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Contents

Editorial: The Crucial Need for a Diverse Missions Force.....	39
David P. Jacob	
Mobilizing the Black Church for Global Missions	40
Melva L. Henderson	
REPENTANCE: A Potential Catalyst for Ethnic Minority Mobilization.....	52
Richard Coleman	
Mobilizing the Next Generation: The Role of Media in the Filipino Context.....	57
Joshua Chew	
Partnership with the Global South: The Future of Missions	64
David D. Ruiz	
The Strategic Importance of Mobilizing the Retiree	72
Vicky Warren	
Inclusive Mission: God is Removing Obstacles and Calling Us to Join Him	76
Dave Deuel	



One Body, Many Parts: The Crucial Need for a Diverse Missions Force

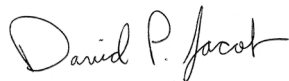
If you conduct a Google search on “the first American missionary,” it returns several results describing Adoniram Judson and his work in Burma. Very few results will list George Liele, a formally enslaved African American, who sailed for Jamaica in 1782 to plant churches. Liele’s missionary career began 10 years before William Carey left England for India and 30 years prior to Judson leaving the shores of the U.S. for Burma. George Liele was the first American missionary, but unfortunately, he is not often hailed as such.

Our goal in this issue is to celebrate and promote the contributions of the world’s diverse missions force, and to inform our readers on ways to intentionally mobilize diverse peoples. We also hope to show that diversity is not only concerned with ethnicity, as important as that is. It’s also about other segments of society who, at times, are sadly overlooked for various reasons. That’s why we’ve included articles on mobilizing African Americans, Asians, and Latin Americans, as well as retirees and people with impairments. Certainly, there are more segments of society we must include, but our space is limited to address them all here. We encourage you to do your own reflection and research as you work in your own context.

In addition to diverse peoples, you’ll also discover diverse methods in this issue. You’ll read about history, education, small groups, repentance, media, partnerships, vocation, adaptive technology, and much more. These diverse postures and strategies are all important to include in our mobilization efforts.

We are the body of Christ made up of different parts, or at least we’re supposed to be. Let’s rejoice in our diversity and our differences as each unique part works together for the fame of the One who created us all.

Together for His Kingdom,



Rev. David P. Jacob, Ph.D. (Cand.)

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Mobilizing the Black Church for Global Missions

Melva L. Henderson

Abstract

While much research has recorded the importance of global missions, minimal research exists to show the contribution of black missionaries and the Black Church's place in global missions. This paper will attempt to detail the historical and current role of the Black American Church and the African American perspective on global missions and missionaries, utilizing research data and my own church experience.

Introduction

Why has the Black Church seemingly not engaged in global missions? Byron Johnson, in his article, "Where Are the African-American Missionaries?," writes:

I remember, over 30 years ago, conversing with one of the few African-American missionaries I knew at the time. He told a story of some Christian friends of his, who were also African-American, who had recently returned from a mission trip to Central America. The natives in Central America made this comment to his friends: "We see Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and other famous African-Americans, but where are the African-American missionaries?"¹

This paper will attempt to provide an answer to this critical question.

Global Missions Defined

Global missions is the act of sharing the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ beyond one's own people group (cross-culturally), so that people from every nation come to believe in and follow Jesus. The term *missions* is used in various ways. Today, it is common to hear words such as *missional*, *mission*, *missionary*. These stem from the root *missio*, derived from the Latin word *mitto*, meaning, "to send." The phrase *missio Dei* references God's mission and everything He is doing in the world.²

Throughout history, God has worked to accomplish His purpose throughout the earth. Every action of God in Scripture finds Him acting per His purpose: to make Himself known

¹ Byron Johnson, "Where Are the African-American Missionaries?" *Missio Nexus*, May 30, 2019, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://missionexus.org/where-are-the-african-american-missionaries/>.

² Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing, 2014), 3.

and to reconcile every people group on earth to Himself. God has chosen to accomplish this mission through His people—the Church.

The Church is the collective body of believers in Christ who received an apostolic mandate, also known as the Great Commission, to go into all the world, making disciples of all men (Matthew 28:19). In essence, God uses the Church as the vehicle through which His global mission is accomplished. Since the mandate “to go” was given, countless Christians have been mobilized throughout the world, fulfilling God’s mission of reconciling the world to Himself.

Why Global Missions?

A 2017 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center recorded an estimated 2.3 billion Christians worldwide in 2015. These researchers predicted the numbers would consistently grow to make Christianity the world’s largest religion.³ At first glance, 2.3 billion Christians may appear to be a significant number. However, an estimated 7.8 billion people live on the planet today,⁴ leaving a staggering 5.6 billion who have yet to receive the gospel.

While the task of evangelizing the unreached is colossal, progress is being made. It is safe to argue that the growing number of Christians worldwide can be attributed to the mobilized Church’s engagement, men and women taking the gospel to the unreached and unevangelized of the world.

Research shows that of the top ten sending countries, the United States has more missionaries on the field than any of the other countries combined.⁵ While this may be true, it is noted that compared to other races in America, there is a disproportionate number of black missionaries on the field. As of July 2019, approximately 43 million African Americans lived within the United States.⁶ Sadly, of that number, very few serve on the mission field.

Christianity Today published a recent article entitled, “Southern Baptists Have Only 13 African American Career Missionaries. What Will It Take to Mobilize More?” The article states that the Southern Baptist International Missions Board has reported having a mere 0.3% African Americans of its 3,700 serving on the mission field.⁷

The Significance of the Black Church

Bill Hybels, the founder of Willow Creek Church in Illinois, stated, “The local church is the hope of the world.” This statement is especially relevant concerning the role and impact of the Black Church within the African American community. Still, the question lies in whether or not the Black Church currently has or has ever had a role in evangelizing *the world*.

³ Conrad Hackett and David McClendon, “Christians Remain World’s Largest Religious Group, but They are Declining in Europe,” *Pew Research Center*, April 5, 2017, accessed June 10, 2021, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/>.

⁴ “Current World Population,” *Worldometer*, last modified October 14, 2020, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.worldometersinfo/world-population/>.

⁵ Daniel Lovering, “In 200-Year Tradition, Most Christian Missionaries are American,” *Reuters*, February 20, 2012, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE81J0ZD20120220>.

⁶ “Quick Facts United States,” United States Census Bureau, last modified July 1, 2019, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/RHI225219>.

⁷ David Roach, “Southern Baptists Have Only 13 African American Career Missionaries. What Will It Take to Mobilize More?,” *Christianity Today*, February 28, 2020, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/february/southern-baptist-imb-african-american-missionaries.html>.

Throughout history, the Black Church has been a beacon of light to the African American community, providing spiritual guidance, along with educational and social services. The Black Church has also provided strong leadership in times of racial inequality and social injustice. The implications of the Black Church and its leadership in society, government, and the local community cannot be vitiated. However, the Great Commission's accomplishment will require spiritual leaders and churches from *every* people group, those who have an impressive social or community footprint, *and* a thorough understanding of the need to take their place on the global mission stage. The Black Church is not exempt.

Growing Up in the Black Church

Growing up as an African American, church attendance was expected and often demanded. Although the phrase “home and foreign missions” was used often, the focus conversationally and financially was the local black community. I would argue that, for many African Americans, the mission field was perceived as the worst zip code in the neighborhood. While the mission field does *include* those in the neighboring community, it must also extend beyond, into the uttermost parts of the earth.

Consider this: in 58 years, calculating birth to the present (minus 5th Sundays), I have attended approximately 2,784 Sunday morning church services. The probability of missed services equates to less than 100 in 58 years. Subtracting the estimated 100 missed services and 15 years of leading a local church body, I have been present for approximately 2,669 Sunday morning church services. Of these, I have never heard a single message on global missions.

Why? Why does the Black American Church appear nearly non-existent on the global mission scene, and what needs to happen to change this narrative? This paper proposes an answer to these questions.

An Unfortunate History

Professor Jim Sutherland of Reconciliation Ministries Network wrote an article in which he addresses the African American's absence on the mission field. Sutherland claims that of 400,000 worldwide, only 400 to 500 hundred Christian missionaries are African American.⁸ He gives an excellent argument to the root cause in his article, “African Americans and Global Missions: The Great Omission,” under the subtitle, “Give the Black Church A Break!”:

First, American slavery didn't end until 1865. It's difficult to go to another country with the Gospel when a pass was sometimes required for a slave to travel in his own county. Slaves had to gain access to the Gospel, then gain freedom. Even so, men such as Lott Carey gained Christ, freedom and the mission field—of Liberia.

Most black denominational mission structures were not in place until about the 1870s. About half of black missionaries served with black denominations. During the Reconstruction Period, after Emancipation of the slaves, gaining simple civil rights was high on the black agenda. The right to vote and use public facilities was temporarily gained. White “Jim Crow” backlash against black emancipation took the form of lynchings by the hundreds, rescinding of voter rights and segregation by states. As if dodging the KKK wasn't enough, the

Why does the Black American Church appear nearly non-existent on the global mission scene, and what needs to happen to change this narrative?

⁸ Jim Sutherland, “African Americans and Global Missions: The Great Omission,” Reconciliation Ministries Network, accessed October 14, 2020, <https://www.rmni.org/files/afam/AfricanAmericansandGlobalMissions.pdf>.

Great Migration of 5,600,000 blacks from rural South to industrial North occurred between 1910 and 1950, during which families and churches were disrupted. Violence was returned with riots in the 1943-1969 period.

The Civil Rights movement, which retrieved at tremendous price the rights taken away after Reconstruction, lasted until the late 60s. Racism existed in the white evangelical Christian community in the forms of denying blacks entrance into many evangelical mission organizations and colleges. Between 1920 and 1960, few blacks were accepted by white missions, due in part to colonial powers and dominions in Africa (such as Congo and South Africa) refusing entrance to African American missionaries to keep their hegemony over Africans.

Economically, the Depression hit the black community powerfully from 1930 until the start of WWII. Recessions also hit the community in the 70s until 1983. If the above periods are layered over one another, the strong impression emerges that, in all fairness, the Black Church did well to send even the few it did send until 1983.⁹

The painful struggles of black people in America and the African American Church leaders' desire to bring the African American people to a place of healing and wholeness are a few reasons why global missions is not a priority. How does one think about saving another when they must fight for their own life?

Missions: The Black Church's Legacy

George Liele, an African American slave born in 1750 in Virginia, is recorded to be the first American missionary.¹⁰ George Liele was the slave of Henry Shopp and, after accompanying Shopp to church services, became a devout Christian. Henry Shopp gave George Liele the task of explaining the Scriptures to other slaves. Liele wrote, "Desiring to prove [the sense I had of] my obligations to God, I endeavored to instruct [the people of] my own colour in the word of God."¹¹ Liele grew as a Bible teacher, and Henry Shopp freed him as a result. Shopp's local church ordained Liele as a minister, and he later started what is believed to be the first Negro Church gathered in America.¹²

Liele loved pastoring the church. However, the fear of being re-enslaved prompted him to relocate to Kingston, Jamaica, in 1782.¹³ There, Liele shared the gospel with the slaves in the sugar plantations. Through his mission work, countless were baptized and many churches were planted. He also established a public school for the children of the slaves on the plantations.

