

# MISSIONNEWS

THE MASTER'S MISSION    A MISSIONS JOURNAL FOR PASTORS AND ELDERS    FEBRUARY, 1999

## Recovering True Partnership Between Churches and Mission Ministries

by David Blackney

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### Getting Beyond the Tension

Welcome to our second issue of *MISSIONNEWS: A Journal for Pastors and Mission Leaders*. Our first issue was well received and we appreciate your feedback. It is our desire at **The Master's Mission** to encourage biblical thinking and then appropriate actions in doing cross-cultural ministries. While we are a missionary agency, we believe the responsibility for fulfilling the missions mandate is given by God to the local church. We exist as an agency to assist local congregations in those evangelistic tasks that take them beyond their local areas. We seek to do this in a number of ways and we want this 'commitment to serve' to be more than just 'worn out rhetoric.' We are very much aware of the strained relationships between churches and mission agencies and missionaries. As Michael Griffiths notes:

"They have not divorced each other, but frequently they seem estranged, formal, and failing to communicate with each other. Like nagging wives the missionary societies complain that the churches are not supplying them with enough men or enough money. For their part, on the other hand, the churches, like disappointed husbands, complain that the missionary societies have become jaded and unattractive. How have we got ourselves into such a mess?"<sup>1</sup>

A recent experience further illustrates this tension. I was invited to preach for a church following the resignation of their senior pastor. For several months a different speaker filled their pulpit each week. After the service a church member told my host that they were disappointed when I was introduced as another mission representative. But they went on to say they were delighted when I actually brought a message from God's Word instead of giving another missions "info-commercial"!

Our departure from the Word of God does disappoint our members who hunger for the message that alone is sufficient to reconcile men to a Holy



God. The perception among many is that mission agencies are selling something most 'consumers' don't want. Too many good mission agencies and churches have been sidetracked from effective ministry by departing from the Scriptures in their *methodology* of church growth and evangelism. They still subscribe in principle to the authority and inerrancy of the Bible, but in practice they function as if the principles found there for directing missions ministries are for another day and time. They have embraced all manner of ways to promote, fund, and conduct missions ministries. This departure is the explanation for the tension that has developed.

Much of modern evangelicalism finds itself adopting methods of ministry which reflect the mind set and methodology of the world rather than the patterns laid down in Scripture. After describing this condition Michael Horton commented:

"As the lines [between the church and the world] continue to blur, a crisis looms on the near horizon. The church must be reminded that, when the text of Scripture is no longer regulating her doctrine, life, and worship, her authority and power, which is grounded in the Gospel of Christ revealed in Scripture, will soon be lost."<sup>2</sup>

We would also argue that when the Scriptures no longer regulate the missions ministries conducted by the local church, that loss of authority and power is already evident in her ineffectiveness in fulfilling the Great Commission. As our effectiveness diminishes, a scramble ensues for a better marketing strategy, a better user-friendly approach, and worst of all, ministry reports that are more fluff than substance. Disillusionment and discouragement are inevitable. There must be a better way! Indeed there is. As Horton noted,

"Psychology, sociology, marketing, politics, and all other secular disciplines have to take a backseat **when we are forming our view** of God, ourselves, and the meaning of life and history, salvation, and the nature, purpose, and **methods** of church growth, worship, and evangelism." (emphasis added)<sup>3</sup>

We must return to the principles of Scripture. We have confidence in their inspiration, now we must return to confidence in their application.

This issue of *MISSIONNEWS* focuses on biblical guidelines that, when appropriated, will move our churches to the joy we see demonstrated in the churches of the New Testament.

Those first churches, like many of us, were slow to re-

spond to Christ's commission to go. In fact it took persecution to really get them going (Acts 8:1,4 with 11:19-26). But as they went, they preached the Word and God gave the increase. As we watch them take steps of obedience in spreading the gospel in their world we can learn valuable principles which can also direct us today. In these events we see disclosed the role and responsibilities of the local church and its leadership in spreading the Gospel. We also witness the attendant joy that characterized their church life. When that joy is restored, missions will cease to be viewed in adversarial ways.

