

# Seven Dynamics for Advancing Your Church in Missions

by Larry Walker

**F**our trends are radically changing missions in North America. 1) The transition from the industrial age to the information age is changing the way people communicate and the way people are managed. 2) The rise of the Third World missionary force is changing the role of the North American mission industry. 3) The generational transition to the Baby Boom generation is forcing us to rethink our methods of motivation and management. 4) The rising influence of ethnic groups in North America is breaking down the dichotomy between local and foreign missions.

Unless the mission community in North America adjusts to these trends, missions will become more and more marginalized. Those agencies and churches that have been most successful in the past are at greatest risk. Their past successes may have blinded them to the changing shifts in missions. Frontier missions is at particular risk. We are facing the most difficult challenge to reach the unreached peoples, especially those located in the 10/40 Window, just as the influence of missions in North America is declining. The methods and techniques that fueled the tremendous post World War II missions mobilization effort are ineffective when used with contemporary audiences. If the North American mission industry is to continue to play a key role in reaching the unreached, we must change or die!

For more than twenty years I have wrestled with the issue of how to get contemporary American Christians involved in God's global cause. Gene Getz was an important mentor during my

seminary years. At Fellowship Bible Church in Dallas, I experienced a church that excelled at relating Christianity to contemporary America. As a mission pastor at that same church, I was able to experience the failures and successes of involving a boomer congregation in missions. Now as a mission consultant with APMC, I have been exposed to some of the best mission churches.

In this article I would like to describe four major obstacles to missions that the North American mission community is not adequately resolving. Then I would like to describe seven dynamics that I believe will help any church advance in missions.

Professor Howard Hendricks on one occasion said that "A problem well defined is a problem half solved." I would like to describe four obstacles to advancing churches in missions. I will then describe how the seven dynamics help to overcome those obstacles. These are not the only obstacles to missions, but from my perspective, they are the major contenders.

The first obstacle to advancing churches in missions is the common perception that mission is peripheral to Christianity. From pastors in the pulpit to Christians in the pew, most perceive missions to be the domain of super saints, hyperactive Christians or maybe for those who are just a little weird. The dynamics that follow describe how to demonstrate the centrality of missions to our faith and how to relate world missions to "normal folks" in the pew.

The second obstacle is the ineffectiveness of mission leaders and enthusiasts in relating missions to contempo-

rary audiences. We have met the enemy, and he is us! Some mission leaders have been so much a part of the mission community and for so long that they have become inept at communicating missions effectively to the non-involved. The dynamics that I will discuss helps mission enthusiasts and leaders to analyze their audience and develop methods and techniques that relate to where people are.

The third obstacle to advancing missions in churches is the nature of pastoral ministry which tends to focus on local needs. The spiritual gift of pastor-teacher does not naturally lend itself toward global issues. Pastors, by training and experience are generally ill equipped to lead their church in world missions. In this article we will look at missions in the local church from the viewpoint of the senior pastor and the crucial leadership role he plays and what can be done in mobilizing churches for world missions.

The fourth obstacle to advancing churches in missions is the influence of the North American culture on the evangelical church. Materialism, pluralism, individualism, existentialism, hedonism, etc... are major obstacles to getting North American Christians involved in missions. The "Seven Dynamics" that follow describes how to raise up counter-cultural "World Christians" who will attract others to a Christian lifestyle focused on reaching the world.

God's purpose and plan for mankind will always be spearheaded by visionary leadership. Although Abraham, Moses, Nehemiah and the apostle Paul had very different personalities and backgrounds, yet all had one thing in

## Seven Dynamics for Advancing Your Church

common: Each had received a compelling vision from God of what He wanted them to do. The dynamics that follow are antidotes to the obstacles for advancing God's mission in today's world.

### Dynamic #1: Vision

*Vision is the process by which a church explores and promotes its unique role in God's global cause.* As I have observed mission programs around the country, visionary leadership is the driving force common to all effective programs. I have found two crucial dimensions to leadership:

The first is a clear, compelling and growing understanding of what God is doing. Visionary leaders understand that the foundation to a mission active church is a congregation with a solid and growing biblical theology of missions. As believers begin to understand that God indeed is a missionary God, and that the Bible is a missionary book, it virtually becomes self evident that the church is to be mission active. A sound biblical theology will clearly demonstrate that "frontier missions" is not a side issue for the radical few, but rather is the center stage in a 4000 year long drama with the spot light on the Lord of the Universe who is declaring his glory to all nations—His wonders to all peoples.<sup>1</sup>

Luke 24:45 says that "Jesus opened their minds that they might understand the Scriptures." Christians today suffer the same kind of cultural and experiential biases that distort their vision and understanding of God's Word. Visionary leaders find resources to teach the biblical basis of missions beginning in Genesis. In addition, they find ways of telling the story of God's glory as it has developed since the first century, showing the incredible progress of missions throughout the years. Then, coming to our day, they demonstrate the fact that there are adequate resources to finish the remaining task.

