



Common Ground Journal

Perspectives on the Church in the 21st Century

Volume 4 Number 2 – Spring 2007

ISSN: 1547-9129

To Change the World: The Social and Political Impact of the Gospel

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Volume 4 Number 2 – Spring 2007
ISSN: 1547-9129

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303 Vine Avenue
Park Ridge, IL 60068-4143 USA

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<http://www.commongroundjournal.org>

e-Printed in the United States of America

Mission Statement

An Online, Open-Access, International Journal

Common Ground Journal (CGJ) is a publication of the CanDoSpirit Network, Inc. and is published twice annually as a resource for Christian congregations seeking to understand and faithfully live out their calling as the people of God in the world. The primary audience for CGJ is thoughtful Christians in congregations who are catalysts for growth within their own churches.

CGJ is devoted to the development of strong, faithful churches whose life and ministry grow out of the church's nature as the people of God. They are organized and led in a manner consistent with their nature and mission. They continually ask, "What does it mean to be a sign of the Kingdom of God in the world today?"

CGJ is a resource for congregational development. We invite scholars and thoughtful Christians in congregations around the world to stimulate inquiry, reflection and action around issues central to the life and ministry of the gathered community of faith. We invite those who serve as leaders in congregations, mission agencies, parachurch organizations, relief and development work, higher education, and non-traditional leadership development to apply their scholarship and expertise in these fields to the context of the local church. We encourage members of congregations to address the broader church with insights grounded in a thoughtful examination of Scripture, and in their own experiences as part of communities of faith in the world.

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The *Common Ground Journal* welcomes articles from scholars and discerning Christians. Each issue will feature invited articles around a theme, as well as articles received through open submissions. Open submission articles are reviewed by members of the Editorial Review Committee who make recommendations to the editor regarding their publication.

General Guidelines

Common Ground Journal seeks to stimulate Christian Churches to thoughtful action around their calling to be the people of God in the world. All articles should be grounded both in theology and the life of the church. Writers are encouraged to write to and about their own cultures and contexts. CGJ invites submissions in the following categories:

- Articles that stimulate thinking and reflection on the nature of the Church
- Articles that link the nature of the Church to its life and work in the world

- Articles that explore the integration of theology and social sciences in relation to life and work of the Church
- Essays on truths gleaned from the interplay of theory and practice, theology and experience in the active life of faith
- Articles that present insights from congregations attempting to live out their identity as the people of God in world
- Articles based on responsible qualitative research designed to inform a local congregation's understanding of its life and ministry
- Articles that raise questions that the Christian community needs to explore in becoming the people of God in the world
- Reviews of books, journals, programs, web sites and related resources

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Common Ground Journal submission guidelines and protocols are based on the need of meeting web design standards that are compatible across multiple versions of both current and legacy web browsers. Please follow the standards carefully when submitting documents for consideration for online publication in the *Common Ground Journal*. Documents to be considered for publication should be e-mailed to the editor at: editor@commongroundjournal.org.

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The best articles are clear and focused, developing a single thesis with examples and application. The successful writer translates complex ideas into everyday language without talking down to the readers. All articles should use inclusive language.

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A “Bibliography” of works cited should be included at the end of the article. A “Recommended Reading” list or “For Further Study” list may also be included. Documents to be considered for publication should be submitted according to the following style protocols:

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Readers are encouraged to respond to articles published in the *Common Ground Journal*. This can be done in two ways. Formal responses to articles and themes or editorial matters may be submitted to the editor via e-mail or postal mail (see *Contact Information* below). Responses may be edited for length.

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From the Editor

By Linda M. Cannell

Cannell, Linda M. 2007. From the Editor. *Common Ground Journal* v4 n2 (Spring): 8-11. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

To Change the World: The Social and Political Impact of the Gospel

Christians have different perspectives related to the social and political impact of the Gospel. For some, it mandates social responsibility; for others, the troubles of this world don't in light of the Lord's coming and; for others, there has to be a certain quota of suffering and disaster to prompt the Lord's return. Some see themselves as holding the line against evil while we wait; others see the need to be more militant, venturing out to attack evil on every front possible.

This series was proposed in conjunction with the Ward Consultation in Brazil in September '06. Leaders from different Christian organizations, nonformal education initiatives, universities, churches, seminaries, and NGO's gathered to engage the question of why the church in Brazil hasn't been more effective in addressing poverty, violence, corruption, and immorality. There was no desire to fashion some sort of quasi political action group, but rather to think together about why the church wasn't more engaged. In this context, two primary issues surfaced that are probably common in many countries and contexts. (1) To make a difference, the need for some sort of interaction with local government and the social service agencies was acknowledged; but most expressed a deep distrust of government and pessimism that effective collaboration was possible. (2) Although most at the Consultation were involved in social engagement, very few knew each other or collaborated across organizational and denominational lines. This factor is, in part, due to the great distances in Brazil, but there is also distrust and competition for resources among Christian groups and churches.