There are two critical but uncommon steps churches should pursue in seeking to obey our Lord's command.

### **An Active Role in Finding Missionaries**

First, the church must reclaim her role in confirming and sending those whom the Spirit calls to ministry. This involves the church or its leadership once again taking an active role in recruiting others to serve in missions. We see both happening in the book of Acts.

In Acts 13, we see that the elders of the church in Antioch were sensitive to the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit. So as the Holy Spirit called Saul and Barnabas to a "different work", the elders of the Antioch church collectively confirmed that call in their lives. Saul and Barnabas were already serving in the church in Antioch, and were demonstrating their qualifications in their ministries before the Lord.

We see the church, through its leaders, always taking the initiative in the sending of missionaries. You don't find the "volunteer system" so common today. It was the leaders who confirmed the call of the Spirit in Saul and Barnabas. It was the Jerusalem congregation that sent Barnabas to Antioch in the first place (Acts 11:22). And in turn it was Barnabas who sought out Saul to join him in ministry there (11:25-26). The Antioch church sent Barnabas and Saul with their benevolent gift to the elders in Jerusalem (11:30). We

*Church members more readily support those whom they know and whom they have seen in the service of the Lord.*



see that Timothy had the endorsement of the brethren when Paul enlisted him in the ministry (16:2).

In missions today, the pattern is usually for our young people at college to be recruited and encouraged to consider missions by having them attend a mandatory Mission Emphasis Week or by sending them to regional mission conferences. The appeal is sent out for them to give missions a serious consideration. Some do and for that we are grateful. The stark reality is that the number of mission volunteers generated by these conferences is not meeting the requests that are coming from the field. Not only are there too few candidates being generated, but often they are volunteering to fill positions that are not the most pressing. Each parachurch agency or denominational mission board will tell you that their number one request from the field that goes unmanned is for church planters, those who are gifted in establishing and growing new congregations. What is the answer? Some would suggest it is to have more conferences on more campuses, with stronger appeals. We believe the only solution that will actually meet the current need is a return to the notion that each congregation should and can identify their best couples, who then could be trained to go. We are also convinced this is the way that most honors God.

As pastors we all know the weakness of the volunteer system as we seek to fill ministry opportunities in our own congregations. We would much rather approach those that we are convinced are gifted and most suited to serve in the specific capacity being considered. Most of us have had the uncomfortable experience of dealing with and trying to train the unsuitable volunteer in those situations in which we gave in to making a general appeal for help. And how does this type of desperate appeal for service honor God who deserves our best? It is the same with missions. Candidates that are first groomed and identified as they function in the local ministries will have the confidence and encouragement of their fellow members, as well as the basic experience they will need in starting a new ministry that is an extension of their home church. Church members more readily support those whom they know and whom they have seen in the service of the Lord. The New Testament pattern was to draft those who were active in ministry to go elsewhere to serve. Yet today most churches don't see their role as actively looking among their membership for those families that God could use to extend the witness of their church to other areas. Most look to mission agencies or denominational boards to educate, recruit, and plan for cross-cultural ministries. The unfortunate result has been churches that view missions not as an integral part of what they are doing in their service to the Lord but as a secondary and somewhat optional endeavor to take up if the interest is there or if

an opportunity presents itself. Mission requests are often viewed as unwanted competitors for limited local funds rather than a partnership that they initiated characterized by the rich fellowship described by New Testament *κοινωνία* (Phil. 1:3-5).

