

COLLECTIVE CALLING

RPTS Missiology Series

REACH • PLANT • TRAIN • SERVE

Volume 2

AGWM
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD WORLD MISSIONS





AGWM COLLECTIVE CALL

RPTS

Missiology Series

REACH • PLANT • TRAIN • SERVE



ASSEMBLIES OF GOD
WORLD MISSIONS

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RPTS Missions Series Publication

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PREFACE

Dear Colleagues,

Being a Pentecostal missionary isn't a career choice based on human ambition or the desire for that deceptive goal the world calls "success." God has a will and purpose for each of His servants. His divine call is at the very heart of who we are as missionaries—individually and collectively.

God's callings are personal. He speaks an awesome and noble purpose into the heart of each person He chooses. To say yes to God's call often means surrendering personal dreams and ambitions on the altar of commitment. It can mean facing loneliness and even peril. The compelling factor: God's call.

Since the earliest years of our fellowship, Assemblies of God World Missions has been commissioned by the General Council to determine that missionary applicants are both divinely *called* and *qualified*. The Executive Committee and World Missions Board personally interview each applicant for missionary service. These are sacred moments. As we sit across the table from these men and women, we hear wonderful testimonies of how God has called each personally.

Even among candidates with a divine call, there may be some who aren't yet qualified; in those cases, we delay approval. Examples include: a need to gain ministry experience, diminish financial debt, resolve a health issue, or acquire specific training for their missionary assignment.

Some don't qualify to work within AGWM because of their firm commitment to a different missiology. For example, AGWM has been steadfastly committed to establishing indigenous churches since 1921. A missionary with a passion for souls and even a heart to establish the church might be committed to a paternalistic approach of paying national pastors rather than teaching them to be self-supporting and dependent on God for their resources. Such a missionary cannot work within the context of our distinctive mission methods and priorities.

Many of our first missionaries were serving overseas with other missions when they joined the Assemblies of God. W. W. Simpson served in China with another sending agency. Even before he experienced Holy Spirit baptism in 1912, he became convinced through his study of the Word of the validity of the Pentecostal experience. He left the mission organization in which he had served for many years and later joined the Assemblies of God because he could no longer work in an organization that rejected Pentecostal experience. But his calling to missions remained constant.

There's an individual call and a collective call. Just as the Lord of the harvest goes to the marketplace to recruit laborers personally (Matthew 20), He raised up the Assemblies of God as a fellowship and a mission with a clear task. The second General Council of 1914 expressed our fellowship's collective call when they committed us to "the greatest evangelism that the world has ever seen." Assemblies of God World Missions expresses that collective call through four aspects of our mission: (1) reach the lost, (2) plant churches, (3) train leaders, and (4) serve the poor and suffering. These aren't the formulations of a strategy committee. They are commands of our Lord, and our primary objective is to establish His church among all peoples everywhere.

Acts 15:36–41 is a poignant and instructive passage that notes the contention between Paul and his coworker Barnabas and their subsequent separation. The church at Antioch had fasted and prayed

and sent these two men on a divinely initiated mission. But, in time, a personal disagreement resulted in a practical conflict, and Paul and Barnabas parted ways.

Both Paul and Barnabas had divine calls, and at one point they were called together. At a later time, they still each had their calls but chose not to work together. Yet, it's interesting and wonderful to note that many years later Paul said of John Mark, who was the original cause of the division between Paul and Barnabas, "He is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11, KJV).


The personal call to missions and working within the framework of AGWM means there must be alignment between the personal call and the collective call of AGWM. If this isn't the case, conflict will occur. As the world missions arm of the Assemblies of God, AGWM is mandated to work within the parameters of our doctrine and missiology. If the personal call of an individual can't be in full agreement, it's best for the prospective missionary to choose another way to fulfill God's call on their life.

So *all* can hear,

Greg Mundis
AGWM Executive Director

Be sure to visit our team website at team.agwm.org regularly for updates, information, and resourcing.

Series Introduction

 On November 23, 1914, in the second General Council of the Assemblies of God held at Stone Church in Chicago, Illinois, attendees made the commitment “for the greatest evangelism that the world has ever seen.”¹ From that time to the present, the Assemblies of God (USA) has maintained a missional focus as part of its DNA.

We have remained resolute in reaching every people in every nation with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This commitment is driven by our deep sense of call to the harvest fields of our world *so all can hear!* Our purpose flows out of AGWM’s vision that *Christ will be proclaimed, and His church will be established in all nations through the power of the Spirit.* (Refer to Appendix A for statements of our vision, mission, and purpose.)

Today’s generation stands at a unique vantage point as we look back over 100 years of missions history and, at the same time, gaze into the future toward the unfulfilled task of over four billion people who remain without a meaningful life-giving witness of Jesus. For this reason, we don’t think it strange at all that a mission with a 100-year history should be reemphasizing the importance of its vision, purpose, mission, and values.

1 General Council of the Assemblies of God Minutes, Monday, Nov. 23, 1914.

There are three reasons for prioritizing these key DNA elements to keep us focused and committed to our collective call in our missionary task.

THREE KEY REASONS

The *first* reason is the tendency of mission agencies to shift their focus over time. Human organizations are predisposed to drift away from the core vision, mission, and values of their original call; this is termed “missional drift.” For individuals who have served many years with Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) as well as those newly appointed, it’s important to reinforce key elements to ensure that our vision, mission, and values continue to shape our team’s collective focus for future generations.

A *second* reason is the success of missions itself. In the twentieth century we observed many denominational mission organizations and agencies evolve and expand as they experienced success in their endeavors, only to lose sight of the moorings that anchored them to their biblical mandate and original purpose. Likewise, AGWM has evolved and developed over time in response to worldwide growth, yet we pray the Spirit helps us keep the main thing, the main thing.

A *third* reason is the phenomenon of the social turn in North American Christianity. Until the 1950s, the consensus was that missions had to do with making disciples and planting churches. With the social turn, many Christians see missions as issue-based, focusing on a particular social problem without any relationship with or value placed on evangelizing the unreached and discipling reproducible communities of faith. Yet those who want a more integrated approach would maintain a strong connection to evangelism, church planting, and discipleship in the pursuit of responding to social issues. We shouldn’t assume missionaries over time will remain informed by the vision and mission or that new personnel will share the vision and the mission to reach, plant, train, and serve in an integrated way as we evangelize the world.

A deep conviction of AGWM is to understand and implement the RPTS mission practice as an integrated approach: *Reach—Plant—Train—Serve*. Viewing any one of these elements as a silo, as something to be practiced apart from the others, results in a disjointed, fragmented, and unhealthy mission philosophy and method. Drawing upon Scripture and missions history as well as insights from current missiological realities, we can glean valuable principles that inform the importance of an integrated approach to our mission for AGWM missionaries serving Christ in diverse regions around the world.

Considering this rationale and background, the decision to introduce a new AGWM publication called the *RPTS Missiology Series* emerged. The *RPTS Missiology Series* seeks to advance the cause of world evangelization and alignment of our AGWM vision, mission, and values through study and evaluation of mission concepts and strategies from biblical-theological, historical, and practical perspectives, with a view to affirming sound mission theory and practice within AGWM, Assemblies of God churches, and support ministries. While we value functioning strategies and practices, the goal is to focus on “best practices” for the express purpose of being a flourishing mission. As such, this series will engage in various contemporary mission and missiological themes in order to articulate, discuss, highlight, and interact with key issues in missions today from the backdrop of continuity with Assemblies of God missiological heritage aligned with fresh and robust thinking and assessments.

In the first volume, the articles focus on AGWM’s vision, mission, and core values. The idea was to begin the series with an emphasis on the foundational elements that have shaped the overall philosophy and methodology of our mission. This second volume speaks to the unique call of AGWM as a denominational mission and the significance that transpires as individuals follow God’s call by serving together

to proclaim the gospel and plant the church in the power of the Spirit among every people where reproducing local communities of faith are not present to give life-giving witness to Jesus Christ.

This volume has two divisions: The first section consists of an essay addressing the notion of collective call from biblical, historical, and organizational perspectives, and considering the implications that affect our mission practice. As products of a highly individualistic society, we often stress views and practices about the missionary “call” through a cultural lens of individualism. This can reduce a broader and deeper understanding of the biblical intent of “calling” if we aren’t sensitive and responsive. The second section consists of nine short essays written by missionaries concerning their personal calling, and as a result, how their lives and ministries have been enriched and enhanced as their individual calling has aligned with the AGWM collective calling.

Reach, plant, train, and serve . . . so all can hear!

John L. Easter





AGWM LARGER CALL AND PURPOSE

||

THEN HE SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES, “THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL BUT THE WORKERS ARE FEW. ASK THE LORD OF THE HARVEST, THEREFORE, TO SEND OUT WORKERS INTO HIS HARVEST FIELD.”

— MATTHEW 9:37-38



Our Collective Call

AGWM Missiological Committee

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The notion of the *missionary call* is something we have valued historically as a denominational mission and continue to value. Our identity as individuals serving together as a larger AGWM team has been forged by the teaching of Scripture, our unique history, and the collective experience shaped over one hundred years of Pentecostal mission practice.

Then how is it that on the one hand we cherish the concept of the individual missionary call and on the other we foster the importance of a larger calling and purpose of the AGWM as a mission organization?

As products of a highly individualistic society, the lens that determines how we view ourselves in relationship with God, His church, and His mission in the world is often shaped by a self-narrative that can limit our effectiveness. When we apply the lens of hyper-individualism to the reading of Scripture, the interpretation process, and the application of principles that determines our mission practice, we must take care not to delimit our perception and behavior as missionaries called to achieve the vision and mission as a collective whole.

So, how do we define and understand AGWM's larger calling and purpose? And, how does this affect our individual calling as missionaries serving in various contexts around the world?

This essay explores the importance of the biblical and historical notion of collective call, and the resulting missiological implications that inform our mission theory and practice. This topic is important for many reasons, including an increasingly diverse set of interests about missions in both our local churches and among missionary candidates. It's important to revisit and refine our understanding of the larger calling and purpose our missionaries feel connected to.

When exploring the notion of *collective calling*, the simplest definition is "something we are all called to do." In business literature, the terms associated with this idea are *mission*, *vision*, and *alignment*. In the business world, a collective calling is embodied in a mission statement, which generally presents an organization's purpose by answering three specific questions: (1) What work does it do? (2) Who does it do the work for? and (3) How does it accomplish this work? These questions also relate to collective calling in missions.

For instance, as an organization engaged in God's redemptive mission, we have a mandate, we know who we're working for, and we have specific ways to accomplish this work. If we accept that it's a good idea for a business organization to determine the boundaries of its stated purpose, wouldn't it make sense for a mission organization to do the same?

Another term related to collective calling is the concept of *alignment*, which describes an ideal situation where the entire organization, from leadership to entry-level team members, works from the same principles and with the same goals in mind. In the mission context, missionaries share the vision, goals, and methods on their fields of service and in their work that align with the larger call and purpose of AGWM.

Since *collective calling* can be an elusive term in an individualistic society, let's clarify our definition here. First, note the factors that shape the collective calling of AGWM. They form an overarching trajectory toward the evangelization of the world: (1) our shared Pentecostal identity; (2) our missions purpose; (3) our core values; (4) the Scripture mandate; (5) our unique history; and (6) the current mission realities of our time.

Based on these factors, we can define our collective call as follows:

Proclaiming the gospel and planting the church in the power of the Spirit among every people where reproducing local communities of faith are not present to give life-giving witness to Jesus Christ.

In the remainder of this chapter we'll explore in more detail why we've settled on this definition. In part one, we'll explore biblical and theological evidence, in part two we'll consider historical analysis, and in part three we'll examine the implications our proposed definition holds for the future direction of our mission agency.

PART ONE: BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Metanarrative of the Bible

Because ideas of collective calling, alignment, and corporate vision are alien to the language and culture of the Bible writers, we need to ask different questions than the traditional exegetical ones. Richard Bauckham's hermeneutic for the kingdom of God provides one way for us to "enter into the Bible's own missionary direction."¹ He argues:

1 Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 11.

The Bible is a kind of project aimed at the kingdom of God, that is, towards the achievement of God's purposes for good in the whole of God's creation. This is a universal direction that takes the particular with the utmost seriousness. Christian communities or individuals are always setting off from the particular as both the Bible and our own situation defines it and following biblical direction towards the universal that is to be found not apart from but within other particulars. This is mission.²

Bauckham suggests that movement from the particular to the universal in the biblical narrative is defined by three aspects: (1) the temporal (from creation to the eschatological future); (2) spatial (from one place to every place, Jerusalem to the ends of the earth); and (3) social (moving from person to person and people to people).³ He says, "The social, or we could say, numerical movement of the biblical narrative is from the one to the many, from Abraham to the nations, from Jesus to every creature in heaven, on earth, and under the earth."⁴

The overarching story of the Bible, which has a "future goal towards which it moves,"⁵ is relevant to our interests in defining a collective calling because that same future goal involves those whom God uses in His redemptive mission. There's a sense in which the particulars of the Bible stories are all moving to a universal horizon;⁶ therefore, there's a collective movement of God's people toward the goals of that eschatological future.

2 Ibid.

3 *Bible and Mission*, 13-15.

4 Ibid., 15.

5 Ibid., 15.

6 Ibid., 16.

The Missional Engagement of the People of God

MISSIONS WAS A KEY
CHARACTER TRAIT OF THE
PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE
OLD TESTAMENT.


The call of Abram in Genesis 12:1–3 and the promises God made to him (mentioned five times throughout Genesis) have together been called the Great Commission of the Old Testament. Abram begins to understand the promises when God explains the purpose of the blessings. God promises a blessing to Abram and his future family. Everything that precedes the final clause happens so that all the *mishpahot* (Hebrew for families, clans) of the earth will be “blessed through you.”

We see that God responds to human pride and autonomy, as evidenced in the account of the Tower of Babel in the preceding chapter (Genesis 11); however, God also responds to faith, as evidenced by announcing His plan to bless Abram’s family: to bless Abram’s name, to bless all who bless Abram, and ultimately to bless all families on earth.