After George Liele established multiple churches and many slaves became Christians, some of the white slave owners began to feel threatened. Afraid that Liele and the Christian slaves following him would incite a rebellion, they began persecuting the black Christians. Many of Liele's leaders were tortured, beaten, imprisoned, and even murdered. George Liele himself was imprisoned twice, once for three years.

By his passing in 1828, there were nearly 20,000 believers and many churches planted throughout Jamaica. George Liele is the very first missionary from America. He traveled to the mission fields of Jamaica 10 years before

⁹ Sutherland, "African Americans and Global Missions: The Great Omission."

¹⁰ E.A. Holmes, "George Liele: Negro Slavery's Prophet of Deliverance," *Baptist Quarterly* 20, no 8 (October 1964): 350, accessed June 10, 2021, http://biblicalstudies.gospelstudies.org.uk/pdf/bq/20-8_340.pdf.

¹¹ Paul Easterling, "Profiles in Africana Religion-Part 3: George Liele and the First African Baptist Church," *Africana Religious Studies*, August 7, 2017, accessed June 10, 2021, <http://www.afrometrics.org/africana-religious-studies-series/profiles-in-africana-religion-part-3-george-liele-and-the-first-african-baptist-church>.

¹² Easterling, "Profiles in Africana Religion-Part 3," 341.

¹³ Easterling, "Profiles in Africana Religion-Part 3," 343.

William Carey went to India,¹⁴ and 30 years before Adoniram Judson went to India and Burma.¹⁵

America's First Black Female Missionary

The first female Protestant missionary was an African American woman named Betsey Stockton. Betsey was born into slavery in Princeton, NJ. While very young, she worked as a servant girl to Dr. Ashbel Green, the 8th president of Princeton University.¹⁶ Betsey never received a formal education, but Dr. Green personally home-schooled her. He also included her in his family devotions. As Betsey grew in her faith, she became convinced that God called her to be a missionary to Africa, but Betsey was a single black woman.

Black Americans pioneered the way for missions, and despite our unfortunate history in America, many have made significant and historical accomplishments in global missions.

In the early 1800s, a single woman traveling to the mission field (black or white) was considered inappropriate and dangerous. However, Betsey decided to apply to be a missionary candidate with the first mission organization, founded by Samuel Mills, The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Dr. Green wrote her recommendation letter, which stated that Betsey Stockton was “never intended to be held as a slave.”¹⁷ In 1823, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions permitted Betsey to travel to Sandwich Island, which today is Maui, Hawaii. Betsey traveled as a missionary and an assistant to Reverend Charles Stewart. When the Board approved Betsey as a missionary, they stated, “Betsey is to be regarded and treated, neither as an equal nor as a servant, but as a humble ‘Christian friend.’”¹⁸ Betsey was regarded by many.

Although downplayed by the Missions Board because she was a single black woman, Betsey established a school on Sandwich Island for impoverished children. Betsey learned the local language, started with 30 students, and trained the local Hawaiians to be the school's leaders and headmasters. By the time she and the Stewart family went back to Princeton, the Hawaiian teachers ran their schools.

Betsey later traveled to Great Island, Canada, and established another school for native Indian children. She later turned the school over to the indigenous people and returned to Princeton, New Jersey, where she taught African Americans. Eventually, she went on to establish Princeton's first African American Presbyterian church. At her passing, a college president presided over her funeral, and she was buried next to the Stewart family.¹⁹ Betsey Stockton was an American missionary before the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.

I would argue that whether acknowledged or not, Black Americans pioneered the way for missions, and despite our unfortunate history in America, many have made significant and historical accomplishments in global missions.

¹⁴ George Smith, *The Life of William Carey, D.D.: Shoemaker and Missionary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chap. 11, Kindle.

¹⁵ Jason Deusing, *Adoniram Judson: A Bicentennial Appreciation of the Pioneer American Missionary* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), chap. 4, Kindle.

¹⁶ J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2005).

¹⁷ Gregory Nobles, “Betsey Stockton,” *Princeton & Slavery*, April 2019, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://slavery.princeton.edu/stories/betsey-stockton>.

¹⁸ Nobles, “Betsey Stockton.”

¹⁹ Nobles, “Betsey Stockton.”

First Black Mission Organization

In 1815, Lott Carey was the first African American to found a mission organization. The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, as it is called, was established five years after white missionary Samuel Mills founded the first one.²⁰ Following the example of George Liele, Betsey Stockton, and Lott Carey, after the Civil War, African American missionaries traveled throughout the world preaching the gospel, concentrating on Africa. However, I would argue that the Jim Crow laws, among other racially driven circumstances, greatly hindered and, in most cases, stopped their mission efforts.

Some Refute the Evidence

There is well-founded historical evidence to support George Liele as the very first missionary from America. Although believed reliable, it is refuted by some. Samuel Mills and Adoniram Judson are argued to be America's first missionaries. Mark Steven Francois in his article-blog, "No...George Liele Was Not America's First Missionary," attests, "The problem, though, is that the claim that Liele was America's first overseas missionary is historically untrue—and this is something that is fairly easy to demonstrate."²¹ Francois argues that three groups of sources provide more direct and reliable information about the ministry of George Liele than the oral history that proposes Liele to be America's first missionary.

While Francois is entitled to his opinion, I believe that the reluctance to accept Liele, a black man, as the first missionary in America highlights the perspective brought on by racial tension prevalent in America at that time, one that still exists today. The atrocities and inferior mindset aimed at blacks were widespread and apparent in America. Even white Christian church leaders embraced practices that presented blacks in an inferior light, using scriptures and theological platforms to justify their actions and attitudes. As these practices became inhumane, it was evident that racism had come to be not just a secular or societal issue, but a Church issue as well.

Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, in their book, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, stated, "In the 18th century, many white Protestants did not believe that African Americans were fully human, and as a result, they did not believe that African Americans had souls. In the South, church leaders and Christians began to defend slavery by using the Bible and Church doctrine."²² This manipulation involved using the Bible, evangelistic, social, and political rationalizations, such as the fact that people in the Bible owned slaves and the argument that slavery allowed African Americans to become Christians.²³ White Americans devalued African Americans' credibility, causing many black accomplishments to be pirated, disregarded, or ignored altogether.

As mission-minded leaders, we set out with a vision to build an infrastructure and create systems that consistently promoted and supported the critical need for the congregation to be globally focused.

²⁰ William Seraile, "Black American Missionaries in Africa: 1821-1925," *The Social Studies* 63, no 5 (1972): 198-202, DOI: 10.1080/00220973.1943.11019203.

²¹ Mark Francois, "No...George Liele Was Not America's First Missionary," *Between the Perfect and the Doomed*, (April 13, 2018), accessed June 10, 2021, <https://markfrancois.wordpress.com/2018/04/13/no-george-liele-was-not-americas-first-missionary/>.

²² Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), chap. 1, Kindle.

²³ Julie Zauzmer, "The Bible Was Used to Justify Slavery. Then Africans Made it Their Path to Freedom," *The Washington Post*, April 30, 2019, accessed June 10, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-bible-was-used-to-justify-slavery-then-africans-made-it-their-path-to-freedom/2019/04/29/34699e8e-6512-11e9-82ba-fcfeff232e8f_story.html.

Our Church's Journey to Missions

I graduated from Rhema Bible Training College in 1992. From its founding, Rhema's mandate was to take the gospel to every corner of the earth. Their mission was and continues to be training as many individuals as possible to carry out this mandate. The Black Church emphasized leading people to Christ, not global missions. Rhema planted the initial seeds in my heart to see the gospel taken beyond the African American culture to every people group on earth. Equally, it produced a passion for educating and mobilizing as many African Americans as possible to fulfill God's global mandate.

When my husband and I planted our local church in 2006, we knew it was critical to establish a mission culture. Being African American pastors in the central city context, we realized that the congregation would be composed of mostly African Americans, those unacquainted with missions. As mission-minded leaders, we set out with a vision to build an infrastructure and create systems that consistently promoted and supported the critical need for the congregation to be globally focused. Initially, everything done spoke to what we believed God called the Church to be—a body of believers destined to impact the world.

Unfortunately, after a while, the leadership, and consequently the church, lost sight of their vision. The church became inward-focused. What happened? Robert James Kauffelt stated it appropriately in his thesis project, "How the Church has Lost its Vision: A Biblical Model to Regain its Mission":

The majority of the churches in America today and the people who attend them have not only lost focus of the mission of the Church, they have also lost the desire to carry out the mission of the Church. The Church in America has become a very inwardly focused organization that has become obsessed with itself... Instead of reaching out to those in our communities who have been marginalized and neglected, we have circled our wagons and turned the focus on ourselves.²⁴

The lead pastor's support is critical; without it, attempts to re-engage the church body toward global missions will fail.

It is essential to understand that every healthy church must have a degree of inward focus. The members need discipleship and genuine care; however, when a church becomes overly occupied with those inside the church's perceived needs, it can quickly abandon its outward focus and lose its footing as a mission-minded body.

Claude Hickman, Steven C. Hawthorne, and Todd Ahrend's article, "Life on Purpose," describes the Church's condition as a failure to live out the World Christian Journey (practices that keep Christians aimed at Christ's global purpose). The World Christian Journey practices are *The Practice of Going* (immersing cross-culturally); *The Practice of Welcoming* (connecting with those who come through migration or visits); *The Practice of Sending* (supporting those who go); and *The Practice of Mobilizing* (empowering others in God's mission purpose).²⁵

Although faithful to *The Practice of Sending*, the other practices that kept the local body aimed at Christ's global purpose were no longer evident. As a Black Church, it was critical to do everything necessary to guide the church back to its foundation.

²⁴ Robert James Kauffelt, "How the Church has Lost its Vision: A Biblical Model to Regain its Mission" (PhD thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), accessed October 10, 2020, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/58824397.pdf>.

²⁵ Steven C. Hawthorne, Claude Hickman, and Todd Ahrend, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., eds. Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009) 725-727.

Back to Its Foundation

Through prayer and the Holy Spirit's direction, we will begin strategically bringing the local church back to her foundation, taking the vision and ensuring that every facet is structured to accomplish the Great Commission. The church will become more mission-focused by providing training and information to the congregants, strengthening partnerships with mission organizations, and supporting and sending individuals in short-term missions, focusing on unreached people groups and local outreaches.

Step one will be meeting with the lead pastor, sharing where the challenges are, and ensuring the direction aligns with the ministry goals and mission. The lead pastor's support is critical; without it, attempts to re-engage the church body toward global missions will fail. The next step is convening with the board of directors, the executive leadership team, and staff. Meeting together will allow the team to work cohesively, revisiting the vision and overall mission, and strategizing to ensure that all auxiliaries, systems, and activities align with shifting the church back to its vision of reaching the community and world.

After the leadership is fully invested, we will strengthen our current mission and outreach department by selecting a missions pastor. This individual's primary responsibility will be developing and implementing strategies for training, developing, and sending the church body into local and global missions.

With the guidance of the missions pastor, the church will begin the process of mission immersion—strategically and consistently exposing and communicating the biblical mandate, purpose, and critical need for global missions. Many Sunday morning messages will be mission-focused, and those that are not will in some way point to the Great Commission.

