How to mobilize your church for world missions

By Larry D. Reesor

These exciting days in the history of the church of Jesus Christ. People are coming to Christ in record numbers around the globe. Missiologists are amazed at the rapid advance of the gospel in places where the message of Christ has never penetrated or is proliferating where it was only scarcely known. Clearly, the wind of the Holy Spirit is sweeping our globe in an unprecedented manner.

The Church of Jesus Christ must capitalize on these unprecedented opportunities to fulfill the command of Christ to take the gospel to every person. Never before in the history of the church have there been so many positive dynamics in place, making it possible for us to realize the fulfillment of the Great Commission. That is why it is so critical that local congregations become mobilizers for world missions.

"Mission mobilization activity is more crucial than field missionary activity," observes Dr. Ralph Winter of the U.S. Center for World Missions. "Wouldn't it be better to awaken one hundred sleeping firemen than to hopelessly throw your own little bucket of water on a huge fire yourself?"

In order to make our local congregations into mobilizers, we must teach believers in the local church to understand God's global plan, motivating them to a loving response to God's Word, and providing opportunities for them to use their gifts, abilities, and resources individually and corporately to accomplish his global plan.

Missions follows after a desire to see God glorified throughout the earth. In his book Let the Nations be Glad, Dr. John Piper writes, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church, worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't." The people of the earth cannot worship him if they don't know, and they can't know if they don't hear, and they cannot hear if we do not tell them!

I believe there are three keys essential to this task of mobilizing the church.

1. The local church is God's primary instrument to evangelize the world.

2. The pastor is the key influencer in the local church for the cause of global missions. Regardless of the church polity or structure, the pastor must lead the charge in every area if the local church is to maximize its efforts to reach the world for Christ.

3. The church must intentionally develop a corporate purpose, corporate strategy, and thus a corporate personality related to God's global cause. In other words, missions must be who you are as a church, not just what you do. Missions must be your church's personality, not just a program. Missions must be the mission of the church!

Global missions must permeate every facet and phase of church life. It must not be a segmented "program" or just one of many programs of the local church.

The basis for a corporate strategy for the local church is found in Jesus' words in Acts 1:8: "...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In its simplest form, the Jerusalem ministry would relate to your church's local outreach, Judea and Samaria would relate to regional and national levels, and the ends of the earth would address international ministry.

With this understanding, it is best to bring all the church's outreach ministries (i.e., local evangelism, missions, etc.) under one umbrella of global missions. This umbrella would then encompass Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, with an understanding that with geographic designations there must be cultural implications. For instance, a church that adopts an unreached people group in a remote part of the world should also look to reach those same people in their designated Jerusalem, Judea, or Samaria. Someone in your church with a passion for
local evangelism should also be challenged to participate in some ends-of-the-earth mission opportunity. Local church leaders must challenge people to their global responsibility and then provide creative, contemporary, cutting-edge opportunities for them to be involved.

The essentials for mission mobilization
First, if we approach mobilization without a proper scriptural understanding of God’s heart for the world and his global cause, it will never be a priority in the local church. We must preach and teach the global heart of God that is the basis for global missions in the local church.

Second, we must work toward these truths becoming part of every believer’s philosophy of life and ministry. Embracing these truths and making them part of who we are will change the way people view life itself. It will certainly change the way they see themselves as a vital part of God’s global cause.

Third, leaders in local churches must provide practical implementation or avenues of involvement for people to use their gifts, abilities, and resources for his global cause.

Mission mobilization will require a change in how the local church thinks about world missions and its role in it. In order to give rise to local church mission mobilization it is imperative that leaders have a clear understanding of generational perspectives, empower their members’ giftedness, and encourage a new perspective of partnership in missions rather than one of solely financial support.

• Generational dynamics. A local church cannot approach missions from the perspective of the builder generation (those born prior to World War II) if our church is full of boomers, busters, and Xers. While we often study these groups from a church-growth perspective, we must also approach the practical implementation of global missions with an eye on generational dynamics. To reach the present generation, we must be contemporary, cutting edge, and contextual in our practical approach to global missions in the local church. Yet, we must not forget to include practical dynamics that appeal to the builder generation. We must have flexibility if we are to lead our churches to be on mission with God to the ends of the earth.