The text doesn’t explain how his family will bless all others, and at this point in the narrative, God’s only requirement of Abram is that he leave his country and people. It is God who acts. God chose one man, who would be the father of one nation through whom all the *mishpahot* of the world would be blessed. The blessing Abram’s family received cannot be divorced from the redemption found in Christ that is available for all nations.

Ultimately, Abraham's promise extends to an international community of faith and exists for the blessing of all people. God cannot bless the church without blessing individuals, but He blesses individuals because together they form the church. In the New Testament, the key to understanding the collective dimension of God's calling is to realize that God chose to bless the church in order to bring Abraham's blessing to the Gentiles (Galatians 3:28–29).

In other words, the election of the whole church is the means by which God will fulfill His promise to Abraham and will bless all families on the earth. We should not reduce God's activity to the election of individuals who will be blessed.



GOD'S PEOPLE, AS A
COLLECTIVE WHOLE, ARE
MOVING IN UNISON TOWARD
THE GOAL OF BRINGING THE
BLESSING OF REDEMPTION TO
THE WORLD.

Genesis 18:16–33 discusses the subject of God's judgment of Sodom. This text brings additional perspective to the calling of God's people and clarifies how God will fulfill His promise to bless all people through Abraham. In this passage, the discussion begins with Yahweh and two angelic beings getting up to leave after having a meal with Abraham. Yahweh seems to be talking with Himself when He asks:

“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of

the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.” (Genesis 18:17–19)

Christopher Wright suggests that this passage is a remarkable text for it puts together in a single sentence God’s choice of Abraham (election), God’s moral demand on Abraham’s community (ethics), and God’s promise to bless the nations through Abraham (mission). The church is heir both to the promise made to Abraham and the responsibility laid on him.

The two purpose clauses in the text are significant because they illustrate God’s desires. The purpose of God’s election of Abraham was to create a community that knew and walked in the ways of the Lord. The purpose of developing this community was to fulfill the promise to bless the nations; however, without Abraham’s obedience the promise could never have been fulfilled.

In Exodus 19 we find additional information about God’s missional role for His people. After the exodus from Egypt, God told Moses He intended for Israel to become a kingdom of priests. “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5–6). One of God’s purposes in electing Abraham was to produce a nation from his descendants, and Israel was the fulfillment of that purpose. However, Israel’s election (like Abraham’s) also had a purpose that fit within God’s plan to bless the nations.

God elected Israel so they would fulfill priestly responsibilities. Priests serve as intermediaries between God and people and teach the Lord’s decrees (Leviticus 10:11). Here we see that God’s people are to function in this kind of mediatory role to make the living God known in the world.

The New Testament picks up on this and affirms this theme in 1 Peter 2:9–10 by explaining that God’s people are to declare His glory.

The Rise of Missions-Sending Structures

The Old Testament theme of God’s people being *on the move* in the world and progressing from individual concerns to Kingdom concerns carries over naturally into the New Testament. These movements of God’s people find their fulfillment in those who follow Jesus and His commands.

What is relevant about this to us as a mission agency is whether we can see a similar collective movement in the early mission-sending structure that emerges in the book of Acts.

Arthur Glasser observes that in the first 12 chapters of Acts it is primarily individuals, and occasionally multi-individual activity, that bear witness to Jesus⁷. However, from chapter 13 and onward, the writer of Acts focuses on Paul’s apostolic band, who by this point had developed a working team of church planters who consistently crossed geographic and cultural boundaries. Many missiologists will point to this as the founding of a new Christian structure (organizational culture) designed to evangelize and plant local churches.⁸

Ralph Winter views this apostolic band as a “second redemptive structure” that God used along with the local church.⁹ The New Testament’s local church and this apostolic band each serve as prototypes for the subsequent Christian fellowships and missionary endeavors that would soon develop within the early church.¹⁰ Each of

7 For instance, Peter in 2:14–40 and 3:12–26; Philip in 8:5–13. A. F. Glasser, C. Van Engen, D.S. Gilliland, & S. B. Redford. *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 300.

8 *Ibid.*, 301–302.

9 Ralph Winter. “*The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission.*” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*. Edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 245.

10 *Ibid.*

these structures have their unique functions, and God uses both to bring the good news to people in an effective manner.

Glasser's comment on Acts 13:1–4 is useful because it provides an interpretive lens for looking at the history of missions-sending structures:

The final characteristic of this missionary church was the nature of the burden that caused its various leaders to come together, not just to worship the Lord, but to wait before Him for the revelation of His will concerning their future service. From the response and instruction given by the Holy Spirit, we infer that their burden concerned a problem they were unable as localized congregations to solve.¹¹

There are two important details to consider in Glasser's statement. First, we see the impetus for missions comes from a response to a missional understanding of Scripture and the work of the Spirit.

In Acts, we learn that one of the key elements of the gathering of believers was the apostolic teaching (Acts 2:42). Likewise, Luke 24:44–49 provides insight as to how Jesus taught the apostles to understand the Scriptures. Christopher Wright notes that in Luke 24:45–47, “This is what is written” does not refer to any specific verse in the Old Testament:

[Glasser] seems to be saying that the whole of the Scripture (which we now know as the Old Testament) finds *both* its focus and fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Israel's Messiah, *and* accordingly in the mission to all nations, which flows from that event. Luke tells us that with these words Jesus “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45, NIV), or as we might put it, he reoriented their hermeneutical orientation and agenda. The proper way for disciples of the crucified and risen

11 *Announcing the Kingdom*, 301.

Jesus to read their Scriptures, is *messianically* and *missionally* (emphasis in original).¹²

In Acts 13, the Spirit called Paul and Barnabas. From this we can infer that

THE HOLY SPIRIT PLACED
BURDENS IN THE HEARTS OF
EARLY CHURCH MEMBERS SO
THEY WOULD SEE THEMSELVES
AS HAVING A MISSIONAL ROLE
THAT STRETCHED BEYOND
THEIR OWN LOCALE.

This had the added effect of making the promise and mandate of the Scriptures more alive for them.

Thus, the core of the “Acts 13 moment” for a local church occurs when its people understand the Bible and the burden given to them by the Spirit, leading them to understand that major accomplishments in God’s redemptive mission cannot be achieved through their church structure alone. From this passage we see that the natural response to the burden placed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit should be to wait before the Lord for His instructions on how to proceed.

The second detail to consider is that the “going,” which was led by the Spirit (13:4), was to places that didn’t have communities of faith.

12

C. J. H. Wright. *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 30.

At this point in the Acts narrative there were individual churches, or possibly networks of house churches, present in several cities and regions (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Caesarea, Damascus, and Tarsus in Cilicia) thanks to Paul's hard work. However, the call—as carried out by Paul and Barnabas—was to go where the church didn't exist.

The New Testament clearly records the itinerant movement of Christians with ministry gifts to help already-existing churches.¹³ However, the paradigmatic status of this passage for missionary endeavors—along with Paul's own understanding of his calling to preach the gospel where Christ was not known (Romans 15:20) and to take the gospel to the regions beyond (2 Corinthians 10:16)—argues strongly for a foundational understanding of the work of the apostolic band in planting the church where it didn't exist.

A further piece of evidence for the outward focus of the mission of the church comes from the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. While the principle issue had to do with the relationship of Gentile converts to circumcision, James's use of the Septuagint rewording of Amos 9:11–12 reveals his view of the Gentile mission. Bruce points out that the Septuagint change of “possess” to “seek” and the change in vocalization of Edom to *adam* (humanity) spiritualizes the passage to bring it in line with Israel's mission “to bring the knowledge of the true God to the Gentiles. It thus paved the way for James' application of the prophecy to the church's Gentile mission. . . . The Gentile mission, then, is the work of God: He has made it known in advance ‘from of old’ and now He has brought it to pass.”¹⁴ So the purpose of releasing the Gentiles from religious and cultural restrictions was to

13 Some examples here would be John and Peter's visit to the work in Samaria (Acts 8), Peter's ministry among the saints in Lydda and Joppa, Barnabas going to Antioch and then bringing Paul from Tarsus (Acts 11), Judas and Silas sent along with the letter from the Jerusalem church to the Gentile churches (Acts 15:22-35), Apollos's visit to Achaia (Acts 18:27), Paul's letters to churches that he did not found, such as Colossians, and his intended visit to the church at Rome.

14 Frederick F. Bruce. *The Book of Acts*. Revised ed. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988),

facilitate their participation in mission to the Gentile world rather than limiting the outreach to Jewish circles and those few who would become proselytes.

SUMMARY


In this section, we looked broadly at a missionary hermeneutic that helps us see the movement of God's people in specific times and places toward the goal of God's redemptive plan for all creation. We then examined three Old Testament passages that illustrate this broad trajectory. Becoming part of God's family isn't simply about personal benefit, comfort, or just "going to heaven." It's aligning and participating in God's mission. We also looked for evidence of this same trajectory of movement in the rise of the initial missions-sending structure of the apostolic band and found that it is also present. Finally, the Acts 15 passage shows that these early Christian leaders saw the Gentile mission as central to God's redemptive purpose.

PART TWO: HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

Collective Call and Missions-Sending Structures in Missions History

Winter observed that while the forms of missions-sending structures have changed over 2,000 years of missions history, the essential functions of the apostolic band have remained. What is relevant to our search is that a look at Christian missions over 2,000 years confirms the trajectory of taking the faith to those who don't know it. Norman Thomas in *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity* assembles key texts about Christian mission across the ages, and the consistent witness through much diversity in Christian faith and practice is that all streams of Christian faith see missions as going to where the church and faith don't exist.

In AD 419, Augustine answered the query of a bishop in Dalmatia who saw the spread of the Christian faith in the Roman Empire as a sign that the end of the world was near. Augustine argued that the end couldn't be near based on God's promises that the whole earth would be filled with the gospel and many barbarian tribes were clearly unreached. He asked, "So how can this prophecy have been fulfilled by the apostles when, as we know for a fact, there are still nations in which its fulfillment is just beginning, as well as nations in which it has not yet begun?"¹⁵



IF WE FAST-FORWARD TO
THE MODERN MISSION ERA,
WE AGAIN FIND THAT IT IS
THE UNFINISHED FULFILLMENT
OF GOD'S PROMISES THAT
BROUGHT ADVANCES WITH
THE GOSPEL.

In William Carey's era the gospel was established on the coastlands of Africa, India, and Asia; in Hudson Taylor's era the challenge was taking the gospel to the unreached inland areas; and in the twentieth century the reality of ethnolinguistic groups without a witness of the gospel ignited a push to plant the church among what became known as "unreached people groups."

The vehicle used to facilitate the Protestant church in missions in the modern era is the voluntary missionary society (Walls calls it an "instrumental society"), which is "the voluntary association of

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Norman E. Thomas, ed. *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*. American Society of Missiology series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 18-19.

Christians banding together to achieve a defined object” conceived by analogy from the organization of a company.¹⁶ He makes the point that voluntary mission societies were a pragmatic solution to the challenge of world evangelization: “The simple fact was that the Church as then organized, whether Episcopal, or Presbyterian, or Congregational, could not effectively operate missions overseas. Christians accordingly had to ‘use means’ to do so.”¹⁷ Writing two hundred years after Carey, Bob Blincoe of Frontiers suggests the same vision of the pragmatic nature of missions-sending structures: they are task structures unlike denominations, and they come together to produce product.¹⁸

What is the product and purpose for their banding together? It is evangelism and planting the church among non-Christian populations.

Klaus Fiedler, in his work documenting the rise of faith missions, observes that none of them wanted to work where other missions were working. They saw taking the gospel to the unreached as their only reason for existence.¹⁹ Walls summarizes that idea in this way:

The missionary society was, as Carey indicated, a use of means for a specific purpose. The original purpose was what Carey called “the conversion of the heathens.” The purpose of both the older and the newer societies was essentially evangelistic; in as far as it was formulated, the theory was that when the church was founded, the mission would move on.²⁰

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- 16 A. F. Walls. “Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church.” *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*. Edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 257.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Robert Blincoe. “The Strange Structure of Mission Agencies Part I: Still Two Structures After All These Years?” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 19, No. 1:5–8.
- 19 Klaus Fiedler. *The Story of Faith Missions: From Hudson Taylor to Present Day Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1994), 73.
- 20 Ibid., 261.

What do we learn from studying missions-sending structures from the New Testament church to the present? While the forms have varied over the years, the function has been remarkably consistent: taking the gospel to non-Christians in order to win them to faith, disciple them, and form them into local churches. We don't find the notion of missions with a primary focus of Christians working with other Christians as the starting point of any mission structure until the twentieth century.

Lessons from Assemblies of God Missions History

In this section, we use the historical backdrop of the rise of missions-sending structures to look at the notion of Assemblies of God missions in the past on two dimensions: (1) the vision of the founders and (2) missionary placement.

The Founding Vision

Edith Blumhofer says that early Assemblies of God adherents were convinced the apostolic faith had been restored and used what resources they had to spread the message. She comments, "They felt called to responsibility for the salvation of everyone, everywhere."²¹ The call to organization that went out in 1914 resulted in a Pentecostal organization that saw itself as an agency for world evangelization. This view was enshrined in the 1914 commitment to do the greatest evangelism the world had ever seen.²² Five decades later in the 1968 St. Louis Council on Evangelism, the Assemblies of God reaffirmed that the movement existed as an agency to evangelize the world.²³

21 Edith L. Blumhofer. *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 153.

22 *Assemblies of God Foreign Missions into All the World: The New Missionary Manual* (Springfield, Missouri: Assemblies of God Foreign Missions, 1999), 11. "As a Council . . . we commit ourselves and the Movement to Him for the greatest evangelism that the world has ever seen."

23 *Restoring the Faith*, 243.

The founders' understanding of their experience of the Spirit as the restoration of the apostolic faith gave them both a sense of urgency to evangelize the world and the power to do so. Thus, in the practice of world evangelism, the work of the Spirit was central to their practice, particularly on two levels. The sense of personal call was primary in both the impulse to go and where to go, while signs, wonders, and power provided the divine dynamics for ministry to bring results in planting the church.

