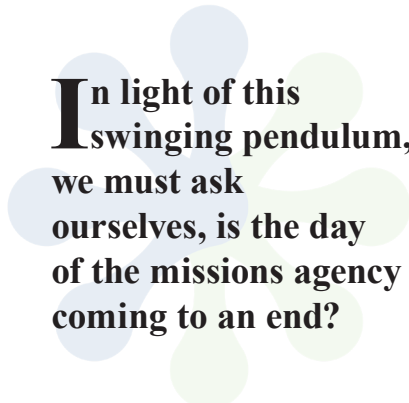
Posture of Agencies

I do not think the missions agency has run its course. As missionary Harry Boer writes, "The missionary society is, scripturally speaking, an abnormality. But it is a blessed abnormality."[4] Missions organizations have been uniquely used by God to lead in missions at times when the church was simply unwilling to do so.[5] They remain a unique gift to the church, and what they bring to the table does not have to be (and often cannot be) reproduced by every local church. To "deny the validity of [them] is to seriously hamper the fulfillment of the missionary mandate."[6]

> In light of this swinging pendulum, we must ask ourselves, is the day of the missions agency coming to an end?

Thus, I do not question their validity. But I do question their posture.

The missionary mandate was given to the universal church expressed as local churches. Agencies, regardless of how well they have represented or continue to represent local churches, are not local churches. When agencies seek to take the lead in making disciples and planting churches by "sending" missionaries apart from the centrality of the local church, it reveals an expropriating posture, even if unintended.

However, the New Testament seems to communicate that God's mission must be tethered to God's church. Acknowledging that leads to a posture not just toward the urgency of the task (reaching lost people), but also toward the means by which the task is to be carried out (building God's people).[7]

For partnerships between churches and organizations to flourish as they should, there must be a shared presupposition: local churches "are the hub of the missions wheel, while mission organizations are spokes in the wheel helping churches extend their work."[8] That makes for a very different posture.

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[3] Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Missions: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 202-08.

[4] Ibid., 208.

[5] Paul A. Beals, *A People for His Name: A Church Based Missions Strategy*, Rev. ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishers, 1995), 137.

[6] Ibid., 222.

[7] Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 123-60.

[8] Beals, *A People for His Name*, 133.

Perspective of Churches

Inevitably, however, some churches will end up overcorrecting. In self-sufficient zeal they may commandeer the relationship with missions agencies or just bypass them altogether. This would be just as unfortunate. Although the Scriptures offer no precedent for missions agencies, they do communicate a measure of autonomy among the apostolic teams during their missionary journeys. Make no mistake, Paul and his teams were profoundly attached to the local churches that sent and supported them, churches of whom they were an extension.[9] But many of their everyday and strategic decisions appear to have come from their dependence on the Holy Spirit and one another rather than the micromanagement of the local church.[10]

A**s churches take the primary responsibility of sending their people into God's mission, they are wise to take advantage of agencies' experience and support.**

Sending churches are responsible to send their missionaries toward healthy ministries that are informed by the Scriptures and empowered by the Holy Spirit. They may choose to forgo the wisdom and experience of missions agencies in the process, but they will likely repeat many unnecessary mistakes and carry a weight that may at times be "too heavy [to] handle alone" (Exodus 18:18). Researcher Patrick Johnstone sums it all up this way:

> Possibly the most defective partnership is that between the mission agencies and local churches . . . it is the result of two centuries of mission agencies acting as if local churches were just a source of finance and people, and local churches acting irresponsibly in their roles of sending and supporting. The centrality of the local church in missions needs to be emphasized, and agencies must be more accountable to their supporting churches for their ministries and use of workers. However, both are vital components of the Church—and must work together.[11]

Healthy partnerships between churches and missions agencies lead to so much more than what could be accomplished by either entity on its own. As churches take the primary responsibility of sending their people into God's mission, they are wise to take advantage of agencies' experience and support.

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[9] See Acts 14:26-28, Acts 20:36-38, Philippians 1:3-8.

[10] See Acts 16:6-10, Acts 21:10-14, Romans 15:17-22.

[11] Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends, and Possibilities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 234.

The Road Ahead

With the above posture of agencies and perspective of churches in place, there is hope for the strange juxtaposition to become sweet complementarity. Churches that haven't given up on agencies are looking to partner with agencies that haven't given up on churches. But such a road begins at this junction: relationships.

Relationships

Instead of relating to one another simply through the exchange of goods and services, there must be a basic common denominator: at least one church leader and one agency leader who actually have a relationship and want to maintain it throughout the course of sending a missionary unit (pre-field, a-field, post-field). Better yet, if the relationship could grow into more than two people—say, one staff team working with another staff team—the possibility for a thriving partnership would multiply. Perhaps that is too small, slow, and grassroots for our Western approach to partnership, but the global church's relational virtues would teach us otherwise.