The first dimension of vision,

explaining God's relentless and glorious redemptive purpose, provides the stimulus for a very natural and even spontaneous Christian response. It counters the pluralism and materialism of our North American culture and makes missions central to our Christianity. Once we understand that God's redemptive purpose is to redeem a people from every people in order to display His glory, then our natural response is: "If that is what God is doing, then what role can I and my church play?"

This leads us to the second dimension of vision. I would like to refer to Barna's definition of organizational vision:

"Vision is the clear mental image of a preferable future, imparted by God to His chosen servants. It is based upon an accurate understanding of God, yourself and your circumstance (George Barna, "The Power of Vision")

This second dimension of vision does two things. It gives direction and focus, and also energizes members of the church to become involved in the vision. Vision is critical in this information age because vision helps us to prioritize among a constant barrage of competing needs, opportunities and choices. A mission program with a clear vision makes world evangelization tangible and do-able even for one local church. Although no one church by itself can evangelize all the unreached peoples, yet, if a church were to adopt one people group, then the task becomes very specific and do-able. Because it is specific, individuals within a church can see how they can contribute personally, which can energize a whole congregation. *The bottom line is that resources follow vision.* James Engel has said that "Resources come where there is vision, and the big job is to raise vision." How can a church increase resources for missions? The problem is not lack of money. It's a lack of vision.<sup>2</sup>

### Dynamic #2: Management

*Management is the process of*

*leading and empowering the church to carry out vision.* The role of management leadership is to help individuals in the congregation find their part in the vision. This places the mission leadership in a very active role of recruiting individuals of every age to participate in the mission vision of the church. *Vision without management leads to frustration.*

This view of management is a departure from the traditional view of mission participation. The traditional challenge to churches has been "some can go, some can give, all can pray." I have learned that this view is limiting and even demotivating. Even the terms "goers" and "senders" are too simplistic. Missions used to be "long term" and "over there" and therefore limited to the professional missionary. While professionals are still needed, many opportunities now exist doing "short term" work, "right here" where lay people can become involved. Personal involvement is a primary motivation for contemporary audiences. The function of management leadership is to help every member to use his or her spiritual gifts and experiences to help carry out the mission vision of the church. Mission active churches find creative ways for getting individuals directly and personally involved in local and foreign cross-cultural missions. Short term missions, international students, and local ethnic ministries are among the most common methods used.

Although the management structure will differ from church to church, there is normally a "missions pro," either a volunteer or staff, who is the key vision imparter. The mission pro also has the ability to organize teams whose main purpose is to get different types of people involved to carry out the vision of the church. Joel Roberts, mission pastor at Evergreen Baptist Church in Rosemeade, California, has forty-seven different teams in his church involved in local domestic and foreign mission projects. Roberts says that missions has become the "in-thing"

for the church. Personal involvement on the part of members has been the main key. Incidentally, mission giving in this church has gone from \$70,000 to \$400,000 per year in just five years.

The management dynamic also includes a strategic plan. Effective mission programs have a written plan that includes a motto, a vision statement, core values, strategy and goals. Mission active churches do not fly by the seat of their pants! They know exactly where they are going and what they need to get there. Aubrey Malphurs's book, *"Developing a Vision for Your Ministry in the 21st Century,"* is very helpful in this regard to explain how to develop a strategic plan.

As a suggestion, one of the routes to getting people involved in frontier missions may be to give them a hands on exposure in regular missions. Then in the context of regular missions, people can be challenged with the needs of the unreached on the final frontiers. Personal involvement is key to mobilizing churches for missions, including frontier missions!

### **Dynamic #3: Spiritual Disciplines**

*This is the process of providing the spiritual vitality that executes the vision and strengthens the management.* Just as all believers must dedicate themselves to personal spiritual disciplines in order to progress spiritually, in the same way, every church must dedicate itself to certain mission related spiritual disciplines in order to maintain and grow an outward mission focus. Any mission program will fail if it is not built on healthy spiritual disciplines.

Each discipline serves as an antidote to cultural forces that are undermining mission involvement. Corporate prayer for world evangelization serves as an antidote to the secular influence of American culture. Local evangelism serves as an antidote to the

pluralism of our society. Mission giving breaks the grip of materialism. Sending missionaries, from one's own congregation, makes missions very personal and tangible and counteracts the self-centeredness of our American way of life. Helping to mobilize other congregations in missions helps mission leadership in the church to give away their expertise instead of hoarding it for themselves.

