

We're Doing Great!

But Can We Do Better?

There is a church in nearly every nation. Mission fields of thirty years ago are now sending as many, or more, missionaries than the traditional missionary sending nations. The population "center" of the Church is now somewhere in Africa - not Europe or North America. Most major seminaries and Bible schools are blessed with one or more faculty members from those former mission fields. Major world movements of the Church are often led or stimulated by those coming from outside North America. Indicator after indicator shows that missions in the twentieth century spread God's Good News farther and more rapidly than at any time in the previous eighteen centuries.

Surely it's time to congratulate ourselves! But can we do better in the time before our Lord returns?

In at least five areas, mission work often needs help - preparation of workers, personnel loss, effectiveness in establishing continuing witness, pastoral and professional care of missionaries, and bringing practice in line with theory - our understanding. These needs overlap and are inter-related. Together or separately, they are apparent in many reports, study papers and administrative evaluations. These problem areas can be ignored as simply the cost of doing the job, or they could be addressed by improved preparation of mission workers. Consider these areas and then decide for yourself (and possibly for your church or agency) if they should be ignored or improved.

First, inadequate preparation for bi-cultural work, and insufficient recognition of its complexities are costing aid and church agencies heavily - both in personnel and finance. Estimates for only one church agency show that loss of personnel, before they have reached a reasonable level of effectiveness, costs that group \$3,800,000 over a five-year period.

The loss of workers in cross-cultural situations is often heavy; 45% in one field of Southeast Asia. Over all North American missions, it is at least 25% after 4 years. In the most rapidly growing portion of the missionary force, Third World-based agencies, attrition rate is at least 50% after four years, according to Third World mission leaders.

There is an additional heavy price to the individuals concerned. Evaluative research since the late 1960's suggests that only 40% of professionals achieve full effectiveness as a result of the cross-cultural experience. Another 40% operate at a sub-normal level, both emotionally and professionally, over the entire period in another cultural setting. Fifteen percent (15%) must be recalled before their term of service is completed, and 5% suffer severe emotional damage evidenced in psychotic behavior, alcoholism, and similar problems.

These figures reflect the experience of business, government, missions and other non-government

organizations **when their personnel have not had careful preparation** to become functionally bi-cultural.

Partly as a result of inadequate preparation and personnel loss, work may well be ineffective. In terms of comprehension of the Christian message, establishment of new self-extending churches, and overall change in the social or economic context where missionary work is conducted, goals are often not met. Results may not be commensurate with the investment of personnel or funds made. It is true that success of a few has been outstanding, but this masks the lack of impact by the many.

The content of preparation must be different than traditionally motivational mission studies. **The goal must be to equip a person to become a bi-cultural worker and person.** According to extensive reviews of research, very little training - secular or Christian - achieves this essential goal. Even those who are adequately prepared before they enter another culture need to be reminded of what they have learned, to be helped in actually implementing steps toward becoming bi-cultural, and to have resources available when new or unexpected situations seem overwhelming.

Cultural understanding and utilizing communication theory will not solve all the problems. At the least it gives a basis for finding and applying solutions. Usually we know how mission should be done, but the problems come in trying to apply our knowledge. Traditional methods seem to sweep missionaries into worn and restrictive channels even when they come to the fields with zeal and fresh knowledge. Initial preparation may thus result in little change and much frustration. Establishing a world-wide network of experienced and godly mentors, consultants, and pastors of missionaries is an essential part of bringing practice and theory closer together, and reducing missionary loss.

The resources are available to change the way we do mission, so that it can be done more effectively. It is particularly important that this approach to missionary preparation be made available to Third World Missions now, at this time of their rapid growth. They represent, as we have said, over half of the active missionary force.

International Christian leaders recognize that American Christian Higher Education is generally the best in the world, but often do not know how to appropriately use what they learn in their own societies. One result is that they may not return. When they do return, they frequently have difficulty applying their hard-won knowledge in their own culture. They only partially fulfil the role in God's Kingdom that originally brought them to the United States.

The US may gain these skilled people, but when their countries do not develop adequately, America ultimately loses financially when called upon for aid and emergency relief in those same countries. When Internationals do return to their homes, they need to have been given something more from America - an understanding of how to use what they have learned in their own context.