### A Different Approach in Funding Missions

The second critical step involves a different approach in funding missions. Done God's way, missions is a partnership of love and joy. Sacrifices are not burdensome. The pattern in the New Testament is different from the 'begging' which we have come to think is a regular part of missions. The 'begging' is still there, but it goes in the opposite direction. Instead of churches being barraged by constant pleas for money from missionaries who have been taught pressure tactics to get funds, we see congregations and individuals asking for the privilege to be included in the ministry. Paul records the spirit of the churches of Macedonia: "I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, *begging us with much entreaty* for the favor of participation in the support of the saints" (2 Cor. 8:3-4). And it should be noted that Paul never demanded or presumed on the support of the churches. While he had the right to assume that they would support the ministries God called him to, he surrendered that right often and worked with his hands to support himself. Other churches repeatedly supported his work by sending gifts. His letter to the Philippian church tells of his appreciation for their partnership. There he acknowledges their help: "And you yourselves also know, Philipians that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs." (Phil. 4:15-16). He went on to teach them that their gift was an acceptable sacrifice, and well pleasing to the Lord, a gift that increased the profit to their account before God. And this is why as pastors we should be at the forefront of leading our churches to take an active role in missions. They are the ones who will benefit spiritually as they mature and are used of God to extend the gospel. And our goal here is not just for them to find a purpose for 'self-fulfillment' or for them to 'feel' better about themselves, but rather that this is the kind of living that honors God. This is the walk that is worthy of our calling. The idea of doing missions transcends the realm of duty to one of joy and enthusiasm when churches are funding ministries they have initiated. They serve and sacrifice because they want to, not because of pressure or guilt imposed upon them.

Beyond finding adequate numbers of career missionaries and a return to the joy of real *κοινωνία* the



wisdom of church leaders taking the initiative in finding and funding their own mission endeavors can be seen in many other ways:

- It is consistent with their responsibility to guide the ministries of the flock to which they have been entrusted.
- They are in a better position than an agency to discern the direction God will take them.
- They know the giftedness and weaknesses of their candidates and can direct their discipling and training for mutually agreed upon objectives.
- They alone have been given the responsibility to maintain doctrinal integrity. They will have the assurance that the missionary they send will not undercut the truths they hold dear.
- Trust and confidence has already been established with their missionary when questions arise concerning which ministries to conduct on the receiving field.

### What Then Should Be the Role of the Mission Agency?

Mission agencies can encourage the churches to return to a biblical philosophy of missions both in message and methodology. They can pray for the churches to seek the

Holy Spirit's guidance in determining the ones He would have them set apart. Mission agencies can assist the churches in sending out the members whom they have set apart to the work to which God has called them.

The agency can help them with evaluating their candidate families. They can provide the special training that may be necessary for them before they go to the field. They can assist them in finding the right location and in the logistics of getting there. The agency should be able to provide a wider base of counsel and experience to guide their decision-making as needed. In times of political upheaval, the agency can assist the congregation in contingency plans.

But the agency should never get in the way of, or take away the joy that comes from the direct partnership a congregation finds when fulfilling its responsibilities before God. Those churches that have sent "one of their own" know that the blessings that come from that partnership are irreplaceable.

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1. Michael Griffiths, *Get Your Church Involved in Missions*, Overseas Mission Fellowship, Singapore, reprinted, 1990, 5.
  2. Michael Horton, in "Recovering the Plumb Line", *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, John H. Armstrong, General Editor, Moody Press, 1996, 246.
  3. *Ibid.*, 252.

## How to Get Started in Sending One of Your Own

- **Lead the church family to begin praying that the Lord of the Harvest will send out one of their own. (Mat 9:36-38)**
- **Teach the privilege of going.**
- **Help parents to be consistent with their convictions on missions when it comes down to the sending of their children and grandchildren.**
- **Challenge those in mid-life to evaluate their eternal investments. Could the church 'draft' some who have demonstrated elder qualifications to do ministry beyond the local church? Others may need encouragement to make adjustments in their current investment strategies to support missions in the sending of one of their own.**
- **Educate your children and youth concerning missions.**
- **Identify and groom promising youth and young couples for missions (have a "hit list").**
- **Trust God to direct your youth and young families while doing the above (don't pressure).**