Adopting an unreached people group is a great spiritual discipline for a

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church because it forces us to focus on the task remaining instead of focusing on oneself or on one's own missionary. Praying, witnessing, giving, sending, mobilizing, and adopting are all spiritual disciplines that counteract the negative forces of our culture and nurture our participation in God's global cause! There is a spiritual dynamic at work in each of these disciplines that gives spiritual blessings that cannot be understood nor explained naturally.

### **Dynamic #4: Integration**

*This dynamic makes missions a natural outflow of the life of the church.* Integration helps overcome the tendency to marginalize missions to a department in the church. If God is a missionary God, and the Bible is a missionary book, then missions should be a natural and central part of the life of the church, involving everyone in the church. The intent of the integration dynamic, then, is to make mission education and participation a spontaneous part of every age group and program

in the church. The intent is not to compete for people and finances, nor is it to try to make missionaries out of everyone. However, it is our conviction that every ministry in the church ultimately exists to help the church fulfill its role in world evangelization!

The integration dynamic accepts the fact that people have different receptivity levels. Everyone is not going to be a mission enthusiast over night. There always will be people open to missions, and those who are closed to missions. The integration dynamic allows for these various levels of receptivity and deals with people where they are.

It is critical that mission enthusiasts refrain from projecting, unrealistic expectations on people. Mission leaders have a special inclination towards missions that God uses to mobilize others. But if this inclination and zeal is overdone, mission leadership can very easily come across as dogmatic or fanatical. The goal is to attract people to missions, not to drive them away. Mission enthusiasts have been known to do great damage to the cause by their overzealous attitudes and approaches.

### **Dynamic #5: Leadership**

*This dynamic is helping pastors and boards to lead the church in missions.* Obviously, the pastoral staff and board of a church play a key role in advancing a church in world missions. Unfortunately, the staff and board are ill equipped to fulfill this responsibility. It is important to see why pastors are not naturally equipped to fulfill this role and to understand what can be done to help expand their mission vision.

Carl Palmer, Senior Pastor at Cedar Mills Bible Church in Portland, Oregon, has helped me to understand the difficulties pastors face in this area. Palmer was the mission pastor at Los Gatos Christian Church, and therefore is

## Seven Dynamics for Advancing Your Church

in a unique position to help us understand pastors. Palmer says that pastors are primarily shepherds and are overwhelmed by local needs. Furthermore, they lack training and confidence in missions. They lack the support of the mission team. Unless you have been a pastor, you do not understand the pressures placed on pastors by the multiple interest groups, each with their own pressing agendas.

Palmer suggests the following ten practical steps to correct this situation over the long haul:

- 1) Define a realistic and balanced picture of pastoral commitment to missions (don't overstate the case).
- 2) Explain how missions can be a blessing to the congregation.
- 3) Establish confidence in the effectiveness of the mission program.
- 4) Develop a 5-7 year plan for missions in the church (try to be patient).
- 5) Pray for the pastor, not just his mission vision or lack of it.
- 6) Plan to influence him through submitting to him.
- 7) Give him scholarships from the mission budget to key mission events.
- 8) Send the pastor and his wife to the mission field frequently (from the mission budget).
- 9) Pass on key books to him and mission resources (sermon helps etc.).
- 10) Involve the pastor in mission decisions, even if he isn't particularly interested.

It is critical to understand the difficulties pastors face and become a positive influence and help for missions.

### **Dynamic #6: Modeling**

*The principle here is that mission is best imparted to others through modeling.* Missions are a lifestyle. It revolves around passion, commitment, resolve and many other intangible values. A lifestyle is best transferred from person to person through modeling. It is the biblical pattern for transferring our faith

from parents to children (Deut. 6). Modeling is the most effective way of transferring mission vision from one person to another.

There are a number of ways a church can expose its people to good mission models. I know missionaries who are not good public speakers, but who are very effective in small group home meetings. When you think of it, short term missions is effective when participants rub shoulders with missionaries and nationals. Some of the ways to expose people to good mission models are through the pastor who can model a World Christian attitude to the congregation, or missionaries and Third World leaders can be brought into Sunday School meetings, home meetings, conferences etc.. Mission committee members and mission leadership can model a World Christian attitude to others wherever they are. Conferences can expose church leaders and members. Churches can mentor other churches in world missions. Note that good mission models always have at least three characteristics of compassion, competence, and consistency.

### **Dynamic #7: Contextualization**

*This dynamic relates missions to contemporary audiences.* Contextualization is an important mission concept that needs to be applied in Borneo but also in Burbank. However, for all intents and purposes, I believe the mission community violates contextualization when it comes to mobilizing churches in missions. Until recently, the mission industry in North America has largely been the concern of the pre-baby boom generation. We are facing a major crisis in the next few years because Christian baby boomers and busters have shown little interest in missions as it has been presented.