Purpose and Placement

In terms of our past, two points are relevant to missionary purpose and placement. First, the central concern of our Pentecostal founders was the evangelization of the world, and virtually everywhere an Assemblies of God missionary went was a pioneering situation.

Second, within the first ten years, the leadership of the movement recognized that biblical parameters needed to constrain personal call, and they put into their council minutes that missions was to be done by New Testament methods (1915) and should follow as much as possible the Pauline example of seeking out neglected regions where the gospel had not been preached (1921).

Historically, this puts Assemblies of God mission efforts precisely in the stream of the faith missions that arose in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Fiedler contrasts the faith missions with the independent and non-church mission movements. Independent missions started with God's call but permitted the development of structure—institutions where missionaries could support themselves; the non-church missions utilized the faith principle where support came only in answer to prayer in faith.²⁴ Fiedler notes that faith missions took the ideas of God's call and faith for support but corrected an inherent weakness in both the independent and

24 *The Story of Faith Missions*, 24.

non-church mission structures: namely, the weakness of a lack of organization to facilitate missionary effectiveness:²⁵

Perhaps the greatest achievement in missiological terms was that faith missions (in contrast to independent missions and non-church missions) managed to develop clear and effective organizational structures, and to defend them against widespread questioning.²⁶

Gary McGee points out that similar unresolved tensions within AGWM became part of the genius of Assemblies of God missions because it kept the organization from being bound to personal calling alone while avoiding the problem of an over-organized approach.²⁷ These tensions allowed the Spirit to bring continual renewal and new initiatives to the structure.

SUMMARY

The question addressed in this historical section was whether the specific purposes around which missions-sending structures came into being affected mission practices. The answer is affirmative—the driving force in missions throughout Christian history has been proclaiming the gospel and planting the church where there is no ever-present and sustained witness of the gospel.

The related question, then, is: Does this same purpose inform Assemblies of God missions? Again, the answer is affirmative.

Like other mission agencies that grew out of revival movements, Assemblies of God missions shares a compelling commitment to world evangelization. This trajectory has continuity with the

25 Ibid., 25.

26 Ibid., 56.

27 Gary McGee. *Miracles, Missions, & American Pentecostalism*. American Society of Missiology series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 140.

founding of all missions-sending structures from the New Testament to the beginning of the twentieth century. The purpose in world evangelization is to take the gospel to the non-Christian world.

PART THREE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The Proper Response to the Notion of Collective Calling

The purpose of this essay is to explore biblical and historical data to see if there is evidence for the notion of a collective calling for God's people and, by extension, mission agencies, that should inform our missions theory and practice. We began by providing a definition of our collective calling derived from our examination of the biblical and historical material. Revisiting the factors that shape an Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) collective calling can be reiterated in the statement below:

The overarching trajectory and purpose of AGWM is to evangelize the world, shaped by our shared Pentecostal identity, values, and mission purpose and driven by Scripture, our unique history, and the current missions realities of our time.

If we accept the notion of collective call, what is our response to it? What does this look like in actual practice in our various ministry contexts around the world?

A Proposal for Our Interpretive Moment: The Meaning of World Evangelization for AGWM

Standing more than one hundred years from our founders, we find ourselves once again at a moment of interpreting the reason for our existence as a missions-sending agency. It is clear the founders pledged themselves to the greatest evangelism the world had ever seen, but what that means in today's missiological reality of where

the church does or doesn't exist is important to our discussion.

In this section, we consider some of the reasons we are standing at an interpretive moment and make a proposal based on our definition of collective call for how AGWM could understand and position itself toward world evangelization in the twenty-first century.

Reasons Why We Stand at an Interpretive Moment

We don't think it strange that a mission with a one-hundred-year history should revisit issues related to purpose, vision, and values. Here we suggest three reasons for the need to reach a solid consensus on what world evangelization means for us today.

The first reason is the reality of a natural shift in the emphasis and focus of mission agencies over time. Fiedler documents that mission movements result from revival, noting that while revivals "start at a given point in church history and, after a time, fade out, they do not disappear. Their teachings, their institutions, and the fellowships they created continue to exist even after the revival fervor has waned."²⁸ This means that people coming into our mission one hundred years after its founding will have a different vision than people of the first generation.

A second source of change is the success of missions itself. Walls observes that, theoretically, early missionary societies were supposed to move on once the church was founded, but this didn't happen:

As new churches appeared, the society remained as a natural channel of communication through which flowed aid, personnel, money, materials, and technical expertise. The societies, as we have seen, developed other roles as educators of church and public, and as a conscience for peoples and governments. All these roles were

28 *The Story of Faith Missions*, 113.

already established in the missionary societies before 1830, and they are all there still.²⁹

Winter calls these early missionary societies and their offspring today “standard missions” that have broad and comprehensive interests ranging from evangelism and church planting to social concern and development of Christian institutions. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, other types of sending structures have grown up around the standard missions to either serve them (such as Wycliffe Bible Translators or Mission Aviation Fellowship), work in areas where they are less capable (such as agencies specializing in relief and development), compete with them (such as those that advocate “national missions” as a less expensive alternative to sending Western missionaries or “congregational” in which direct sending of finance bypasses mission agencies), or use them to facilitate their own version of missions (such as exclusive short-term service at the expense of long-term boots on the ground).

Natural growth then leads to concerns about nurture and slows down evangelism. Other kinds of supportive ministries begin to occupy more time, attention, and finance than the standard mission.

WHAT THIS MEANS IS THAT
STARTING IN THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY, FORMS OF
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THAT CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

IS DIRECTED TO THE NON-CHRISTIAN WORLD.

Again, it's natural that people coming to our organization will be influenced by these trends and the result will be a range of different understandings of the goals of mission.

A third issue is the phenomenon of the social turn in North American Christianity. Until the 1950s, there was a consensus that missions involved making disciples and planting the church. With the social turn, many Christians see missions as issue-based, focusing on some particular social problem. Those who take a more integrated approach maintain a strong connection to evangelism, church planting, and discipleship in the pursuit of responses to these social issues. However, for many people a “conversionary” agenda is seen as either improper or something that others do while they work on the issue they have chosen.

We can no longer assume that people coming into AGWM share our values of *reach, plant, train, and serve* as the basis for our mission to evangelize the world.

A Proposal for Defining World Evangelization

For the reasons suggested here, AGWM stands at an interpretive moment about how we'll understand the vision of our founders to do the greatest evangelism the world has ever seen. How should AGWM understand world evangelization today? Our proposal, based on the components in the definition of collective call and our foundational missiology of the indigenous church and partnership, is that the AGWM call to world evangelization means:

Proclaiming the gospel and planting the church in the power of the

Spirit among every people where reproducing local communities of faith are not present to give life-giving witness to Jesus Christ.


There are three reasons for this definition. First, cross-cultural missions has always had at its core taking the gospel to where faith and the church are without witness and presence. This vision has grown from Christians reading the Scriptures and the mandates given by the Lord Jesus Christ to His church in the five commissions (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44–49; Acts 1:8).

Second, the founders had a vision to evangelize the world. They saw this Pentecostal organization as a missions-sending structure to the entire world. The only reason to organize was to work more efficiently at the task of world evangelization. By the 1922 General Council they were already shaping the work of missionaries by affirming that we should follow the Pauline model of going to the regions beyond. “Regions beyond” are indicative of where Christ isn’t faithfully proclaimed and the church has no expression of life, meaning, or relevance to a people.

Finally, our core concept of developing indigenous national churches and our current mission realities means the focus of all our missionaries, and the existing established national churches, should be initiating church-planting movements among those in our world who have the least access to the gospel.

How Is World Evangelism Best Accomplished?

If we accept the idea that world evangelization should focus on planting the church of Jesus Christ among peoples where viable church-planting movements don’t exist, the critical question is how do we as AGWM best accomplish that task? We suggest two key elements that are central in AGWM missiology but are often considered separate from one another.



WHEN IT COMES TO
MINISTRY, PENTECOSTALS
SEE THE PERSONAL CALL
OF THE SPIRIT AS CENTRAL.
THE SPIRIT CALLS, EQUIPS,
EMPOWERS, AND GUIDES
OUR SERVICE.

Pentecostals also hold Scripture as being the rule for their faith and practice and base their work in mission on the call to the church to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. For Pentecostals, Acts 1:8 is not only the prologue to the book of Acts but the basis of our two central ideas of the Spirit and the Word. The call to go to the ends of the earth comes from the Scriptures, and the empowerment to bear witness comes from the Spirit.

The best way to work on the task of church planting is to bring together the personal call to ministry from the Spirit with the ultimate biblical goal of God's glory among the nations. The Bible establishes the Spirit's call to the individual, which means the individual's call is embedded in the mission of God. We see a unity in God's mission and our Pentecostal heritage of Spirit baptism for the purpose of world evangelization that doesn't eliminate personal call but shapes its understanding and gives it direction.

The role of the mission agency, therefore, is much more than facilitating someone's personal call. Nor is the practice of mission to be shaped primarily by personal interest, personal issue-based mission outreach (e.g., human trafficking or other social justice concerns), project-driven mission, or even short-term ventures.

Similarly, the work of the mission agency and its cross-cultural workers isn't to be a managerial enterprise based solely on rational calculation and efficiency. Rather, the Spirit is calling people to participate with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their redemptive mission to all the tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations of the earth.

Our mission efforts through *reaching, planting, training, and serving* advance the goal of developing indigenous national churches we can work alongside in partnership. This means that wherever missionaries serve, whether among non-Christians or strengthening the hands of indigenous national church movements, they can make a vital contribution toward this goal.

Notice that the weight here lies on the historical vision of world evangelization, and positions personal calling to find meaning and application in that setting. The overarching theme or motif in our work is taking the gospel to those who have least access, where our mission team is working through the primary vehicle of establishing vibrant and reproducing church-planting movements.

Reaching, planting, training, and serving become the methodology empowered by the Spirit. In this view, workers must align with the motif and pursue their understanding of their personal call within this backdrop.

Issues That Arise Around the Notion of a Collective Call


Finally, let's review some key questions that might arise regarding the idea of a collective call. We will cite four primary areas of concern and attempt to provide a perspective of how we can address these concerns while adhering to the idea of a collective call as the ultimate trajectory of our mission.

For some, having a focal point in mission such as “proclaiming the gospel and planting the church among every people where reproducing local communities of faith are not present” automatically introduces a question into the ranks of the mission team. To some, those team members more directly involved in church planting where no viable church planting movements exist seem more important and strategic than those working with the church. How do we address this concern?


First, all missionaries have strategic importance as they align their work with God’s ultimate redemptive trajectory. Most of our people aren’t used to explaining their ministry in terms of how it fits into the ultimate trajectory of God’s mission. We can explain its importance in micro-terms but are less comfortable with the universal.

The point isn’t whether we’re in direct or indirect ministry in partnership with a national church or are at the frontiers of church planting, but whether we’re working along lines that move us all in a common trajectory of establishing viable church planting movements with whom we partner to advance the gospel in their nation and beyond.

Second, we need to remind ourselves that God’s mission requires the whole body of Christ and all the gifts; the Harvest Master positions us where *He* chooses.



OUR SIGNIFICANCE COMES
NOT FROM OUR LABORS BUT
FROM OUR RELATIONSHIP
WITH GOD AS SONS AND
DAUGHTERS, AND OUR
STRATEGIC IMPORT COMES



FROM OUR OBEDIENCE TO WHAT HE HAS ASKED US TO DO IN HIS REDEMPTIVE PLAN FOR THE NATIONS.

A related concern for those working in the church is that some will wonder if their call to work among an existing national church is legitimate. As we have tried to show in the series of metaphors, work among the existing church is critical.

Working in God's redemptive mission isn't limited to those who are called as cross-cultural workers. The indigenous church that is planted is a vehicle of accomplishing the mission in God's hands. Missionaries working in partnership with national churches and local Christians in *reaching, planting, training, and serving* do so with a view to help them participate fully in God's mission themselves.

It's also important to reinforce that while God calls people to work among the already-existing church, this doesn't mean every possible kind of work in those situations is equally strategic or aligned with the ultimate vision of getting the gospel to all the tribes, tongues, and peoples of the world. It's inherent in our ideas of the indigenous church that the mission band doesn't do what local church movements can do.

Rather, the missionary team plants indigenous churches that then pursue God's mission among their own people and beyond. When cross-cultural workers do what local Christians or churches can do effectively, they're no longer facilitating indigenous ministry and/or participating in true partnership.

Partnership isn't a rhetorical term to justify "I do what I want to do" in ministry. It means working with the national church movement to forward its goals of reaching and serving its people and helping it work to establish God's glory among the nations. The call to world evangelization is both in the depth of harvest and the breadth of harvest. But in pursuing the depth of harvest desired where a national church exists, the missionary wants to ensure their work isn't duplicating what local Christians can do and are doing so the result is moving away from indigeneity and not toward it.

This illustrates the fact that our mission principles of indigeneity already put constraints on personal call. John Bueno, in his report to the General Presbytery on August 11, 2010, shows this balance between personal call from the Spirit and Scriptural parameters:

But I believe that not only Scripture but the practice of the Assemblies of God missions testifies to the fact that real growth appears when Spirit-led men and women follow in obedience to the promptings of the Spirit according to the precepts of the Word. We do, of course, have guiding principles in this action. It isn't just a free-for-all for anybody who wants to do what they want to do.

The idea of a collective call to plant the church where there is no life-giving witness of Jesus Christ doesn't delegitimize callings to work among existing national churches; in fact, by our notions of indigeneity it requires them. By the same token it makes more obvious a parameter we have tended to hold tacitly: the promptings of the Spirit must align with the precepts of the Word. The notion of a collective call puts the macro scope of God's redemptive mission among humanity as central to our reason-for-being as a missionary body.

Another area of concern is that collective call could mean managerial mission rather than being inspired by the Spirit. In our view, having an overarching goal doesn't impede the sovereign call of the Spirit

to ministry. Our basic elements of *reaching, planting, training, and serving* provide definite boundaries for ministry but don't constrict or repress personal call. If anything, they affirm, empower, and encourage personal call.

