

# REACHING THE SUMMIT

*~ Part Four in the "Window to the World" Resource Series ~*



*1600 North Brown Road • Lawrenceville, GA • 30043  
678-823-0004 / 678-823-0027 fax / [www.mtw.org](http://www.mtw.org)*

© 2005 Mission to the World

# REACHING THE SUMMIT

---

Reaching a mountain peak basically requires two things: knowing where the summit is and having the means to get there.

For missions leaders to reach the summit of their own ministries, they must know the goal of their efforts and develop the means to get there. God's word is clear on the goal: the church of Jesus Christ growing and taking hold of all cultures. A mobilized congregation is the means missions leaders can contribute to that end.

When church members are committed to world missions and their efforts are directed towards the growth of nationally-led churches, the missions ministry begins to reach the higher elevations. Mountain climbers know that this is where the journey becomes the most strenuous and the steps upward come more slowly. Every component must be in good working order. And these components must all work together. Moreover, climbers will encounter issues at these elevations they didn't encounter earlier. Everything must come together.

*Integration* is similarly a key principle for more seasoned missions ministries. Your missions leaders may have been able to develop an active ministry by sending two-week project participants, generously supporting missionaries and holding exciting conferences. Further growth, though, is not simply "doing more of the same." Build on your foundations, ensure all the key components are in place, get them working together, and consider how you will address special issues facing your ministry.

## **Ensure You Have All The Right Components**

Through formal and informal consultations with missions leaders, Mission to the World has identified essential characteristics for a strong missions ministry. These elements form the basis for the questions in the *Window to the World* diagnostic tool and are included in the following pages. Missions leaders will certainly have a longer list of their particular emphases, but healthy ministries typically share these twenty components. Have several leaders from your church complete *Window to the World*, compare their results and determine areas for growth.

## **Get The Parts Working Together**

It's been known for centuries that horses yoked together and pulling in the same direction can pull more than the sum of their individual abilities. Synergy literally means "working together" and it occurs when the various parts of your ministry are more effectively pulling toward a common purpose. One way to create synergy is to interconnect the various components of your ministry, resulting in internal integration. You can also connect your external ministry sites for greater impact. The articles on integration will help you consider ways to create synergy in your missions ministry.

## **Address Special Issues**

When your missions ministry was in the early stages of development, you likely focused on the essentials, such as forming a missions committee, pulling together a conference, and learning how to support missionaries. Now that this foundation has been laid, your ministry will benefit by considering special issues that affect how you support ministries cross-culturally. The more personally connected you are to ministries overseas, the more you will need to be aware of the issues facing missionaries and national leaders. Articles relating to themes such as sustainability, contextualization, and holistic ministry will help you think through some of the most challenging issues in missions today so that you may be a more effective partner.

## **Lead Others**

Lastly, as a more mature missions ministry, you have an opportunity and responsibility to mentor other churches in your area. Being a peer to leaders in other churches provides you a significant platform to positively influence them—often in ways no one else can. The suggestions in the final article can help you multiply your own contribution to the Great Commission by leading others to be more active participants in missions.

## **FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Under the titles of the following articles, the “theme” refers to one of the essential elements of successful missions ministries listed in *Window to the World*. This list is included in the following pages. A fruitful exercise for your missions committee would be to evaluate your ministry according to each of the twenty themes and begin to strengthen undeveloped areas. You may also want to refer to the articles in the rest of the *Window to the World* series:

*Laying the Foundation* encourages churches to focus on the essentials: developing their missions leadership, creating a vision for the ministry, and developing a missions conference to mobilize their members.

*Setting Your Sights* explores the importance of the Church and national church planting movements as the visible goal of a missions ministry.

*Setting the Pace* offers practical help on how to mobilize your church for world missions.

# ENSURING THE ESSENTIALS

---

The “Essential Elements” list on the following pages was developed through conversations with ministry leaders and missionaries about the key components for a successful missions ministry. Review the list and evaluate your own ministry for areas of strength and those needing development. You may want to review your assessment from the *Window to the World* diagnostic tool. Circle the elements you feel are the strongest. Then in the worksheet below, list the five areas most in need of attention and action steps to strengthen them.

## Circle Your Strongest Elements

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Missions Committee | 11. Word & Deed          |
| 2. Ecclesiology       | 12. Multiplication       |
| 3. Short Term         | 13. Participation        |
| 4. Prayer             | 14. Emphasis             |
| 5. Sustainability     | 15. Church Planting      |
| 6. Theology           | 16. Facilitation         |
| 7. Vision             | 17. Church Leadership    |
| 8. Contextualization  | 18. National Leadership  |
| 9. Giving             | 19. Education            |
| 10. Partnership       | 20. Commission of Church |

## Identify Areas Needing Attention and Action Steps

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL MISSIONS MINISTRIES

1. **Missions Committee:** An active, organized committee that coordinates the missions ministry is absolutely essential. The committee should not see themselves as the ministry, but rather as a leader that involves the entire congregation and all its ministries.
2. **Ecclesiology:** The Bible teaches us that God loves His Church, and has commissioned it to be His primary means and end for advancing the kingdom. Missions leaders need to develop a biblical understanding of the Church and emphasize efforts that help establish churches around the world. In so doing, it is important to discern the difference between a lasting church and a temporary gathering of believers, as many ministries claim to be committed to church planting.
3. **Short Term:** One of the most effective ways of mobilizing members for missions is to send them on local and global missions projects. All participants will return with a greater heart for God's world, and some will begin to pursue missionary service. Select projects that best fit with your church's long-term vision.
4. **Prayer:** The need for more laborers was Christ's only prayer request. Churches should reflect our Lord's heart for a needy world by meaningfully and regularly including prayer throughout the ministries of the church.
5. **Sustainability:** While churches in the West should give generously to missions, they should consider how to avoid national churches' becoming overly dependent on outside resources. Dependency can stifle growth and innovation.
6. **Theology:** It is both stimulating and challenging to engage godly Christians who have developed different convictions or expressions. While encouraging the interdependence of the global body of Christ, missions ministries can also affirm a natural emphasis on planting churches that share their theological convictions.
7. **Vision:** A seemingly limitless number of opportunities will come before the missions committee. Determining which ones to pursue requires a clear sense of direction. The vision of the ministry should be carefully developed, written, and embraced by church leaders.
8. **Contextualization:** No church ministry will be more exposed to the diversity of the larger body of Christ than the missions ministry. This is cause for celebration of God's love for all peoples and affirmation that the ministry of churches in other cultures can be expressed in biblically valid and culturally indigenous forms. Missions leaders need wisdom and experience as they encounter these different expressions.
9. **Giving:** Compared to the rest of the world, churches in the West have been blessed with tremendous resources. The message of Genesis 12:3 and elsewhere is that God blesses His people *so that* they will be a blessing to others. To that end, churches should be sacrificial in their support of world missions.
10. **Partnership:** When churches collaborate with other sending churches towards shared ministry goals, far more can be accomplished. More importantly, such partnership expresses the interconnectedness that Christ desires for His body. Churches should consider how they can contribute their experience and resources to other churches, as well as grow from the relationship.