To shift the focus, we invited the mayor of the local city, and also Dr. Javier Comboni, a world class economist and formerly finance minister for Bolivia¹ to speak to the issue from their experiences in government. While not denying that there can be corruption in any sector of society, including the church, these politicians indicated that

¹ His article appears in this issue.

many government leaders don't even consider the church as an option when seeking ways to help society! With such pessimism on both sides of the divide, it is no wonder why productive engagement in issues of mutual concern is hindered. Dr. Comboni's article is a call for leadership. He brings a unique perspective because of his experience as a change agent for an entire country.

Laurie Bailey, editor of the *Common Ground Journal*, asked these questions in the call for papers for this issue: Should we expect to see society change if individuals are being truly transformed? What hinders such change? Most of the articles deal with aspects of these questions; but we acknowledge that the complexity inherent in the questions is not fully addressed in this issue. Can these questions be answered? At a simple level, yes. We should expect to see society change if individuals are being transformed. We should expect to see Christians reaching out to those in need; and we do. We should expect to see churches making a difference; and we do. However, in every age, the problems of the world seem to overwhelm the good. Perhaps the image of the mustard seed is apt as we consider the challenges that will confront the church in every age until the day the Lord returns.

Many years ago, as a student, I became exercised about reaching out to needy people in society. I was young and idealistic and looking for a great cause. I had already determined that I would become a medical doctor and give my life to transform some continent or other. I left the dormitory late one night to walk and plan out my great cause on behalf of the world's needy. The squeak of the wheels barely registered as a lone woman pushed a shopping cart past me loaded with everything she owned in the world. I didn't "see" this woman who lived on the streets of Toronto. I was too busy telling the Lord that if he gave me a great mission I would see it through. As Ted Ward has observed, 'telling God how' is a persistent temptation in life and in missionary service. As I reached the end of the street, I suddenly realized what I had done. I had missed the opportunity to individualize and humanize mission. I turned to look for her; to go after her to apologize for not even acknowledging the presence of another *person*. I could have talked with her about her life on the streets; done something to break through habitual suspicion and distrust. I may not have been able to 'fix' her situation, but I should have connected with her as one human being to another. But she was gone. I have never forgotten that incident. Perhaps, there is only one decision that needs to be made as we

read through the articles in this issue: in what way is *this* transformed believer seeking to make a difference in my immediate environment?

The rest of the articles in this issue deal with different aspects of mission. As I read the articles on best practices, trends, and intercession, I reflected that the primary issue is not ministry/missionary training. Rather, the issue seems to be empowering men and women to make a difference and then helping them to identify those areas of training that become apparent *as they are serving*. *Preparing* people for mission or engagement in the world is a 20th century idea. Most of our educational energy is spent in preparation for some *future* activity or role. With concern increasing that much learning and responsible action are not as connected as we like to believe, and that much learning is discovered to be inadequate in the face of service in the world, leaders from nearly every sector of society are rethinking the notion of preparation and formal training. I read a book this week: *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed*. (Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton. Random House Canada, 2006). It recounts stories of men and women in several countries who have made a difference in society. In most cases, they could be your next door neighbor or mine. They were simply men and women who saw one thing that was not right, and they took action. From these stories, the authors discern principles for those they identify as social innovators. It is a book of hope.

“[Hope] is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.” – Valclav Havel

In this 21st century, just what is it that men and women need to know and practice as they accept responsible service in this troubled world? What level of personal responsibility do we look for as we come alongside the people of God? To what extent is theological learning for the whole people of God as we seek to be involved in God’s mission in the world? What will characterize best practices for the church and mission in the 21st century? What are the trends that give us hope? What is the nature of our prayer for oppressed nations?

Linda M. Cannell, Guest Editor
April 2007

Due to a family illness Laurie Bailey has taken a leave of absence from her responsibilities as Editor of the *Common Ground Journal*. For the next several issues, we will invite guests to organize the articles in relation to the themes selected for each issue.

About the Guest Editor



Linda Cannell is currently Lois W. Bennett Distinguished Professor of Educational Ministries at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. She is also the Director of the *CanDoSpirit Network: An International Community of Support for Christian Leaders*.