Beginning with the long-standing partnering foreign agencies, the church will open its pulpit to visiting missionaries. The goal is to allow the missions workers to connect with the church members, spotlighting their work on the field, while at the same time educating congregants. After the service, congregants will have the opportunity to donate to their missions work and visit the missionary's table to receive more information or become an individual supporting partner. Our bookstore will be resourced with recommended books and articles detailing African Americans' contributions to missions, such as *George Liele's Life and Legacy: An Unsung Hero*, by David Shannon. Additionally, through the mission pastor's networking efforts, the church will seek opportunities for members to engage cross-culturally with organizations serving in foreign countries, such as organizations that teach English as a Second Language (ESL).

Second, congregants will be encouraged through Sunday sermons to build cross-cultural relationships and to share the gospel at their jobs, in their neighborhoods, and communities.

Third, we will add small groups and specialized training courses focused on missions within our church and Bible college. The goal is to educate and engage as many as possible within the local body and the African American community. We recommend *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, edited by Winter and Hawthorne, as an excellent resource for the training process.

The fourth phase will afford short-term mission opportunities. The February 2020 issue of *Christianity Today* noted that of the 3,700 missionaries within the Southern Baptist Church, only 13 are black.²⁶ We believe this step to be critical in moving the African American Church into global missions. Baylor University noted that students who

²⁶ Roach, "Southern Baptists Have Only 13 African American Career Missionaries," *Christianity Today*.

engage in short-term mission opportunities have a greater appreciation for other cultures, are less materialistic, and have a better appreciation for a missionary lifestyle.²⁷

In my opinion, Christians *going* and churches *sending* are two vital components of any world mission integration process. Creating short-term opportunities is just one way the local church can engage the black community while decreasing African Americans' disparities on the mission field. Doing so will open the gateway to discovering and identifying more individuals like George Liele, Betsey Stockton, and Lott Carey, Black American heroes contributing to our nation's greatness, alongside Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson.

Conclusion

The contribution of the African American community to global missions consists of church planting, building and founding schools, training, developing leaders and missionaries, and reaching the unreached with the gospel despite the difficulties brought on by systemic racism. I believe that the Black Church will revitalize the next wave of African Americans thrust into the nations. It is the heritage and legacy of the African American people, their calling as members of the universal body of Christ. ❁

²⁷ BaylorUMedia, "Short Term Missions Trips: Are They Worth The Investment?," Baylor University, May 2, 2011, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.baylor.edu/mediacommunications/news.php?action=story&story=93238#:~:text=But%20the%20study%20showed%20that,of%20missions%20as%20a%20lifestyle.&text=%22Long%2Dterm%20involvement%2C%20whether,you%20see%20transformation%20taking%20place.%22>.

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REPENTANCE: A Potential Catalyst for Ethnic Minority Mobilization

Richard Coleman

“But, I wasn’t even alive then! Why am I being held responsible and punished for sins of the past? It’s just not fair!” Many an ethnic minority¹ has heard this retort from white Americans who feel unfairly lumped together with their racist predecessors. Case in point, in one of its articles, the satirical *Babylon Bee* wrote about *Sesame Street’s* introduction of a white puppet named Todd who gets “blamed for everything.” He is confronted by Grover, a blue puppet, “about Todd’s culpability regarding a distant ancestor who fought for the Confederacy.”² Although the article is purely fictional, it nonetheless expresses a common sentiment among white Americans.

From its very foundations, America has been mired in racism. In fact, the founding documents of the country did not place equal value on all people. For a helpful treatise on the history of racism in America, read historian Ibram X. Kendi’s, *Stamped from the Beginning*. Though the author is at times antagonistic toward Christianity, his conclusions are nonetheless eye-opening. Another author, Jemar Tisby, wrote *The Color of Compromise* to show how the American Church has been complicit in establishing and maintaining unjust systems based on race. The goal of such books is not to condemn white people for all of eternity and give them no opportunity for redemption. On the contrary, the hope of these authors is to provoke introspection, conviction, repentance, restoration, and a mutually beneficial way forward. In that same spirit, this short article is an attempt to bring awareness, and hopefully action, to one subset of the American Church’s ministry: cross-cultural missions.

Regardless of one’s political bent, it is clear that people of color by and large feel frustrated with their treatment in America.

At present, many denominations and missionary sending agencies are inquiring about ways to recruit more missionaries of color. These organizations have taken a look at their rosters and noticed that most, and in some cases, all of the people serving with them are white. Frankly, every traditional sending agency in the US is facing this reality. There are less than 300 full-time, cross-cultural African-American missionaries serving anywhere in the world. They make up less than 1% of the entire US missionary sending force.³ The International Mission Board of the

¹ There are a number of words, phrases, and acronyms currently used to describe non-white people. These include BIPOC, [people] of color, and ethnic minorities. Each designation has its pros and its cons. In this article, “ethnic minority” and “[people] of color” will be used. Given my personal experience, the bulk of the illustrations will relate to Black Americans.

² “Sesame Street Introduces ‘Todd’, a White Male Muppet Who is Blamed for Everything,” *The Babylon Bee*, March 29, 2021, accessed June 1, 2021, <https://babylonbee.com/news/sesame-street-introduces-todd-a-white-male-muppet-that-is-blamed-for-everything>.

³ Current soon-to-be-published research led by Jim Sutherland, President of Reconciliation Ministries Network International (www.rmni.org), contains more specifics about these statistics. I am assisting with this research.

Southern Baptist Church, for example, tallied just thirteen African-American missionaries at the close of 2019. This was out of a total 3,700 career missionaries sent by the denominational sending structure.⁴ Convicted by the optics (assuming the worst), or longing to experience the valuable contributions of other parts of the Body (assuming the best), majority-white sending organizations have scratched their collective heads seeking ways to find and mobilize people of color. While there are all sorts of methods that organizations can try, they must be preceded by genuine repentance.

Suffice it to say, Christian missionary organizations played a role in the reduction of ethnic minority missionaries serving overseas and had a part in stifling mobilization momentum.

The climate in America is rife with ethnic and racial tension. Regardless of one's political bent, it is clear that people of color by and large feel frustrated with their treatment in America. When this frustration is met with denial, defensiveness, insensitivity, or outright anger, people of color grow weary in their attempts to partner with white people and the organizations they run. The pain of collaborating becomes too intense. Time and space do not permit, but there are a number of examples I could give showing this to be the case. So, what is a majority-white organization to do? Repent.

Practically speaking, there are four steps an organization can take in this process of repentance. First, the agency or denomination must search into its own history. What does the research reveal in relation to racist actions or policies in missions? Some agencies and denominations, due to racism in their own hearts, pressure from colonizing countries, or fear of "the other," enacted policies that withdrew Black missionaries from the field, kept them from serving in certain countries, or blocked them from applying altogether. The stories of Montrose Waite, Mary McLeod Bethune, Alonzo and Althea Edmiston, and so many others bear witness to this very fact.⁵ Suffice it to say, Christian missionary organizations played a role in the reduction of ethnic minority missionaries serving overseas and had a part in stifling mobilization momentum.⁶

Second, after drawing out its history, the organization must bring the ugly things it has discovered to the light. These historical transgressions should be shared with the leadership team, followed by a discussion on the most tactful, yet honest way to communicate these findings to constituents and to the broader world. Make it known. Be honest about it. Hiding things and failing to show transparency only breeds distrust. Not to mention, these shortcomings prevent genuine healing from happening.

Third, the organization must prayerfully consider what a humble gesture of repentance should look like. On the one hand, the gesture should be authentic and from the heart; on the other, it could be helpful to invite people of color from outside the organization's circle to contribute their thoughts about the appropriateness of the gesture. Consideration should be given as to who should speak and carry out the action. Who should be invited? When should it be done? How should it be done? These types of questions are simply reflective of good missiology, the same kind of questions that sending organizations are eager to ask overseas, but forget to ask back home.

⁴ David Roach, "Southern Baptists Have Only 13 African American Career Missionaries. What Will It Take to Mobilize More?," *Christianity Today*, Feb. 28, 2020, accessed June 1, 2021, <https://christianitytoday.com/news/2020/february/southern-baptist-imb-african-american-missionaries.html>.

⁵ Montrose Waite, founder of Carver Foreign Missions, served in Liberia with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Mary McLeod Bethune, the founder of Bethune-Cookman College, wanted to be a Presbyterian missionary, but was denied the opportunity to serve. The Edmistons served in the Belgian Congo under the Presbyterian Church.

⁶ See Carl F. Ellis, Jr., *Going Global Beyond the Boundaries: The Role of the Black Church in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Urban Ministries, 2005).

Saying sorry and acknowledging wrongdoing may deal with the past, but it does not address the present policies, beliefs, and attitudes that perpetuate blatant or even subtle racism.

Finally, it is crucial to remember that acts of repentance are not silver bullets. They are only a starting place, a way to get things moving. They mean nothing if they are not followed by action. Saying sorry and acknowledging wrongdoing may deal with the past, but it does not address the present policies, beliefs, and attitudes that perpetuate blatant or even subtle racism. With the help of people of color and organizations who have gone through similar processes, the leadership team should develop a game plan to create a just and equitable environment. As a word of caution, this task should not simply be thrown to ethnic minorities for them to fix. The whole team needs to be involved.

The sending agency originally known as Sudan Interior Mission, now simply referred to as SIM, once had policies that discriminated against Black Americans and kept them from joining the agency.⁷ The policies stemmed from prejudice, as well as pressure put on the organization from countries intent on colonizing indigenous peoples.⁸ In February 2008, the then president of SIM, Steve Strauss, washed the feet of several African-American leaders in an act of repentance for the racist schemes that kept Black Americans from serving with the agency.⁹ Since that act of contrition, SIM has taken great strides to listen to and create space for Black Americans to serve. They have invited people of color to join their board, co-sponsored the National African American Missions Conference, and spent more time listening to people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Although the organization is still a work in progress and has by no means arrived, it is moving in the right direction. At present, it has more Black American missionaries than just about any other traditional sending agency in America.

Secular businesses all over the world have been issuing such apologies for past wrongs of discrimination. Yes, some of them have been doing so out of “worldly sorrow,”¹⁰ but at least they are moving in the right direction. They are creating job opportunities, funding education, and looking for ways of giving back to the very communities they had previously overlooked or exploited. Should believers, the very children of God, allow the world to take the lead, while churches and Christian parachurch organizations remain stuck in their past transgressions? Yes, everyone would love to move on and change the subject, but until genuine repentance takes place, the issue of racism will continue to be one that serves as a barrier to mobilizing people of color.

Should believers, the very children of God, allow the world to take the lead, while churches and Christian parachurch organizations remain stuck in their past transgressions?

In the end, it is God who calls. He is the one who speaks to the heart and compels people to join Him in His mission. Even the most heartfelt acts of sorrow will not cause masses of ethnic minorities to sign up for long-term, cross-cultural service. The prayers to the “Lord of the harvest”¹¹ are still essential and must continue. That being so, organizations should work to remove obstacles that would turn potential candidates of color away. This would be a necessary step in the right direction. If ever there was a time for this to happen, the time is now. ✱

⁷ Janet Sebastian, “Woman on the Front Lines,” *Charisma Magazine*, (November 2008): 34.