11. **Word and Deed:** As missions ministries determine which efforts to support, they should have in mind the kind of churches that are being developed. A biblical church necessarily requires a commitment to both ministries of the Word (e.g. evangelism, preaching, teaching) and deed (e.g. mercy and justice).

12. **Multiplication:** Churches should actively be involved in planting new churches. Multiplication refers to the process of beginning new churches not simply by the occasional addition of a church, but through a movement of churches planting churches, that in turn reproduce. Effective missions ministries should look to support ministries in other cultures that share this commitment.

13. **Participation:** Christ has laid the task of world evangelization in front of every believer. Thus, missions ministries should not be seen as a separate department but as leaders of the entire congregation. Church members should see the Great Commission as their personal responsibility and have some relationship with someone serving in cross-cultural missions. Mobilized churches will be identifying members to consider missionary service, who would be sent out and supported in prayer and finances by the congregation.

14. **Emphasis:** In order to maximize the impact of the missions ministry, churches should identify special areas of emphasis for long-term participation and concentrated support. Churches with such focus sites typically continue to support other missionaries. However, a higher level of promotion, recruiting and funding will go toward these emphases, as well as repeat site visits and short-term projects.

15. **Church Planting:** If the Church is God's Plan A for establishing His kingdom—and there is no Plan B—then church planting is the means of expanding that kingdom. Moreover, studies have shown that church planting is by far the most effective method of evangelism. Therefore, a majority of missions resources should be directed towards church-planting efforts.

16. **Facilitation:** Increasingly, missionaries are being sent not as primary evangelists and pastors but as facilitators to indigenous leaders. Many such leaders are looking for a peer to come alongside them for counsel, resources and connection to the global Church. Although their ministry may not be as visible as other missionaries or the nationals they serve, these new missionaries can have enormous impact and deserve to be strongly supported.

17. **Church Leadership:** A significant factor in determining the success of a missions ministry is the support of church leaders, and in particular the senior pastor. The strongest ministries describe their church leadership as champions of missions, through their personal participation and public commitment.

18. **National Leadership:** No matter how long missionaries live in another culture, they will never understand the context as well as a national. Practically, church multiplication requires the development of indigenous leaders and their primary role in the local church. Missions ministries should look to support efforts that emphasize national leadership.

19. **Education:** While an annual missions conference may be the most visible event to promote missions, churches that are the most mobilized create opportunities to educate their members about missions throughout the year. The congregation should be regularly learning about missions through such means as sermons, presentations and missions courses.

20. **Commission of Church:** God has called the Church to be His primary instrument to evangelize people, extend mercy, and transform the culture around it. Missions ministries should consider whether the efforts they support are primarily based in the local church or are separate ministries.

# CONNECTING THE PARTS

---

Creating synergy in a missions ministry comes by connecting the various components and ensuring they're pulling in the same direction. When a ministry is aligned in this way, it will have far greater impact. Two ways to encourage integration follow. The first relates to internal integration, meaning that you are intentionally connecting the various components and values of your ministry. The second refers more to the people groups your ministry is reaching. This external integration links your ministry sites, particularly through developing a globalized approach to missions.

## Internal Integration

Look over the “Essential Elements” list again. What would it look like to connect several elements? For example, integrating *short-term, vision* and *church-planting* could mean sending two-week project participants to sites that reflect your long-term vision for church planting. Connecting *sacrificial giving* and *emphasis* could mean increasing the level of support for missionaries going to your focus sites or directing a special offering towards that ministry. Integrating *prayer, church leadership, national leadership* and *missions conference* could mean inviting your church leaders to pray for their peers in another country during your missions conference. The more components you connect to others, the more impact your ministry will have.

In this exercise, circle three to five elements, review their summaries on the previous pages, and write out ways to integrate these components.

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Missions Committee | 11. Word & Deed          |
| 2. Ecclesiology       | 12. Multiplication       |
| 3. Short Term         | 13. Participation        |
| 4. Prayer             | 14. Emphasis             |
| 5. Sustainability     | 15. Church Planting      |
| 6. Theology           | 16. Facilitation         |
| 7. Vision             | 17. Church Leadership    |
| 8. Contextualization  | 18. National Leadership  |
| 9. Giving             | 19. Education            |
| 10. Partnership       | 20. Commission of Church |

---

---

---

---

---

Another aspect of internal integration relates to connecting missions to other ministries of the church. There are philosophical and practical benefits for doing so.

Philosophically, missions should not be seen as a separate department of the church, where only a few people are involved. Because the Great Commission is central in God's heart, it should be central in the heart of all your members. No member is exempt from participating in God's work of redemption. Or more positively, God wants to use every ordinary Christian—which is each one of us—in the most amazing story ever to be written.

Practically, integrating missions throughout your church's ministries is the most effective way to involve your entire membership. While it may be possible to have a few missions events or initiatives throughout the year that include all your members, you will likely be disappointed if you expect such broad participation at every missions opportunity. Members' schedules, gifts and calling all have to be considered. So, look for ways to integrate missions within existing commitments and schedules, thereby making missions more of a lifestyle.

For example, many missions ministries would like to mobilize their entire church for prayer. One way to do so is to schedule a few well-organized efforts, such as during a missions conference and on the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. In addition, look for ways to encourage others to pray for missions. This could mean including a missions prayer in the worship service(s), encouraging families to pray for missionaries, having Bible studies adopt a church-supported missionary for prayer, and asking Sunday school classes, youth groups and children's ministries to pray for missions. Preparing simple prayer guides related to your missions ministries' involvement will be a welcome stimulus.

Other suggestions include developing a two-week missions project for your youth, giving a missions presentation to your session, sending your pastor to a key site, including missions material in a bookstore or table, or asking the women's ministry to host a missionary. By integrating the Great Commission into the life of your church, you will be more effective leaders of the entire congregation.

In the space below, list key ministries of your church and ways to involve them in missions:

<b>Ministry</b>	<b>Possible Missions Involvement</b>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## External Integration

This aspect has more to do with the ministry focus beyond the walls of your church, or what is referred to as the “here/there” integration of missions. Connecting your involvement overseas to ministry in your own community can have a powerful effect.

For example, your church may decide to focus on a particular people group overseas. Integrating that work locally could mean determining whether members of that same or a related people group live in your area. Short-term project participants could prepare to go overseas in part by meeting these people and beginning to appreciate their culture. During the trip, participants likely will develop a heart for them and will now have ongoing opportunities to serve locally. Overseas missionaries could help equip church members for such ministry. Other strategic possibilities exist as well, as many members of ethnic communities in the U.S. retain close ties to their home country. Ministry can follow these relationships in both directions. Resources and materials can be shared between the two sites. In some cases, national leaders have been raised up in one location to serve in the other. The motivating effect on church members is often significant, as they see the impact of integrating local and global missions.

