



Repositioning Mission Agencies for the Twenty-first Century¹

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Since the steady crescendo of expansion after World War II, American mission agencies have been awash in an environment of change. Most mission agencies have experienced one or more rise-and-fall cycles of available candidates, funds, and deployment opportunities. There are general patterns and similarities from one organization to another, although far more often the ebb and flow must be explained by the particulars of local churches' motivations, denominational policies, characteristics of given overseas fields, and the vagaries of sociopolitical climate, natural climate and disasters, and the increasingly turbulent patterns of intertribal tension and ethnic warfare. Some mission work is stimulated by disaster and wanes during periods of relative calm. One missionary organization will be inspired into creative ventures by the very same political circumstances that will drive another organization into withdrawal or diversion.

In an attempt to draw some useful generalizations, this essay reflects on the purposes most commonly undertaken by missionary organizations, especially those historically described as sending agencies; describe the ways in which these purposes relate to current situations in our shrinking world; and examine the changing characteristics of the sociocultural contexts of missions. These issues will then be submitted to at least three tests:

1. Do our organizational patterns, management styles, and strategies of mission reflect the lessons learned from colonial and postcolonial experiences?
2. Are the church's global scope, its international partnerships in mission, and the necessity for a serving posture adequately reflected in the managerial decisions about missionary deployment?
3. Are our organizations taking adequate account of the upsurge of local-church participation and ad hoc missionary initiatives?

Since very early in the modern missionary movement, the mission agency has taken on the role of the business and communications secretary for the missionary, representing and advocating for the best interests of the mission of the church, the missionary, and the agency itself. Following is a list of the tasks and the needs commonly fulfilled by the mission agency. The items are sequentially listed, in general, from the earliest and most common tasks up to the more recently identified roles and needs that have been added to the mission agency's work list.

Sending

The sending of missionaries is not a single process. It involves at least three tasks.

Recruiting. Perhaps the most important part of the recruitment task is determining what sources will be emphasized. At first, local churches and denominational councils were the primary arena for the recruitment of missionary candidates. Having moved away during this century from the

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local approach be cause of the need for large-scale coordination, the pendulum is now swinging back as local churches, especially larger ones, take a more direct hand (sometimes unilaterally).

Selecting. The steadily more assertive posture of mission agencies has centered on the issue of appropriateness for given sorts of missionary service. Across the past 200 years, and especially as mission agencies have come to be seen more in their managerial and technological functions, screening of potential personnel has become much more pervasive. The difficulty of assessing spiritual gifts and the pressure to deploy younger missionaries have caused a shift from literal biblical criteria in favor of measurable competencies and traits.

Deploying. Formal corporate decision making about locations and situations wherein missionaries may be productive, over against the more open approach (“wherever God calls”), has long been a tension in mission management. To a greater extent than many missionaries are prepared to accept, the mission agency usually has a determinative role in the decisions about where missionaries will be stationed, what work is to be done, and how project funds and technical support will be allocated. As the role of the mission agency has become steadily more proactive and determinative, this source of conflict has created a sharp division between those who make choices pragmatically and those who rely on intuitive and inspirational feelings about the leading of God.

Overseeing

Accountability. Affixing accountability of the missionary, by urging or requiring some sort of periodic review of financial and job-related performance, has been a long-standing function of the mission agency. While some missionaries resent any accountability other than directly to God, the experiences of totally independent and free-lance missionaries have demonstrated the need for accountability to wise and knowledgeable referees. But tensions today are increasing, particularly over the increasingly technological and bureaucratic nature of managerial oversight, represented by standardized report forms, formal travel reports (rarely used by leaders as a basis of informed interaction with the missionary), and busywork procedures such as requiring preapproval of events and expenditures.

Management. Managing missionaries and mission projects is a prerogative usually assumed by the mission agency and often delegated to selected missionary councils or leadership groups on the field. In general, the larger the financial exposure or risk, the more likely the agency is to take dominant responsibility.