About the Editor



Laurie D. Bailey is editor of *Common Ground Journal*. She has over 25 years experience in Christian education and congregational development. She is involved in theological education and leadership development internationally through CanDoSpirit Network, Inc.

In Memory of Dr. Paul G. Hiebert

By Charles Cook

Cook, Charles. 2007. In Memory of Dr. Paul G. Hiebert. *Common Ground Journal* v4 n2 (Spring): 12-13. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

This morning I was informed that my good friend and mentor Dr. Paul G. Hiebert succumbed to his battle with lung cancer. After hearing the news I went back to my study and pulled down a number of his books and browsed through their pages. I was again reminded of *Paul's great insight and wisdom which he shared so capably and humbly*. In my mind, Paul was the *quintessential Christian scholar!* He had a remarkable ability to *generate theory and engage his students in its application*. Paul was indeed *a godly gentleman and a scholar!* On both accounts he showed the way to those of us who were privileged to *study under him or live with him*.

While I grieve the loss of a remarkable friend and mentor; I simultaneously celebrate with the angels the homecoming of a friend who ran the race with grace and finished well! He is now part of that "*great cloud of witnesses*" that spurs me on to follow his example of faithful service to God. Christ's victory over death gives hope of a future reunion and Paul's "*home going*" adds one more major attraction to heaven!

So how does one recapture Paul Hiebert's life? Well, *the truth is no one really recaptures him for another...* since each of us was touched by him in personal and unique ways. All of us who knew him have our own personal "*Paul Hiebert memories*." Yet, as I leaf through the last two decades where my life entwined with his, *there are common themes, remarkable aspects to Paul's life that I suspect that all who knew him would affirm to be true*. Paul was an uncommon man. A man who I grew to love and appreciate and who I was privileged to call my friend!

Obituary

The Rev. Dr. Paul G. Hiebert, missiologist and missionary to India, has died of cancer on March 11, 2007 at the age of 74. After six years of service as a missionary under the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions, Hiebert earned a doctoral degree in cultural anthropology, and taught for some years in secular universities. Subsequently, he taught missions and anthropology at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California (1977-1990) and at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Highland Park, Illinois (1990-2007).

A prolific writer, Hiebert has published more than 150 articles and 10 books. His colleagues will remember him for his efforts to bring the insights and skills of anthropology to the theory and practice of Christian mission, and for his contribution to the critical realist approach to epistemology. His students will remember him for his generosity, and for his care and concern for them as people.

Hiebert was a loving husband, father and grandfather. His wife, Frances Flaming Hiebert, died in 1999. His parents, also missionaries to India, were John Nicholas Christian Hiebert and Anna Jungas Hiebert. He is survived by his sisters, Phyllis Martens, Elizabeth Dahl, Gwendolyn Schroth, JoAnne Sorensen, Margaret Hiebert, and Loey Knapp; his three children and their spouses, Eloise and Michael Meneses, Barbara and Bryan Rowe, and John and Jane Hiebert-White; and by his grandchildren, Bria Hiebert-Crape and Dan Aulisio, Holly and David Metzler, Andrew Meneses, Mary and Nicholas Hiebert-White.

His family will remember him for the following things among many others: playing rough and tumble with kids, enjoying family camping, celebrating all events at Chinese restaurants, happily eating hot curry till dripping with sweat, traveling so much he could hardly be found ('Where's Dad?'), doodling on styrofoam cups, being an honorary member of his sisters' Red Hat Society, and faithfully having family devotions.



In Loving Memory

Paul G. Hiebert

Trends in Global Mission

By Peter Greer and Dave Larson

Greer, Peter, and Dave Larson. 2007. Trends in Global Mission. *Common Ground Journal* v4 n2 (Spring): 14-22. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

One year ago, national interest was piqued when the *Wall Street Journal* published an article detailing the departure of Bruce Wilkinson from his own recently-created organization, Dream for Africa. In the spirit of his two popular texts, *The Prayer of Jabez* and *The Dream Giver*, Dr. Wilkinson's dream had been heartfelt and bold. Wilkinson had wanted to create a massive compound that would be part orphanage, part bed-and-breakfast, and part theme park for 10,000 Swazi AIDS orphans. On the project's website, Wilkinson says he followed his heart to the African nation of Swaziland, and few doubt that his desire to help was genuine. At the same time, few who know Africa were surprised by this ambitious project's utter collapse.

Dr. Wilkinson's withdrawal evoked the scorn of some, yet for the many who share a concern for the crises plaguing Africa, a more appropriate response might be heartache and sympathy. Dr. Wilkinson took huge risks and made enormous personal sacrifices. For that, one must admire him.