There is major need to develop trainers, educators, who are from other nations and will serve in those nations. They have great potential for giving critically needed help to national churches, greater potential than foreign missionaries who are not part of the culture.

How Can This Challenge Be Met?

A primarily academic approach to training for skills of cross-cultural competence is not adequate. Even that is unavailable in many programs at seminaries, Bible schools, and short-term institutes.

As a broad proposal for design of more adequate missionary training, I suggest a six-stage model of training that includes both academic and applied learning. It is based on more than 30 years' of research by both secular and Christian educators and on our own experience and examination of the problems in many parts of Africa and Asia.

This six-stage model cannot be followed by training programs or institutions acting by themselves. Full implementation requires extensive, continuing dialogue and cooperation between everyone concerned with missions. Mutual respect for the role each plays is necessary in building essential working relationships between sending churches, training programs and institutions, and mission agencies.

Agencies must focus on what they were created to do and not attempt to ignore or usurp the role of church or institution in training programs. Churches need to focus on their primary role of discipling and developing mission passion and not attempt to outperform agencies in their role on the field. And both agencies and churches cannot consider training programs as irrelevant unless they totally control them. Institutions must exhibit more humility, showing readiness to alter traditional training methods to meet the expressed needs of churches and missions.

Six stages in developing cross-cultural workers

One, a period of intensive training in inter-cultural communication to create **cognitive models** of how missionary work should be conducted. Teaching covers such areas as inter-cultural communication, culture and culture learning, linguistics, history of mission, inter-cultural strategies for change, communication skills, starting and developing churches (including discipling), and inter-cultural education. Specific job skills must be introduced - how to teach, how to establish churches, how to lead small groups, appropriate and skilled use of the communication arts, etc.

Two, strong emphasis must be given throughout the residential period on **development of spiritual character** through small group and community prayer, regular community worship, service within different communities in the area, and personal accountability to a mentor.

Three, an essential part of this intensive training is inter-cultural living and working for

development of **social and cultural skills**. An environment where daily monitoring of actions and progress is possible is required. Living with cultural differences, praying and worshipping together, learning to not only appreciate but love people from different cultures does much to overcome the innate ethnocentrism of all people.

Four, in an international living and learning community, **interpersonal skills** can be effectively developed. Classes, discussion groups, shared projects, sharing the work of living together, and personal counseling within the community give an optimum environment for this development.

Five, entering a second culture is usually far removed from the residential training center. It is here that crippling culture stress is most directly confronted. Cognitive preparation for this entry is needed, supplemented by a network of prepared supervisors who arrange guidance and encouragement as possible at the time of entry, to ensure that bonding with both the national and missionary communities occurs. The mentor who previously developed relationships with the trainee would seek to give long-range oversight.

Six, long-term follow up is highly desirable, utilizing the technology of computers and international E-mail to link new missionaries with field-experienced missiologists. Personal visits should be arranged periodically. A well-prepared missionary summed up the felt need, "We need mentoring on the field. We are so overwhelmed by the immediate that we forget what we have learned that would help us." Participation is always a personal choice, but the availability of such a resource puts accumulated wisdom, experience and research directly at the point where it is needed - on the field.

The six elements should be a "seamless garment," to avoid fragmentation or overlapping of effort that fails to address fundamental needs.

How do we bring this model to reality? How can this analysis be used to change the way we do mission? As a start, close cooperation should be developed between mission agency, sending church, and training program. That is essential at every point.

Seldom are missionaries unwilling to gain adequate preparation, after they have once faced the complexities and frustrations of inter-cultural ministry. But initially, deeply committed workers are eager to begin. They are highly motivated, sacrificial in their willingness to serve, and sincerely seeking the glory of God through extending His Kingdom. Understandably, they are impatient with anything that appears to delay their obedience to God-given vision. The issues needing to be addressed are not motivational but questions of effectiveness, whether they come from newer sending churches or traditional missionary-sending groups.

The issue is intention versus accomplishment.

Intention - vs. Accomplishment

Motivation is one thing; ability to do the job is something else.

Knowing the *Message* is one thing; communicating it is something else -

Talking about missions is one thing; doing missions is something else.

Loving those like yourself is one thing; loving people who differ in everything important to you is something else.

Being a missionary is one thing; effectively doing missionary work is something else.

Discussing culture is one thing; functioning within another culture is something else.

Joking about culture shock is one thing; living through it is something else altogether.