Reporting. Communications fall into two categories: from the missionary to his or her own immediate supporters, and from the agency to these same supporters plus the agency’s own list of contributors and churches, corporate sponsors, and large-scale donors. In recent years, many agencies have moved more directly into campaigning for funds through various sorts of centrally distributed devices (e.g., coin banks, pledge cards, and book sales).

Intermediacy

Establishing communications between mission and supporting constituencies emerged very early as a task for the mission agency. Especially in the earlier days, limited communications and the time it took to travel great distances left a great load on someone, and the mission agency became the continuing carrier of this burden. One aspect is the need to represent the mission and its missionaries to governments and regulatory agencies. Everything from immigration and naturalization regulations, to passports, visas, residency permits, taxes, school loans, and the many dozens of other hidden tasks require time and skill, which, realistically, is best provided by the agency.

Support

The word ‘support,’ in the language of missions, is used in two ways. When used alone, it means primarily financial support. When used with a modifier, usually ‘prayer,’ the emphasis is on emotional and spiritual support. Mission boards and executive officers have almost always taken seriously their responsibility to assist in encouraging prayer support and to exhort the immediate constituencies to maintain and expand their financial support. Individual missionaries participate in this process with more or less help from their mission agencies. In some cases, almost the entire responsibility is carried by the agency, especially within the larger denominations.

Centralization

While centralization rarely has been a stated purpose or intention, it has, *de facto*, been at the heart of the mission board idea. Both denominational missions and other organizational modes have embraced the idea of unification and organizational centralization of the missionary enterprise. Thus the mission agency’s executive officers and board are afforded a substantial span of authority in decision-making, a determining control of communications, and command of the criteria-setting for recruitment and deployment. The result is unification and sometimes a higher degree of managerial coherency. Cost savings and increased access to services are also affected as centralized purchasing and centralized service personnel or service contracts (e.g., for counseling, missionary children’s education, continuing education needs, retirement plans, insurance, and tax advisement) make available the variety of resources expected by people in a highly specialized technological society.

Impact of a Shrinking World

Of the vast array of influences toward change in the mission of the church across the past two centuries, three seem especially important as the twenty-first century approaches.

Mass technologies. Although now familiar and well understood, modern transportation and communication technologies have not yet been fully taken into account in terms of mission organization and management.

The most obvious changes across the two centuries of the modern missionary movement have resulted from mass technologies. The speed and convenience of travel have dramatically transformed the functional size of the world. Similarly, innovations in communications, and now the significant slashing of communication costs, have reduced the primary effects of isolation and decision-to-implementation lag. It is much easier to come and go and for much less reasoned purposes. Frequency of supervisory contacts is more common, and interactions with colleagues, distant family, and supporters are more frequent and more engaging. Although this factor has not been carefully examined, it is possible that being more continuously reminded of things going on back home, yet being out of reach for personal drop-in contact, increases the stress of missionaries. E-mail from the children at college brings every dormitory turmoil, campus incident, and car repair emergency to the missionary parents’ breakfast table. Similarly, constant and prompt news of the ups-and-downs of the health of aging parents now brings the are-we-needed-more-back-home question into weekly reassessment.

Wider access to missionary experience. This new pressure for change (largely an outgrowth of the first) is only partially understood and certainly not yet well integrated into a positive role.

As the laity of the sending churches has much wider access to missionary experience today, the mystique of mission service has fallen profoundly. At the same time, the nominal period of service for a full-time career missionary is substantially shrinking. As the variety of people and the variety of motivations they represent increase, the length of service and the predictability of commitment to mission service decreases. The full-time career missionary resents the come-and-go folks who take

home half-truths. They resent the time that they are expected to give to making the wanderers comfortable. They resent the feeling that they must explain over and over why there are servant-employees in their homes.

Along with wider access through travel and mission field visits has come a sort of industrial-strength approach to specialized recruitment and management. The spiritual grounding of the missionary call has been largely overwhelmed by advertisements for missionaries and descriptions of the mission fields that are almost as job-specific as commercial recruitment.