Finally, a contemporary issue affects every region of the world where we serve as AGWM missionaries. It is the result of Assemblies of God USA pastors embracing the missiology of unreached people groups, particularly as expressed in the popular concept of the 10/40 window.

Well-meaning pastors want to be strategic in their giving and some have decided to cut support to all missionaries not working in the 10/40 window. These decisions haven't been based on the kind of ministry being done but on location or geography alone. We believe that framing the idea of a collective call that focuses on *planting the church where there are no viable reproducing communities of faith* offers a convincing apologetic as to why AGWM missionary efforts continue to be strategic in these regions.

We believe that a clear and compelling communication of the collective call as defined serves to help pastors grasp and appreciate more than ever the strategic role of those working among existing church movements as they connect their work with the ultimate trajectory of God's mission.

CONCLUSION

For early Pentecostals, who saw their experience of the Spirit as a restoration of the apostolic church, the call was everything. Historians of Pentecostalism in the United States tell us that the radical evangelicals who first experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit were predisposed to distrust all forms of human organization. They looked for a final revival that would lead to world evangelization and usher in the return of Jesus.

During that early explosion of renewal, what they got right was the connection between their experience of the Spirit and the evangelization of the world. However, many things they initially believed or expected would happen now look naïve and biblically suspect. What endured out of this renewal, no doubt to the shock of those first Pentecostals, were groups that banded together, even when the majority around them made dire predictions about their demise when they let “people” get involved in organizing. Without that organizing, cooperating, and biblical shaping that began with the founding of the Assemblies of God and continues to this day, we wouldn’t be where we are as a movement in the USA and as the World Assemblies of God Fellowship around the globe.

Looking back, it seems unavoidable that the moderation and tempering of individual callings and initiative by the Spirit through cooperative organization and biblical parameters provided for successful and lasting missions work. We suggest that when considering the primary sources of Scripture, missions history, and our unique Pentecostal experience, aligning AGWM ministries and personnel called by the Spirit with the central motif of evangelizing where the church doesn’t exist provides the surest way to fulfill the vision of our founders and keep our mission focused on the desire of God’s heart.

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RESPONSES

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AS YOU SENT ME
INTO THE WORLD,
I HAVE SENT THEM
INTO THE WORLD.

— JOHN 17:18



Unity of Purpose, Diversity of Ministries

Jason B.
(Northern Asia)

THE FANTASY OF INDEPENDENCE

I still recall clearly the reaction of my outspoken college professor and mentor when I told him where I was planning to go for a one-year, missionary-associate assignment. Having served many years in North Africa, his heartbeat was for Muslims, and he almost scoffed at my choice: “That country has a growing, healthy church; they don’t need your help! Well, if you do go there, you keep an eye out for the unreached minorities.” His comment replayed in the back of my mind over the next few years. By the time I made application for a career mission appointment, my intention was to return to that country to plant churches among the unreached.

After being accepted, I remember being at Missionary Training and hearing the other candidates talk about the ministries they anticipated. I silently evaluated each one based on how closely they mirrored my own call to frontier missions. If they spoke about being directly and primarily focused on church planting among unreached people groups, excellent—five stars. If they were destined for a region of the world I saw as unevangelized but didn’t anticipate

being personally involved in new church starts, I was moderately pleased—four stars. If their destination was a place with a well-established church but they planned to do something that sounded cool, I shrugged my shoulders and thought, *I guess that's probably worthwhile*—three stars. Then there were a few whose ministries sounded so far removed from pioneer church planting I thought they might be better off staying home—two stars or worse.

I fantasized about the day I would return to Missionary Renewal after a term or two with an invitation to address my gathered colleagues about the secrets of my runaway success in launching a rapidly multiplying church movement within a previously resistant people group. Then everyone would see what missions was all about: running straight to the edges of Christian presence in the world and setting off explosive, breakthrough church growth. They would drop their lesser ambitions and become like me—singlehandedly crossing names off the unreached-people group list. Wouldn't that be a great day?


THE REALITY OF DEPENDENCE

Then I got to the field. I discovered that to most of the members of my target people group, I was little more than a novelty—hardly a source of spiritual enlightenment. Even the few who would talk to me were more interested in improving their English than discussing spiritual things. I also discovered that many of the best locations for reaching that ethnic group weren't readily accessible to me as a foreigner. Within a few years of starting that first term, I found myself looking to others for help.

It was a humbling but necessary process. When my children had illnesses or injuries, I called American doctors stationed in our city with another organization. I might have sometimes thought of medical missions as old-fashioned before, but I was certainly thankful for their services now.

When the launch of our business platform ran into an unexpected delay, we faced the possibility of losing our residence permits. We turned to some Asian expatriate friends who had just started a tiny international school, asking if they could provide a job and visa while we got things sorted out. They happily did so, and once again I became grateful for a type of ministry I had earlier considered rather unimaginative.

I could go on and on about the ways I became dependent on others who served in different forms of ministry. From campus ministry colleagues in a “reached” part of the world, I gained a vision for the potential of reproducing discipleship and a handle on how to put it into practice. Colleagues with years of English education experience offered an ESL certification course that positioned me for direct access to the group of people on my heart. An American couple in orphan work became needed friends for us and grandparent figures for our kids. My regional leadership and some generous churches provided start-up funds for a business platform that would provide residence in a strategic city.



AS I ADJUSTED MY MINDSET
FROM EXPECTING TO BE THE
LONE RANGER TO ACCEPTING
MY DEPENDENCE UPON
OTHERS, I STARTED TO GRASP
THE BIGGER PICTURE OF THE
WHOLE BODY OF CHRIST
WORKING TOGETHER IN HIS
COMMISSION.

THE BEAUTY OF INTERDEPENDENCE

I now have a healthier appreciation for the way different ministries can contribute to the goal of making disciples of all the nations. Yes, I happen to be the “boots on the ground” on the frontier, but I realize that many times my equipment and supplies come from elsewhere or even the home front. In the process of evangelism, I might use a film that was produced in America’s Bible Belt and dubbed in Singapore. When new believers need guidance on how a Christian marriage is supposed to work, I may well point them to a video series made in London and translated in Hong Kong. Naturally, we look forward to the day when more locally produced materials are available, but in the meantime, we’re grateful for the worldwide church!

Looking beyond the materials that package the message, I recognize that who I am as a disciple is largely the fruit of a host of saints who were faithful to their various callings. My own commitment to missions developed from my home church, my pastor, and my parents, all of whom were doing what they could to disciple the nations from where they stood. Teachers, authors, and pastors who may never have owned a passport but who disciplined with excellence deepened my spiritual life. Of course my character and identity were profoundly shaped by my dedicated Christian parents, who in turn learned from seminars, books, radio programs, and sermons aimed at carrying out the Great Commission to “make disciples” in my home nation.

As it turns out, this respect for the greater Kingdom work has enabled me both to applaud others’ service and to take joy in new aspects of ministry the Lord has brought my way. In the past, I might have chafed at the idea of taking time away from direct contact with the unreached; now when a new ministry opportunity presents itself, I gladly lay it before the Lord and hear His voice clearly without being straightjacketed by my own drive to be the hero.

Happily, we've moved forward in the last few years toward our dream of winning, training, and gathering believers from among "our" people group. At the same time, we're also thankful for various other opportunities that have come our way, many of which could ultimately contribute significantly to that very goal. For example, the national church in our city has a growing heart to reach out to local unreached groups, and we're delighted to support them with encouragement, prayer, example, and Global University materials. After realizing over the past few years how much effort it can take for an outsider to make inroads in local relationships, it's a great boost to our faith when we can mobilize local believers who already have longtime personal relationships with the unreached to meaningfully share the gospel across ethnic lines.

After years of being on the receiving end of assistance in ministry, we're glad for opportunities to "give back" to our colleagues in various ways. We've been able to provide insight to new and veteran personnel from our experiences of launching a business, using English teaching as a ministry platform, and homeschooling. Some of these colleagues will move on to engage with other unreached peoples, and I find myself looking forward to their successes. Others will be on campuses, winning and training a new generation of believers, and I pray they'll instill a heart for the least-reached that will yield even more frontier workers in the future.

So, when I see breakthrough and harvest among the unreached here and the time comes for me to speak about it, I hope I'll be better prepared to paint a picture of the collective effort behind that victory. I'll give thanks for the Spirit's working through believers in distant corners of the world, at different stages of the discipleship cycle, to fulfill the Lord's command through all of us to make disciples of all peoples. "So that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together." (John 4:36b, NASB)

And I'll let Jesus give out the stars.



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Aligning Personal Passion to Advance Kingdom Ministry

Suzanne Hurst
(Africa)

I'm a registered nurse. Often, people who choose nursing as a career are compassion-oriented. They're touched when they see human suffering and instead of backing away in fear or insecurity, they run toward it, wanting to alleviate the pain. Before becoming a missionary, I worked in a hospital and gravitated toward the more intense, critical areas of patient care. I liked the excitement of a challenging diagnosis, the intrigue of caring for someone with an uncommon ailment, and the adrenaline rush of life-and-death situations. I even enjoyed the technology of healthcare. The more machines I found in a patient's room, the more skills I needed to manage the situation. It was rewarding to work with a critically ill patient for days or weeks and be there when they finally walked out of the hospital. It was a privilege to participate in that person's healing journey.

When the Lord called me into missions, and specifically to Africa, I was excited to use my nursing training and skills. I had seen movies, read the news, and knew that malaria, HIV/AIDS, typhoid fever, and other exotic illnesses were rampant on the continent. I was eager

to jump in and get my hands dirty. I wanted to learn about these diseases and treat those who were suffering.

LANGUAGE LEARNING AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE


My husband, Pat, and I spent our first term in a remote area of northeast Zaire now called the Democratic Republic of Congo. I worked a couple of days a week in a church-managed clinic. I was naïve but excited to help the poor and marginalized in this part of Africa.

My AGWM-Africa regional leadership had a commitment toward language learning and cultural competence. While this emphasis didn't completely soak into my zealous mentality, it encouraged me to walk into the bush clinics with my eyes and ears wide open. What I saw surprised me, and not in the way I had expected. Yes, the clinics were simple and a far cry from the clinics I was familiar with in the United States. Yes, there were strange illnesses and interesting symptoms. And, yes, the staff operated on a shoestring budget with minimal medications and supplies. Medical treatments and health procedures were different from what I was used to; however, the nurses who ran these clinics impressed me. They made do with what they had and were creative problem-solvers. The intersection of health knowledge and culture was complicated, and who better to address this than people from that culture?

I was also surprised by the severity of illnesses that would have been much less difficult to manage had they been treated sooner and by the amount of health problems that were easily preventable. Instead of clinical and diagnostic nursing, my thoughts turned to health promotion and disease prevention.

As I thought about these things, I also considered our other missionary activities on the continent. The local church was the top priority. Every missionary activity focused on planting new

churches or building and empowering local churches to help win the lost, disciple members, and be agents of transformation in their communities. Many of our missionaries were dynamic preachers and often attracted huge crowds, yet every country had an emphasis on pastoral training. Part of our ethos was the strong conviction that local individuals were better equipped to pastor local churches, for the same reasons that local health workers were better equipped to work in the clinics. While biblical principles hold true across cultures, how those principles are communicated and how the local population perceives them is directly tied to contextually effective ministry.



TRAINING LOCAL MEN AND WOMEN IN BIBLICAL STUDIES AND PASTORAL MINISTRIES EMPOWERED OUR LOCAL, AND SUBSEQUENTLY, NATIONAL CHURCHES.

Reflecting on our local-church emphasis included observations about the role of the local church. I recognized my need to understand this biblically mandated role if I was going to be involved in partnering with and empowering these churches. The church exists to evangelize and disciple. As an American churchgoer, I was comfortable with these words without really thinking about what they meant and how this might look in an African community.

Strange as it may seem, I could relate this concept to the time I had spent in the local clinics. Was this contributing to our missionary team efforts to empower the local church or was this serving to meet my desire to be involved in clinical nursing? I don't regret the time spent in the clinics. I learned a lot about culture and local health

beliefs and disease processes. Although my time spent there wasn't detrimental to our AGWM mission efforts, there came a moment when I realized that once my personal learning was well under way, it was time for me to back out of that responsibility. The clinics had functioned well before I arrived, and they could continue to function well without me.

COMING ALONGSIDE THE LOCAL CHURCH

I was challenged, humbled, and conflicted. I wanted to use my nursing skills. I wanted to learn about the interesting tropical illnesses. I wanted to see, touch, and treat AIDS, malaria, and yes, even intestinal worms. I wanted to make an impact on the lives of others. Suddenly, I realized that there were a lot of "I's" in my missionary vision, contrary to the AGWM-Africa mission vision, which is not about "I" but about "we." It wasn't about taking over something that our churches were already doing—it was about coming alongside and helping them.

So, how did these revelations translate into ministry for me? I realized there was nothing inherently wrong with having a passion for a certain type of ministry or desiring to use personal skills. Passion and a skill set are essential! However, my personal passion or my personal ministry "needs" couldn't be the driving force if I was to work effectively on a missionary team with the goal of strengthening local churches and seeing people come into relationship with Christ. While I wanted to be a hands-on nurse, I had to ask myself some hard questions: How did this empower local ministry? How did this accomplish the mission of God? Did this promote the local church or me? If I suddenly had to leave the country, what would happen? Would everything come to a standstill, or would the local and national church be so well trained and equipped they could march on without me?

Leaving the clinics put me in a bit of a ministry quandary. I had always envisioned myself being involved in the clinical aspects of healthcare and now I didn't know how to use my training and skills. I observed the role and influence that our churches had in their communities and thought about all the preventable illnesses I had seen. I came to realize that, for me, as a missionary, the best thing I could do was to train trainers. Health has many aspects, but after seeing the incredible amount of suffering due to a delay in seeking treatment for illnesses that were often largely preventable, I began to focus on health education and disease prevention. And who better to train local populations in this than the local church? The Assemblies of God has local churches in thousands of communities across the continent of Africa. Some are large and some are small, but on a spiritually sensitive continent, all have an incredible amount of influence. These churches exist in the middle of communities; they form part of the daily life of the community and know well the struggles and obstacles the community faces.