⁸ Black missionaries often sought to empower the indigenous people. This was in direct opposition to the colonizing countries’ needs for cheap labor, which was often oppressive in nature.

⁹ I was present during this act of repentance. I have also been a part of various meetings hosted by SIM to discuss ethnic minority mobilization.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 7:8-11

¹¹ Matt. 9:38

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Mobilizing the Next Generation: The Role of Media in the Filipino Context

Joshua Chew

Current State of Mission

The task that Christ gave us in the Great Commission, to make disciples of all nations, is far from finished. As of right now, we are still looking at either 3.24 billion or 4.61 billion unreached people in the world.¹ The difference in number is due to how we measure unreached people groups, professing Christians, and evangelical Christians. We are also facing a challenge in mobilizing the next generation, those currently below 30, to be involved with His work around the world. Whether it is for them to work cross-culturally, to fund missions, to intercede, or even to mobilize others to take part in missions, the younger generation is generally uninvolved.

We are not seeing many young professionals in their late twenties or early thirties committing to be long-term missionaries. To quote Jim Elliot:

Our young men are going into the professional fields because they don't 'feel called' to the mission field. We don't need a call; we need a kick in the pants. We must begin thinking in terms of 'going out,' and stop our weeping because 'they won't come in.' Who wants to step into an igloo? The tombs themselves are not colder than the churches. May God send us forth.²

Whether it is for them to work cross-culturally, to fund missions, to intercede, or even to mobilize others to take part in missions, the younger generation is generally uninvolved.

A recent survey by Barna shows that almost half of church-goers do not know of the Great Commission, while another study states that nearly half of millennials believe that evangelism is wrong.³ These are just some of the challenges we are currently facing in mobilizing more Christians to be involved in missions.

Current Mobilization Efforts

What is being done in terms of mobilization efforts to engage the younger generations? Currently, Evangelicals organize things such as missions conferences, missions month in churches,

¹ The first estimate of 3.24 billion is found here: "Global Summary," *Joshua Project*, accessed May 21, 2021, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/statistics. The second estimate of 4.61 billion is found here: "Global Status of Evangelical Christianity," *Global Research*, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://grd.imb.org/>.

² Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1979), 54.

³ "Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong," *Barna*, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/>. Also see "51% of Churchgoers Don't Know of the Great Commission," *Barna*, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/>.

missional Bible study materials, missions courses, short-term outreaches, among other ongoing mobilization efforts.

We have many major mobilization conferences going on in the North American region. One notable conference, which targets the younger generation specifically, is the Urbana Missions Conference. But in the Global South, especially among Asians, we do not have many such mobilization conferences.

From the data, it seems clear that Asian believers might have the capacity and capability to reach Asia if they are mobilized.

Another mobilization event that occurs is the annual International Day for the Unreached, organized by the Alliance for the Unreached. Generally, this is recognized mainly in North America, as there are no hosts here in Asia. That is, until this year when Project Ablaze had the opportunity to host it.

There are many great resources to bring awareness to the need for missions and mobilization, such as this journal, but one has to wonder, are these resources engaging the younger generation? Barna's survey regarding the Great Commission seems to indicate that the answer is no. The majority of people are still unaware.

Joshua Project is a good resource for knowing the current state of the world, but how many young people know about that website, let alone understand the statistics it lists? Over the past 5 years of our Project Ablaze movement mobilization efforts, we have asked young professionals about the unreached, and the most common misunderstanding is that the unreached are the unbelievers—people staying in far flung villages without access to internet and electricity. This is true to a certain extent, but we are now seeing highly unreached major metropolitan areas like Tokyo, Istanbul, Jakarta, etc, of which the younger generation is unaware.

Many of the gospel-deprived groups that we are mobilizing workers to are in Asia. In fact, Joshua Project lists that 59.1% of Asia is unreached.⁴ Of the 3.2 billion who are unreached, 2.8 billion live on the continent of Asia. The same set of data also shows that 9.2% of Asians are Christian adherents, with 3.2% being evangelicals. Though the percentage is small, it translates to about 437 million Christian adherents. From the data, it seems clear that Asian believers might have the capacity and capability to reach Asia if they are mobilized. Geographical distance and cultural similarities indicate huge potential for Asians to reach our own—the unreached are among us.

How are we then to create awareness and educate the next generation of Asians about the need among gospel-deprived people? How are we to mobilize the next generation, the millennials in Asia, to reach our own?

Media Influence

A missionary once asked me how the LGBT movement spread like wildfire. How did they spread their ideology? How does ISIS recruit their suicide bombers and martyrs? It is all done through the power of videos and media.

With the recent pandemic, we have seen the world go online to engage and connect with one another, and also to search for content to watch. New video platforms like TikTok became popular overnight.

⁴ "All Continents," *Joshua Project*, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://joshuaproject.net/global/continents>.

According to data from Joshua Project about the nations in Asia, the Philippines has among the highest population of evangelical believers and Christian adherents,⁵ with 99 million Christian adherents, and 13.8 million evangelicals.

According to DataReportal's 2021 digital study, published by We Are Social and Hootsuite, Filipinos spent an average of four hours and fifteen minutes each day on social media in 2021.⁶ Meanwhile, in 2020, Filipino's spent an average of three hours fifty-three minutes on social media. In contrast, the world's average in 2021 is two hours and twenty-five minutes. The Philippines also lead the way globally in daily internet use, with a daily average of ten hours and fifty-six minutes, while the global average is six hours and fifty-four minutes.

Knowing that the majority of Filipinos are Christians and that they are spending a huge amount of time on the internet and social media, there is a need for us to utilize media and engage them on digital platforms.

Ralph Winter said, "God cannot lead you on the basis of information you do not have."⁷ What information do we have that millennials need to know and respond to, especially regarding His mandate? And how do we present and communicate this information to them?

Mobilizing Filipinos

The statements mentioned in this portion come from my personal experience serving in the Philippines as a media mobilizer and missions coach. After being in the Philippines since 2013, I have come to see traits in Filipinos that can enable them to be effective cross-cultural workers. This information may not apply to every Filipino, but from my experience and observation, it is apparent in a majority.

Due to the frequent natural disasters that strike the Philippines, Filipinos are highly resilient in harsh conditions, not just physically, but also mentally and emotionally. Being in a cross-cultural context, this will be highly beneficial as they will face various challenges and need to persevere.

Filipinos are very welcoming, polite, and hospitable, and they strive to show this to strangers, ideally making people feel comfortable around them. They are also very practical and creative, able to innovate when problem solving. This will help them settle down and build relationships with locals as they work to be His witnesses among Unreached People Groups (UPGs).

As Asians, Filipinos will definitely be able to blend in well within cross-cultural communities, which is an advantage over a North American trying to blend in among Asian UPGs. There are also a high number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who are currently living among unreached people groups. If we can tap into this group of OFWs and mobilize them, the impact will be far reaching.

As Asians, Filipinos will definitely be able to blend in well within cross-cultural communities, which is an advantage over a North American trying to blend in among Asian UPGs.

⁵ "Country: Philippines," *Joshua Project*, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/RP>.

⁶ Simon Kemp, "Digital 2021: The Philippines," *DataReportal*, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-philippines>.

⁷ As quoted in David Flynn, "Perspectives & College Students: A Dynamic Combination," *Mission Frontiers*, November 1, 2009, accessed May 21, 2021, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/perspectives-college-students>.

Filipinos like to spend time online as I have shown with the statistics, so what better way to mobilize them than to go where they are—online platforms?

Christian Media

As a millennial, I love to watch videos. My friends and I here in Asia frequently share funny videos, prank videos, and inspirational videos over Messenger. The challenge is that we do not have enough “millennial friendly” missional content that we would want to share. DataReportal’s 2021 digital study reveals that of the 73.91 million internet users in the Philippines, 99.4% are watching online videos.⁸ The research also shows that 83% of those internet users are watching vlogs. These numbers show us that Filipinos have a strong interest in watching videos. Hence, there is a need to saturate the digital space with missional video content that will educate them on the need for missions, point them in the right direction toward this need, and communicate how they can be involved.

There is a need to saturate the digital space with missional video content that will educate them on the need for missions, point them in the right direction toward this need, and communicate how they can be involved.

There are many Christian media producers—Campus Crusade, yesHEis, the Kendrick brothers, Dallas Jenkins, etc.—who are producing excellent evangelistic videos and gospel films, which are all easily available on the internet. We also have Media to Movements, which is using media to engage and evangelize unreached people groups, specifically.

In terms of Christian films, there is a variety, from the classics of *Ben-Hur* and *The Passion of the Christ*, to *Facing the Giants*, *Fireproof*, *War Room*, *God’s Not Dead*, *Breakthrough*, *Courageous*, *Paul Apostle of Christ*, *The Case for Christ*, *Soul Surfer*, *Indivisible*, and the more recent series, *The Chosen*.

Missions Media

There is great content available from the evangelistic and gospel categories of media, but what about mobilization video content? Missions films? There are only a few. We have *Tears of The Saints*, which presents the unreached people groups in an impactful manner, as well as *State of The World*, by Global Frontier Missions. The International Missions Board also produces great missions videos. But the list and options for mobilization content are quite limited. Most of the content produced is from missions agencies, and, generally, cannot be accessed across different organizations and platforms. A YouTube search for missions videos will show that the current videos produced are mostly recruitment videos for the producing organization.

What types of videos do we hope to see produced? We need more videos that present the current state of the world, showing the stats of unreached people groups, not in graphs and charts, but in footage and clips that depict their God-given uniqueness. Ideally, these will show the needs among unreached people groups, not simply as a prayer point, but perhaps showing interviews and stories of them seeking and searching for hope.

Various websites like Joshua Project, The Traveling Team, Operation World, and Wycliffe Global Alliance have great information that should guide our missions efforts. But millennials may not be able to relate to these numbers in order to comprehend and visualize the need. We need more media producers who will focus on producing content for Filipino millennials that can present this research in video forms.

⁸ Kemp, “Digital 2021,” *DataReportal*.

In comparison with gospel films, we only have a handful of missions films: *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, *Chariots of Fire*, *The End of the Spear* and the more recent, *Free Burma Rangers*. How many missions films do we have that the younger generation will want to watch?

We do not have a lack of stories that can be told through film, that will challenge and impact the next generation into missions. The lives of Hudson Taylor, William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Mary Slessor, etc., are amazing stories that can inspire generations to come. Much of the younger generation may prefer watching a video rather than reading a book or article about the lives of these great missionaries. How I wish there was a film on the life of Hudson Taylor for the impact it could have on believers.

Missions Videos: Quantity vs. Quality

In his e-book, *Global Transmission, Global Mission*, Jason Mandryk describes the challenges faced by Christian content creators:

There are two sides to the digital coin. While we can enjoy the benefits of technology, there are also accompanying challenges. Firstly, we need to manage the flood of content currently being released. We need to ask ourselves, “Is this necessary?” (Trust me, I asked myself this question a hundred times just in relation to this e-book, and only narrowly came up with yes.) Simply because we have discovered a new platform does not mean we need to inundate it with our own voices. People only have the capacity to absorb so much content, and meaningfully participate in so many hours of Zoom calls. Let’s aim for quality over quantity. Second, while churches and ministries are learning how to provide digital fellowship and content, the world of entertainment is way ahead of the game. For every engaging and edifying piece of content Christians create, there are a hundred Netflix shows, a thousand YouTube channels or podcasts and a million instances of far more debased material out there, usually with far bigger budgets and extensively more experience at capturing people’s attention.⁹

We need to explore media means for mobilizing and recruiting Asian millennials in reaching the unreached, bringing the gospel to those without access to it.