Jim Teasdale, TMM board member and missionary to Kenya, emphasized the importance of challenging our own to answer the call to career missions in the closing scene of The Master's Mission's video, **So Send I You**. He said:

*"Mission ministry is one of the greatest things in which you can be involved in your life. People say, 'Well, as a missionary you sacrifice so many things'. And we have our war stories that we tell when we are on furlough, in the churches. And yet we have to realize that we are having the time of our life. In our American churches—in our churches from societies that have a Judeo-Christian tradition—we are doing our young people a disservice when we don't challenge them to serve the Lord full time. We all need to have that zeal for Christ at home—that commitment to share his Word, that commitment to share Christ with those that don't know Him. But at the same time we do need from our local church bodies those who will go out and take the gospel to the ends of the earth. We need to also encourage our young people—help them understand that this is a life that is challenging, that is rewarding, that is exciting, and that has eternal consequences."*

# Helps for Mission Committees

Our churches have long been inundated with the good. Requests abound for good causes and programs designed to meet needs. But as someone once said, "the good can become the enemy of the best." With limited local church resources and the pressing need to discern what is the best expenditure of the monies entrusted to its care, the church too often follows inadequate steps in the allocation of its funds. Often the "pet projects", the "squeaky wheels" or the "first come—first served" mentality quickly eats up the budget allocated for the small amount of ministries a church can afford to do. A missions committee with qualified members can ensure good stewardship of the Lord's resources. They have been charged with the task of developing and implementing an effective philosophy of local ministries and missions outreach guided by the Scripture. Answering the following questions can help them in their work:

## QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE:

- Have we established our convictions from Scripture that will guide our thinking concerning our philosophy of ministry here and missions ministries there?
- How do we define evangelism, conversion, church? What does it take to have a church? How will we structure accountability and define faithfulness?
- Do the missions committee's responsibilities involve both oversight and service functions for your missionaries?
- What qualifications are required to serve on the missions committee?
- Who has the Scriptural responsibility to oversee those who serve in missions?
- Are we responding to appeals only or are we looking to see where God is at work in our midst?
- How can we insure that our youth programs support our philosophy of missions?

*While missionary biographies and contemporary missions journals can inform us, the missions committee should be good Bereans in insisting that all the policies they adopt are consistent with Scripture.*

## QUESTIONS FOR POTENTIAL MINISTRIES SEEKING SUPPORT:

- Are the individuals proven in leadership? What is their track record in the ministry of discipling others?
- Are they involved in the lives of the national people or are they in an enclave of mission personnel?
- Do they speak the language? Are their wives involved with the people through their homes?
- Are they doctrinally compatible with our statements of faith and understanding of biblical truth?
- How will they report to us on their activities? To whom will they give an accounting of their funds?
- Do they want to get to know us and help us fulfill our missions responsibilities or do they simply want our funds?

## ONCE A PARTNERSHIP IS ESTABLISHED WITH A MISSIONARY FAMILY:

- How will we keep the congregation informed? How will we strengthen the relationship between our church family and the missionary family?
- How often will we visit them on the field? Who should go and who will pay for these trips?
- How will we assist our missionary during furlough times? How can we have him serve through our church when he is home?
- How will we determine their financial support? How much of their support can we contribute? How will we receive these funds? (individual gifts, a faith promise budget, a % of the general budget or budget \$ amount, a combination, etc.)



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# Resources That Can Aid in Implementing a Biblical Philosophy of Missions

*A Biblical Philosophy of Missions* — a booklet which outlines various issues in missions practice today and evaluates them from a biblical perspective and suggests alternatives.

*So Send I You* — missions video, shows the importance of proper training for missionaries and how this training prepares them for fruitful service on the field.

*A Biblical Philosophy of Missions Church Seminar* — conducted by TMM staff for church leaders and/or the congregation. Presents helps for both mission committees and leaders in the church as well as the congregation to rediscover the joy of doing missions God's way.

Call 1-800-419-8618 to order or schedule any of these resources — there are no costs to the church.



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