I realized that not only could these churches have an incredible impact on health issues such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, or children's health, but they could share the love and compassion of Jesus, through word and deed, while addressing these issues. My skill set could partner with a Bible school by training pastors in health promotion or with youth workers by addressing HIV/AIDS to an incredibly vulnerable demographic or with a local women's ministry group by providing information and training on children's health. The opportunities were limitless.

Yes, a part of me had to die. I had to let go of my dream of "treating" thousands of Africans and tropical diseases. While curative care is necessary, I decided to leave that aspect to the large aid organizations and focus on working with our missionary team and Africa Assemblies of God fellowship. I would partner with local churches and work alongside them to become agents of transformation in their communities.

I must admit this isn't the most glamorous ministry. People often ask what "cool" medical things I've seen, and potential missionary associates inquire about working in "my" clinic or "my" orphanage. I'm used to the disappointed looks on their faces when I tell them my focus is on disease prevention via the local church as a way of sharing the love of Jesus. Somehow this doesn't make for an exciting mission trip. But the "coolest" thing I get to see is when a local church, no matter how small, realizes their God-given mandate and potential to bring about holistic change in their community. And to see that community, which sometimes has a history of rejecting the gospel, respond in awe as the church steps outside its walls and touches the tangible needs around them. People are saved and disciplined, the body of Christ flourishes and grows, and God's mission is accomplished. What could be cooler than that?



Our Collective Calling Regarding Theological Education and Ministerial Training

Dave Johnson
(Asia Pacific)

My wife, Debbie, and I both have specific calls from the Spirit to be involved in training others. We've always located ourselves in the fourfold mission strategy of reaching, planting, training, and serving as people called to equip local believers to proclaim the gospel, plant the church, and care for God's people.

For many years we served in a provincial region of the Philippines that had a small Assemblies of God (AG) Bible college. Debbie served on the faculty for nine years, six of them as president. She also launched an informal training program designed to train laymen to plant house churches. I served at the school on a more occasional basis in lesser capacities while engaging in evangelism and helping to plant churches as well as participate in other ministries. While I had the greater academic qualifications to serve as president, she had the burden and the passion for teaching and mentoring and was clearly God's choice for that role. This is consistent with Pentecostal spirituality, which places more value on being led by the Spirit than on human qualifications to determine ministry engagement.

By the time we joined the faculty of the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS)¹ in 2013, God had placed a burden in my heart for mentoring pastors and church leaders through publishing. The APTS leadership shared that burden, so my personal calling resonated with the corporate calling of the school. Since we now market our work internationally, we've been able to participate in the broader calling of the AGWM to train and mentor leaders all over the world, in this case both inside and outside the Assemblies of God.

Debbie has had a similar experience. She began as head of the English language program and later also became the dean of students. Through both these ministries she has poured her life into the students in a way similar to what she did at the Bible college, finding a place for her calling within the broader calling of APTS and AGWM.


When we started working in missions many years ago, the emphasis was on personal calling. No one said much about our collective call as a mission. For some who work in education, the idea that our organization's collective call is world evangelism can raise questions about where educators fit into that call. For us, the missional engagement of the people of God as it relates to theological education is drawn both from the Great Commission passages (i.e. Matthew 28:16–20), which call for making disciples rather than simply converts, and particularly from Paul's words in 2 Timothy 2:2 to take "what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (ESV).

Over time the church's methods for training disciples and workers have changed. By the time the modern Pentecostal movement was born in the early twentieth century, Bible institutes had become a common way of providing formal ministerial training², at least in

1 APTS, located in Baguio City, Philippines, is the official theological institution of higher learning for the Assemblies of God in the Asia Pacific Region (see www.aps.edu).

2 In this essay, I use the terms *theological education* and *ministerial training* interchangeably.

the United States, and the Assemblies of God simply followed suit both at home and abroad. As Teresa Chai appropriately mentions, the focus of these institutes was on practical ministry.³ While many early Pentecostals had serious reservations about formal ministerial training, they also recognized the need to train workers in order to plant churches and conserve the fruits of evangelism. From the start, then, theological education in the Pentecostal movement has had a missional focus. As Pentecostal educators, we find ourselves and our ministry trajectory right in line with the heart of our mission's vision for taking the gospel to the world.



IT TAKES TRAINED WORKERS
TO PROCLAIM AND TO KEEP
THE FRUIT FROM THEIR
EVANGELISTIC LABORS.

PENTECOSTAL MISSION AND THE NEED FOR PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Now that we are at APTS, it's also clear to us that education in an indigenous church movement must be comprehensive to meet the needs of all levels of leadership. As the Pentecostal movement matured and spread globally, it became obvious that we needed higher levels of formal education to address an increasingly complex global mission. In Asia, for example, calls began as early as 1960 for advanced theological education in the region.⁴ Today, the Assemblies of God has many theological seminaries around the world, some

3 Teresa Chai, "Pentecostal Theological Education and Ministerial Formation," in *Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity*, ed. Wonsuk Ma, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, 343-59, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 347.

4 Dave Johnson, *Led by the Spirit: The History of the American Assemblies of God Missionaries in the Philippines*, (Pasig City, Philippines: ICI Ministries, Inc.), 133.

of which are offering degrees as high as a PhD. Miguel Alvarez, a Church of God (Cleveland, TN) educator, notes that “In the natural course of development Pentecostals have now come of age, and a new wind of theological discipline has emerged. This is absolutely normal and legitimate. The movement is now on the move shaping its theological foundations”⁵

Assemblies of God veteran missionary and educator Carl Gibbs describes five levels of leadership training that are critical to the growth and sustainability of the Pentecostal Movement: disciples, lay leaders, bi-vocational leaders, full-time leaders, and scholars.⁶ Conceived like a pyramid with disciples at the bottom and scholars at the top, Gibbs proceeds to note the ratio of the numbers of leaders needed to sustain a growing movement.⁷

The two lower levels of training are normally done through the ministries of the local church. For Gibbs, the third level of bi-vocational leaders holds the key to church planting. Noted Asian scholar Wonsuk Ma writes, “Throughout the region [East Asia] and around the world for that matter, the proliferation of lower-level, often informal, training programs resulted in significant growth of the Pentecostal movement.”⁸ While I don’t disagree with Gibbs or Ma, I do diverge from them slightly because of the numerous full-time workers I have known, most of whom graduated from a Bible school, who became successful church planters.⁹ As the number of churches multiplied, so did the need for more Bible schools.

5 Miguel Alvarez, “Distinctives of Pentecostal Education,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, vol. 3.2, 281-93, 286.

6 Carl B. Gibbs, “The Training Pyramid,” in *Cross-Cultural Theological Education: Essays in Honor of John and Bea Carter*, ed. A. Kay Fountain, 103-130, (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2016).


7 *Ibid.*, 4.

8 Wonsuk Ma, “Theological Education in Pentecostal Churches,” in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, ed. Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, and Joshua Raja, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 729-35, 733.

9 “The Training Pyramid,” 105.

However, the two highest levels of the pyramid are what bring stability to the movement, and those formally educated tend to be more successful and last longer.¹⁰ Speaking of full-time leaders, Gibbs notes, “Without full-time leaders, new emerging churches will lack transitional leaders to take the movement from the planting stage to the harvest stage. Full-time leaders nurture converts through preaching and creative systems of discipleship. They train small-group leaders and mobilize church members to express their individual gifts.”¹¹

Regarding the scholars, Gibbs goes on to say that “without biblically based scholarship a revival is not sustainable, and a movement will lack defense against false teachings and unbiblical practices. This level is trained to write the books, create the curriculum, and train the trainers.”¹² Since Bible school educators must have a degree at least one level higher than the level at which they teach, they normally receive their masters and even doctoral degrees in a seminary, thus multiplying the impact of the scholars on the movement as a whole. The result is that the scholars level has an impact that far outweighs their numbers. Therefore,



IT IS CRITICAL THAT SCHOLARS
MUST NOT LOCK THEMSELVES
IN ACADEMIC IVORY TOWERS
BUT REMAIN INVOLVED WITH
THE MINISTRIES OF LOCAL
CHURCHES AND COMMUNITIES

10 Ibid., 107-8, 117.

11 Ibid., 107.

12 Ibid.

FOR PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TO REMAIN MISSIONAL.

PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND PENTECOSTAL MISSION IN CREATIVE TENSION

The purpose of having theological institutions is to serve the church in its calling to reach the world for Christ. Steve de Gruchy states the need for balance well: “The practice of mission engages with theological education in a dialogical manner. On the one hand, theological education requires missiological practice, while on the other hand, missiological practice requires theological education.”¹³ Many local ministers who teach in Bible schools in the majority world also pastor churches, in part because many schools cannot afford full-time teachers. While this leaves them little time for theological reflection and further study, the positive side is that these educators remain in touch with their ecclesiastical and social context and provide opportunities in their churches for their students to gain ministry experience and additional mentoring through on-the-job training.

The reverse, however, can be true at the seminary level, where the library facilities are generally much better, providing the atmosphere and opportunity for theological reflection. In this situation, faculty members and students alike must be intentional about engaging in ministry off campus. The key is to hold theological reflection and practical ministry in balance. De Gruchy explains why:

When theological education is removed from its missiological

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Steve de Gruchy, “Theological Education and Missional Practice: A Vital Dialogue,” in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives—Ecumenical Trends—Regional Surveys*, 42–50, ed. Dietrich Werner, et al., (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 42.

orientation it loses touch with the world and it turns inward. What happens then is that it creates problems, tensions, arguments, and debates that are wholly internal to the academics involved, and which soon bear little resemblance to the lives that ordinary people are living. . . . [On the other hand] . . . missiological reflection and practice also provides theological education with a sense of *telos*, of purpose or direction for that engagement.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

It isn't difficult for Debbie and me, as people involved in training others at many levels, to find our place in the broader collective call of our mission to take the gospel to the whole world. God's plan for evangelizing the world is focused on planting churches in every locale to conserve the fruits of evangelism and for discipleship to take place. To plant churches, we must train pastors. While many methods of training workers have been employed at various times and places throughout church histories, the "current missions' realities of our times" means that today's methodologies are focused on the five levels of training previously mentioned by Gibbs. As the number of churches multiplies, we will need to open more training institutions to ensure training is available to the largest number of believers possible. As educators, our individual calling can and must fit within the corporate calling to maximize our personal effectiveness.

14

Ibid, 43.

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The Collective Call Belongs to the Entire Church

Paul Kazim

(Latin America and the Caribbean)

I began my missionary career in Peru. When I first arrived, I wanted to be part of God's plan to develop a Peruvian outpost for the kingdom of God. What I found was the outpost had already been established. Fast-forward a few decades to my current role as an area director for Mexico, and I still meet new missionaries who are zealous to do something significant for God only to find it has already been done. As a worldwide mission organization, what does our collective calling to plant the church where it doesn't exist mean for the missionary working in the context of an established indigenous national church? While there are many areas and people-groups in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) who have never heard the gospel, every country in the geographical area has an established church that to some degree fulfills the threefold requirements of an indigenous movement. For me, personal calling and our organizational collective call must both be connected with the vision of the national church.

REVERSE MENTORING

When I arrived in Peru, I discovered that in one sense they didn't need me as a missionary educator to develop a program to train pastors. Previous missionaries had established a Bible school system that was sufficiently maintained by the national church. On the other hand, I noticed a lack of training materials that reflected the reality of the three unique geographical regions of the country, and the preponderance of training materials translated from English exaggerated the problem. People met my first attempts at creating materials to be used on the local level with mixed reviews. Certainly, my developing ability to communicate in Spanish didn't help; even when I thought I was communicating clearly it wasn't uncommon for a student to tell me they didn't understand what I was saying. At first, I misunderstood the blank stares of students raised in animistic environments to my explanation of the teleological proof for the existence of God. Eventually, I understood their problem wasn't a lack of belief in gods, but which one to believe in.

As I described the attributes of God, one student confirmed something I had read years prior in *Eternity in Their Hearts*, a series of anthropological stories written by Don Richardson. She told me the Incas had a name in Quechua for the God I described: *Virachocha*. My first instinct was to tell her I was teaching about Jehovah who was *not* the same deity as a Quechua god. She went on to explain how the Inca believed that *Virachocha* was an invisible spirit who didn't allow any idols to be made in his image, who created the world with his spoken words, and according to some documents was a triune god. As she spoke, I noticed that her classmates, who had been fighting sleep during my theological discourse, became alert and responded to her comments. The current Quechua Bible has only one loan word from Spanish: *Dios*, the word for God. I wondered, *What if the original translators had borrowed the Quechua word Virachocha rather than Dios?* I wondered, *What is God's name? Did the Andean people need to become Spanish speakers in order to know the God I worshipped?*

For me, the desire to learn from Peruvians and later from Mexicans continues to this day. Long conversations over meals with both believers and nonbelievers have helped me avoid many pitfalls. The collective calling of our mission and interaction with the vision and wisdom of local Christians has refined and clarified my personal calling.

If our big-picture trajectory is to evangelize the world, those of us working with the existing church need to listen and learn from that church in order to labor with them effectively to see the gospel penetrate every corner of their society.

A standard practice, established first by missionaries in Mexico, was to evangelize children. But these efforts weren't as fruitful as we hoped. Missionaries had a burden to reach children for Christ, which was good, but these efforts needed to connect with the local culture to be effective. This was brought home to me when Daniel, a friend from a small Mayan town, described his family's practice of the afternoon meal. Grandfather sat at a large table and waited for his children and his grandchildren to arrive. The women prepared the food, and everyone sat to eat together. Anyone who was unable to attend the meal had to ask for Grandpa's permission to miss the family time. During the meal, he would give moral instruction to his grandchildren.