In this exercise, list people groups your missions ministry is focused on reaching:

---

---

---

Identify local communities of these same or related people groups:

---

---

---

List possible ways to connect ministry among similar people groups:

---

---

---

# GO? AND MAKE DISCIPLES

---

DAVID

“Therefore, GO and make disciples of all nations...” Matt. 28:19

For most of my Christian life, I had thought that to satisfy the Great Commission, I had to GO overseas and be a missionary reaching people of other ethnicities in other lands. After living and working in the Middle East for five years, I came back to the U.S., planning to return to the Arab world for a lifetime of missionary service. However, soon after my return, I was asked to teach a Sunday school lesson from the book of Acts on the beginning of the world mission of the Church. That was eighteen years ago, and preparation for that lesson has profoundly impacted the direction of my life and subsequent ministry.

As I read through Acts, my previous understanding of missions in the early church began to change. I had always thought of Paul and Barnabas as being the first cross-cultural “missionaries.” However, according to Acts 2, “Jews from *every nation* under heaven” responded to the gospel preached to them by Peter and the apostles at Pentecost. These Jews were ethnically of other nations, but, according to the Greek translation of this text, were living permanently in Jerusalem as immigrants, much like we have in our cities and towns throughout North America. In order to understand the gospel properly, each person needed to hear it in his or her own language, as is evidenced by the fifteen or more languages listed in Acts 2.

I was next impacted by the story of Phillip's ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. This story deals with the conversion of a short-term international visitor to the land of Christ and the disciples. Phillip met him on the “the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza,” which was at that time Judea. Soon after, in Caesarea, a city in Samaria, Peter ministered the gospel to the Roman centurion, Cornelius, and his household.

I always assumed that Acts 1:8—“being witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria ...”—meant “being witnesses to people like me in my home city (my Jerusalem), people like me in my home state (my Judea), and people different from me who lived on the other side of the city or in another region of my country (my Samaria).” However, before Paul and Barnabas were sent out “to the ends of the earth,” the early disciples were witnesses to *the nations* in Jerusalem, to *an international* in Judea, and to *a foreigner* in Samaria.

God does not consider those who “go voluntarily” with the gospel to be His only desired means of cross-cultural ministry. A chart follows which shows how God has worked throughout history, not just through those who “go voluntarily,” but also through those who “come voluntarily,” those who “come involuntarily,” and those who “go involuntarily” with the gospel.

## FOUR MECHANISMS OF MISSION HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

	OLD TESTAMENT PERIOD	NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD	MODERN MISSIONS
<b>GO VOLUNTARILY (with the gospel)</b>	Abraham Hebrew Prophets	Phillip to Ethiopian Eunuch Peter to Cornelius Paul and Barnabas	William Carey Hudson Taylor Current Overseas Missionaries
<b>GO INVOLUNTARILY (with the gospel)</b>	Joseph Jonah Daniel & friends Esther	Persecuted Church in Acts	Military Business People Modern Day Persecuted Church
<b>COME VOLUNTARILY (to the gospel)</b>	Naaman the Syrian to Elisha Queen of Sheba to Solomon Ruth	Magi at Jesus' birth Greeks who seek out Jesus Cornelius sends for Paul	International Students & Visitors Immigrant Laborers & Businessmen
<b>COME INVOLUNTARILY (to the gospel)</b>	Gentiles Settled in Israel by Cyrus the Great (2 Kings 17)	Roman Military	Slaves Brought to America International Refugees

In the Old Testament, one of God's primary means of witnessing to the nations was to those who “voluntarily came” to Jerusalem and saw how God had blessed His people in the “land of milk and honey.” In Deuteronomy 10:17-19, God gave these instructions to his people through Moses: “The Lord your God is the God of Gods and the Lord of Lords.... He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for *the alien* by giving him food and clothing. *So show your love for the alien*, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” Later in Deuteronomy 31:12, He instructs them further: “Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and *the alien* who is in your town, *in order that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God ...*”

King Solomon understood this heart desire of the Lord God when constructing the temple. In his dedicatory prayer in I Kings 8:41-43, Solomon prays:

<sup>1</sup> from *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement Study Guide*, Steven C. Hawthorne, Institute of International Studies, 1999, p. 49

As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel, but has come from a distant land because of Your name ... when he comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of You, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You ...

In the New Testament, Jesus was distressed that the Court of the Gentiles in the temple had been taken over for personal gain. His passion was so great that he cleared the temple, saying, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?'" In addition, one reason God sent His beloved chosen people into exile in the Old Testament was because they were not obedient to this heart desire of God. As a consequence, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah and other Old Testament heroes became missionaries who "involuntarily went" as representatives of the living and true God of Israel to the leaders of the greatest nations of that time.

Today, we too have trouble understanding that God desires for us to be not only a light to our own nation, but also to the nations around us. The largest international student population today is from India, of which most are Hindu. Unfortunately, statistics report that 70% of international students are never asked to have dinner with an American family. Many Muslims I meet in my city have never been invited into a Christian home for coffee, tea, and discussion about our Savior. Missionaries I know who have returned from Latin America to serve among the massive Hispanic population in the U.S. oftentimes report losing as much as 70% of their support because they are not "missionaries" anymore. We willingly support missionaries to reach Hindus, Muslims and Hispanics overseas with our finances and our prayers. There are also many great opportunities for reaching out to every nation right here in our own neighborhoods.

Our God is a never-changing God! He continues to want missionaries to "go"! However, those of us who stay have a biblical mandate and many examples showing His desire for us, not to sit passively on the sidelines, but to reach out with the love of Christ to those who have come to our land either voluntarily or involuntarily! May He be glorified in our obedience to His revealed will!

*David is a team leader for Enterprise and is working to equip churches to reach Muslims in the U.S. He lives in Atlanta and has been with MTW since 2001.*

# HOW WILL THE CHURCH MINISTER AFTER WE LEAVE? PURSUING SUSTAINABLE MINISTRY

Theme: Sustainability

---

**PAUL MEINERS**

The building where the church met, like their own simple houses, was not that impressive—until you realized they had built so much of it with their own resources. As the pastor and leaders showed us around, you could see pride on their faces. Each one who spoke described construction or ministry that was fulfilling their vision. The pastor said little, but deferred to those he had “equipped for the work of ministry.” They introduced members each of them were training in ministries in this poor community—like caring for the sick, training people in skills to earn a living, and using these as opportunities to tell others the gospel and encourage new believers. When we asked them how we could help, this seemed an unanticipated question. Over tea in the office, they came up with some small, hands-on projects in which we could work along side them, adding some value to ongoing ministries of their church. This church is **sustainable**, we agreed—our help might enhance their ministry, but they know what they are doing and can prosper on their own. In fact, there is much we can learn from them!

We have a great goal to pursue—to use our involvement with churches and ministries in the rest of the world to stimulate their effectiveness, using their own God-given resources in ministering to their community—in a word—*sustainable*. The opposite is dependence on outside resources to carry on their work. In pursuing this goal, we will be encouraged by their “obedience to the gospel” to be even more effective in our own ministries in our communities in the Western world.