In addition, however, one must recognize that this African endeavor is not the first of its kind to fail. This realization prods us to seek a larger framework within which to view such tragedies. We see that this project exemplified a number of disturbing trends in global missions. The failure can be seen as the natural outgrowth of the following four:

Trend One: Do-It-Yourself Missions

Thankfully, Bruce Wilkinson is hardly alone in feeling called to make a difference in a hurting place. God created his followers to have hearts of compassion that mirror his own heart. Thus, as children crafted in God's image, it is natural and right to feel pain when we see egregious injustices such as one million AIDS orphans or children with bellies distended from hunger. Moreover, it pleases God when we want to do something that will convert our sympathy to concrete action. But we must exercise prudence. Our first reaction may be to book a flight to Haiti, India, or Swaziland and

engage in direct ministry to those in need. Our first impulse, however, may not always be the best option.

It is encouraging to see increasing numbers of Christ-followers taking up their God-given call to “go and make disciples of all nations” and to “love one another deeply.” Those new to overseas missions bring with them an irreplaceable sense of passion and enthusiasm that may have diminished in some seasoned missions veterans. Certainly they have something of great value to contribute. But while the breakdown of the dichotomy between missionaries and “other Christians” is exciting in many ways, some of its recent manifestations have been troubling.

Certainly the average individual is not qualified to pick up a scalpel and serve in medical missions without first receiving in-depth medical training. Likewise, then, should we not question whether most churches and their members are qualified to tackle the complex work of community development or other forms of missions—without first gaining an understanding of the country, the people, cross-cultural communication principles, and effective missions strategies?

Churches and individuals are increasingly bypassing—and even disdain—traditional “experts” from mission’s agencies, development groups, and others with experience. When they step off the plane, newcomers do bring enthusiasm and energy, but often they also come with a number of misconceptions and naïve assumptions. Those who have not done their homework often believe that change will come easily once they share their novel ideas with the host country. Frequently, they are mistaken. Many newcomers also believe that with good intentions it is impossible to do harm. This erroneous conception can be particularly damaging.

One community in Rwanda experienced the devastating effects of a church’s good intentions when an egg disbursement program failed. For one year this U.S.-based church distributed free eggs to a Rwandan community. In that year, egg vendors and chicken breeders were forced to close their businesses because they could not make a profit. The following year when the church discontinued the egg giveaways, the community members could not buy eggs because the vendors and producers had been driven out. Though the Rwandan families had a plethora of eggs for one year, their nutrition suffered thereafter. Where a development professional would have anticipated the long-term detrimental effects of the free egg distribution, an enthusiastic church saw

only the short-term good. Where a professional would have considered the local markets, producers, and long-term viability of the assistance, those eager to help rushed in and caused harm.

Trend Two: Do Your Own Thing

A close corollary to the first trend is the desire to “do one’s own thing.” This stems from many of the same Western characteristics as the desire to “do it oneself.” This trend manifests itself in many ways; for example, when we duplicate efforts and take questionable risks by establishing new ministries instead of working with those that are highly effective and proven. While an entrepreneurial spirit and innovative ideas are certainly welcome on the mission field, we must question whether our efforts and resources could often be put to better use by partnering with an established, successful ministry.

In our culture, we seek personal achievement, recognition, and rewards. Our competitive nature drives us to be star players—not team players—often resulting in duplicated efforts, wasted resources, and ineffective ministries. Dr. Wilkinson, for example, is a man of vast talents and resources who could have contributed greatly to many existing organizations. Instead, he began his own project, resulting in disappointment for him and for those who had rallied behind it.

In many ways, it was the imposition of such individualism on a collectivistic culture that doomed the effort. Dr. Wilkinson’s project required large tracts of land, yet unlike in the United States or other more individualistic societies, land in Swaziland is traditionally owned communally. Additionally, Dr. Wilkinson’s plan to help Swazi orphans involved uprooting the children from their native villages and moving them to one central community. If the United States struggled with an epidemic of orphaned children, this approach may have worked. However, in Swaziland most orphans are far from abandoned. Normally, extended families or other social networks care for orphaned children, and entire communities rally to support them. Although the number of AIDS orphans in Swaziland is unprecedented and requires a large scale effort, a more successful approach might have involved working with local families to help them increase their capacity to meet this pressing need. Removing children from this extensive support network could be more devastating than beneficial.

We also do our own thing when we act without first seeking and heeding constructive criticism and helpful suggestions from both local populations and resident mission's practitioners. In humility we must come first and foremost as listeners and learners. We cannot go into a culture with the arrogant notion that we have all the answers and nothing to learn.

