

MOBILIZATION

THE KEY TO WORLD EVANGELIZATION

Pollster George Gallup projected tens of thousands of U.S. churches would close their doors this decade, not because of low funds or programs, but because of lack of vision. Proverbs 29:18 addresses this: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Cad Dudley, Christian leader and missions enthusiast, spoke of the need to be strategic: "Congregations that intentionally affect their times have a sense of purpose and a plan; they have a vision of what God is calling them to be and to do. The person who articulates the appropriate vision for the church is both the cause and result of a mobilized church; both the church and the leaders are mutually empowered in the process."

Not only are churches struggling with catching and keeping their vision, so are believers who feel called into missions. Estimates are that from the moment someone first gains a World Christian conviction until the time that person finally ends up on the mission field is, on the average, seven years. If ongoing encouragement and practical World Christian discipleship are not incorporated into people's lives during those seven years, they usually lose their vision and passion for the world. This is why the late Donald MacGavran, founder of Fuller School of World Missions, said in his book, *A Giant Step*, "Let us furiously organize frontier mission societies in every congregation of every denomination." He was trying to tell us of the absolute necessity of people banding together to create, maintain, and follow through on their mission commitments; and within the Body of Christ, the mobilizer is the one who can help orchestrate it all.

Dave Williams is an example of a man who has been "orchestrating" for years by starting and developing Perspectives on the World Christian Movement courses throughout Korea—and as a result has seen many missionaries raised up from this now great sending country. While there, he also developed powerful small groups called Pre-Candidate Fellowships in order to coach and mentor the goers, seeking to hand them off to mission agencies in good shape and ready to go. He is now helping us launch such fellowships in the U.S. Let us know if you would like to start one!

But in spite of bright spots like Korea, the worldwide fact remains: what Jesus decried in Matthew 9 - "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" - is still true today. Dr. Ralph Winter, General Director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship, comments: "Here is a tragic fact: Only about one out of a hundred 'missionary decisions' results in actual career mission service. Why? Mainly because parents, friends, even pastors rarely encourage anyone to follow through on that kind of a decision. But what if that number could double to two out of a hundred? The effect would be explosive!" Each year, no less than 200,000 sincere, dedicated people contact one of the hundreds of excellent mission agencies in this country asking for information about possible service with that ministry. But the heartbreaking news is that less than 1,000 of those will ever make it to the field. Why? There is no one to nurture and guide and equip them to complete the process. In other words, the workers are plentiful, but the mobilizers are few!

Phil Parshall, missionary and author, described mobilizers this way: “Someone must sound the rallying call. Those who desire to see others trained, prepared and released to ministry are known as mobilizers. Mobilizers stir other Christians to active concern for reaching the world. They coordinate efforts between senders, the local churches, sending agencies, and missionaries on the field. Mobilizers are essential. To understand the role of mobilizers, think of World War II as a parallel. Only 10% of the American population went to the war. Of those, only 1% were actually on the firing lines. However, for them to be successful in their mission, the entire country had to be mobilized!”

What if the Body of Christ could be stirred to action in the same way Parshall describes America’s total involvement in World War II? Who is going to “rally the troops” across the planet to understand and engage in the greatest, most significant battle in all of history: the evangelization of the world in this generation? In Numbers 10:1-2, the Lord said to Moses, “Make two silver trumpets for yourself...you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps.” One trumpet to call and get everyone’s attention and the other to direct the troops. A good metaphor depicting the essential role of the mobilizer!

Dr. Winter believes that “the greatest mobilization effort in history is now gaining momentum, moving ahead with a quickening pace, and with more and more goals that are concrete, measurable, and feasible.” How can we participate? What are the critical components to get the job done? Winter claims, “The number one priority is for more mission mobilizers. Why do I say this? Because I believe there must be at least 40,000 younger adults who have in the past few years made a missionary decision, but who will never make it to the field - due to ignorance, indifference, school debts, etc... Only crash education can stem the downward spiral. Anyone who can help 100 missionaries to the field is more important than one missionary on the field. In fact, mission mobilization activity is more crucial than field missionary activity.” Quite a statement!

Standing before a crowd of college students, Dr. Winter challenged them, saying, “Suppose I had a THOUSAND college seniors in front of me who asked me where they ought to go to make a maximum contribution to Christ’s global cause. What would I tell them? I would tell them to stay home and mobilize. ALL of them.” How in the world can this former missionary say this with a straight face - trying to talk people into NOT BECOMING MISSIONARIES? Because the need to sound the alarm is so great. Wouldn’t it be better to awaken 100 sleeping firemen than to hopelessly throw your own little bucket of water on the huge fire yourself? Yes, some need to go now as pioneer missionaries. Fantastic—but still others need to exercise the even more unusual faith to stay back from the field and assist the entire mobilization process. It is difficult, though, to persuade believers of how essential mobilization is because churches have found it hard to understand the rationale for mission mobilizers and therefore are reluctant to help fund them.