When I pictured that family meal in my mind, it dawned on me that our evangelistic efforts were backwards. Simply put: reach children and grandpa will react negatively. Who are they to instruct him? On the other hand: reach grandpa, and the children will follow. This illustrates clearly the need to consider personal calling and collective calling through the lens of the cultural realities of local Christian churches. For us to forge ahead and do it our way is to practice paternalistic mission.

MISSIONARY MENTORING

SOMETIMES PEOPLE
MISTAKENLY THINK THAT IN
AREAS WHERE THE CHURCH
EXISTS, A MISSIONARY
CANNOT BE INVOLVED IN
PLANTING THE CHURCH
WHERE IT DOESN'T EXIST.

In Latin America and the Caribbean this isn't true at all. Our efforts not only strengthen the local church to reach their own people and society, but by working together with a larger vision to take the gospel to the world, we help mobilize workers from existing church movements to plant the church among unreached people in other places.

One time a general superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Mexico admitted to me the Mexican church had made no effort to reach the non-Spanish-speaking Native American tribal groups in Mexico. He said something like, "We're going to leave those groups to you American missionaries. You've learned to be cross-cultural. We don't do that so well." The idea of foreign missions seemed impossible to him. Finances, lack of cross-cultural training, and the strange idea of leaving one's family seemed way too difficult. As one Mexican friend told me, "Leave your family? That's what you gringos do."

Despite these prevailing attitudes, U.S. missionaries worked with local ministers to establish a mission training center in Oaxaca. Now, instead of rejecting the task of working among the Native American groups, all students who want to receive missionary appointment

must spend six to nine months among one of the groups in Mexico prior to applying. From its inception, AGWM missionaries have been among the teachers at the training center. Some of my former students are now serving in Jordan and India while others are working with Hindi-speaking immigrants in Vancouver, Canada.

We have also expanded what began as a literacy program to include pastoral training among Mexicans who speak Spanish as their second language. The work of AGWM missionary Efrain Figueroa and others has created an educational and credentialing pathway for Native Americans. The participants take one course at a time and return to their villages and towns. Some of the them have planted multiple churches while still in the process of studying.

WRITTEN MATERIALS TO STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH

In our setting, most Bible school textbooks have been translated from English. Often Global University materials are either translated from English or produced by Spanish speakers in the United States. While various people have taken steps to encourage writing, most of the material Latin American Pentecostals produce is written at the popular level. This is a step in the right direction, but we need to publish more advanced theological and hermeneutical research by Latin American authors.

Based on research for my doctoral dissertation, my plan is to convene a committee of national pastors and lay people as an opportunity to listen to a variety of voices and produce new works of exegesis and theology. This group will include men and women of geographical diversity as well as interpreters from non-native, Spanish-speaking groups within the country. By “new works” we don’t mean that what is discovered will have no relation to the centuries of Bible interpretation that serve as a basis for our faith. Rather, the hope is that freed from the need to agree with missionary-delivered

orthodoxy, Latin interpreters will arrive at local conclusions hidden from foreign eyes. Liberation theology can't be the only version of local theology produced in the Latin American context. The goal is that this group will remain orthodox and contextual. If this works, it will be the result of two decades of teaching in LAC and the fact that those involved have developed a level of trust that can validate their contextualized ideas.

For me, the collective call belongs to the entire church. It isn't exclusive to missionaries operating independently from the existing church as if those movements had nothing to do with taking the gospel to the world. Participating in the collective call includes listening and learning from local Christians and churches as a step in developing the indigenous church. When mentors and mentees learn from each other, God can open opportunities for them to switch roles in ministry.



Children's Ministry and Calling

Phil Malcolm
(Africa)

In the fall of 2002, my wife, Robin, and I stood in my parent's house and took a deep breath—relieved to be somewhere safe. We had just arrived home from our first term as missionaries after being evacuated out of a civil war that had erupted in Ivory Coast. We had left everything behind except what we could cram into a few suitcases. The evacuation was the cap on a nonstop journey of one challenge after another.

During our first two years in Africa, we faced one trial after another: grand mal seizure, the death of Robin's mom, robbery at gunpoint, malaria, a severe skin infection, etc. You could say we were down . . . but were we out? After these experiences people wanted to know, Were we going to go back to Africa? No one would have blamed us if we had said, "Enough! We've given enough. We've put our children and our health at risk. We've sacrificed enough. We're done."

It wasn't an easy decision, but after much prayer and debate we chose to return to Africa. It basically came down to one thing: God had called us into missions, and we didn't feel released from that call. How could we say no to Him?

WHAT IS THE CALL OF GOD?

The call of God has had a huge effect on our lives and ministry throughout the years. But what is the call of God? During my years as a missionary, I've had the opportunity to talk to many people (especially those who think God might be calling them into missions) about the "the call"—what it means and how it affects us as Christians. As I've pondered this idea and tried to express it to others, I've come to understand better what the call of God means.

I look at the call of God in three broad categories: universal call, individual call, and collective call. The universal call is the call of God for every person to follow Him, experience abundant life, and fulfill their purpose by serving Him. God desires this for all people.

The other two aspects of the call are more closely tied to the work of missions, and I'd like to take a more in-depth look at them. Growing up in the church as a missionary kid, I heard a lot about the call of God. Most of this talk focused on the individual: such as Paul on the Damascus road, Peter in his fishing boat, and Samuel laying on his bed in the temple. Each of these individuals heard the voice of God calling them to serve Him. I never really heard people talk much about the collective call. Yet, in my own ministry experience, especially as a missionary, I've seen firsthand the importance and impact of the collective calling on our lives and ministry.

MY INDIVIDUAL CALL

While I enjoyed life as a missionary kid, I never wanted to be a missionary myself—or be involved in any full-time ministry. In fact, during my high school years, I wandered away from God and the church. But I ended up attending college at Northwest University of the Assemblies of God. I still wasn't interested in ministry, but my parents both worked there, which meant I could get free tuition. I

planned on studying general requirement classes for a year before transferring to another school to pursue my dream of becoming a graphic artist.

During my first semester, God touched my heart and called me back to Him during a chapel service. This was when I first experienced the universal call. Then, during a spiritual emphasis week, God spoke to me in a vision—one of the few times I’ve ever had that experience. While praying, I found myself floating high over a huge river that ended in a thundering waterfall. Then I zoomed in lower. As I came closer to the river, I could see it wasn’t a river of water but a river of people marching off a cliff into oblivion. My heart was broken for those lost souls. Then God spoke to me and said, “This is what I see every day, and I want you to help me stem the flow.”

During that powerful encounter I felt an individual call from God into full-time ministry. Later, during a prayer meeting in the chapel, I felt God calling me to serve Him in Africa. In one semester my plans changed completely. I was called to be a missionary—the one thing I had said I would never do. I praise God that He cares for each one of us and is willing to call each person individually.

Of course, that calling took a while to come to pass. As I often share with people today when we talk about this idea, the call of God is a journey not an event. While there are milestones along that journey, it’s an ongoing process to prepare us for the ministry to come. This was true in my own calling.

God had called me, but I didn’t know how to fulfill the call. Other than feeling a call to Africa, I had no idea where or how to do missions. I needed the guidance and support of others. Fortunately, by working through the Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) program, I received insight and guidance from others who were willing to help me. I joined an organization that was collectively called and had the same heart for Africa that God had given me.

This became evident during my first step toward missions, a summer internship. I applied for the short-term mission program, but other than putting “Africa” on my application I had no clear idea where to go. The Africa-region leadership team matched me up with a missionary in West Africa, and during my two months in Ghana, a part of Africa I had never visited as a missionary kid, missionaries Bill and Sonia Shaw poured into my life. They not only *talked* about how to do missions, they *showed* me how to do missions. During that time, I felt God directing me toward missions in West Africa. This is the collective call in action. I knew generally where I wanted to go, but other men and women of God helped me narrow my focus and find my way forward.

After I finished Bible school, I needed practical experience to prepare for ministry in Africa. During that time, God redirected me into children’s ministry, which was something I had never dreamed of doing. Eventually, my wife and I were ready to go; we both felt God directing us to apply to the Assemblies of God World Missions program as full-time missionaries. But there was still more of the journey to come.


After applying, we went through a rigorous approval process, and once approved we spent months building a support team and raising a budget. Then we attended language school. Finally, two-and-a-half years after we started the application process, we arrived in Africa!

OUR FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCES WITH THE COLLECTIVE CALL

In Africa, I came face-to-face with the importance of the collective call. We needed to work with a team of other missionaries and African colleagues to fulfill our calling. We were called to work with children, but children’s ministry doesn’t exist in a vacuum. In fact, it’s practically impossible to have a viable children’s ministry without a strong, well-functioning church.

When we arrived in Ivory Coast for our first term, it quickly became evident that we couldn't do the ministry ourselves and be truly effective. If Robin and I tried to do all the ministry, we would limit our impact to one community, one church, and just a few children. If we were going to reach the children of the entire country, we needed to work with a team. We needed to train our African brothers and sisters to reach children, disciple children, and care for the needs of children.

Fortunately, we weren't alone.



NOT ONLY HAD GOD CALLED
US, HE HAD CALLED MANY
OTHERS TO REACH THE LOST
PEOPLE OF AFRICA.

Generations of missionaries had come before us. They had prepared the ground, planted seeds, and raised up a strong indigenous church that had grown to hundreds of local Assemblies of God churches across the country. We could draw from many believers to build a children's ministry team. We were able to work with Africans who also felt a call of God to serve in children's ministry. Together, we built a strong program. The importance of this team effort became even more evident when our first term ended abruptly as civil war erupted in Ivory Coast. We had to evacuate the country, but because we had worked in collaboration with African brothers and sisters, the ministry continued after we left.

Perhaps the greatest example of collective call in our ministry is seeing the impact of a leadership team that has a vision to reach the children of Africa. Today, ministry to children is a primary ministry focus for the Africa leadership team. They have stated that the goal for the team of missionaries in Africa is to establish a healthy

church within walking distance of every African. On a continent where children make up almost 50 percent of the population, these endeavors must include ministry to children.

The leadership team has reinforced the importance of children's ministry not only through their words but by their actions. This has allowed our ministry to expand in ways we never dreamed possible. We've organized and participated in continent-wide children's ministry workshop events. We've traveled outside our region of West Africa to collaborate with other children's ministry missionaries. At the urging of our leadership, we wrote a book to train the pastors in hundreds of Assemblies of God Bible schools on the importance and implementation of children's ministry in their local churches.

Yes, God called me individually to minister to children in Africa as He also called Robin. But the fulfillment of our individual calls has gone far beyond what we envisioned because of the collective call of others who have worked with us. We aren't called to be individuals working in isolation but to work with others in the body of Christ. As Paul so aptly points out in 1 Corinthians 12, God chooses the members of the body of Christ and arranges them according to His will. We cannot say, "I have no need of you," because in truth we desperately need each other.

We need each other to provide godly insight and wisdom. We need each other to give support and encouragement. This goes against our strong, Western sense of individualism, but it's God's plan for His bride. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). As we work *together* to fulfill our individual callings, we are much more effective in our collective calling as the body of Christ—to stem the flow of that vast river of lost souls.



Individual and Collective Calling in the Arab World Context

Dick Brogden
(*Eurasia*)

Imagine a runner with legs of two different sizes: one muscular and the other anemic. At worst this runner would simply run in circles; at best he would struggle along in a dissonant limp. Or imagine rowing a small boat with one massive, muscular arm, and the other arm feeble and shriveled. That boat would likely go in circles no matter how much effort you applied. Similarly, imagine a large Roman naval galleon with three banks of oarsmen on each side. If each side of oarsmen rowed at their own pace or style, imagine how ineffective that vessel would be.

Unlike these examples of uneven legs, arms, and sides of rowers, individual and collective callings in mission must both be equally robust. A faulty understanding and application of either calling (and lack of synergy between them) will lead to inefficiency in mission.

ONE VISION

Recently the Arab World leadership (a specific area of Eurasia in AGWM) decided that every missionary in the area should be part of a church-planting team. Our renewed vision statement reads:

Uniting the Arab world to plant churches among unreached peoples.

This is our collective call. All of us who minister in the Arab world are called to work toward this vision. To accomplish this goal, we have determined that every one of us should be on a church-planting team. This collective call doesn't replace or overwhelm the individual calls of over 160 adults in our area but must contain them. In other words, in order to be part of our area, each person must show how their individual call aligns with this collective call. Let me give three examples how these two calls harmonize:

International Churches. While validating the role of international churches, we don't believe that our collective call is for Christians to travel across land and sea to minister primarily to other Christians. We *do* believe that international churches are excellent platforms for our church-planting teams to reach the unreached, with the international church being the means—the platform—not the end. In this sense, the ministry of an international church must be done well, with the goal to propel the team that works from that church to reach unreached peoples.

We are doing this in a variety of ways. Some Muslims come to the church looking for answers. Church-planting team members of an international church all reach out to Muslims in personal evangelism, and they disciple internationals who are church members to reach Muslims in their workplace. International church-planting team members also interact with underground national churches to train, encourage, mentor, and equip them to grow and develop.

Bible School and National Church Ministry. We desperately need missionaries to teach in our Bible schools (not necessarily or usually brick and mortar) and to help our national churches

develop mission visions and departments. However, these missionaries will do so from a “come and join us” perspective rather than a “go and do it” perspective. In other words, all missionaries who teach in Bible schools or help develop national churches will do so as part of a church-planting team. They will learn the national language, evangelize, and disciple unreached peoples, and from that place of moral authority partner with the national church to help them engage unreached peoples.

The same would apply to those who have a heart for children; those who are passionate about addressing injustice; and those who are called to work in relief, development, or business. Everyone must be part of a church-planting team that is reaching the unreached—their individual call, gifting, and talent must contribute to the overall vision of the area.