One visitor to Africa recently gave \$55 to a woman begging on the street. A seasoned practitioner asked how many of her friends would quit their jobs and productive activities and join her in begging. "I had to give it to her," he replied. "The Holy Spirit told me to." This man felt called to action, but by local standards, he had just given the woman more than two weeks of income that others were struggling to earn. In two weeks, she would beg again, but in the meantime, how many who heard of her fortuitous encounter would lose their incentive to work?

While those of us just entering a country may have limited perspectives, local churches often have a more developed vision of the most effective and needed forms of assistance. In Rwanda, for example, the Anglican Church has established a savings-led microfinance ministry. Realizing that they are effective ministers to the Rwandan population but not experts in microfinance, the Church contacted HOPE International, a U.S.-based ministry committed to ministering Christ's love through microfinance, for technical support. In a letter addressed to HOPE International, a Rwandan church leader expressed his desire to form a true partnership—not the sort where a foreign ministry partners with the church only long enough to advance its own agenda. In a true partnership, we enter as servants, committed for the long-term and prepared to listen and respond to the concerns of the local population.

Trend Three: Too Much, Too Soon

Some have said that Americans have a love affair with grandiosity, but a love of grandiosity in missions can doom otherwise promising ideas. Swazi nationals recognized the need to care for their orphans and the importance of stimulating their economic development. They objected, however, not to Dr. Wilkinson's suggestion that there was a problem, but rather to the scale and pace of his solution. His desire to relocate 10,000 orphans almost overnight was simply too much. If Dr. Wilkinson had attempted to care for orphans on a smaller scale in the context of local communities, he likely would have

fared much differently. In working with individual communities, Dr. Wilkinson could have ultimately reached the same number of children by working with smaller units. He could have started small and steadily expanded his program. It may have required more time, but this approach would likely have been less alienating to the Swazi population and more effective in the long run.

Similarly, the Rwandan egg distribution example demonstrates an overly ambitious initiative. The church wanted to provide eggs for an entire community, ministering on a large scale, but their efforts were ultimately unsustainable and caused more harm than good. If the church had instead partnered with the few egg producers, training them to breed and raise healthier hens, egg supply would have naturally increased and the laws of supply and demand would have ensured that the general population could purchase cheaper eggs.

The mentality that strives for big changes at a rapid pace can also backfire by emphasizing handouts over hands up, and short-term charity over permanent solutions. Because the investment requires less time, and often less initial capital, it is easier to reach many people very quickly through relief or charity. True development is more intensive and often requires time for training and growth; but small steps taken toward true, lasting development will produce bigger and better results in the end.

Similarly, we have heard parents speak of their sponsored children as “earning” more money than they can earn in their jobs. These indignant and wounded parents have explained that they want to provide for their own children—but someone needs to give them a chance by helping them succeed in the marketplace. This is the kind of sustainable development that empowers and humanizes instead of degrades.

Trend Four: Different is Better

The allure of the unique can sometimes lead us to overlook the effective. When we leave the tried-and-true simply for the sake of being different, we set ourselves up for failure. There is room for significant innovation and improvement in missions. Important developments have come about because someone tried something differently, but being different should not be the end pursuit.

Many methods currently in practice are used precisely because they work. These include microfinance, water purification and sanitation assistance, healthcare, church

planting, theological/biblical education, and evangelism and discipleship ministries. In these ministries and others, we should not shy away from proven techniques—even when they are less than glamorous. Sometimes new ideas are nothing more than discredited schemes attempted anew by those who have not studied or learned from others' past mistakes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we applaud and welcome with open arms the growing mission interest. We believe that Dr. Wilkinson and many others like him have compassionate hearts and valuable contributions to offer, and we, as a faith-based organization, embrace the opportunity to work with these willing individuals. At the same time, we seek a change in the way our culture approaches missions. Instead of trying alone to forge new paths to different and bigger mission's successes, let us humbly and respectfully learn from those who have gone before us. Let us welcome the opportunity to partner with existing ministries that are achieving success in the field, and let us recognize that sometimes the ministries that change the most lives are those that persistently affect small changes—not those that try to accomplish everything overnight.

At the same time, we in mission's organizations must grow in flexibility and humility as well, creatively discovering ways to train, equip, and engage volunteers who desire to participate in bringing Christ to a hurting world. We have traditionally not shown sufficient flexibility, creativity, and initiative in partnering with churches and individuals who want to be actively involved in making a difference. Asking individuals for financial contributions and then asking them to step aside is arrogant and harmful.