Greater involvement of local churches. The newest and already the most problematic influence toward change is the pressure for closer involvement of local churches. Effectively dealing with this and the preceding trend could become the foundation for the emergence of a revitalized mission of the church in the twenty-first century.

Almost everyone in the mission establishment sees closer involvement of the local churches as a mixed blessing, but the trend is picking up intensity: local churches are taking greater initiatives and expect to be treated at least as equal partners with the mission agency. They demand a stake in recruitment; they want some measure of authority in the overseeing of the missionaries whom they support; and their views of stewardship and management must be taken into account by the mission agency. After several generations of virtual autonomy, mission agencies are finding these adjustments rather difficult. The missionary executive is being pulled in so many directions that maintaining a coherent approach to the purposes and the standard procedures of the mission is almost impossible.

Colonialism Lives

Warning against recurring colonial assumptions is still needed. The assertion that Christianity is a white man's religion, heard earliest from the Chinese, is a fundamental stumbling block wherever the Gospel is carried. Unless the cultural baggage of Western philosophy, democracy, materialism, militarism, and racism is laid aside over and over again, because it creeps back in the Western role in the international and intercultural mission of the church will very likely wane in the next century.

The insidious colonial assumptions that inhabit and inhibit Christian missions include the following: *Missionaries can go anywhere they wish.* Yes, in the modern era missionaries can go anywhere, even if it means taking on a cover or disguise. But this assumption is based squarely in the ethos of colonialism; it is based on the presumed rights and the actual power of people from a dominant society to enter wherever and whenever they choose within the empire. To some mission agencies and churches, any resistance or delay is interpreted as evidence of satanic works against the Gospel. When will it become clear that resistance to outsiders and their agendas is an ordinary characteristic of a people's sense of dignity and humanity? Even Christians do it! Why do those who carry the gospel message assume that they have a right to do to others what they would not allow others do to them?

Rediscovery of the importance of frontier missions in the past twenty-five years has stimulated the assumption that missionaries can go anywhere. Indeed, some of the more valuable deployments of missionaries are on the frontiers of evangelization and church planting. But the limits on these open frontiers are often more severe than in the past. The easier frontiers are used up and gone. The new frontiers are in situations and among people who are the hardest ever to reach, especially among the urbanized subcultures, rich and poor. Appropriate background, experience, education, and motivation for these frontiers are sadly lacking among American missionaries. Indeed, many American missionaries cannot go just anywhere without some fundamental changes in themselves that lie far deeper than willingness.

Missionaries can do anything. 'Missionary' is a term loosely applied to people who go from one place to another with the intention of furthering the Gospel. This breadth of definition, combined with an increasing willingness to travel to seek a clearer view of God's will in one's own life, has led to all sorts of unnecessary investment and misdirected effort. In today's world constraint is far more

important than exuberance in the deployment of missionary resources. Doing things that local people should be doing, doing things that really don't need to be done, and doing things in ways that are culturally inappropriate and even resented are just a few of the unfortunate consequences of this very Western assumption about willingness, eagerness, and omni-functional competency.

The presumption of the versatility of missionaries is another of the foundational assumptions underlying the bad habit of sending unprepared and inept people into situations that demand greater expertise, insight, and interpersonal sensitivity. The work of missions in the twenty-first century is apt to be at least as demanding as anything seen in the twentieth century. There will be fewer places to hide the inept. One of the toughest tasks of missionary managers in the years ahead will be selection and assessment of readiness in people who want to become missionaries. Western nations cannot send their second best. Heretofore it has been an unwritten rule that recruitment is more important than critical screening. No more.

We are here to build things for God. Founding and building properties for institutions that are assumed to serve the church is a long-standing Western contribution to mission. Brick-and-mortar projects, including the infrastructure for individual churches, denominational office complexes, clinics, hospitals, and schools of various sorts (primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, Bible colleges and theological seminaries), can sometimes help. In the past they were usually greeted with enthusiasm. Today both the mission agencies and the established churches in many regions are aware that they can also hurt the church in the long run, creating deeper dependency, saddling local churches with embarrassments that they cannot afford to maintain, coming into conflict with government plans for education or health services, and actually inhibiting evangelization and the development of effective relationships between the churches and their communities.