## God Equips Each Church for Its Ministry

The Judean church in the New Testament had a long spiritual background, while the newer Gentile churches had more material security. Paul pointed out the importance of the church in Corinth contributing to the needs of the poorer church in Judea. Their gift would result in thanks that they had genuinely obeyed the gospel (2 Cor. 9:12-14) and were now in fellowship with the earlier, Judean, believers. Like spiritual gifts, God distributes resources differently so that we function as an interdependent body. We are to give according to what we *have*, not bemoan what we *don't have*. (2 Cor. 8:13-14; Rom. 15:26-27) If one part of the body neglects the resources God gave them, believing they can only serve God if they had different resources, they show lack of faith in themselves, but even more lack of faith in God, since “my God will meet all your needs.” (Php. 4:11-13,19; 2 Cor. 9:8-11)

## How Has God Blessed Us Differently?

Often we don't understand the healthy way in which the Church around the world should interact with its other parts. It is too easy for us, as Westerners, to compare our resources to those of churches in the majority of the world, and conclude that we have most of the resources and they have few. Americans like to be helpers. Standing on our own, giving instead of asking for help, and finding our own creative solutions are all highly rated

American values. Besides, poverty makes us feel guilty and uncomfortable. Two-thirds World churches belong to cultures that value fitting into your community more than independence, helping each other out in times of need. Giving gifts is important if you have the means, and expressing your need is quite acceptable. Therefore it is natural for an American church to conclude, “We have the resources to help,” and their sister church in another country to agree, “We have needs you can meet.”

On closer look, what are some different resources with which God has equipped a Western church and her sister church in a poorer country? The chart below is a simplification, but should help us compare how they might partner in the poorer, host church’s community.

<b>Western Church Qualities</b>	<b>Host Church Qualities</b>
More training in theology & ministry	Good memory and reality of faith
Communicate best in their own culture	Communicate best in their own culture
More economic resources, how to use them	Understand poverty, how to make do
Work better on quick results	Work better on long-term results
Develop big plans and strategies	Focus on consistently doing the basic things
Work for short time (2 weeks to 20 years)	Will be there before and after foreigners visit
Limited language skills	Fluent locally
Attract attention in the local community	Fit into the local community
Don’t know local culture	Understand local culture

### **Can Western Generosity Create Problems?**

Western resources become a problem when we come as outsiders and become a temporary (up to 20 years) part of a church’s community. As visitors we want to contribute, and to us the needs are obvious. So we organize, teach, pay the expenses, and leave resources behind. Here are some of the problems an overwhelming foreign impact can cause:

- Our money influences decision-making. “He who pays the piper calls the tune.”
- Other cultures have a strong sense of hospitality and like to please their guests. They defer to our decisions and won’t offend us with what we’d call “honesty.”
- By having significant impact as outsiders, we become their “temporary community,” and disturb their local community relationships. This shift in community alignment is harder for us to understand because the majority of our non-rural, non-urban churches don’t have such strong connections to their own communities.
- The church we help may decrease their efforts to creatively maximize their own resources by shifting their interest to using ours. Instead of planning ministry based on community opportunities and resources, their ministry plans reflect the goals and methods of their donors.

Let's illustrate with some ways ministry methods can change if a Western church takes a directing role through their generosity.

<b>Reliance on Outside Resources</b>	<b>Reliance on Local Resources</b>
Pastoral encouragement <i>focuses</i> on an annual conference with outside speakers enabled by outside money.	Pastoral encouragement <i>focuses</i> on monthly meetings of pastors in which they encourage each other.
Caring for the sick is mainly the time a medical team comes to work with the church, with thoughts of building a clinic and hiring a nurse (with outside support).	Caring for the sick is done by people in the church trained in community health, who visit people and help some see local medical staff with whom the church has relationships.
The church builds a building with outside money. They have not given much, since the foreign church was quite generous. Some years later it has deteriorated because the church can't afford to maintain it and few have the skills to fix that type of facility. They have contacted the donor church requesting funds for repairs.	The church builds a building, relying on their own money, materials and labor. Proud of their accomplishment and the camaraderie of their effort, they are excited to invite others to worship with them. When it's too full for the growth, they are able to use their own resources to expand it.

Does this mean that Western Christians should leave churches in other cultures alone? No, that would be disobedient to the missionary call and ignore the interdependence and global use of our gifts from God. The question is not "if", but "how" our efforts will promote sustainability instead of dependence. The key word in the comparison above is "reliance."

Here is our purpose: *It is our desire that believers carry on the ministry to which God has called them in their own environment by relying on the resources that are in their own hands. There are stages in their development toward maturity in their ministry when carefully used help of various forms from the outside will be a stimulus to their growth and equipping, but we believe that help should be temporary and nurture strength and independence, not create dependence.*

### **How Can We Pursue Sustainability?**

We can lay down some principles to follow in three important areas.

#### *Turning Ministry Over to the Local Community*

- Assume that in the near future you may be removed from your work. What can you do to be as dispensable as possible on that day?
- Training is a key means of developing sustainability. From the very start ask this question: "Why am I doing this myself? If this activity pertains to the future of the body here, I should always be working with someone in order to train them to take it over!"
- Donors all want to be needed, think we have much to offer, and are tempted to make ourselves needed longer than necessary. We have to pursue these relationships as partnerships, promote the value added by the local community, and not perpetuate our role any more than is essential.

- Decisions should be made as close to the community as possible. The greater our distance from the local community and culture, the less qualified we are to make good long-term decisions. Connect with groups of local leaders, be quiet and learn to listen. Develop church and ministry structures of multiple local leaders.
- Realize that the most effective lessons of governance are the ones you model, not those found in an organizational document that seems foreign to your national coworkers. Model open, accountable, mutual decisions in which there is “subjection to the brethren.”

#### *Ensuring Any Ministry is Community Based*

- Before committing to a new aspect of your work, ask, “Can this be carried on from within the community?” If the answer is “No,” or “Doubtful,” then modify it, drop it, or make sure it is only temporary. If you believe it is important, test the community’s interest, ability and commitment. If they don’t provide key support, postpone it until it is appropriate to test it again.
- It’s better to start small and respond to community interest and vision. To build vision is more valuable than to build structures. When their vision is adequate, they can build the appropriate structure.
- Beware the temptation to “improve” things by adding features that cannot be sustained with local resources. Such features can change a project from short-term “partnership” to long-term “paternalism.” By adding surgery to a clinic you can lose the clinic. Shallow wells can be sustained; deeper ones will produce no water because the pump can’t be maintained.
- Outside resources, when used, should be for new projects, ideas that are generated and designed by local leadership, projects of limited time and scope, and should act to stimulate local resources rather than replace or squelch them.
- Even if more of the resources come from outside, community resources must be key for the project to go ahead. Their resources may be primarily planning, “sweat equity” (labor), getting permissions, or generating community involvement. Whatever they provide, they must be able to say honestly, “It couldn’t have happened without us” and have ownership pride in the project. They must feel this is “our project,” not “their project.”
- Even using outside resources, it is still all about the local project, not about the outsider. The project should be designed to meet local needs and standards, not satisfy donor wishes. Key to this is that the primary decision-making needs to be close to the community. If there are not yet community people capable of making the decisions, the first step is to develop them, not bring in resources.