For those of us interested in becoming more involved in global missions without making a career change, let us listen and learn. Let us go into a country or a mission agency without trying to find solutions, and while there, listen and observe intently. Let us shadow professionals in the field and ask them to share their insights. Let us learn from their successes and their failures. Let us build relationships, not only with these professionals but also with community members. We must fight the initial reaction to go and impose change. Instead, we should focus on building relationships and see how much more effectively these problems can be solved when we partner with local people. We should find the needs they are trying to meet and help them intensify their efforts. Let us

listen to their dreams and help them turn dreams into realities. As we learn to listen to and partner with the communities we serve and the organizations that already exist there, our ability to meet practical needs is sure to increase, as is our credibility and our witness as Christ's followers.

About the Authors



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Intercession for Oppressed Nations

By Benjamin Froese

Froese, Benjamin. 2007. Intercession for Oppressed Nations. *Common Ground Journal* v4 n2 (Spring): 21-29. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

“What if God has us here to stand in the gap for this country; to confront spiritual darkness with God’s light of hope; to build bridges of peace and reconciliation between people, between political and church leaders, between people and God? What if God has us here to do a mighty task in learning and serving through intercession on behalf of this country? What if?” My journal entry of December 16, 2004 expresses what God was stirring in me—that intercession was to be one of the main purposes of our mission team.

Our seven-month assignment was in the heart of the Democratic Republic of Congo, a war-torn nation facing numerous social, economic, and political issues. The economy had shrunk to the level of 1958, while the population had tripled; the average life expectancy was fifty-two; 80% of the population was employed in ‘subsistence activities’; illiteracy was growing; AIDS was widespread (Wrong 2001, 208). The political situation had been a corrupt, greedy, classic kleptocracy for decades, and poverty was rampant.

At the same time, Congo was a nation where the church had exploded numerically in the 20th Century, from 25% of the population in 1900 to 90% today.¹ Many Congolese attended church, prayed regularly, and held intercession services; however, there was a lack of evidence that the nation was being transformed by the gospel except for the immense numbers of people attending Church.

The wide variety of needs we experienced first-hand was overwhelming, and we were in danger of being paralysed into inactivity. How were we to intercede effectively on behalf of the DRC, a nation so seriously oppressed by the cruel exercise of power?

We desperately needed to discover and use biblical, Spirit-led principles for effective intercession. What follows, though not an exhaustive study, grew out of my desire to learn more about effective intercession for oppressed nations.

¹ <http://www.gmi.org/ow/country/conz/owtext.html>, accessed December 4, 2006

Intercession

According to Wink (1996, 298), intercession is “spiritual defiance of what is—in the name of what God has promised.” Through the act of praying, believers engage in ushering in God’s Kingdom. The Greek word for intercession, *enteuxis*, means to “meet with, in order to converse” (Wentroble 1999, 85). Intercession is about meeting, talking, and listening to God in conversation, and seeking his will.

Intercessors are often known as “sentinels” in Scripture. God put specific “sentinels” on the walls of Jerusalem who were to call on the Lord unceasingly until God made the city the “praise of the earth.” These sentinels were assigned to pray until God changed the city (Isaiah 62:6-7) and until the forces of evil were conquered.

Spiritual Forces of Evil

Effective intercession is declaring war on the enemy of God. To “know your enemy” is a key strategy in warfare since evil inhibits nations from experiencing revival and transformation. Keith Martens (2003, 16) defines spiritual influences of evil as “unseen influences that purpose to oppose or act contrary to God, His Truth, and a person’s well being.” Ephesians 2:1-3 identifies three primary sources of evil influences: the world, the devil, and the flesh. Human behaviours may be understood as the result of, or a combination of, any of these three evil influences.

The flesh gives people sinful desires and thoughts. Succumbing to the flesh is committing idolatry. On the national scale, if people tolerate evil economic structures, oppressive leadership, and social injustice, God is Jealous, and He might destroy a nation because of idolatry (as seen in Amos 9:8).

“The ways of this world” (Ephesians 2:2) are the cultural, economic, political, and religious manifestations that are under the control of Satan (cf. 1 John 5:19). God is sovereign over the world, but Satan does have significant influence in the world and its structures, as is evident in Satan offering to Jesus the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 4:8-9). In the values, structures, and cultures of the world, Satan tries to exert his ungodly influences. Paul’s references to “basic principles of this world” may be understood as the deceptive ways of human thinking or cultural values of people (cf. Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 16-23).

Methods of Intercession

Since the evil influences are broad in scope—working together against God’s rule—the methods of intercession for oppressed nations must also be broad and balanced. To be successful in intercession, believers need to find ways to take the offensive and overpower evil with good.