Here’s how Wesley Tullis, formerly a Director of Prayer Mobilization for Youth With A Mission, helps churches and believers understand mobilization: “Essentially mobilization refers to any process by which God’s people are awakened and kept moving and growing until they find their

place for strategic involvement in the task of completing world evangelization. Mobilizers are those who channel key resources, training, and vision for world evangelization to the Body of Christ. It has been said, that to improperly appreciate and support the role of the mobilizer is to seriously hinder the functions of the goer, sender, and welcomer.” So, mobilization is not exclusively focused on just raising up more cross-cultural missionaries. The ultimate objective is to recruit, train, and connect every believer to their most strategic role in fulfilling the Great Commission—whatever role that may be!

A MOBILIZER IN SIMPLEST TERMS IS ONE WHO MULTIPLIES, DISCIPLES OR MENTORS IN MISSIONS.

Jesus Christ was a mobilizer. Take a close look at some of the things He did and did not focus on:

He didn't focus on planting churches,
He didn't focus on evangelism,
He didn't focus on theological education.

Instead, He focused His ministry on the big picture more than anyone around Him. His focus was to mobilize others who would carry on beyond Him. While we definitely need to have people who are “on the front lines,” we must also have a focus on reproducing our lives and vision into others. If we have the foresight to build a strong core here and now, it will have an exponentially greater impact down the road—launching tens of thousands of prepared missionaries to the ends of the earth.

Greg Parsons, Executive Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission, shares these innovative thoughts: “Missions mobilization is a strategic new category that churches are increasingly recognizing as key to their global outreach. It may not be in your church's missions policy....yet, but it is becoming more and more understood by alert missions thinkers and strategizers. We are familiar with church planters, evangelists, student workers, theological educators, but a new, growing category may be the most important of all... the role of the missions mobilizer. It's really not new, though.

The Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) was probably the most effective mobilization effort in church history. Most historians agree that the two most significant people motivating the SVM were John R. Mott and Robert E. Speer, yet neither of them were ever missionaries on the field.” Churches are now realizing that if you don't have people who work at spreading vision here, you will probably never have many people who go to the field there! The struggle is that when churches get involved in sending missionaries out, they want them to hold “important roles.” They use words like “overseas” as if an ocean makes a difference, or “foreign field” as if it needs to be far away, and “front lines” as if support personnel are not essential. They don't recognize there must be key people here who will stir the troops, declaring, “This is what is left to be done. Now let's go do it!” Without them, we lose sight of the big picture and have no idea how to prioritize mission efforts. In some respects, to stay and mobilize requires the most faith

and vision! In other words, anyone can count the seeds in an apple. But who can count the apples in just one seed?

As a point of application, let's look at how to funnel some resources toward this strategic group of people called mobilizers. Most churches' missions committees are primarily a group of decision makers, trying to evaluate and choose between mission giving opportunities and distributing the funds accordingly. Many committees set up categories to help them make those choices. Usually they will give certain percentages toward local missions, regional missions, national missions and foreign missions. Sometimes student ministries or mission agencies are included in the mix, but many times they are left out. Unfortunately, the group that is almost always uninvited to this dividing of resources is the mobilizers. If mobilizers are "the forgotten key to world evangelization" according to Rick Wood, an editor for Mission Frontiers magazine, "then why is it not the number one giving priority?" He goes on to say that "mobilization is the most critical ministry to completing the task of world evangelization, but it is also the most neglected and misunderstood of all ministries. Without aggressive mobilization we will not see the numbers of missionaries going to the field that are required to reach all of the unreached people." If mobilization really is the key to world evangelization, then why are evangelization efforts there funded at an estimated 20 times higher rate than the supposedly more strategic mobilization efforts here?

May I be so bold as to suggest a more strategic and balanced way to viewing the overall missions funding process that includes ALL the key players? The diagram below might be a way a local church could view and then allocate its mission dollars:

I am not necessarily recommending that funding should be cut toward the four geographic areas (four columns) that mission dollars are channeled toward. But the proposal here is to add two categories that are every bit as strategic to the overall process. The first is the mission agencies who provide "on the field" training, supervision, encouragement, and direction to the missionaries. And finally, an idea whose time has come: mobilization - those individuals and groups who form the foundation and fan the flame for the entire structure. These are the men and women who focus on deploying the army of laborers to the "front lines" where they are ordering their lives around the Great Commission. Many of us believe these forgotten saints may very well be the key to getting the gospel to the whole world. Let's empower them to do just that!