There is a need for many more missions mobilization videos, but we need to remember that the millennials who are online searching for video content to watch will have countless options. If the quality of our mobilization content does not match the quality of video content the world is producing, we will lose the millennials as our audience.

There is a need for professional producers who will commit to producing high quality missions content and believers who are committed to funding the production of missional video content.

Conclusion

Millennials in Asia, particularly Filipino young adults, have the potential to be a mobilized missions force for the unreached people groups in the Asian continent and beyond. Unfortunately, the challenges lie in raising awareness, training, and, in many instances, financial capacity for sending.

⁹ Jason Mandryk, *Global Transmission, Global Mission: The Impact and Implications of the Covid-19 Pandemic*, (Operation World, 2020), 43-44.

We need to explore media means for mobilizing and recruiting Asian millennials in reaching the unreached, bringing the gospel to those without access to it. We can use video content to present these needs, to create awareness, and to show how they can be involved.

As the body of Christ has different roles, I believe that churches in different regions of the world also play different roles in fulfilling the Great Commission. It is my prayer that the North American church will seek the Lord in discovering their role in mobilizing millennials here in Asia for reaching the UPGs among us. *

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Partnership with the Global South: The Future of Missions

David D. Ruiz

The world in which we are doing mission today is becoming increasingly complex and complicated. Many of the processes from the last 50 years for mobilizing, recruiting, training, and deploying missionaries have proven inadequate for the challenges we face as churches and missions agencies today. Last year's pandemic has further complicated the matter.

The geographical change in global Christianity is the first major challenge we are facing. Starting around the 1980s, the direction of the curves in our statistical graph changed radically. We are witnessing the rapid decline of Christians in the Global North (including Europe and the United States) and, at the same time, the explosive growth of Christians in the Global South (including Africa, Asia, and Latin America). The *Atlas of Global Christianity* records that in 1900, Global North Christians represented 82% of believers, while only 18% of Christians lived in the rest of the world. Today, only 33% of Christians live in the Global North, while 67% are living in the Global South.¹ If we compare only the segment of Evangelicals, the change is more evident. In 1900, 92% of Evangelicals lived in the Global North, with just 8% in the Global South. The ratio today is 23% in the Global North and 77% in the Global South.²

There was a time in history when the Church in the Global South had a strong influence on world Christianity, imprinting its values on global mission and the way the Church acts. Andrew Kirk recognized this, affirming,

“During the period of the early Church prior to Constantine, the Christian message was spread from the periphery of Roman empire to its very heart.”³ Nearly one thousand years later, the Church appears to have come full circle. We are living, once again, in a time when the Church is moving from the periphery to the centers of the world. According to Todd Johnson, in 1981, Christianity in the Global South recovered its position as the larger segment of the Church, as it was during the first 900 years of Christendom.⁴ Reflecting on the last five hundred years of Christian mission, Andrew Walls attests, “Christianity had once more become, as in its

Many of the processes from the last 50 years for mobilizing, recruiting, training, and deploying missionaries have proven inadequate for the challenges we face as churches and missions agencies today.

¹ Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 55.

² “500 Years of Protestantism,” *Center for the Study of Global Christianity*, accessed May 8, 2021, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/04/136e0d3b6-d706-4bcf-a892-87a608c59104-18.pdf>.

³ Andrew Kirk, *Mission Under Scrutiny* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 152.

⁴ Todd Johnson and Sandra Lee, “From Western Christendom to Global Christianity,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., eds. Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 388.

beginnings, a non-Western religion,” concluding his thoughts by saying, “What is already certain is that Christianity is now a predominantly non-Western religion, the profession principally of African and Asian and Latin American people, and it’s currently moving progressively in that direction.”⁵

**God is hearing
more prayers
and worship in
Spanish than any
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the world.**

The diversity in Christian traditions is also radically changing as we have experienced an increase of the so-called “Independent Christian” through the last century. By 1900, Protestants represented the majority of the non-Catholic, non-Orthodox Christians, comprising almost one third of the whole segment of Christianity. Today, the percentage remains steady at 22%. Still, independent churches represent an important segment of Christianity, similar to Protestants, at 17%.⁶ Latin America and Africa have been experiencing an incredible growth of the Pentecostal churches; for example, in Latin America, Pentecostals represent almost 65% of the Evangelical church. “One example of Southern Christian activism is the rise of Pentecostals in Latin America. Initially thought to be politically ‘quiet,’ they have become increasingly drawn into politics.”⁷

Language in Christianity is changing as well. Todd Johnson confirmed what some secular scholars have announced, “The dominant languages of Christianity are shifting south. Already by 1980, Spanish (primarily in its Latin American forms) was the leading language of church membership in the world.”⁸ As we can imagine happening today, God is hearing more prayers and worship in Spanish than any other language in the world, yet we continue to perpetuate English as the *lingua franca* in our Christian congresses, consultations, training settings, and publications.

The missionary force has now emerged and is growing from the regions in the Global South. As Jason Mandryk writes, “The explosive growth of the Majority World Church is awe-inspiring, but perhaps more astonishing still is the accompanying rise of numerous viable Majority World mission movements. Today... missions activity is no longer predominantly a West-to-East activity.”⁹ Bruce Koch also highlights that the Global South mission force “has surpassed the force from traditional sending countries in the West around 2005.”¹⁰ Along with this growth, the Global South is providing some exemplary models that could help the rest of the Church become effectively engaged with this new *époque* of global missions.

As the world entered the COVID-19 pandemic, it faced recurrent lockdowns, effectively closing the majority of meetings and gatherings. We experienced important periods, like when churches’ buildings closed and remained closed, which was especially critical in nations where the Church is growing. After facing this unexpected situation, several important facts about the Church have surfaced. The priorities of the Church are being put to the test; we are realizing that the areas we invested so many resources, personnel, and effort into in the past are no longer functioning

⁵ Andrew Walls, “Afterword: Christian Mission in a Five-hundred-year Context” in *Mission in the 21st Century*, eds. Andrew Walls and Ross Cathy (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 198-199.

⁶ “Global Christianity: A Look at the Status of Christianity in 2018,” *Center for the Study of Global Christianity*, accessed May 8, 2021, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/04/GlobalChristianityinfographic.pdf>Pg1_.pdf.

⁷ Johnson and Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010*, 51.

⁸ “Christianity 2010: A View from the New Atlas of Global Christianity,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 1, accessed May 8, 2021, <http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/2010-01/2010-01-029-johnson.html>.

⁹ Jason Mandryk, “The State of the Gospel,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., eds. Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 364.

¹⁰ Bruce Koch, “The Surging Non-Western Mission Force,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., eds. Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 370.

today, yet the Church continues to move. Besides this, an incredible amount of money has been invested in buildings, systems, staff, vehicles, even airplanes—things that, in certain places, are poorly utilized or closed now. We must recognize our sin as we, the global Church, only invested 6% of our total resources in foreign mission,¹¹ which could be a source of hope in the midst of suffering. We failed in placing thousands of missionaries in areas that are facing the tremendous impact of COVID-19, like India, Bangladesh, etc. Instead, most of the missionaries are being sent where the Church is already present and growing, like Brazil.

Our effectiveness in discipleship, a crucial element in producing new missionaries, is being evaluated, and we are failing. Global North and Global South churches are facing the same problems due to the rapid growth of churches in the South, and churches in the North applying worldly success metrics, like budgets, fame, high attendance, social media followers, and even the square meters of their meeting place. The focus has moved from discipleship to church size. Following Matthew 16:24, churches must confess that they have failed in the quality of their members. They exhibit a lack of commitment in character as they do not obey the command to “deny themselves” in order to be what the Lord wants them to be, the obedience to “take up their crosses” in order to do what the Lord wants them to do, and the unconditionality to “follow me” in order to go wherever the Lord wants them to go. It is urgent that we recover discipleship as the measure of success for the church if we want to see effective missionaries today and in the future.

Churches have become experts in presenting, developing, organizing, and recruiting workers to serve in the church, but have failed to teach members what they must do when the lights are off and the building is closed.

Churches have become experts in presenting, developing, organizing, and recruiting workers to serve in the church, but have failed to teach members what they must do when the lights are off and the building is closed. Most of them are just waiting for the next meeting. However, we are learning that the most important things happen when the Church is not gathered, when the building is closed. The Church is operating 24 hours a day; it has not stopped, it is not in a state of suspension, and it will not disappear. In fact, it is more alive than ever as its members make a lasting impact in their community; they are alongside the widows, the orphans, the anxious, and the sick, serving those who have lost their peace and are without hope for the future. The needy are experiencing the loving touch of the Church where they are and no longer must come to the church building to feel it. The Church is among them.

As you know, the future of world missions is in global partnership, which is increasingly shifting to the South. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity states, “Globally, Evangelicalism is a predominantly non-white movement within Christianity. In 2000, 79.1% of all Evangelicals were of color (non-white; 185.2 million). In 2015, 84.1% of all Evangelicals in the world are of color (non-white; 270.1 million).”¹² In the same way, Todd Johnson describes, “Northern and Western scholars [are] no longer at the Christian center of gravity.”¹³ The older, more experienced, and more funded sending structures that are recruiting today are no longer at the forefront of Christian activity. We need to realize that there is a lot to learn from the emerging missions movement, with its passion, vitality, and activism in mobilizing missionaries, even with few economic resources.

¹¹ “Global Evangelism,” *Center for the Study of Global Christianity*, accessed May 8, 2021, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/04/1EvangelismInfographic.pdf>.

¹² “Quick Facts about Global Christianity,” *Center for the Study of Global Christianity*, accessed May 15, 2021, <https://archive.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/Quick-Facts-about-Global-Christianity.cfm.html#top>. Also see Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 2020).

¹³ Todd M. Johnson, “Christianity and Language,” *Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary*, accessed May 15, 2021, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/blog/christianity-language/>.

Nevertheless, cooperation is always a challenge, especially between two or more missions entities from different parts of the world and different missions perspectives. The challenge today is the Western Church's blind spot for the rest of the world. Todd Johnson once shared about his experience celebrating 500 years of reformation in Wittenberg in 2017. As the data showed that 40% of Protestants were African, and they were misrepresented in that meeting (as always), the presenter stated in a very polite way, "Our African brothers need to know that they are welcomed to sit at this table." A Ghanaian brother present in the meeting responded, "It is good for you to invite me to the table, but it is better for you to invite me into the kitchen."¹⁴ The biggest challenge facing the global mission community when it comes to Global South/Global North collaboration is that both have a different understanding of the crucial issues of partnership.

Partnership has a different meaning in both parts of the world. In the Global South, we understand partnership as acknowledgement that the old sending nations and the new sending nations are equal partners in responsibility and capacity in the cross-cultural task. Meanwhile, for the old sending nations, partnership seems to mean that by sharing personnel and finances, the others will accept their conditions to join a project. "The old partnership concept resulted not in an increase but a decrease in world evangelization by the partners. Instead of partnership in evangelistic obedience, too often the missions became entangled in the internal affairs of the churches with frustration resulting for both,"¹⁵ said Hedlund some time ago, and I believe he is still right. When the Global South feels excluded from the planning process of cooperation, they understand that it is just an invitation to participate in an event, a program, or a project, but not to build a partnership.