Encountering Evil with Truth

Evil influences need to be confronted in intercession because “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against...the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). Since evil influences often involve lies at the root level, the first line of defence and offence is truth: to know truth and live truthful lives (Moreau 1997, 140). The spiritual battle is fought by engaging the truth, putting off sin, putting on righteousness, and exercising our authority in Christ to resist the enemy’s attacks (Moreau 1997, 15). One strategy involves focusing consistently on praying for God’s Truth in the form of peace to come upon the oppressed nation (Robb and Hill 2000, 14).

The core of the battle in intercession is found in holiness, which involves receiving God’s truth and turning away from individual and corporate sins. The intercessor begins by asking God to reveal anything that personally hinders God’s purposes, then asking similarly for the local church, and finally asking on behalf of the oppressed nation.

Repentance of cultural sins in an oppressed nation breaks evil influences. In “identificational repentance,” a person or group identifies itself as an appropriate representative for the people or nation that has sinned (Moreau 1997, 105). Nehemiah, an important biblical example, confessed the sins of Israel and his family before God (Nehemiah 1:5-11). In most biblical examples of identificational repentance, those repenting were godly people who were both political and spiritual leaders. A critical question then becomes, Are the intercessors appropriate representatives of repentance? Moreau (1997, 106) also suggests that until church leaders represent the will of the people as a whole, the spiritual dynamics of repentance from the sin will not be released into the larger culture. Holiness in receiving the truth is essential for effective intercession for oppressed nations.

Encountering Evil with Authority

Claiming God's authority in intercession involves simply *commanding* something to happen and not just *asking* for it (cf. Mark 11:32). When evil influences are discerned, they must be dealt with decisively in the name of Jesus. Martens counsels that believers should cancel out the possibility of demonic influences, by using the simple phrase "if there is anything opposed to Christ...then in Jesus' name..."² Demons do lurk around nations that are oppressed and must be dealt with if they are opposed to Christ in any way.

Using the authority of God against demonic powers commands that something be done. This authority is God's and he gives it to each believer to wage war (Ephesians 1:20-2; 2:6). Such is the prayer that God uses to assault enemy territory and establish his Kingdom. Before intercessors can use God's authority, however, they need to exercise compassion and discernment (Foster 1992, 229, 231). Compassion keeps intercessors from being destructive, and discernment gives the ability to know what is going on and how to respond in God's authority. Sometimes God might want intercessors to pray with His authority and other times to *just be there*. Wisdom and sensitivity in using God's authority is essential for effective intercession.

Listening to God's Counsel

Many intercessors in Scripture followed the principle of listening to the Lord and depending on Him. Joshua repeatedly heard from the Lord specific instructions and tactics to take over cities promised to Israel (Joshua 5; 6; 8). Understanding God's revealed will is integral in effective intercession (Jersak 2003). Intercessors are effective when they have their eyes fixed on Jesus, as intercession is "a mighty instrument, not for getting man's will done in heaven, but for getting God's will done on earth" (Foster 1992, 238).

Robb (2000, 15) also advocates depending fully on God's direction, as intercessors listen and obey his voice. In oppressed nations they will spend most of their time praying out God's blessing, healing, and deliverance as they go about their daily activities in a nation. By listening to God's counsel and responding in simple obedience

² Training received by Dr. Keith Martens in September 2004 on using God's authority in prayer. Dr. Martens is the director of *Kingdom Ministries* in Fresno, CA.

to his leading, they are being proactive, not reactive, in bringing God's Kingdom (the rule of Christ) to oppressed nations.

Combating Demonic "Powers"

What are the evil forces that need to be confronted in intercession? Ephesians 6:12 reveals our enemy as "rulers", "authorities", and "powers". Moreau (1997, 18-9) calls this the "systemic front," where the agenda is warfare against the domination systems that make up our cultures and societies. The "powers" are anything that opposes God and his kingdom order. Christian (1999, 149) states that the "powers" are evident through poverty, war, financial exploitation and racial discrimination.

However, the "powers" were created by God and were meant to serve him and his purposes. Jorgenson (2002, 217-9) follows Wink in his understanding that the purpose of institutions is to serve society, and if they do not, they become demonically controlled. Therefore, the primary issue of combating demonic forces in society is discerning demonic influences. The task of intercession then is to expose any idolatry and call back any institution or society to its created purpose. Wink assumes that the "powers" in Ephesians 6:12 can be redeemed, as it is only the effect of sinful human beings that creates "evil" institutions. It is the goal of the church, and therefore the intercessor, to bring about complete peace in all things, including the "powers." (cf. Ephesians 1:10.) In this view, anything opposed to Christ's will is controlled by Satan's evil kingdom. The church needs to engage the culture and expose its cultural systems that are opposed to God's Kingdom.