Using stewardship as an excuse for seizing a controlling posture in every partnership. The habit of insisting on the rights of authorizing the budget and monitoring the expenditures has destroyed many relationships between the mission and the church-on-the-field. As local Western churches are becoming more directly involved in fiscal and personnel support for overseas projects, this budgetary tyranny has become stronger than ever. Surely, responsible handling of resources dedicated to God requires vigilance, but God is not honored when control is a stronger value than trust. Part of the solution is avoiding the sort of flimsy joint project that clearly lacks responsible management on the field.

Flying high the denominational banner. No longer does a Baptist name on a church assure that it is substantially different from the church down the road that calls itself Assemblies of God. No longer does every Wesleyan church hold tightly to a grounding in Wesley or every Calvinist church assert its several points of historical Calvinism. Observers overseas are noticing that denominational names are more commonly used by the outsiders (missionaries) than by those who constitute the emerging Christian communities. Local Christian leaders often point out that regardless of the historical divisions and designations within the church at large, there is more that makes us distinctive and gives us identity under the name of Jesus Christ than any distinction that denominational designations can suggest. When the contrast between Christian and Muslim or Christian and Buddhist is at stake, the label 'Presbyterian' does not help much. In today's world many Christians find it far more important to identify with other Christians precisely because they need to stand together as Christians.

This trend toward minimizing historical distinctives and categories imposed from Western church history has been hard for many missionary organizations to swallow. They feel threatened because for many in the Western churches missions as a category of social activity is an extension of the fondness for competitive team sports. We cheer for the Cubs, not the White Sox; the Cowboys, not the Broncos; the Free Church, not the Nazarenes. When we can't wave our own home-team banner, we lose interest in the game.

SOP, PDQ, ETC, and FYEO

SOP: Standard operational procedure. Once an organization has established its norms for operation, almost every management detail settles into dull uniformity. Employees, and usually clients, are expected to operate by the standard operational procedures. It is assumed that standardization will make doing business simpler, more predictable, and more easily communicated, especially to newcomers.

This assumption creates havoc among new missionaries, whose distrust of the ways of the past underlines their sense of their own creative possibilities (sometimes exaggerated). At a deeper level, the mission that persists in blindly perpetuating habituated practices is doomed to a decline because of the resultant non-responsiveness to nuance and change. Further more, there are many essential competencies and sensitivities that those leading the missionary enterprise blithely assume are well in place, when in fact their functional absence creates raw sores. For many missionary organizations standard operational procedures are a millstone around the neck.

PDQ: Pretty darn quick. The cult of efficiency has made deep inroads into the churches of the West; it determines the causes these churches are willing to support. When lay leaders, especially, discuss missions, the negative side of the conversation very often focuses on costs and outcomes: Why does it take missionaries so long? Why does it cost so much? Why can't they just decide what to do and get out there and do it?

Communicating the realities of today's world and the requirement for careful and graciously non-manipulative (usually slow) agreements across cultural lines is more difficult than ever before. Willingness to help is surely a desirable attribute for a missionary, but perhaps in today's world of missions it is equally important to show willingness not to help when that is more appropriate. The assumption that one should hit the ground running produces an overeager, often overbearing, posture. Getting the picture, letting others tell about what is happening and why, and avoiding the temptation to dump ideas all over people demands patience and time.

How can the supporters of missions be brought to understand the realities of intercultural and interchurch relationships? Whatever the answer, it must come to grips with the preference in many Western churches for doing things PDQ.

ETC: et cetera, et cetera. Some organizations bravely outlive their purposes. One of the oddest moments in mission's history was the closing of one of America's first missionary agencies, the Sandwich Islands Mission. This group had been formed in Boston early in the nineteenth century for the purpose of evangelizing the people of the Sandwich Islands. Before forty years passed, the members of this organization deemed their mission accomplished, and thus they dissolved the corporation.