Measurement of the success of a partnership is also different between the Global North and South. For instance, when a partnership faces a crisis, the Latin American Church's first question is biblical, not strategic or methodological. There is a growing sense in Latin America that partnership is a biblical demand with biblical implications. This means that when obstacles arise, we first question our motivations and review our spiritual gifts, then later we examine the methods and processes. It is our understanding that, most of the time, when a partnership is facing a problem, it is a calling for a review of our commitment with the Lord and His Word, not with a particular project.

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What resources mean in the Global South is radically different from some of the Global North assumptions, and most of the time it is the cause of the continuing lack of equilibrium in partnership. For most in the Global North, the prevailing idea is, "If we have a good plan, a good leader, and the necessary resources, the project will be done." For the Global South, due to the lack of finances, the most valuable resources to success are not necessarily money, systems, and leadership, but vision, commitment, and passion. So, the partnership is built around relationships that produce commitment and mutual understanding. As we often say in Latin America: before being partners, we need to become friends.

False expectations for the recruitment of candidates lead to mutual misunderstandings. Latin missionary structures, for instance, compete unequally in the race for recruiting candidates due to lack of resources and clarity in projects, and most of the time they lose. On the other hand, the Global North missions agencies have more experience,

¹⁴ Todd M. Johnson, "The World Christian Encyclopedia, 3rd edition and the Future of Frontier Mission," *Global Great Commission Network*, accessed June 1, 2021, https://www.ggcn.org/wp-content/uploads/tokyo2010/resources/2020_updated_papers/World_Christian_Encyclopedia_Tokyo2020_Update.pdf.

¹⁵ Roger Hedlund, "A New Partnership for Mission," in *Readings in Third World Missions: A Collection of Essential Documents*, ed. Martin L. Nelson (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1976), 228.

economic resources, and ministry opportunities. Most of the time, they win the race. Problems begin to emerge when the candidate, already in the process of preparing to go, notices the other details—the fine print—such as the language of the relationship, finances, decision-making processes both at home and on the field, and fewer opportunities for non-English speakers, all of which were never mentioned during recruitment and training. As a result, candidates become frustrated by a lack of information and reduction of opportunities, as well as the failure of the new sending nation’s structures to comply with the missionary’s expectations due to lack of resources or experience.

Both sides need to commit themselves to be faithful to the biblical principles of cooperation. The first step to solving these problems is to go back to the Word and find what it says regarding cooperation. The Bible’s principles are cross-cultural. When we follow them, we are speaking the same language. 2 Corinthians 8 gives us five principles we must consider in the goal of having the same language and passion, ultimately striving toward success in the urgently needed cooperation between the Global North and the Global South missions entities.

“They gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:5). The reason for cooperation is to understand that it pleases Him when we give ourselves to one another as an act of obedience. This is what the Word orders us. This is the spirit that Jesus modeled in Philippians 2:5-11, where the Lord Himself shows His cooperation with the plans of the Father as He decides to leave behind who He is, what He has, and the voluntary use of His majestic attributes, and then submit Himself to fulfilling God’s plans. He gave Himself for us as a result of understanding God’s will. Hedlund summarized the concept as follows: “Partnership, as expressed at Whitby, was to be ‘partnership *in obedience*’ ...But above all it should be an example in responsible commitment to carrying out the Great Commission.”¹⁶ This concept proposes that we first partner with the will of God, which is that nobody should perish, then make a common cause with those who are doing the same thing.

Not as one who orders but as one who serves (2 Corinthians 8:8). The moment has come in which we need to rethink our understanding of the spirit of partnership found in the Word. An implicit element of this point is that we cooperate in order to join God’s plan, not because we have plenty of resources or a better plan to share. If we see this closely, we have made a mistake by believing that the only thing that can be given in a cooperation is material resources, whether it is personnel, money, operative systems, etc. Cooperation is an act of love, and just as love is a two-way path, we need to follow the characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13, Jesus Christ’s model of love in John 13, and the measure of success in John 17. Paul gives a great picture of this in 2 Corinthians 8:4, “begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in support of the saints.”

Not as one who has, but who gives everything (2 Corinthians 8:9). The example is unquestionable, and it challenges us to approach the others in this process of cooperation in the same way. We are not to show off our wealth, nor use it as a means of maintaining cooperation in our favor, but, as a good friend of mine said, “to administer the joy of giving.” We in the Global South should not come to the cooperation table with our hands empty. If we go with empty hands, it might tempt us to hold them out to beg! We must put ourselves and all we have in the service to the other. Let us recover together what Stephen Neill identified: “an emphasis recovered in world evangelization, the status of worthiness and equality.”¹⁷

We, as mission structures in the Global North and South, need to repent for trying to reduce mission mobilization to simply sending missionaries.

¹⁶ Hedlund, “A New Partnership for Mission,” 230.

¹⁷ Stephen Neill, quoted in Hedlund, “A New Partnership for Mission,” 227.

Based on concrete actions that might provide a benefit to those with whom we partner (2 Corinthians 8:11). There is a Latin American saying, “Let’s see if they sleep as well as they snore,” which also means, “A lot of noise and too few nuts,”¹⁸ or “Too much yada yada yada and too little work.” The wisdom of popular idioms demonstrates that things get done with concrete actions, not with too much talking. We in the Global South say that strategic alliances do not begin when an agreement is signed, but when we begin to be together, know each other, and love each other. Then we are ready to work together. Sometimes we spend so much time talking to come to an agreement that we never actually reach a final agreement to start working.

The result of cooperation is mutual benefit (2 Corinthians 8:14). This verse reads, “At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality.” What is the Holy Spirit saying when He refers to equity so many times in the passage? He is categorically stating that because of cooperation, we arrive at a concept of equity and worthiness, in which each person has something to provide and to complement the other’s knowledge or need. Neither one is superior because of their resources, nor inferior because of their passion, experience in suffering, or renovation in vision. Both have been taken into cooperation by God to fulfill the task of world evangelization.

We are living in a new world, but the demanding prayer of Jesus Christ for unity is still the same: “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:23). This is a more remarkable reason to learn together how to cooperate.

We, as mission structures in the Global North and South, need to repent for trying to reduce mission mobilization to simply sending missionaries: “If we mobilize and train individuals, we will have an increase in the number of missionaries.” Instead of refining our mobilization strategies, we need to partner with the Church and help her recover the genetic code of a transformational and reproductive church, as Jesus Christ designed it. Unless we partner and help the Church return to the mission of God and its central position in our reflection, refine the perspective of the Church at the core of mission, and recover discipleship as the measure of success of the Church, there is no future for mission mobilization.

Before us, we have an opportunity to give a clear testimony to the world of our commitment to God, His mission, and to the Church, as we commit ourselves to evaluate the best way to establish necessary relationships between the old and new sending structures and the Church. It is time that, leaving the past behind, we look for a solution to these challenging problems. Let us work hard to maintain our unity, and, above all, let us be willing to pay the price! Only through this are we able to display a Church that challenges inequality and reduces the gaps that it causes. Equilibrium is a mental attitude where we know that we are doing what pleases God in the search for cooperation, even when we are in a disadvantageous position. ❀

¹⁸ From the name of the Shakespeare humorous play, “Much Ado About Nothing,” published in 1623.

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The Strategic Importance of Mobilizing the Retiree

Vicky Warren

I remember sitting around the dining room table with a group of Christian executives who were celebrating either their recent or looming retirement and listening to their aspirations of retirement life. They were looking forward to time on the golf course, traveling the country in their RV, woodworking, pottery, and an array of other activities. Interestingly enough, I did not hear even one of these individuals allude to taking more time to focus on the Great Commission, or spending more time to pour into the next generation of believers, or welcoming international students, migrant workers, refugees, or foreigners, or spending more time in prayer for workers for the harvest, or mobilizing other retirees.

I remembered a challenge I had heard years before from Nelson Malwitz, founder of The Finishers Project (now MissionNext), “How ready are we to abandon our agenda for our lives and adopt His agenda for our ultimate prosperity—not necessarily in this life, but the next?” As I reflected upon this experience and on these words, I wondered if the life decisions of these retirees had more to do with a lack of understanding of their role as a “World Christian” than simply an oversight of prioritizing this calling.

Individuals who are about to embark on a season where they have more time, more financial resources, more life experiences, and more accessibility to travel the world than any generation in history, don’t even appear to have Kingdom service on their radar. They are in a season where they can live a life of great significance through serving, going, giving, sending, praying, welcoming, and mobilizing. What a missed opportunity!

I am not saying that the Lord does not want us to have periods of rest and relaxation or participate in activities that bring us joy in this world, but He is calling us to ensure that these activities are not our primary focus or aspiration upon retirement. We must remember that we have a purpose as the seniors in the church to mentor, disciple, and mobilize believers to actively engage in their calling as Christians, and we should do so with great joy. Since our primary purpose is to glorify the Father through our willingness to follow Him in His mission to make His name known among the nations until our last breath on this earth, we need to realize that it takes focus, intentionality, and understanding—and that the Lord is not done with us at the age of retirement.

So how do we begin the conversation of the strategic importance of mobilizing the retiree? First, we need to understand what is meant by mobilization.¹ The term mobilization is sometimes

¹ The word “mobilize” (or British spelling “mobilise”) is derived from French/Latin terms, *moveo*, meaning “to move,” and *mobilis*, meaning “moveable.”

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used in a narrow sense to describe the work of recruiting and training specialized, cross-cultural mission workers. Although this is common in some circles, we use the idea of mobilization in its broadest sense of helping God's people move with God in His mission.² The idea of getting God's people to "move with God" is a useful analogy to describe how Christians participate with God as He fulfills His mission,³ regardless of their season of life or vocation.⁴ The phrase, "the mission of God," refers to the purposive work of God Himself initiating, enacting, and fulfilling His mission.⁵

Next, we need to exhibit many of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, and gentleness. And finally, we must be intentional. We need to ask questions that mobilize the heart of each retiree. How might you use your retirement years to advance the gospel message to the ends of the earth? Who might you mentor in the work of the Lord during this next season of your life? How might you use your life experience to serve Kingdom efforts? What might sacrificial giving of your time, talent, and treasure look like in your retirement years?

Each believer has been given a race to run, and the retiree has an opportunity to model for the next few generations what it is to finish this race well. We have wonderful examples of this in the Bible: Jethro mentored Moses, Paul mentored Timothy, and Jesus mentored the disciples through daily living. By living a godly life of obedience to the Father, each of them demonstrated what righteous and holy living should be in every season of life. The saints saw how their teachers lived, and thus modeled their lives accordingly.

What does this look like today?