Jerry Nelson, the missions pastor at College Avenue Baptist Church in San Diego, told me recently that 85% of his mission budget comes from people

over 55 years old. And this is a boomer-buster church! The "graying" of the mission program in churches is a strong trend across the nation, that many churches are only recently seeing.

Unless we begin to look at the boomers and busters as genuine sub-cultures with distinctive values and assumptions and begin to re-engineer our methods and communication techniques in terms of their culture, missions will become increasingly marginalized in the North American Church. In the words of the apostle Paul, we should seriously consider: "I became a Baby Boomer in order that I might win the Baby Boomers." The dramatic contrast in the backgrounds and values of these two generations have greatly expanded the traditional "generation gap" between them. The information age is adding additional complexities to the different ways these two generations view and interact with the world.

The mission community has been slow to take this gap seriously. I believe we need to apply a missionary perspective and strategy to this problem. We need to analyze the boomers as we would any other culture and develop appropriate strategy, methodology and techniques accordingly. The mission community is dominated by the pre-boomer values of loyalty, duty and responsibility. These values helped this generation to excel during the Great Depression and World War II. We are greatly indebted to the accomplishments and values of this past generation. But to use those values to mobilize missions to the boomers and busters is to appeal to their weaknesses rather than their strengths. It just doesn't work. I suggest three expressed values that are particularly effective in relating missions to boomers and busters.

The first value is the idea of personal success. This value has evolved as the "pig in a python" generation has grown up. The hippies of the sixties said that personal success was "changing the establishment." As their dreams unraveled

during the seventies this value turned into materialism. Now, in the nineties, the boomers are re-evaluating what success is all about. The status symbol in the eighties was the BMW, in the nineties it is a job! Boomers are realizing that life in the fast lane was not all it was cracked up to be. We have an opportunity to help them find true success!

As Christians we know that ultimate success, significance and fulfillment are found only in God. If God is a missionary God, then our significance can be found in participating in God's global cause. In the words of Jim Elliot, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, in order to gain what he cannot lose." We want to help boomers see that there is no greater cause for their lives than world evangelization!

The second boomer value is the importance of fun, challenge, and adventure. Boomers have expressed this value in entrepreneurship, hedonism and risk taking. Can we find a biblical expression to this and a substitute for this value? Hebrews 12:2 says "Jesus, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross..." The omniscient God-Man, when he set his face like flint toward Jerusalem, knowing exactly what he would be facing, did it for the joy of it. Certainly, obedience was an important part of the picture but don't forget the joy!

There is one common trait I have found among missionaries. They love what they do! In my own experience as a missionary in Guatemala, my family and I experienced fear, depression, lice, worms and an endless list of discomforts and sacrifices. But we all look back at those years as truly the greatest in

our lives. For there is no joy compared to the pleasure of being a part of what God is doing and wants done. When we participate with God in his global cause, the nations get the gospel, God gets the glory and we get the joy. That is a great arrangement!

The third value is personal auton-

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omy. This value is very important in understanding how to manage boomers and busters, leading them to get them involved in missions. The pre-boomer generation functioned generally under a hierarchical management structure. That worked well because loyalty, duty and responsibility were their expressed values. The boomers and busters, however, respond better to participatory management. Therefore it is important to give as much authority to them, along with the responsibility. If we involve the boomers and busters in planning for missions, they will be more interested in its implementation!

The pre-boomers had the attitude, give me a job, it doesn't matter what it is. The boomers want a job that fits their gifts and experience. Boomers need to be taken on a "niche hunt," helping them find their gifts and place. The apostle Paul alluded to this when he said that the foot should not do what the

hand was made to do, etc.

We do not know the "ins and outs" of what world missions will look like as carried out by boomers and busters. But I do know that it will be different than it has in the past. Some of us have the privilege of being paradigm pioneers. I believe with all my heart that boomers and busters will play a key role in declaring God's glory to every nation on the face of the earth. The North American Church has the gift of entrepreneurship and the ability of sharing it with the global Body of Christ. It is my conviction and hope that entrepreneurial boomers and busters, partnering with the Third World missionary force, will finish the task of world evangelization in this generation by AD 2000, or soon there after. So may it be to God's glory!

#### Footnotes

1. The "Perspectives Course", *The 4000 Year Connection*, by Don Richardson and *Destination 2000* by Bob Sjogren are examples of proven resources for believers nurturing a biblical world view by demonstrating the centrality of missions to Scripture.
2. The best source I have found for developing organizational vision is a book by Aubrey Malphurs, *Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century*. It explains how to develop vision in a very practical step by step approach.

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