Today's mission agencies, apparently wishing to avoid that precedent, have grasped immortality by creating ever larger and more complex goals. There is a sort of *et cetera* habit in contemporary organizations, whether the corporation is for profit or non profit. The overextending caused by unbridled expansion and diversification has been the downfall of notable manufacturers, service corporations, and merchandisers. Missions are not immune.

FYEO: For your eyes only. As the world has polarized into geopolitical camps, the tendency toward secrecy, manipulative cleverness, and distrust has been deeply embedded into intercultural relations. In the interests of truth and trust, it is time for Christians to become more trusting of one another, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, and for Christian organizations, especially mission agencies, to minimize the sort of suspicious privacy and secrecy that causes far too many documents to be stamped FYEO. This is a costly habit because far too many decisions are made without bringing the issues into the fresh air. Cooperation is enhanced by openness; overuse of confidentiality breeds distrust. Competitive secretiveness in the service of the Prince of Peace is out of place and unbecoming.

New Circumstances, Emergent Forms

Today the global environment in which Christian mission operates includes increased resistance to missionaries who represent old images and models and who have 'missionary' as their visa identity. Mission agencies may find themselves beating their heads against the wall and wasting strong human and physical resources in order to preserve traditions and old habits. Clearly, new models of 'missionary' are demanded. New understandings of the relationships and roles of outsiders in a more tribalized world are needed. What is even more needed is for mission agencies to face up to the all-too-common ineffectiveness of their missionaries. It is unwise to resist, ignore, or explain away the evident needs for changing recruitment standards, deployment practices, missionary description, and presumptions about styles of evangelization and church planting.

There is also a notable openness on the part of non-Christians to helpers from outside, even if such helpers are Christians. Some mission agencies are so tied to their own past that a visit to Vietnam, for example, attracts them, like moths to a flame, back to their former properties. Soon they start nagging their hosts to hand back the old land deeds. The old ways, the old uses of property, the acquisition of stuff, and the claims of rights jeopardize the future with the very people who are now open enough (often at some risk to themselves) to invite and relate to former missionaries and mission agencies. If we were to react more sensitively to these now-frequent offers of friendship and relationship, God's hand would be far easier to see. In China, for example, agencies that have been willing to broaden their definition of 'missionary' and to accept identification and registration as a language-education agency or a resource development group are discovering important new sectors of openness to the Gospel. But agencies that stubbornly insist on their old designations, agenda, and methods are sitting at the border pouting.

Another hard-to-miss development is the increased willingness of North Americans to undertake short mission experiences. Thousands of North Americans are pouring into the arena of international and intercultural missions through various forms of short-term missionary events ranging from agency-sponsored tours of the mission field to work teams building bunkhouses for church-related camps. Although in the case of some of these people, at least in the short run, such experiences may be a waste of the time and resources of the mission agency, for many of these Western adventurers such overseas junkets are the spark that ignites mission consciousness and awakens a concern for more effective forms of missionary presence.

For slow-minded mission agencies the short-term phenomenon will be an increasing nuisance. But for creative agencies, ways are already being found to encourage and support these activities as additional species and types of Christian relationship and development. Procedures are being developed for dealing with the issue of how the on-site missionaries can be assisted in handling the stress caused by the floaters. The underlying problem from the start of the current short-term missionary avalanche has been an oversimplification, namely that there are two kinds of missionaries, *short-term* and *real*. The rediscovery of the short-term category--the Book of Acts suggests that the apostle Paul was probably the first short-term--has brought many more Americans into firsthand contact with the overseas ministries of the church. The trend is likely a consequence of the need to redress the remoteness of missions from the churches and the increased affluence of American Christians. As a result, there are more and more local mission committees in churches that include at least a half-dozen members who have *been there*. All in all, more good than harm has resulted, though in the years ahead, missionary organizations that do a more thorough and thoughtful job of articulating the workings of long-term and the short-term missionaries will set the path toward a more effective use of resources. Meanwhile, the old-timers tend to see themselves as the *real* missionaries, too often demeaning, avoiding, or misusing the naive and some times demanding short-termers.