• Personalization. Every believer, no matter how young or how old, is important to God and useful in his kingdom cause. Personalization is simply defined as "every believer using his or her gifts, abilities, and resources in God’s global cause, which is gathering worshippers unto himself." It is the role of leaders to teach people their worth to God, challenge them regarding their vital role in his kingdom, and provide avenues of involvement as a practical expression of their gifts, abilities, and resources in his global cause.

Personalization has two vital aspects: identification and involvement. Believers must identify with a particular missionary, project, or cause. What naturally follows from identifying with missionaries or mission outreaches are meaningful relationships with the mission personnel. Relationships then lead to involvement in the missionary task. Both relationships and involvement are significant to the present generation. The Scriptures say, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). The converse is also true: where your heart is, there your treasure will also be. If we will implement the personalization principle, "let us do it with you," we will learn that when people are personally involved, the resources follow! Personalization will enable believers to utilize their gifts, abilities, and resources in the kingdom, allow them unbelievable fulfillment as believers, and will also accelerate the work of the kingdom in incredible ways.

• New paradigms. We must implement the "partnership" paradigm. The previous paradigm, one of supporting others financially in order for them to do ministry on your behalf, served the body of Christ well in the previous generation. However, it did not fully facilitate the expression of personalization that is relevant to the current generation. The support paradigm now provides the basis for a new paradigm that meets the current generation: the principle of partnership.

To explain further, the traditional approach for most denominations has been an institutional one: "you give us the resources and we’ll do it for you." Most non-denominational and/or interdenominational mission organizations have had a quasi-institutional approach in which the missionaries made a personal appeal for support. Although the
quasi-institutional approach was somewhat personalized, the churches rarely developed relationships which led to partnerships, and out of which grew projects. We believe the partnership paradigm is the most effective one for today’s generation. We even find the builder generation gets excited about personalization once the people find it is not a threat to their more established and accepted methodologies. It must not be an either/or, but a both/and approach. The partnership approach can have different levels but it will, we believe, allow for greater personalization and thus, greater advancement of the kingdom.

Missionaries must not see themselves solely as implementers of the missionary task, but also as mobilizers of the missionary resource. This will really require a major paradigm shift in the way that mission agencies, denominational or non-denominational, approach their role in the missionary endeavor. The individual missionaries and agencies must see themselves as servants, facilitators, and partners with the local church in the global cause. This paradigm shift will enable churches to be more true to the New Testament model, and allow them to be more effective in fulfilling their God-given role as New Testament churches. However, it will also accelerate the missionary endeavor. Missionaries are finding that they can accomplish much more through synergistic partnerships than they could ever do alone.

Countless pastors have been rejuvenated in their ministries as they gain this new vision for the local church and their personal ministries. They are anointed with fresh oil! They begin to see their role and their church’s role from a new perspective. Through personalization, they find exciting, effective ways to influence the world for Christ. There have been revival-like atmospheres in churches that were either stagnated or very provincial in their approach and unbelievable resources were released for the kingdom! Incredible numbers of boomers, busters, and Xers commit to career missions and get involved in partnership missions with short-term mission trips as the key component of these partnerships.

One rural church recently implemented these kinds of dynamic principles and saw their missions giving increase almost eight times from the previous year. They have developed five strategic mission partnerships on several continents. In addition, they are sending over one-third of their people on partnership mission trips the first year, and have between 15 and 20 people who have committed to career missions. They never dreamed they could touch the world so significantly from their rural area. They have never before felt like such a true New Testament church!

God intends for every believer to be on mission with him to the ends of the earth, starting right in their own geographic Jerusalem. We must simply forsake a penchant for form, and focus on function in the local church. We must be the instruments of God to lead our churches to more effectively reach the world for Christ.

Be assured that a global vision will not diminish your local vision. It is not an either/or proposition. It is both/and! Scores of pastors have testified that as they developed a global view and led their churches to reach the world “out there,” they never experienced more blessings locally.

As we embrace the new millennium, God wants our local churches, his primary instruments, to be vibrant, alive, and energized churches. Becoming a global church is not a panacea for problems. However, there is a special dynamism that comes when a local church moves outside of itself to be an effective instrument of God to fulfill his global cause: for the peoples of the earth to worship the true and living God.

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