Live Dead Teams. The flip side of this coin is that those already in the Live Dead system (which is laser focused on church planting among the unreached through teams) must contribute to the unity of the area by realizing that the unreached can’t be reached by Live Dead teams working in isolation from national churches or the wider body of Christ. That is why we expect all Live Dead team members to attend a national church (learning the national language and building relationships) and to partner with local believers in the work of making Jesus famous among every people. Each Live Dead team member’s individual calling must be in harmony with the area’s vision to be unified in the priceless assignment of seeing vibrant indigenous churches among all peoples. With 400 unreached people groups in the Arab world, the only way we can do this is in unity with local, national, and body-of-Christ partners.

ONE MIND

In order to be clear about our collective call, we made the decision that the first term of every new missionary would be spent on a training team. In this term, we will teach them seven core components of the ministry in order to perpetuate a common understanding of our context and the way forward. These are the core components:

1. Abiding in Jesus
2. Arabic language and culture
3. Foundational missiology
4. Interpersonal, multicultural, multi-agency team dynamics
5. Rhythm of life (work ethic, Sabbaths, physical, emotional, and mental health)
6. Professional identity (BAM, culture, proclamation)
7. Church planting

We aren't asking everyone to be the same, and this common training isn't intended to overrule any individual calling. Our emphasis in the first term is to equip our area members to be united in reaching a common goal and to discover how their individual calling contributes to that vision.

TO HAVE ONE MIND IS AN APOSTOLIC PRAYER (ROMANS 12:16)—IT ISN'T A REQUIREMENT OF MINDLESSNESS.

We can preserve our collective callings only as we commit to the vision and apply our unique perspectives and energy to the common cause.

MANY PERSONALITIES, MANY PATHS

Critical to unity is the empowerment of diversity. We're committed to doing one thing—planting the church among unreached peoples. This is our collective call. But we aren't bound to do this one way. Our principles must be held in common, but our methods will be as diverse as our seasons of life, our gifts, and our personalities. As committed as we are to the vision of planting churches among the unreached, we are just as committed to empowering individuals to achieve that goal through ways and means unique to their circumstances, context, capacity, creativity, and character. What works for one (or in one place) may not be suitable or timely in another.

CONCLUSION

When understood and employed correctly, a collective calling empowers and enriches individual callings. A collective call unifies and energizes a diverse group of personalities. It allows for diversity of individuals and approaches, even as it remains focused on what God has asked the group to achieve.

In the Arab world, we have a clear collective call: Plant churches among unreached peoples. In order to stay true to that call, we ask all our members to be part of a church-planting team.

We're committed to encourage diversity of persons and methods. We desire to empower every individual call that aligns with the collective call.

In our view, there need be no tension between the collective and individual callings. In fact, there's mutual benefit and power when these callings align.



Collective Call: Student Ministry Perspective

Dr. Anita Koeshall
(Europe)

A recent survey assessing “collective calling” defined it as:

The overarching trajectory and purpose of AGWM to evangelize the world that is shaped by our shared Pentecostal identity, missions purpose, and values, and driven by Scripture, our unique history, and the current missions realities of our time.

In these brief notes, I will address the questions: As a missionary to the university students of Europe over the last thirty-five years, was there a sense of a “collective call” that resonated within our hearts as we connected with the larger missionary family? Was that collective call the same or similar to what we have spelled out in this survey of “collective call”?

My husband, John, and I arrived in Europe on a bleak January day in 1980, passionate about evangelizing and discipling 100,000 students and forming communities of faith on the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. The idea of a “collective calling” failed to register on the horizons of our thinking. Furthermore, when we came before the mission board, student ministry as a mission assignment

appeared a strange bedfellow with church planting and Bible schools. At that time church planting through campus ministry wasn't the usual *modus operandi* of the Assemblies of God either in the USA or Germany. Most of the missions world considered campus ministry to be para-church, functioning parallel with local churches rather than within and through churches. As far as we knew, one lone missionary in the past had been sent to do campus ministry. However, our work in Chi Alpha as campus pastors and owners of a Christian bookstore at the university in Madison, Wisconsin, had convinced us of the power of proclamation and discipleship in that secular environment. We were confident that partnering with local believing churches wasn't optional but mandatory.

EVANGELIZING AND PLANTING COMMUNITIES OF FAITH—YES!

Student ministry can function as an evangelistic tool or perhaps as a Bible study on campus to help Christians retain their faith in the godless environment of the university. However, we believed that every group should be a fully orbed community of faith that was committed to prayer, worship, witness, discipleship, and fellowship—not a Sunday school class for young adults. A functioning body of Christ on campus, but not independent, rather serving as a missional band extended to the students as well as a bridge between the secular student and the more traditional church. With this conviction we arrived in Europe, hoping to connect with the Pentecostal churches of Germany and in every other country where God would privilege us to plant student work.

We began our work in Munich in partnership with fellow AG missionaries and church planters, Harold and Agnes Schmitt. They had been in the city for a while and had planted a thriving church. In this relationship we saw the reality of our dreams begin to take shape.

Were we planting churches in alignment with the idea of “collective calling” as it’s identified today, among those who are unreached and live in places with no viable church capable of reaching them? Without a doubt Students for Christ serves to evangelize and disciple students, embedding them in a powerful community of faith. Through friendship-based outreaches of weekly coffee-to-go stands and fellowship events, many students have come to faith. I would argue that the student group, with its spiritual leaders and pastors, worship, fellowship, witness, and grounding in Scripture, is fully equipped to function with all the power of the Spirit on the campus. It’s a community of faith, a body of Christ; not independent, but connected, supporting and supported by the local, more “typical” church. After thirty-eight years of ministry in Europe, we maintain connections with disciplined students who are serving the Lord as leaders in their churches, pillars of their communities, and witnesses in their places of work. They know how to be the church!

PLANTING THE CHURCH AMONG THE LEAST OR UNREACHED—YES!

If the action of those who take up the collective call is to “plant the church where it doesn’t exist and make disciples among those peoples,” do the students of Europe count as the “unreached” or “least reached”? Often when we first itinerated, we encountered doubts: “Isn’t Europe already reached?” “Haven’t they had the Bible for centuries?” “There are many churches there already!” In truth, many countries of Europe have fewer than 2 percent followers of Jesus among the “old stock” Europeans. And most of them aren’t found on secularized universities! As an example, East Germany and Czech Republic are considered the most atheistic places on earth—there’s no belief in any kind of supernatural being or power.

IT SEEMS STRANGE TO DESCRIBE AS "UNREACHED" THE CONTINENT WHERE LUTHER, THE GUTENBERG PRESS, CALVIN, WESLEY, AND EVEN MOTHER TERESA HAD THEIR ROOTS.

But true Christian faith has been long usurped by Christendom, and the church has become an institution that students of today don't trust. Miroslav Volf stated that it's necessary to wash the face of Jesus; I propose that it's also necessary to wash the face of the church. The century-long marriage of church and state granted the church power in areas of education, politics, business, and health, even as it defanged the necessary prophetic voice appointed to the church. The university dwells in the backlash of Western European Christianity, where skepticism and critical thinking have shaped students' spiritual worldview since the 1960s.¹ The institutional church has long lost its attraction as a sacred space where students can pose the difficult questions of life and find credible discussions and truthful, relevant answers. However, students show openness to another form of church: an authentic, noncontrolling, and accessible community that embodies the love of Christ. Yes, the students *are* an unreached people in secular Europe.

¹ The year 1968 is a pivotal year in European history. Called by some the "year of the barricades," it was set in a decade of student demonstrations and revolution—against American imperialism and the Vietnam War, against authority and the authoritarian control of the universities, and pro-free love. This decade brought an end to culturally legitimized nationwide organizational structures and dictators that wielded power with out accountability. For more information, see Stephen Kreis, 1968: The Year of the Barricades 2000, History Guide, <http://www.historyguide.org/europe/lecture15.html> (accessed September 9, 2010).

CHALLENGES TO THE IDEA OF A COLLECTIVE CALL

Although we followed what we would have identified as a personal call—first to student work in general and then to Europe in particular—we worked and lived in a context of individualism—a cultural trait that will automatically work against the idea of a collective call that “gives it location and riverbanks.”²

In 1637, the famous French philosopher René Descartes wrote, “I think, therefore I am.” He lived and worked in a time when science and reasoning were becoming the basis for determining truth. Individuals were challenged to think for themselves, to doubt, and to be skeptical. Therefore, Descartes stated the only thing he could be sure of was “I am” because “I think.”

People like Descartes laid a foundation for what would become the mindset in both the USA and much of Western Europe: “Think for yourself!” “Don’t follow the crowd!” “It’s your life, you can do what you want!” Freedom, independence, and competition are values that rank high on our list of individual rights.

Subconsciously, churches adopt many of the fundamental values of the culture in which they are embedded. This is true of our individualistic understanding of church and our relationship with Christ: We, in the USA, are taught to follow Jesus as individuals—to decide (eyes closed, no one looking) to raise our hand, to pray the sinner’s prayer, and have daily, private devotions. Many of our worship songs use the singular pronoun “I” rather than the plural “we.” A key factor in determining whether someone has been called to the mission field is their *individual* call—“the Lord told me” is a statement no one can argue against. Nothing in our culture or church prepares us or demands that we participate in a “collective”

2 Looking back on our experience, had our riverbank not allowed for evangelism and planting of communities of faith on university campuses—outside of the traditional view of church—we would have pushed back.

calling. In chapter 1 of this document, we state, “Pentecostals see the personal call of the Spirit as central. It is the Spirit who calls, equips, empowers, and guides our service.” In our church world, the personal call remains the primary indicator of the Lord’s will and guidance, but we must ask seriously if this is biblical or part of our cultural heritage.

It seems that the Lord’s voice to us personally, back in the 1970s, *was* in step with the notion of a “collective” call to evangelize the world among the least reached. Looking back on our early days, though, we were stretching the parameters of what our forefathers would have identified as “church planting,” and perhaps we still are! Had our early mission leaders denied us the privilege of pursuing university ministry, it would have raised difficult challenges for us.

EVANGELISM, DISCIPLESHIP, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

As mission agencies, as well as the independent individualists in our society and in our churches, are increasingly attracted to projects oriented toward social justice rather than evangelism, we find, interestingly, that communities of faith on university campuses in Europe tend to remain focused on evangelism. Coffee-to-go, discipleship groups, being present at university events to share the gospel, and personal sharing with friends and classmates are part of everyday student life. A newsletter arrived recently from one of the women who had been in my discipleship group in the 1980s. She followed Jesus through her years as a med student and served as an eye surgeon in Chad and Peru. But she is more than just a doctor; she leads Sunday school classes for children and meetings for women’s ministry in the high Peruvian mountains. There has been no bifurcation of the activities of caring and compassion from living and sharing the message of the gospel.

PLANTING THE VISION IN OUR SPIRITUAL CHILDREN

As I reflect on the collective call, I see it as God's heart and mission. How beautiful it is when we experience multiple instances of the Lord of the Harvest directing us by His Spirit, sometimes speaking to us collectively and sometimes individually, but the message to us all is the same: *proclaim the gospel and plant the church in the power of the Spirit among every people where reproducing local communities of faith are not present to give life-giving witness to Jesus Christ.* If this is God's heart and call for all His people, then for us an equally important question remains: Were we able to challenge European churches to join us in the call to proclaim Christ on the universities in their cities—so there would be a viable local church touching generation after generation of students? This should be the end goal, that the vision and mission God has planted in our hearts be implanted also in the hearts of our students in Students for Christ and in the national churches with whom we partner: to reach the unreached and least reached and to plant the church.



A Collective Biblical Mandate for Cross- Cultural Workers

Alan Johnson
(Asia Pacific)

When people ask me how I became a missionary to Thailand, I tell them the short answer is, “A pie chart drove me crazy.” Now since most people don’t find graphic representations mentally destabilizing, I explain this in more detail. As a new Christian in an Assemblies of God church, I was never moved to become a missionary by hearing one speak because of the disjuncture between what they said and my personal experience. The missionaries would talk about huge numbers of converts and mighty signs and wonders, yet as a youth pastor in the Northwest I was surrounded by non-Christians every day. The missionaries sounded so successful in contrast to the spiritually needy around me.

Then a pie chart exploded my worldview. A rather simple representation, it attempted to explain a big idea: there were people in the world who had no one in their cultural system to share the gospel. The bulk of these people were Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus. Over time, the implications of this big idea in a simple diagram sank into my heart and one major thought came to me: *There are differences in spiritual lostness.* While the people around me certainly weren’t Christ-followers, they had many opportunities


to hear the gospel in ways they could understand and access. Conversely, those who were lost in the Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu world lacked *any access* to the gospel. There was no adequate witness from people within their culture, which required people who did have the light of the gospel *to cross out of their culture* into a new culture to proclaim the gospel and plant the church. This big idea completely shattered my comfortable world and brought the disturbing thought that I might have some personal responsibility in this.

I might have been able to relegate the pie chart to an interesting fact, but for two subsequent events that reinforced this new world awareness. First, someone introduced me to a reading of the Bible in a much broader framework than I had known previously. The pie chart had presented a world of sociocultural systems where things like language, culture, and religion bonded people together and created a shared identity. Rather than discrete individuals being saved or lost, I began to see a world of peoples, tribes, and tongues, some of whom lacked access to the gospel. About the same time a friend invited me to a seminar by Don Richardson, who had just published *Eternity in Their Hearts*. For the first time I saw the whole Bible as a book about God's redemptive plan. I was particularly moved by the notion that the call of Abraham in Genesis 12 was a kind of Great Commission of the Old Testament. I began to understand that being in relationship with the living God meant He could use us to declare His glory among the nations.

Gradually, the Holy Spirit tugged at my heart about my responsibility to take the gospel to those without access. Over several years of processing these ideas, our family came to the point where we felt our next step of obedience was to apply for cross-cultural missionary service among those with least-access to the gospel.

Although I wasn't fully aware of it at the time, I now realize that two things came together in my life that are historically important to our

Pentecostal mission—the Scriptures and a personal sense of calling to participate in God’s mission as revealed in the Scriptures. We can never underestimate the importance of embedding personal calling in the overarching trajectory of God’s redemptive mission in Scripture.



CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS
ISN'T ABOUT WHAT MAKES
US FEEL GOOD OR WHAT
WE THINK IS COOL OR
TRENDY BUT ABOUT ALIGNING
OURSELVES WITH GOD'S
REDEPTIVE PURPOSE.