#### *Avoiding Problems in Paying People Involved in Ministry*

- Ministry, for most believers, is a calling to exercise our gifts, not a paying job. Paul limits people supported for ministry in the church to those, like elders, with major responsibilities (1 Tim 5:17-18), or, like widows, with no other support and serving the body (1 Tim 5:3-16). Both types of people must meet clear qualifications, and their pay is rightful but not guaranteed (cf. 1 Cor 9:4-18). Even those with a right to support may have to be “tent makers.”

- Employees answer to their employer. Therefore, do not “employ” those who should answer to someone else. You may temporarily provide scholarships, employ workers, or provide tent-making work for a pastor, but don’t employ him as a pastor. A pastor should report to his church, not to foreigners. As soon as possible, ensure that *anyone* who gets outside money reports to a local body that employs them and handles the funds. Their priority needs to be making good decisions for the ministry, not pleasing donors.

### Getting On With It

Are these guaranteed methods? Is pursuing sustainability easier? Many years of trial and error testify that sustainability is not the easier goal in the short haul. It involves more involved planning with nationals and difficult decisions. Some “friends” may not stick. *However, we are only servants, and in the end it is their church. It will prosper or fail based on how well they live out their calling from God with the resources God has put in their hands.*

When we think missions, money is one of the first things that comes to our minds. We need to ask God for at least an equal measure of wisdom to use it in ways that will stimulate churches in other countries to stand on their own. If we contribute to their dependence on Western resources, we will lose out on another gift—the potential they have to become self-sustaining churches that are our teachers where we are weak. We could learn some lessons from them about ministering in our community, making the Scriptures clear to our culture, learning to be bold and suffer for the name of Christ, and integrating our faith into our own lives and those of the needy people around us. Those who become involved in missions, even for a short-term, often come back with a new perspective, not only on ministry in another culture, but also on ministry in their own.

***Rev. Paul Meiners*** and his wife *Liz* are career missionaries in Africa. Paul’s present role is as MTW’s Regional Director for Sub Sahara Africa.

# IT IS THE GOSPEL, IN MIGHTY WORD AND DEED!

Theme: Word and Deed

---

**REV. RANDY NABORS**

We have no new theology, only one as old as Isaiah, Jesus, and the book of James. We have no new theology, only one that doesn't get used as often as it should. We are believers in the Word of God, we have honored the gospel, and we did that by believing it. We found that it truly is the "power of God unto salvation." And in this Gospel we also found the love of God. We have been loved by God through His people, and God has loved His people through us.

As those who are Reformed and evangelical, we have had to fight many battles with error. We have had to be tenacious about what Truth is, and where it comes from, and we have been diligent to articulate what we mean. We have often paid a price for such a stubborn commitment to what we believe is the only hope of future generations, that they not lose the certainty of the faith of their forefathers.

Sometimes in our battles we have not stressed all of the Word, especially when it was the Word itself that seemed to be at stake. Surely, though, there never was a true Christian who did not in some faltering degree practice what the Word teaches, especially when it comes to love. When we have not loved, we have been inconsistent with what we have preached. All of the Word, the Holy Bible, which we love, which is so powerful to save, which is complete and so clearly reveals the will of God, speaks so simply of being. It is the being that reveals what we are, not the knowing.

## **Living the Gospel**

We have no need to attack the knowing part of our faith. It is truth that we need and which saves us. We are not attacking our intellectual understanding of the faith, just how essential it is for that knowing to have made a difference, in our being. So one could possibly be a missionary of the "knowing," and know a great deal for oneself, and be absolutely ineffective in reaping the harvest. One can, in fact, be absolutely a hindrance, even antithetical, to the mission of the gospel by knowing, and letting others know we know it, but not living it.

It is the living of the gospel that God wants and that God uses. Certainly he could have given the world pages written from heaven, and dropped from the skies. Certainly he could have used technology to speak it, giving every man a set of headphones. For some reason God likes relationships, and so he sent His Son, by whom he has spoken to the world. We call this the incarnation and there never has been such a deed to display the Word of God.

God loves the poor, and commissioned His Son, and us, to go to them. And we bring to the poor the Word, something that is preached. Bringing the Word to someone inevitably gets us involved in their lives, or else we really have not sought to disciple them, and so the Word becomes something that is lived. These two things can be intellectually split, word and deed. We are even sophisticated enough, and wicked enough, to attempt to do one without the other. Yet, they are inseparable, for each validates the other.

How strange that we would plant churches that reflect our theological weakness, yes, even our hypocrisy. That we would plant churches of “knowers,” and give them no vision, or leadership, or example of what it means to live out the gospel, and love the brethren, and love the poor, and do good to all men, or let our light shine before men so that they might see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven. So strange that we would fight a false theology of salvation by good works, and not articulate, or model, a theology that shows we are saved unto good works that have been preordained that we should walk in them.

How strange that we should become veterans of a verbal and literary war over how much each other is right, and know so little about being right, and doing good, in the world. While proud of the scars we have for the battle over Truth, should we be ashamed that we have so few scars in the doing of justice, the love of mercy, the sharing of our bread with the hungry, the clothing of the naked, and the visitation of the prisoners and the sick?

Can you see a vision of a missionary, who knows what he believes, who is rock solid on the authority of the Word of God, who knows the gospel and knows how to teach it? He knows what it is, and what it isn't, and he learns how to put it in the language of the people to whom he goes so that they can understand it. And while he does this, he makes the widow's heart to sing; he gives the orphan hope. He ministers Christ to the least of the brethren of Christ as he visits a woman dying of AIDS, builds an orphanage for her children, creates a home for children who sleep in garbage dumps at night, recruits a doctor to build a hospital, recruits a deacon to come and build an industry, trains a local pastor, not only in the Word but in the doing, and all the people begin to speak well of this thing in their midst. It is the Gospel, in mighty word, and mighty deed.

What would the world be like, and how would it be shaken, if holistic churches were planted in communities of need so that the things that are weak would confound the things that are mighty, and the base things, and the things which are despised, (the people God chooses), would bring to nothing the things that are: so that no flesh should glory in His presence?

***Rev. Randy Nabors*** is senior pastor of New City PCA in Chattanooga, TN.

## POINTERS FOR PRACTITIONERS: SHOULD YOUR CHURCH'S MISSIONS BOARD FUND OVERSEAS BUSINESSES?

Theme: Sustainability

---

**DR. RUSSELL MASK**

The Chalmers Center frequently receives phone calls from churches in the U.S. asking what to do when a sister church in a low-income country requests funds to start a business. Oftentimes the deep poverty in developing countries encourages churches and missionaries to seek ways to raise the incomes of churches and their members. One possible approach is to start a business that can generate a reliable source of revenue for the church, the pastor, or the members.