As the Dickersons were preparing to retire, they researched what they might do to serve faithfully in their retirement years. After a thorough investigation, they opted to take their RV and go on the road to serve with an organization that ministered at campgrounds and reservations. Upon retirement, the Bayles opted to serve with a ministry that provides medical care from a hospital ship that travels the coast of Africa. The Johnsons decided to focus on mobilization and serve with an organization that focuses on mobilizing hundreds of believers to go and serve among the unreached—those who have no access to the gospel message. The McCormicks launched a prayer ministry that prays strategically and intentionally for workers for the harvest to be thrust out by the Lord to the unengaged peoples of the world. The Bakers left their home of 50+ years and went to serve among an unreached people group. The opportunities are endless, but in order for us to do this well, we need to influence the trajectory of the Christian retiree's life through teaching, conversation, mentorship, and through mobilization efforts.

We need to influence the trajectory of the Christian retiree's life through teaching, conversation, mentorship, and through mobilization efforts.

As retirees, we can begin to share our own joy-filled journey as we serve the Lord during our retirement years. Serving with MissionNext as a mobilizer, I have the great privilege of helping to build awareness of God's global purpose in a variety of ways: recounting the biblical mandate and the great story of God's purpose, recounting the history of the advance of the global Christian movement, and introducing believers to fellow Christians of other

² Jesus said of His mission activity, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working" (John 5:17).

³ Jesus said, "He who sent Me is with Me" (John 8:29).

⁴ Steven Hawthorne, "Mobilizing God's People for God's Mission," *EMQ* 54, no. 3 (June 29, 2018).

⁵ Numerous texts declare God as initiating all that we now regard as mission, among them, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). Also, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Romans 11:36).

cultures and countries. MissionNext is focused on connecting multiple generations of believers with a myriad of opportunities to serve domestically or globally, and I could not imagine doing anything else in this season of life!

Whether they are called to cross cultural barriers to serve others, or prayerfully and financially support those who do, MissionNext can help. At MissionNext, we specialize in helping people in practical ways to be effective, persistent, and fruitful, whatever their role might be. We recognize that disciplines of faithfulness, generosity, prayer, and a willingness to learn are necessary, regardless of one's role in the work of mission. Along with providing visionary knowledge, we cultivate zeal and practical wisdom. We coach, challenge, guide, mentor, and monitor—whatever it takes to continue to press for excellence in the work of mission.

We can do this same work as the body of Christ. We can encourage the retirees to seek opportunities to use their skills, their time, and their resources strategically and intentionally in their final years by being faithful examples ourselves. The easiest way to make disciples is to begin the process early in a Christian's life so that it becomes a natural pathway and progression. Unfortunately, most Christians today have experienced little discipleship, so we have a bit of catching up to do. We can begin by being prepared at all times to give an account of our own lives, our priorities, and our testimony. I Peter 3:15 in the Amplified Bible summarizes this approach well: "But in your hearts set Christ apart [as holy acknowledging Him, giving Him first place in your lives] as Lord. Always be ready to give a [logical] defense to anyone who asks you to account for the hope and confident assurance [elicited by faith] that is within you, yet [do it] with gentleness and respect."

Retirees today seem to make choices about how they invest themselves in their retirement years based more on their own values, which are formed and influenced by a worldly model rather than by a biblical worldview. This generation of retirees is the healthiest, most physically active, and well-educated American generation ever, and yet, they are the least likely to spend their retirement years focused on advancing the gospel message. These retirees have years of work and life-related experience and are skilled and resourced with a multitude of talents that are needed around the globe; but in our culture, they have been programmed with a DNA that prescribes work for 30+ years, then a life of leisure instead of a life of incredible significance and purpose.

We need to have conversations in the Church about significant living that celebrates life and faith at midlife and beyond. How can we improve and impact the lives of retirees in the second half of life? How can we empower them to live with Christ-like vitality and inspire them to serve others and to continue to co-labor with the Lord? Through prayer. We need to pray *for* this generation. We need to pray *with* this generation. We need to cast vision, opportunity, and purpose with passion.

We do not want to overlook the fact that there are those who are retiring well, and we need to point to them as a compass for others. Here is one such testimonial:

After five years of spending our vacations doing faith-based projects in different countries, we decided that if the opportunity arose, we would like to do it full time once we retire. We planned on working two more years, but the opportunity came for an early retirement, and we moved forward with this dream. Through MissionNext we were connected to a strategic region of the world and are now serving. Thanks for all your help in connecting us with a program that fits our talents and gifts!

This generation of retirees is the healthiest, most physically active, and well-educated American generation ever, and yet, they are the least likely to spend their retirement years focused on advancing the gospel message.

One of my greatest joys is watching the lights come on as people begin to see clearly how God has carefully and purposefully prepared them for their retirement years. It is truly a privilege to come alongside a person, a couple, or even a family and be part of a divine encounter as they embrace their next steps, knowing that the Lord is leading them, and they still have work to do as they co-labor with the Lord.

If we want to see a revival among retirees, we must begin the conversation today in every area of the church. What a privilege we have to speak into the lives of so many that are transitioning into their retirement years! At no time in history have we had such a significant opportunity before us. In Q3 2020, 28.6 million boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) reported being retired. That is 3.2 million more than in Q3 2019, according to a November report from the Pew Research Center. If we make conservative estimates, that equals approximately five to six million Christians. What might it look like to see two to four million of those retirees (accountants, farmers, teachers, engineers, pastors, artists, technologists, pilots, construction workers, businessmen and women, and a multitude of other vocations) actively engaged in some aspect of the Great Commission? It is worth the conversation! It is worth the effort!

**If we want to see
a revival among
retirees, we must
begin the conversation
today in every area of
the church.**

So, what about you? What is your most strategic role? At MissionNext we have over 4,000 names of individuals and couples who have completed a profile and are looking for possible new service opportunities through the MissionNext database. If you would like to add your name to that number, visit www.missionnext.org and complete your profile! ❁

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Pioneer Business Planting. Pioneer Business Planting equips church planters to reach unreached/unengaged peoples through economic, social, and spiritual opportunities in the marketplace. Her passion for mobilization has led her to focus on activating the entire body of Christ worldwide through speaking, teaching, equipping, connecting, advocacy of living a life on mission, and stepping into one's calling for the purpose of God's glory.

Inclusive Mission: God is Removing Obstacles and Calling Us to Join Him

Dave Deuel

God has commissioned, called, and gifted many people with disabling conditions to mission. This should excite pastors, missionaries, and mobilizers aiming to send workers on mission. All other mission leaders within the contexts of the church, agency, and academy can also appreciate such a large task force. The fact that people with disabilities are called and keen to engage with mission should energize us to address the remaining obstacles for people with impairments to serve in mission.

Who are people with disabilities? They are “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”¹ Over one billion people globally have a disability affecting their functionality. Despite this large number, people with disabilities are still underrepresented in our churches and consequently, in our mission. Moreover, approximately 74% of seminary graduates in the United States believe they are unprepared to support people with disabilities in their churches.² This partially explains why so many people with disabling conditions, arguably the largest minority group, are still waiting to serve God in mission. But God is removing obstacles that stand in their path.

Regardless of their disability, they are pictured on life’s road going somewhere. The deeply troubling fact is this: other people place obstacles in front of them.

In this study, we start our investigation by identifying a biblical perspective.³ Then we will consider some of the encouraging patterns impacting disability in mission and look at the sending process by asking some challenging questions regarding mission qualification, training, placement, support, and expectations for accomplished mission. I will finish by considering the potential outcome if people with disabilities are serving in different capacities in mission.

Encouraging Patterns in Mission

People with Impairments are Moving

In several passages, the Bible presents people with disabilities not standing, sitting, or lying down, but moving on the pathway of life. Regardless of their disability, they are pictured

¹ Article 1, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

² Naomi H. Annandale and Erik W. Carter, “Disability and Theological Education: A North American Study,” *Theological Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 83-102.

³ Benjamin T. Conner, *Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness: Exploring Missiology through the Lens of Disability Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018).

on life's road going somewhere. The deeply troubling fact is this: other people place obstacles in front of them. Two passages from Israel's law illustrate:

Do not . . . put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God (Leviticus 19:14, NIV).

Cursed is anyone who leads the blind astray on the road (Deuteronomy 27:18, NIV).

Yes, Scripture pictures people with disabilities moving along on life's road and encountering obstacles. But what are the obstacles? Blocking and misleading may take many forms, some metaphorical.⁴ For example, Job removed both sight and mobility obstructions when he said, "I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame" (Job 29:15).

When Jesus commissions His followers, He addresses them as if they are already going. After all, they have been following Him, so He acknowledges their mobility. No wonder He admonishes them, "*As you go, make disciples of all peoples*" (Matthew 28:19, my translation). People with disabilities are also already walking the road of life as they spread the gospel and disciple others. God warns us not to put down stumbling blocks before them, literal or metaphorical, and calls us to remove the obstacles that we can for disability in mission.

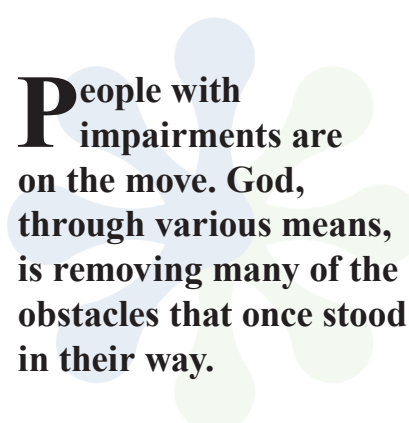
We can see the biblical precedence for disability in mission in Luke-Acts as people with disabilities join the rest of the marginalized to walk the path of life. For example, in Luke's Gospel, he builds on the law's road imagery when the banquet host orders his servants to go out to the wide streets and narrow alleys, where people with disabilities begging for alms would gather. Then, in a more challenging effort, he extends the banquet invitation to include those beside rural roads and paths following the hedgerows. These remote areas on the edge of society were where the poorest people with arguably more severe disabling conditions might live.⁵ This passage reminds us again that people with disabilities are gathered beside or moving on roads.

In the book of Acts we see an example immediately after the Day of Pentecost, when Peter was on his way up to the temple to worship. He encountered a man at the temple gate with an impairment that kept him from walking and shared the gospel with him. The man responded and the Lord healed him. His first response was to run into the temple, leaping and praising God. The man had never walked into the temple before, but had been stuck outside begging for alms. God had removed another obstacle, this one highly symbolic, for the healed man could finally participate in temple worship (Acts 3:11-26).

People with impairments are on the move. God, through various means, is removing many of the obstacles that once stood in their way. In fact, mission itself is changing by becoming more accessible. We have every reason to believe that this exciting pattern will continue.

⁴ The metaphorical obstacles are rooted in values about God and His creation. These values lead to our applications to specific circumstances such as placing or removing obstacles before people with disabilities. For a comprehensive explanation, see Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), xiii-xiv.

⁵ James M. Morgan, *Encountering Images of Spiritual Transformation: The Thoroughfare Motif within the Plot of Luke-Acts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 89-94.



People with impairments are on the move. God, through various means, is removing many of the obstacles that once stood in their way.

Breakthroughs that Resolve Disability in Mission Challenges

The gospel and Jesus' commission have not changed. But our world is changing rapidly and dramatically in many ways, most crucially in accessibility for people with disabling conditions. First, transportation has become considerably more accessible. You can get disability accessible flights to and from airports with accessible bus, train, and other public transportation connections just about anywhere you need to go. To a great extent, God has removed transportation obstacles.