The Spirit who calls us to our part in that task is the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures that reveal God’s plan of redemption.

GOD'S MISSION IS A REDEPTIVE MISSION

While attending missionary training, for the first time I imbibed deeply of AGWM mission philosophy and values. Probably because my sense of calling was wrapped up in the idea of taking the gospel to those who didn’t have access to it, I understood that the Bible and our missiological reality of people without gospel-access made bearing witness to Jesus Christ and gathering disciples into the church the central focus of missionary labor. Although no one stated this truth back in 1984 when I went through missionary training, I innately understood that our fourfold strategy of reaching, planting, training, and serving (RPTS), by its very nature, had to be integrated and that this wide variety of missionary activities would be accomplished best with a full and robust indigeneity.

My call to those with least access to the gospel meant I was open to go wherever these people lived. At the end of the day, the regional director for Asia Pacific was looking for younger couples to go to Thailand and help plant the church among Buddhist people, and we were happy to do so. Even today, after nearly 200 years of missionary labor, Protestant Christianity among ethnic Thai stands at only .31 percent. Over the years when people ask what we do, I reply that because we minister where the national church is a tiny minority in a huge sea of non-Christians, we “wear all the hats” in the sense that most of us end up working across all aspect of RPTS. We’re involved in evangelism, planting and strengthening the church, training leadership both formally and informally, and we’re often involved in social ministry with the national church because of the country’s huge social needs.

Although I didn’t articulate it this way when I was younger, for me the heart of our participation in God’s mission is the fact that it’s a *redemptive* mission: reconciling people to the living God through Jesus Christ. In my early years I never gave much thought to missiology because the real world of need was outside my door every morning with a wide variety of opportunities for ministry. However, as time went on and I became involved with church-planting team development and training new missionaries, I became aware of a growing diffusion of interests on the part of our AG church movement in the USA that was reflected in the way new workers understood their personal call. They didn’t see reaching, planting, training, and serving as integrated activities, and their priority was no longer to plant the church and proclaim the gospel in the classic sense of Christian mission.

We desperately needed a way to express our collective biblical mandate that would appeal to all cross-cultural workers more than their personal interests and desire to follow trends not always well-rooted in the Bible. Other colleagues were having similar

experiences, and the language of “collective call” became the means to signify that something in Scripture provides the big trajectory for our work and integrates our personal call.

A CENTRAL IDENTITY FOR CROSS-CULTURAL WORKERS

In reflecting on my own experience in Thailand, I realized that the Bible’s big picture of God’s glory among the nations and the mandate to take the gospel to those without access had given me a sense of identity, which led to a task that went way beyond what I felt capable of doing. But the Spirit of Harvest called me to accept responsibility in the place and time I found myself. In fulfilling that mandate, I landed on the idea that we must shape our central identity as cross-cultural workers by looking at the New Testament apostles: not to produce the self-designation of being an apostle, but to *function* as the apostles did, doing the kinds of things they did.

Now, most of us don’t wake up in the morning, put our feet on the floor, and say, “Wow, I feel like an apostle today!” When I go out my door, with a Buddhist temple and a mosque nearby, surrounded by millions of people who don’t know a single Christian, engulfed by incredible spiritual and physical needs, and knowing there are few people ready to spend their lives on behalf of these people, I hear the quiet voice of the Spirit. He tells me it isn’t about how I feel but whether I can step up to the plate and say, “Here I am, Lord. Use me as a bearer of the saving message.” I tell the Spirit that though I don’t feel like an apostle or have the gifts and fruit of an apostle, I’m ready to be used and to function apostolically to take the good news to these people.

For me, the notion of *apostolic function* serves well as the template of our identity as cross-cultural workers and provides the unifying point of our vision. It doesn’t mean that we all do the same thing but that

we're all heading in the same biblical trajectory of God's glory among the nations.

Thirty-three years later I still can't forget the pie chart and its big idea. When our Pentecostal predecessors in mission heard the call of the Spirit and saw the vision of God's Word, they concluded that our mission exists to evangelize the world. The Spirit and the Word issue that collective call, which brings meaning and direction to our personal callings in this great task; and that calling still speaks today. There are vast blocs of people living in societies with little or no gospel light, and someone must cross cultural and geographic barriers to take them the good news. For me, that idea is just as disturbing and powerful and life rearranging as it was when I first heard it nearly forty years ago.



Called to Serve in Asia Pacific

Bill Snider
(Asia Pacific)

Asia and the Pacific Islands form a diverse and challenging region that is home to Buddhism and the largest Islamic population in any one nation, Indonesia. Japan and Thailand have less than 1 percent Christians, and there are hundreds of unique people groups with little or no witness. Asia has mega-cities like Jakarta, Manila, Bangkok, and Tokyo, and small Pacific islands separated by thousands of miles of water. This is a world of the unreached. Out of close to 880 million people in the region, there are still over 470 million who live in places with no Christian presence.

Asia Pacific has Assemblies of God national movements at various stages of development, from those that are fully indigenous, sending out their own missionaries, to those that are a tiny minority, struggling to plant the church in a spiritually and socially hostile world.

VALUES THAT UNITE

Vision and values unite our missionaries in this region. As a team, we have adopted this values statement: *We are a Spirit-led mission that values meaningful relationships, the local church, and ministry that is contextual, strategic, and sacrificial.*

We are a Spirit-led mission and personally have followed the Spirit's call on our lives. We are united by the belief in a Spirit-led calling that is also a focused calling: in the power of the Spirit we are to *reach* the lost, *plant* churches, *train* leaders, and *serve* the poor —so all can hear the saving message of Jesus. This collective call sets the parameters for our ministries. Although we're each different in personalities and giftings, we're united by a common DNA and purpose.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

When my wife, Kim, and I moved to Manila, Philippines, in 1988, we believed that God had called us to establish a Christian media ministry for people groups in the region. This eventually became Asia Pacific Media. At that point we knew little about the region and had no contacts other than local mission leadership. Thankfully, our mission training had established the importance of working with the local church. We knew our goal wasn't to build a para-church ministry but a mission-directed ministry to connect people to local churches and believers. My personal vision was shaped as I understood mission purpose. Since media in the late 1980s was primarily radio, we first established a radio program for the Philippine General Council of the Assemblies of God. We also trained and launched a team that produced a radio program for a people group in the eastern Philippines that was only 2 percent evangelical. Mission purpose guided these early efforts.

As part of the Assemblies of God World Missions, collectively our trajectory and purpose were clear: evangelize the lost and see churches planted where they didn't exist. Over time these goals moved us toward unreached people. We also believed our role was working with local leaders and believers. Now these relationships are treasured memories of our mission experience. Having a collective understanding of purpose helped us move in the right direction. At times I struggled with how slowly the national people accepted my ideas, but through this

I DISCOVERED THAT MY
PERSONAL CALL TO MISSIONS
COULD BE SHAPED AND
REFINED WHEN I SUBMITTED
IT TO THE BROADER MISSION
PURPOSES AND GOD'S TIMING.

There are many types of mission efforts today, some that seem “cutting edge” and are attractive to donors and some that are mundane, but the collective call, our mission purpose, guides our plans and helps us discern a way forward.

As Asia Pacific Media expanded, our mission purpose—the call to reach the lost and empower local leaders and the church—guided the creation and direction of our productions and training. We shared a vision for using media and offered training so the church would incorporate these tools into their ministry. We also listened to church leaders to discover what would be most useful in their ministry. We believed that sharing the vision with church leaders and training future video storytellers was the right approach.

AP Media adopted a simple ministry theme: *His message. Multiplied.* The ministry goal is multiplication of workers and messages directed primarily at those who have never heard about Jesus. The question we keep before us is: How can we use this ministry to empower the church in evangelism, train future workers to produce their own stories, and create materials to bring the gospel to those who haven't heard? The ministry aligns with our broader mission purpose.

The personal call and the collective call of the mission work hand in hand. I've seen the absolute necessity of a personal calling *and*

a collective vision. Calling keeps you at your post when times are difficult. It's the inner fire that launches you and keeps you on the journey. But the collective calling informs our efforts, guides our thinking, and ensures that our work will endure.

Often my role in ministry has been to connect people in fulfilling God's mission. For example, we brought Global Initiative to the Philippines and Indonesia several times to raise awareness, provide training, and affirm the truth that it is possible to reach Muslims for Christ. In one meeting with leaders in Manila, I wondered if we had accomplished anything because so few came to the event. Yet within six months, a young man who had attended left his local church position and moved his family to a dangerous Muslim region in the southern Philippines. He became pastor of the only church in an entire province. After serving there for two years, an insurgency movement attempted to take control of a major city in the province. Over a period of months, the Philippine military laid siege to the city, sending tens of thousands of people to refugee centers. This pastor and his wife began to reach out to these families. It was a *kairos* moment. People responded. Today, we have key church leaders working in this city, which was formerly closed to any Christian influence. My role may appear small, but it was strategic in opening a door to establish the church in a place that formerly was off-limits. Today, this pastor and other local workers are reaching people where no westerner could go. He traces his call to that meeting in Manila.

WHAT ROLES DO MISSIONARIES PLAY?

Under our collective call, we have opportunities to minister wherever God places us. These roles empower others through our words and our actions.

Apostolic Intent

Not every missionary is a church planter. We each have different gifts and abilities. But with an apostolic mindset, every missionary can draw a line from their present ministry to the unreached. If we aren't involved in personal engagement, then we can be advocates for those who haven't heard. In this paradigm, every missionary can pray for those involved in evangelistic efforts, identify needy areas, advocate for ministry, and remind the local church of the needs of those who've never heard.

Disciple Makers

Jesus gave the mandate, "Go and make disciples." The goal is to reproduce our lives and calling in others. Missionaries bring their passion and call to a place. Over time, vision is transferred, leaders are raised up, and the seed we sow produces a harvest. In Asia today, we are at various stages in the discipleship journey, but we share a common commitment to share life and ministry with others, to reproduce our lives in others.

Catalysts for Action

A missionary is a catalyst, which the dictionary defines as "an agent that provokes or speeds significant change or action." Missionaries provoke action! In southeast Asia, missionaries saw the need to focus on children, from providing a safe place for their physical and spiritual growth, to age-appropriate evangelism, and developing materials for churches to use in outreach and discipleship. Today, local leaders are guiding children's ministries. Likewise, the growth of campus ministries across the region began with a few missionary workers who believed the future was on the campuses. Decades later, most national churches now have strong campus ministries. This is also true of media ministry; churches are now requesting media

training and using our productions in creative outreaches. AP Media has been a catalyst for creative outreach, working in a growing number of nations in response to the unprecedented growth in communication media.

Missionaries carried a burden for the Muslim world of Asia for years, while local leaders tolerated their efforts without showing genuine support. But through persistence, gifted workers sharing their ministry experiences, contextualized training, and the work of the Holy Spirit, many national workers now share the burden for these groups. Many local workers have repented of past prejudices and are now committed to reaching the Muslim people of their nation. God is honoring their faith, and we are beginning to see a harvest of souls.

Serving in the Gaps

Similarly, missionaries often stand in the gap for ministries that are overlooked or neglected. In following indigenous church principles, we don't compete with or duplicate what a national church is doing. Instead, we identify the gaps in ministry. In recent years this has included a focus on international churches, seminary education, creative media, outreach to children, human trafficking, orphans, and unreached people. As missionaries serve in the gap for segments of a population, local believers see the potential and step up.

Partnerships That Empower

Assemblies of God missiology emphasizes two key themes: the indigenous church and partnership. Missionaries and national leaders in Asia are involved at various levels of partnership based on biblical foundations, shared vision, and mutual respect. True partnership takes time, humility, and trust. The national church leadership asked us to work with the church in Myanmar. Our goal there is a fully functioning media ministry, reaching unreached

people with creative messages, and strengthening the church through training leaders. We share our strengths, experiences, and resources. One Filipino church leader stated this relationship well, “Partnership is simply obeying the Great Commission *together*.” This type of partnership enables us to reach the hundreds of unreached people groups.

LOOKING THROUGH THE RIGHT LENS

Recently, I was delighted with a video where a young mother placed a pair of glasses on her visually impaired 2-year old. The look on the child’s face was priceless. For the first time in her life, the child saw her mother’s face! The right lens brought her world into focus.

Cross-cultural ministry is challenging, but the right lens offers missionaries not only a clear focus but a sure path forward. We have followed the Spirit’s call, and together we participate in God’s mission to see viable church-planting movements among every people. God is at work in our lives and in the lives of our church partners. We recognize the biblical mandate and understand our mission history. This provides sure footing as we face the challenges of our day. The right lens brings our personal calling into alignment with our purpose to evangelize the world—our collective calling. The result is a lasting mission work and Kingdom growth.

A P P E N D I C E S

AGWM Vision Statement, Mission Statement, and Purpose Statement

AGWM Vision Statement

Christ will be proclaimed and His Church will be established in all nations through the power of the Spirit.

AGWM Purpose Statement

So *all* can hear.

AGWM Mission Statement

Our mission to all nations is to reach the lost with the message of Christ, plant churches, train believers, and serve the poor and suffering.

A S S E M B L I E S O F G O D
W O R L D M I S S I O N S

CORE VALUES

1. We are committed to a biblical understanding of the mission of the church.
2. We are committed to fulfilling our mission in the power of the Holy Spirit through Pentecostal practice and teaching.
3. We are committed to the principles of the indigenous church and partnership.
4. We are committed to understanding the culture and worldview of those people with whom we work.
5. We are committed to practicing spiritual disciplines for the development of personal spiritual formation.
6. We are committed to the team concept of working together as missionaries.
7. We are committed to proclaiming the gospel to unreached people.
8. We are committed to holistic missions in word, deed, and spirit.



RPTS

REACH · PLANT · TRAIN · SERVE

*"To say yes to God's call
often means surrendering
personal dreams and
ambitions on the altar
of commitment."*

GREG MUNDIS

Executive Director of Assemblies of God World Missions