The reason why relationships are so necessary to the future of church-agency partnership is because of the currency of missions sending: *people*. Far more than the static exchange of goods and services, agencies are helping churches to send people. They need more than the chutes of the field personnel manual—they need to be shepherded as unique and dynamic sheep. That can happen most naturally from the foundation of unique and dynamic relationships between church and agency leaders.

Interdependence

This emphasis on interpersonal relationships will only grow as denominational loyalties fragment and church networks continue to rise. Agencies will likely have to relate to a wider diversity of traditions, and reckon with helping those traditions to partner together. Churches may not be able to find so large a tribe as in the past.

> **The reason why relationships are so necessary to the future of church-agency partnership is because of the currency of missions sending: people.**

The only way partnership will not also fragment will be through interdependence: the missionary, the sending church, the receiving field, and the missions agency all connected and doing their part. The future will depend on the church and agency's willingness to draw the net of relationships. Perhaps this could be the most complementary role of the agency: drawing and/or maintaining the net of relationships around the sending church.

Flexibility

Missions agencies have not been known historically for flexibility and creativity in missions sending. The vision, strategy, locations, qualifications, etc. have been predetermined and the church must provide candidates to match. Indeed, many have been turned away from foreign fields because they did not meet certain criteria, some having been led to believe that no other agency would consider them. The road has been ruled by the agency. And yet the "board" is not the Lord.

The road ahead runs through the local church and the vision and strategy they have put in place (which demands that they do so!). What if they want to send marketplace workers in addition to vocational missionaries? What if they want to send their people to serve directly under a national partner? Missions agencies with a posture of support will seek to be more flexible when relating to these churches.

Missions agencies have not been known historically for flexibility and creativity in missions sending.

Networking

Up until now local churches involved in missions sending have experienced missions agencies as networks unto themselves. In many cases the agency provided an internally developed infrastructure that missionaries entered as they arrived on the field. Their leadership, care, and logistical support were all conveniently nearby and aligned. This insulated world rendered the local church almost unnecessary (apart from financial support).

Yet if the centrality of local churches rises, and the size of missions agencies correlatively decreases, then the ability to supply such an all-inclusive vehicle is unrealistic. Instead, helping local churches to explore and forge their own directly-connected networks would provide great mileage on the road of missions sending.

Conclusion

Perhaps this approach to church and agency partnership is far too futuristic to be realistic. But I am inspired by one initiative that seems aimed at these very things. A collective of sending churches have banded together to "build a new type of sending organization, one that intentionally takes a back seat so that local churches can lead the way in sending their people to the nations."[12] They are calling this agency, Upstream Sending, and a number of their distinctives align with what I have shared above as part of the road ahead in church-agency partnership. Such a hybrid entity may not be able to thrive after decades of agencies providing solely back-end services or an all-inclusive vehicle.

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[12] "Homepage," *Upstream Sending*, accessed November 1, 2021, https://www.upstreamsending.com/.

Or it could open the door to the future.

The relationship between local churches and missions agencies has been a strange juxtaposition of the primitive and the advanced. Yes, the local church originally held centrality in missions sending, but that became old hat long ago. Could we see a "back to the future"—a reorientation of missions agencies in the face of a rapidly changing world? Is this what it would look like to be faithful in our aim, yet innovative in our approach?

Call it a hologram in the desert, an Instagram in the tobacco field, or a smartphone in the middle of Timbuktu, but I think there's something happening here that we can't unsee. ✳

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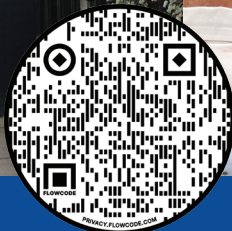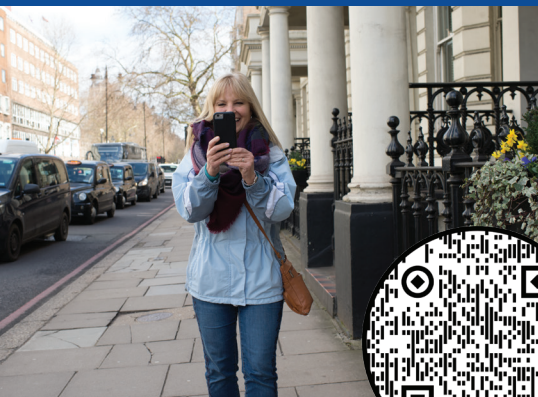
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