For example, I know of one church in Manila, Philippines that operates a small store, a restaurant, and a ladies dormitory in addition to its street kids' shelter. The businesses generate income that funds the church's rent and part of the shelter expenses, and they also provide real-life places to minister and disciple. In rural areas some churches desire to start agricultural or animal husbandry projects such as chicken farms to achieve similar goals.

When proposals for these sorts of projects come to church mission committees in request of funds, it would be useful to consider the following points about microeconomic development strategies:

1. Businesses created to support a church's ministry must operate by sound business principles if they are to succeed. This means they must: a) Operate fully as a business with a real profit concern; b) Not rely on altruistic markets for their products or services. A reliable market is one in which customers buy the product or service because it meets their needs, not out of altruism; c) Not be so closely related to the church that the business cannot practice increasingly professional management and pricing. For more details on this, see the book by Dr. David Befus entitled *Kingdom Business: the Ministry of Promoting Economic Activity*.
2. It is important to learn whether group businesses or individual businesses are more appropriate for the context of the church. The economic incentives of group-based businesses are usually not as strong as individual businesses, and management is much more difficult, but this may be context-specific. Results may be more positive if individual families are targeted instead of group businesses.
3. Recognize the risks of doing harm through a failed business. If business assets are misused, the reputation of the pastor or church can be damaged. If the business is poorly conceived or implemented, yet subsidies from U.S. churches continue, we begin to encourage mediocrity and possibly a sense of failure.
4. Realize that business feasibility assessment requires on-the-ground analysis by culturally-informed businesspeople. It is not something that can be easily done 8,000 miles away by a church missions committee, even if it has businesspeople on it. The context may be so complex that sometimes it is not even easily done by a Western businessperson on a short-term missions trip.

5. Acknowledge that there are probably local resources and lots of indigenous knowledge that can be tapped right there where the church is. They may not need our help as much as *we* think they do.
6. Evidence from most developing countries is that poor people can and do save. These savings are resources that can be mobilized and used for income generation if people are motivated and have safe ways to do so. They may not actually need our resources to get a business or loan fund started, but determining this is, again, not easily done from great distance or via short-term trips. For more information about this topic, see the discussion of the promotion model in the following article, entitled “Alternative Microfinance Strategies for Churches and Missions.”
7. Recognize that local people need business income *and* reliable places to save and borrow once they have a business. They benefit from savings and loan facilities because they need lump sums of money that they can use for family emergencies, family life-cycle needs, and further opportunities to invest in businesses or household assets.
8. If you want to help with business development or with savings and loan services, you may benefit from more training to learn current sound practices. Training in practical and field-tested strategies and church-centered programs is offered by the *Chalmers Center for Economic Development at Covenant College*. Training is available through distance learning classes and at the Christian Economic Development Institute (CEDI) courses at Covenant College (visit [www.chalmers.org](http://www.chalmers.org) for more information).
9. Finally, there are theological issues that should be considered concerning the proper means of funding the ministry of the church. While Paul used tentmaking to fund his ministry from time to time, many note that the ministry of the Church should normally be funded by the tithes and offerings of the congregation (I Corinthians 9). Some thought should be given as to whether funding a church-run business enterprise establishes an unhealthy pattern.

***Dr. Russell Mask*** is International Microenterprise Development Coordinator for the Chalmers Center and Assistant Professor of Community Development at Covenant College. Visit [www.chalmers.org](http://www.chalmers.org) for more information about resources and training.

# ALTERNATIVE MICROFINANCE STRATEGIES FOR CHURCHES AND MISSIONARIES

Theme: Sustainability

---

**DR. BRIAN FIKKERT**

Desiring to express Christ's love and compassion to the poor, many churches and missionaries wish to use microfinance—the provision of savings and loan services to the poor—as a tool for ministry across the Two-Thirds World. Unfortunately, there are a myriad of strategies in microfinance, and it is easy to get overwhelmed. In an attempt to sort it all out, the Chalmers Center has simplified the options available to churches and missionaries into three categories, the “3 Ps” of microfinance: Provide, Partner, and Promote. What are these three options, and what are the pros and cons of each of them?

## **The Provider Option: Church or Missionary provides Loans to Low-Income People**

This is the option that most churches or missionaries pursue, but it is the most difficult to do well and may inflict considerable harm on the poor. Loan programs run by churches or missionaries are too small to be financially viable, thereby requiring long-term explicit or implicit subsidies. As soon as these subsidies dry up, the programs are doomed. Furthermore, these programs typically do not have the proper organizational structure—particularly in terms of governance—to ensure the long-run presence of the loan program. Lacking the ability to communicate permanence credibly, these programs are likely to have trouble collecting loan repayments as their borrowers, whose loans are uncollateralized, have little economic incentive to repay loans to a loan program whose temporary status offers them neither carrots for repaying nor sticks for defaulting.

It is important to note that when a loan program dies, it not only hurts the program but also the poor that the program aims to serve. Not only are the poor left without the financial services that they need, they are also less likely to have access to such financial services in the future. The reason for this is that when a program dies, the last loans that it has made will largely not be repaid, as clients have no economic incentive to do so. This experience can severely damage the “credit culture” in that region, as clients have learned that they may not really have to repay the loans they have taken. This damaged culture will make this region unattractive to other organizations considering providing financial services in the future.

## **The Partnership Option: The Church or Missionary Partners with a Large-Scale Microfinance Organization**

Churches and missionaries often work in the same regions as large-scale microfinance institutions (MFIs) operated by Christian relief and development agencies. This provides a tremendous opportunity for all parties to work together to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of the poor. I have seen marvelous examples of this in the Dominican Republic, where loan officers from a Christian MFI and local pastors both attend the weekly borrowers' meetings held in the pastors' churches. The loan officers deal with the financial matters, collecting and disbursing the loans. The pastors conduct Bible studies with these groups, something that the MFIs have little time and few resources to do. By focusing on their respective gifts, the churches and the MFI are together able to communicate Christ's concern for the whole person in a very powerful way.

Unfortunately, this partnership model happens very rarely. MFIs often complain that the message of grace that dominates churches and missionaries works against holding people accountable for loan repayment. Churches and missionaries, on the other hand, often complain that MFIs seem too concerned about money and are not sufficiently concerned about people's spiritual and overall well-being. It takes considerable humility and vision for both sides of this partnership to understand one another and to join hands in ministry, but the benefits of doing so can be tremendous.

One caveat about this approach that must be considered is that the MFI is likely to offer financial services that do not meet the needs of the very poorest households. The poorest households desire to save and to borrow very small amounts of money. Unfortunately, legal regulations often prevent MFIs from holding savings deposits, and the loans offered by MFIs are typically too large for the poorest households to manage.