This potential for a disability mission revolution is at our fingertips, but must be thought through and applied.

Communication has also improved significantly. Sharing the gospel is different today than when Jesus first commissioned his disciples. To spread the gospel message back then, you had to physically go or send a messenger with your message. Message delivery could take weeks or months. Today, in a matter of seconds, you can sit in your home and send your message anywhere in the world, effortlessly and free of charge. Those at the ends of the earth now have laptops, tablets, and especially, smartphones. Digital media helps people with impairments reach out with their mission, messaging unhindered.

Adaptive technology, an exploding field, helps overcome disability functional limitation. Disability community services may cover much of the expense and provide the technical support needed. Also, adaptive workspace research continues to move forward at warp speed. Inclusive employment for people with disabilities, for example the Inclusive Virtual Workplace initiative, ideally designed for each person and their disability, has opened new doors. These technological and workspace solutions resolve many of the challenges for disability in mission, and their applications are almost limitless. All that remains for us is to think innovatively about disability in mission, and adapt/adapt these disability solutions.

As a result of national and international policy, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), and global initiatives like the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Voluntary National Review process, many countries are becoming more open to receiving people with disabilities. This call for change not only impacts civil society's standards, policies, and practices, but also those in churches. Mission leaders also may need to reconsider written or unwritten standards, policies and practices that hold back people with impairments and their families from serving in mission.

These rapid changes in accessibility, transportation, communication, adaptive technology, adaptive workspace, and disability policy open up more mission roles for people with disabilities. With the growing accessibility in mission, people with disabilities too can reach "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This potential for a disability mission revolution is at our fingertips, but must be thought through and applied.

Questions for Which We Have Answers


Bearing in mind that people with impairments are moving, obstacles are being removed, and mission is changing, let us look at the ways that God is empowering people with disabling conditions to prepare them for mission. Consider some critical questions mission leaders routinely ask:

Are people with impairments disqualified in any way from serving in mission?

Although in Scripture we can see that people with disabilities are also commissioned, called, and gifted, two issues cause some mission leaders to give pause, and raise questions about people with impairment serving in mission. These two issues are the understanding of the image of God and the passage that speaks of the priest with defects being forbidden to offer sacrifices. Let us examine both briefly.

First, people with disabilities are not restricted from mission on the basis of the image of God. The image means that God gives people with impairments, like all people, a connection with Him as they reflect His image to others (Genesis 1:28). John Kilner reminds us, “Persons with disabilities have a special connection with God, and God intends them to become a reflection of God as well.”⁶ Godly growth in us all is God’s intention for the image,⁷ and His will is to fulfill His determination for all of us to live and grow in reference to His standards for humanity.⁸ The image gives people with impairments dignity and destiny.

Second, people with disabilities are not limited in particular aspects of mission. Leviticus 21:18-21 states that a priest with a “defect” was not permitted to offer sacrifice. Crucially, that priest with an impairment was not forbidden from serving as a priest, from ministering in the temple, or from eating the Lord’s sacrificial meal in fellowship with God. Carrying the sacrifice up the steps to the altar was a special circumstance that does not apply to mission today. After all, the Apostle Paul had a form of impairment, but this did not restrict him from serving on mission. In fact, all of the spiritual mission resources available to people who do not have disabilities are available to those who do.⁹



**Commissioned,
called, and gifted
people with disabilities
are waiting to serve.**

How will people with impairments get trained for mission?

We must think intentionally about training believers with disabilities for mission. Mission leaders may need to speak with pastors and other Christian leaders about people with impairments who could be recruited for mission.¹⁰ COVID-19 has changed the way we do ministry training. Unable to do in-class, face-to-face training, ministries all over the world developed online versions. Without question, training has become more accessible for people with disabling conditions, and this change is here to stay.

Whereas ministry experience for mission trainees has customarily happened within the confines of the local church, people with impairments can now get ministry experience through internet technology: they can spread the gospel; they can teach and disciple those who need instruction; they can offer one-on-one ministry to people in inaccessible places. Technology has given new meaning to ministry.

⁶ Devan Stahl and John F. Kilner, “The Image of God, Bioethics, and Persons with Profound Intellectual Disabilities,” *The Journal for the Christian Institute on Disability* 6, no. 1-2 (Spring/Summer/Fall/Winter 2017): 26.

⁷ John F. Kilner, ed., *Why People Matter: A Christian Engagement with the Rival Views of Human Significance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 140-151.

⁸ John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 79.

⁹ Nathan John and Dave Deuel, eds., “Ministries of People with Disabilities: ‘All In,’” *Lausanne Occasional Papers* no. 68 (Spring 2021), <https://lausanne.org/category/content/lop>.

¹⁰ Dave Deuel, “Recruiting International Students with Disabilities,” paper presented to the National Association of Christian International Student Office Directors, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, 1995.

How will people with impairments get placed into mission roles?

Leaders in local churches and Christian organizations will need to support placement of people with disabilities in mission. Commissioned, called, and gifted people with disabilities are waiting to serve. What will going into mission entail for people with disabilities? For many, going will happen just like for anyone else, perhaps with adaptive technology to support them. For others, “going” will happen from their laptops in their homes, or wherever they might be. Yes, they will receive training, get ministry experience, and—with the support of leadership—find placement in mission performing all types of roles. Sound far-fetched? For a few that we have sent, it is already reality. For those waiting, all we lack is the will to make it possible.

Testimony after testimony argues that God does use people with disabilities in mission, not *in spite of* potential limitations, but *because of them*.

The church will acknowledge today’s and tomorrow’s mission leaders for their commitment to seeing this happen. All believers will see supporting people with disabilities as an opportunity and a priority, not as an insurmountable challenge.

How will people with impairments receive mission support?

When it comes to how people with impairments can gain financial support, the simple answer is this: just like everyone else. Once again, we must recognize the possibilities. Going need not require a huge budget to support a family with a disability. Although each personal situation is different, many countries offer disability services to residents. If these services are not available, families can learn to perform many services themselves.

Many mission agencies or mobilizers offer member care to people with disabilities and their families. Specialists reach out before families leave for other countries and help them make the transition, even helping locate disability services in the destination country.¹¹

Other mechanisms are being developed, such as foundations aimed toward adaptive mission. Adaptive technology will accommodate many disability challenges in the future. As argued, transportation is accessible to just about any destination in the world. Mission is more accessible and supported than it has ever been before, and it will continue to improve.

God Is Working

What has God been doing and how should we respond?

If God had not used people with disabilities and their families to conduct His work of mission throughout history, the commitment this study calls for might seem unrealistic, even unattainable. Yet the opposite is true. Testimony after testimony argues that God does use people with disabilities in mission, not *in spite of* potential limitations, but *because of them*.¹²

¹¹ Deanna Richey, “Mission Possible: The Role of Member Care in Mobilizing Workers with Disabilities,” in *Disability in Mission: The Church’s Hidden Treasure*, eds. Dave Deuel and Nathan John (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Press, 2019), 133-146.

¹² For example, read the testimonies in Dave Deuel and Nathan John (eds.), *Disability in Mission: The Church’s Hidden Treasure* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Press, 2019). See also the Disability in Mission blog archive on the Joni and Friends blog site. <https://www.joniandfriends.org/category/disability-in-mission/>.

People with disabilities and their families have participated in mission and God has blessed their labor. There are extraordinary examples, like Paul Kasonga who suffered from multiple disabilities due to leprosy. With personal support from Olive Doka, Kasonga lit the fires of revival that led to Zambians embracing the gospel.¹³ Although he lacked mobility due to leprosy, which took away much of his hands and feet, the Zambians transported him on a litter from place to place and made him a crude wheelchair so that he could move about his home and meet people in his doorway to teach and counsel them. Kasonga's mission was extraordinary.

Christians believe that God acts in this world. It is in our belief DNA. To try to make the disqualifying argument that people with a disability on mission are a risk to their health or run the risk of mission failure any more than persons not disabled is biblically indefensible. In fact, it is dangerously incorrect to tell a person with a disabling condition that God has not called them to mission due to their disability.

God is working and so are people with disabilities. There is a saying among them, "We are not looking for charity; we want jobs." Scripture gives us a shining example of King David as one who facilitated employment for Mephibosheth by giving him land to farm and laborers to help him plant, harvest, and sell his produce.¹⁴ The Apostle Paul had a disabling condition, and he prayed three times for God to remove it. God did not remove it, but Paul's mission was still successful without a miraculous healing. In the final days of his life, the apostle—already living with an impairment—gave direction to a global mission outreach while under house arrest. Luke's concluding words in the book of Acts describe Paul's effective mission: "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!" (Acts 28:30-31).

Like the apostle, some with disabilities may not be able to leave their homes due to the nature of their disability. But they too can conduct the mission role for which God calls and gifts them from their home "without hindrance," that is, without obstacles.

What might the outcome of sending people with disability be?

What might be the outcome if people with disabilities would serve in all aspects of mission?¹⁵ For the Church, there can be a confident assurance that we have finally included people with impairments who often have been left out of the work of mission. For people with impairments, seeing someone with a disability in mission will offer hope that they too might one day serve in ministry roles with the rest of the church. Finally, a watching world will see the extraordinary faith, powerful commitment, and amazing giftedness of people with disabling conditions on display in mission. Not surprisingly, many will listen to their personal stories of how God has worked in their lives through their disabilities, maybe more attentively than testimonies from the rest of us. The Lord of mission will receive honor, glory, and praise.

¹³ See Dave Deuel, "Paul the Leper and Olive the Servant," in *Disability in Mission: The Church's Hidden Treasure*, eds. Dave Deuel and Nathan John (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Press, 2019), 73-81.

¹⁴ Dave Deuel, "A Workplace for Mephibosheth: A Biblical Case for Employing People with Disabilities," *Lausanne Global Analysis* 10, no. 2 (March 2021).

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To try to make the disqualifying argument that people with a disability on mission are a risk to their health or run the risk of mission failure any more than persons not disabled is biblically indefensible.

Where are the obstacles for people with disability to go out in mission? Incredibly, God is removing them and using us as his hands and feet. People with disabilities are on the move in mission, perhaps now more than ever before due to communication technology, transportation accessibility, and support services. They are traveling and sharing the plan of salvation and the full counsel of God. As argued, these commissioned, called, and gifted disciples are going. Meanwhile, the rest of us can affirm them in their mission calling by, in a word, “sending” them. We must work to remove the remaining obstacles. If we do, we will discover a highly committed group of people who are ready to go and serve. Mission leader, remove an obstacle today. *

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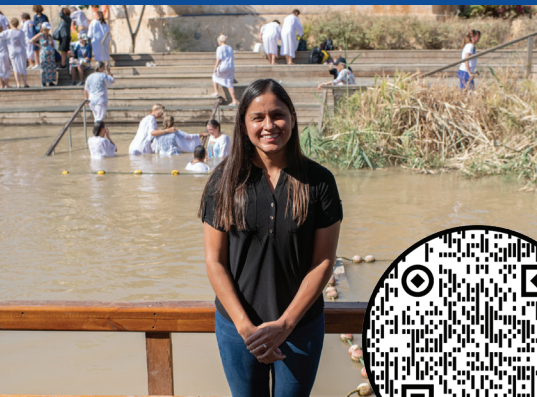
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