But there is another sort of short-term missionary reemerging: the highly competent specialized fellow laborers whose gifts and expertise are made available to the church communities of the world in genuine partnershipsCresponding to invitation, planning, and negotiation. The trend is to utilize such persons in small teams, usually composed of peer partners from at least two nations. The church's crying need for leadership development throughout the world is being addressed through this process far better than by sending in one after another ill-equipped and inexperienced teacher of canned curriculum for leadership in the church.

Innovations that attempt to take account of such developments can be done cautiously. Following are some of the matters of important renewal and refinement of missions for the next century. Each is so important that careless, shallow, or inept handling could set back the progress of any mission agency.

Short-term Mission Discoverers

The integration of short-term persons, with all their typical handicaps and inadequacies, not the least of which is the lack of time for learning language or culture, into the whole network of relationships of the people of God worldwide can surely be accomplished more productively than at present. Too much emotional stress has been stimulated by the quasi-intellectual debates about the relative value and the cost-benefit ratio of short-term missionaries. The more difficult and more worthy question is how best to deploy short-term persons of various sorts. What might happen if mission agencies in full cooperation with local churches were to re-conceptualize 'short-term missionary' into 'short-term discoverer'? These willing and usually well-motivated people, whose meager background, linguistic shortcomings, cultural innocence, and anxious personalities require special accommodations, can be developed into a valuable liaison resource from church-there to church-here. How can they be more effectively guided before, during, and after the field experience? What standards are necessary, and how can they be implemented? What sorts of experiences are actually valuable for the field, for the short-termers, and, most especially, for the church at large?

Tentmaker Witnesses

Various sorts of vigorous adults with significant experiences behind them and well-advanced spiritual maturity are now taking their places in all sorts of mission roles. Sometimes they are affiliated with a mission agency; more often they are unaffiliated because mission agencies are preoccupied with their more customary recruits, deployments, and relationships. Often these volunteer specialists are either not available for long-term or permanent relationships with a given agency in a given place, or their particular gifts call for an itinerant role that is not of much interest to the agency (which starts every relationship by dividing the missionary community into 'career missionaries' and 'short-termers').

Nevertheless, the expansion of these new species--tentmakers, moonlight missionaries, and contracted specialists--is so substantial that new mission agencies are forming around them, representing a marker on the trail where tradition has delimited the old path away from new needs.

Multicultural Collaborators

Another innovation is the use of international task-force teams. Teamwork has proved to be extraordinarily difficult for Western missionaries. The obvious necessity of inventing some sort of basis to share the territory and the task with missionaries from other countries and cultures has forced this issue. But Americans, for example, are rarely experienced in team relationships except in competitive sports. We tend to be loners. Sometimes we are prepared to use helpers, but the relationship works best--in our eyes--when we make the assignments.

The multicultural reality of today's worldwide mission force compounds the problem. Many people in the world, not just Westerners, find it difficult to work as peers or subordinates to people of another language, culture, or race. While this is a problem that Christian transformation can deal with, many missionaries have not yet sought the spiritual resources to enter into this transformation. In many, many situations, intercultural teams have fallen apart. Indeed, three couples from Texas or from Iowa expecting to work together as a team are more likely to fall apart than not.

At least part of the solution lies in the representations of cultural diversity and the style of teamwork demonstrated in the central office of the mission agency. In these centers it is typical to hear a good line being advocated about intercultural acceptance and the importance of teamwork, but the overwhelming majority of faces seem very pale, and after the collective 'amen' for the platitudes, all return to their respective cubicles and the teamwork idea is left for the field people.