### **The Promotion Option: Church or Missionary Promotes Savings and Credit Associations**

Recent research suggests that low-income persons have the capacity to operate very simple credit unions in which the poor save their own resources and then lend them to one another. The Chalmers Center has pilot tested church-centered savings and credit associations in Africa and Asia. Church members—who are themselves very poor—are trained to start savings and credit associations in their communities, to manage the group's resources, and to use these groups as opportunities for spiritual, social, and economic ministry. Thus far, the results have been very encouraging.

For example, members of a Chalmers savings group successfully completed its first, six-month cycle, providing a safe mechanism for its members to save and to earn 50% interest on an annual rate! Furthermore, the group successfully lent and collected all of the 41 loans it granted, with the average loan size being \$10. This strategy appears to meet the needs of the very poorest households for savings and small loans.

The impact of these groups goes far beyond meeting the financial needs of low-income persons. Because the church members themselves operate these savings and credit associations, opportunities for evangelism and discipleship abound. The Chalmers Center is currently refining a biblically-based training curriculum that enables the weekly group meetings to serve as opportunities for deep spiritual impact.

Moreover, as these groups meet regularly, relationships between group members are strengthened, and they begin to minister to one another in all sorts of non-programmed ways. In a sense, churches are equipping their members to dispense a bit more of the Great Physician's comprehensive treatment plan.

The main drawback of the promotion strategy is that it needs more testing. It is unclear how well these groups will function over the long term and what their overall impact will be. Further testing of this model in the Chalmers Center's pilots is ongoing.

***Dr. Brian Fikkert** is the Director of the Chalmers Center for Economic Development at Covenant College and Department Chair of the Economics and Community Development Department at Covenant College. Visit [www.chalmers.org](http://www.chalmers.org) for more information about resources and training.*

# CONTEXTUALIZATION

Theme: Contextualization

---

**DR. NELSON JENNINGS**

“Contextualization” is one of those big words that most Christians think represents a good thing, even though they may be a bit unclear as to what it actually means. As a concept, contextualization is on the one hand quite simple and straightforward. However, its wider connections and ramifications—both practical and theoretical—are truly complex. The term itself has an interesting background, and unraveling its usage will help us pinpoint some of the nuances of this absolutely crucial missiological reality.

## The Term

In North American English, the suffix “-ization” indicates an act, process or result of making or doing something; compare such familiar terms as “privatization,” “realization” and “legalization.” Insofar as contextualization is used in reference to the Christian faith, the term therefore means Christianity becoming “contextual,” or appropriate and fitting to its various settings. All such settings for the Christian faith—including downtown Los Angeles, southern Sudan, and Brazilian footballers—have their own particular characteristics, so an almost equivalent term would be “particularization.” Put simply, then, contextualization refers to the “particularization(s)” of the universal Christian faith into individual contexts or settings.

So far, so good. Note again that contextualization is an act, process or result. For clarity’s sake, for now at least, let’s think of it as a *process*. To be sure, there are various parties engaged in the *act* of contextualization; we will come back to that later. One can also point to *resulting* contextualizations of the Christian faith, although such results are never final because of the dynamic character of the parties and contexts involved. It is better to think of such resulting contextualizations (or expressions) of Christianity as snapshots of an ongoing process, whether it be Christian marriage in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America, articulations of the Trinity in the ancient Church creeds, worship in the late-19<sup>th</sup>-century Pacific Islands, 1980s leadership styles in Korean Presbyterian churches, or the churches’ relationships with the state in contemporary Uganda.

As an actual word and focal point of discussion, “contextualization” was coined in the early 1970s. At the time the term was intended to draw attention to the socio-politico-economic aspects of any situation or context in which the gospel was at work. This was due to the fact that during the 1960s the collective worldwide Church, and missiologists in particular, had become enamored with “indigenization” and its more narrow anthropological focus on such cultural realities as language and traditional customs. Evangelicals, who moved towards consolidating their worldwide identity at Lausanne in 1974, already had concerns about the growing influence of liberation theology and its emphasis on salvation in political and economic terms. Even so, prominent Third World evangelicals from Latin America, Africa and Asia pointed out the full scope of the Christian gospel, so most evangelicals have now accepted to one degree or another the need for the Christian faith in its entirety to be expressed in ways appropriate to each particular overall *context*.

## The Agents

How one understands the process of contextualization depends in large part on who the primary agents of contextualization are understood to be, a factor noted earlier. One powerful North American evangelical instinct points to the expatriate (subconsciously assumed to be North American) missionary as the one primarily responsible to make the necessary adjustments to the form of the unchanging Christian message he or she brings, as well as to the resulting believers' lives and practices. After all, this instinct claims, compared to the receivers—who almost always are from non-Christian backgrounds—it is the missionary who not only knows the Bible but also comes from a culture with a Christian heritage. By this scheme the task of contextualization is daunting to be sure: the missionary has to communicate biblical truths given in ancient cultural forms to a totally different and non-Christian culture, all the while having to resist the temptation to import his or her own, altogether different cultural norms. Those in the receiving culture help the missionary learn their culture, and God somehow superintends the process, but the idea is that the expatriate Christian emissaries are primarily responsible for contextualizing the faith.

There are at least three reasons, however, why this instinct needs correction. First, it is out of date. That fact alone does not invalidate the concept, but viewing the expatriate missionary as primary is continuous with the pre-World War II image of how missions proceeded from “the West to the rest.” Second, and speaking directly to the matter, God and the receiving agents are primary, not the expatriate emissary. The missionary (of whatever cultural background) is essential to bring the gospel to those settings that have not yet heard it. However, what is of basic importance is God's initiative in communicating to people in their own languages and contexts. He speaks, and people hear in their heart languages, and it is the dynamic communication process—contextualization—that occurs between God and indigenous people that is primary. That critical God-indigenous people dynamic makes the missionary more like a third-party catalyst. Third, placing the missionary at the center of the contextualizing process tends to downplay the contextualized, particular character of the Christianity that he or she embodies and represents. The truth is that all expressions of the Christian faith bear the marks of their contexts. Moreover, no Christians embody the final and universal form of the faith, nor do any of us enjoy a vantage point outside of contextual realities that can dictate to others what is complete and normative.