Virtual Missionaries

If anyone doubts the effects of technological change, a reckoning of the number of computers and computer-driven devices that affect everyday life will settle the issue. What really startles is the awareness that all of this has happened within the past twenty to twenty-five years. Any image of the next century must place the computer, especially in its role within communications, close to the center. For one thing, e-mail and the telephonic uses of e-mail technologies will be dramatically enlarged. It will be possible to carry on rather intimate, confidential conversations with any of a vast array of people across the globe while sitting in a lounge at the airport. This will surely open up new and more expeditious ways to conduct Christian mission.

Surely the most responsible forecast in reference to computers and communication is that every mission agency needs to assign two people to accept the responsibility, along with their other tasks, to read regularly in the field of communications technology, attend one new technology exhibition each year, and inform the rank and file within the mission of the most promising computer applications for the mission of the church. To do less is to run the risk of being last to grasp the really important transformations.

Minimal Management

Formalizing the management of missions has steadily increased over the twentieth century, bringing depersonalization and eroding the quality of relationships. All sorts of problems in mission management can be traced to distances between decision making and the context of the problem. Within business and industry there has been a substantial investment in research and high-level think-tankings concerning the need to move decision making toward the field context without losing access to the resources and personnel who carry the responsibility of defining and maintaining the coherence of the organization. Within mission agencies, some recognize this problem and are exploring it; others play a vigorous game of high-speed ping-pong trying to anticipate the angles of the in-coming ball. Worse, other agencies define the issue as a need for micromanagerial adjustments, and thus they tinker.

Perhaps the major guideline needed is to move toward minimalizing of management hierarchies. If a pencil needs sharpening, do it. It shouldn't take two levels of authorization. If a bridge is to be built, the whole organization should know about it and lineup, not to impede or over regulate, but to support those who will build it. Administrators of mission agencies, if they seek appropriate counsel and advice from within and from outside the mission organization, should be able to re-conceptualize their style and paradigms of mission management.

Conclusion

We must anticipate transformations in the organized enabling of the mission of the church. If the dominant paradigms of habituated missions are not challenged, mission organizations will fall out of touch with those they represent or those to whom they minister, and their mission will become more harmful than helpful. Although it is wise to assume an ongoing need for long-term, fixed-place, and institutional missionaries, the needs are changing quantitatively and qualitatively. Some guidelines are offered for the next few years as we turn the corner in missions.

1. Build competent teams of consultative missionaries and make them available for collaborative planning with leaders from other missions, from supporting churches in the sending base, and from emerging churches in other nations.
2. Learn to work in response to, and in partnership with, initiatives from churches in other places.
3. Give priority to requests for partnerships that bring outside resources to bear on a short-term basis to augment, not replace, local resources.
4. Put major emphasis on developing local leaders in emerging churches.
5. Be ready to pull out and wait for the next moment of call.
6. Maintain a resource base that is not necessarily on the field but is ready to serve a wide variety of fields.

Missionary work is now being carried out in new ways. And the new ways often turn out to be the really old ways. The apostle Paul, for example, was a highly itinerant missionary, working with a series of different partners. He rarely stayed anywhere very long. He planted churches and left them to the care of the Holy Spirit long before they were strong (Titus 1:5). He invited his associates to undertake itinerant teaching ministries to strengthen and straighten out the new churches, and they all kept moving.

In the past 200 years, the so-called modern missionary era, the standard style of missions has usually involved sitting in place, digging in deep, and persisting until we judge that the church is strong enough to stand alone. What lessons have been learned from such examples as the churches in China and Burma? These churches were considered weak and unready, but left to the Holy Spirit's care, they experienced great growth.

As always, change comes at great price, but lack of change is even more costly. The changes that mission agencies are willingly and thoughtfully implementing today are too few and too slow. Many opportunities may be lost because of rigidity and timidity.

We do not create opportunity for mission; it is God who is the creator of the mission of the church, and the twenty-first century is in God's hands. We need not fear losing an opportunity. Our rightful role is to commit ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit, read the signs of the times, and, wherever possible, establish new models of mission in response to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the disciplines of the Holy Scriptures.