## Translatability

Some evangelicals will start to feel a bit queasy in this juncture, so at this tricky point we need to consider Christianity's basic trait of cultural and contextual *translatability*. God as Creator is wholly separate from His creation: He is transcendent. Yet God has remained involved with His fallen creation, preeminently through entering the world as a concrete man, becoming particularized or contextualized as Jesus of Nazareth. At the same time God's Word, which centers and focuses on Jesus, speaks to all people in their particular languages as the Bible is (re-)translated again and again into new (and changing) languages. Jesus thus comes close to all kinds of people, to every tribe, tongue and nation. He is not a provincial or tribal Savior, but He is the covenant Lord and Redeemer of all the earth. Together with His translated Word, Jesus crosses over cultural and generational boundaries and enters new contexts, shouldering His way into the beliefs of all kinds of people. Unlike Islam, for example, which brings into alien settings an enduring Arabic Qur'an and

foundation of life, Jesus and His Word are translated into ever new settings, whereby people come to worship and follow Him within the terms and contours of their own languages and contexts.<sup>1</sup>

Putting this translation process in a more explicitly theological way, the triune God speaks to particular people in their own mother tongues by His Word and Spirit as well as through His emissaries. Because this God speaks in people's particular languages—whether English, Hebrew, Greek, Swahili or any other human language—He shows Himself to be their/our God as well as the God of all peoples, not some foreign tribal deity. He transforms peoples and their settings from the inside out, so to speak.<sup>2</sup> To put it from a Christian perspective spoken within any particular linguistic and cultural context, since this God speaks our language and knows us intimately, He knows our past, pre-Christian heritage as well. We and all other peoples have always been responsible to this Creator, Covenant Lord. Our sin has been blinding us, the evil one has been deceiving us, but God has been wooing us to grope for Him and His truth. Now that He has brought or translated the good news of Jesus into our context, He is guiding the whole contextualizing process in which He grants faith and growth, shaping our understanding of the Christian faith and reforming our lives into Christlikeness.

Inherent to this translatability of God's living and written Word is a tension between the universality and particularity, or "contextuality," of the Christian faith. On the one hand there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism for Christianity. It is the same God who is the God of all His people around the world and down through the centuries. In tension, however, with this universalizing side of Christianity is the homing drive of the faith, the push towards being "our" faith in "our" God in "our" particular language within "our" setting. God's universality and transcendence help protect such a homing instinct from overly domesticating (yet another almost equivalent term for "contextualizing") the faith into a syncretistic alliance with local particularities to a point of rendering Christian distinctives unrecognizable. In that sense the Christian faith should always have a pilgrim character to it, such that it maintains a measure of counter-cultural teaching and practice. On the other hand, God's immanence in particular contexts—supremely exemplified in the Incarnation—helps protect the inherent transcultural, universal side of the Christian faith from making it foreign and irrelevant to, or quarantined away from, any facet of any particular context. This need for relevance and applicability is why "contextualization" is such an "absolutely crucial missiological reality," as stated at the outset. A healthy contextualization cultivates a prophetic involvement of God's people within their particular contexts, avoiding the twin extremes of irrelevant quarantine and syncretistic localization.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Walls has pioneered much of current thinking and research into the translatability of the Christian faith, e.g., in his *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Kwame Bediako has explored this transforming and interpretative role of mother-tongue Scripture within each cultural context in, for example, "Gospel and Culture: Guest Editorial" *Journal of African Christian Thought* 2, 2 (December, 1999): 1.

<sup>3</sup> I have borrowed this scheme from Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989, pp.39-46).

## Redemption Applied

It is important to note as well that this universal-particular, transculturalization-contextualization dynamic is not something just for settings where Christianity is relatively new. For an English-speaking early 21<sup>st</sup>-century North American context, that means that the “missiologic” reality of contextualization is always taking place here as well, not just on “the (foreign) field.” Whereas pioneer, unreached sectors of the world’s peoples have their own unique place in what “missions” involves, insofar as God’s world mission is intent on comprehensively redeeming all of the earth, the “mission field” is still everywhere, including “here.” Full redemption of any and all contexts will only come at the eschaton, so contextualization will continue to be an ongoing reality in whatever setting the Lord’s people find themselves.

“Full redemption” of the entire world and its particular contexts—worked out in ongoing processes of contextualization—involves a spectrum of dimensions of belief and practice: worldview, cognition, linguistic forms, behavior, communication, social structure, and decision-making processes.<sup>4</sup> How the Christian faith looks in each of these interrelated dimensions will of course vary from context to context—although the variance will not go beyond recognition of a common Christian identity. Thus, for example, a Christian worldview will include, among other marks, God as Creator, the ultimate place of Jesus of Nazareth and the central role in the world of the Holy Spirit. It becomes problematic, however, to speak of *the* Christian worldview, since worldviews are always to be found among particular Christians in particular contexts—including biblical worldviews. The same universal-particular dynamic is true of other dimensions of faith and practice as well. Thus while Christian decision-making is to exemplify Spirit-led mutual submission, to speak of *the* Christian decision-making process moves into the danger area of making universally normative a particular, contextual reality.

## A Closing Image

The manifestations of God’s redemption throughout the earth and world history are like countless braids interwoven in one grand tapestry. Each braid in turn has three strands: *sanctification* of God’s people wrought by the Holy Spirit, the corresponding *discipleship* of God’s people as they follow Jesus’ example and teachings, and the *contextualization* of the covenant community’s sanctified obedience in particular situations. The strands must not be unraveled away from each other, lest the entire tapestry become skewed and unbalanced. God is ever working among His people throughout the entire earth. How we concretely and contextually manifest our obedience to His gracious covenantal dealings with us is part of the worldwide venture of faith, guided by His Word and Spirit.

*Rev. Nelson Jennings and his wife, Kathy, are former missionaries to Japan. He is now assistant professor at Covenant Theological Seminary.*

---

<sup>4</sup> David Hesselgrave, “Contextualization that is Authentic and Relevant” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12, 3 (July-Sept., 1995): 116ff.

# A LEADER OF LEADERS

Theme: Partnership

---

Your church has the opportunity to influence not only your own church members but also other churches in your network of relationships. As a missions leader, you also have the responsibility to do so. Furthermore, as a peer to other church leaders, you are in an ideal position to encourage them to be more involved in the Great Commission.

Before you begin, though, first consider what you hope to accomplish and how you should relate to other churches. The following questions relate to the people you can connect to and your motivation for doing so.

1. What natural relationships do you have with other churches?
2. Do you want to engage churches in other denominations? If so, will you adjust your plans or expectations in any way?
3. Who in your church can be a spokesperson for your ministry?
4. What is your attitude towards churches that are different in size, ministry philosophy, or development of missions?
5. Can you relate to other churches in an attitude of service and humility?
6. Are you willing to be involved in ministry or events that you don't completely control?
7. Are you able to learn or receive from other churches?

Now, identify ways to motivate others to grow in their missions ministry. The following suggestions will help you get started.

1. Identify missions leadership in local churches.
2. Host an event for missions leaders to meet each other.
3. Begin a monthly breakfast or lunch for church missions leaders.
4. Share resources with each other.
5. Invite another church to join you on a short-term project.
6. Give church leaders motivating books on missions.
7. Co-host a conference and invite missionaries and/or national leaders.
8. Jointly sponsor a seminar or course such as *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*.
9. Encourage other churches to complete the *Window to the World* diagnostic tool as a starting point for discussion.
10. Ask church leaders to consider whether the Church is at the center of their missions efforts.

Finally, you should remember that missions mobilization is hard enough in your own church. Influencing other churches can be even more challenging, and requires wisdom, patience and perseverance. But the results are well worth it. Not only will you maximize your impact for the Great Commission, you are helping to answer Christ's prayer to send out laborers into the harvest.