The battle with the "powers" is the daily struggle of believers living in culture and society. Therefore, the only method of breaking demonic forces is to walk in holiness and purity so that no demonic forces may mislead the believer (Jorgensen 2002, 216).

Peter Wagner (1992, 77) believes that the enemy is actually "high-ranking members of the hierarchy of evil spirits to control nations, regions, cities, tribes, people groups, neighbourhoods." One view of territorial spirits, which comes from a particular interpretation of the book of Daniel, sees them battling in the heavenlies over oppressed nations. This assumption suggests that intercessors must take the Kingdom of God into all areas in the world violently. Satan has representatives in geographical areas where

they rule illegally and have a demonic impact on people's lives in that region. Satan also sends these ruling spirits to influence governmental leaders (Jacobs 1991, 226, 224).

Scripture is not clear, however, on how spirits are organized and how they operate (Robb 2000, 205). God seems to have allowed some self-limitation that will not violate the freedom of his created beings, angelic and human alike. Although a spiritual hierarchy may be possible, F.F. Bruce (1965, 198) warns people against constructing a fixed hierarchy. Wagner's system seems oversimplified and so consumed with Satan's agenda that he forgets to remain focused on God's agenda. Nevertheless, he seems convinced that spiritual mapping of territorial spirits has led to significant city-wide responses to the gospel (Grigg 1993, 196). Believers must not be ignorant of the enemy's tactics but should be encouraged to trust God to help them discover ways to deal with demonic forces effectively (Robb 2000, 204).

Researching History

Effective intercession includes a listening heart toward the society. The mature intercessor will ask systematic and inquiring questions involving political, economic, and social issues (Jersak 2003, 222-4). These specific questions of the society will give hints on how to intercede. Jacobs (1991, 235-9) invests intentional time in seeking understanding of a place's strongholds, what she calls the "gates to the city." During the on-going search for answers, the intercessor will begin to see how the evil influences are being used in the society, usually in the form of ideologies full of lies and myths (Robb 2000, 21).

During our tenure in the DRC, we sensed a culture that was fearful toward spirits; a society held in fearful bondage toward evil spirits until the gospel sets them free. We noticed evil influences in the economic and political arenas, as the greed for power and wealth led the nation's leaders to serve their own purposes. We heard whispers of inter-tribal conflicts that lacked forgiveness and repentance. These resulted in the integration of ungodly leadership within the church and Congolese society. We discovered the weak passivity or aggressive exploitation of Western nations in the history of DRC, resulting in economic collapse and wide-scale poverty. And as we could, we participated in intercession that addressed these underlying issues.

Beyond Prayer and into Action

Many books on intercession offer principles about how to intercede for nations. However, they often ignore the complexity of issues that occur in nations that are significantly oppressed. Some maintain an overly simplistic, narrow-minded perspective of the spiritual battle taking place because their focus is set on engaging the spiritual battle *just* on their knees. Intercession in oppressed nations cannot remain a simplified spiritual exercise, hidden inside the comfortable confines of churches and prayer closets. It is messy business because it involves a proactive response as one, in communication with the Holy Spirit, enters into society courageously with the Truth. Note Isaiah 58.6-7:

Is not this the kind of fasting *and intercession* (italics added) I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

God is concerned about stirring his people into action against oppression. Only then will he listen and answer the prayers of his people (Isaiah 58:9-10).

Foster (1992, 241) contends that acting and speaking against oppression is the work of authoritative prayer. Intercession includes an active interaction of proclaiming and living out the truth, as it is the false beliefs of a culture or society that make it evil. Note the countless examples of God's prophets in the Old Testament who spoke out against social wrongs. A current example is Robb's prayer journey experiences into oppressed nations where the focus is on the obvious need for reconciliation between conflicting groups (2000, 15).

Jorgensen (2002, 223) believes that the church's responsibility is to expose all the idolatrous assumptions in a culture and society as an act of spiritual warfare. A wholistic interpretation of the "sword of the spirit" as the word of God (Truth) destroys the falsehoods that are believed in any evil systems (Ephesians 6:17). The most effective weapon will always be the proclamation of the good news of Jesus (Truth) against any evil influences. Jesus' ministry was a "struggle against basic presuppositions and structures of oppression, against the domination system itself, against Satan himself" (Jorgensen 2000, 226). The DRC has been exploited and corrupted at the governmental level ever since the nation came into existence. The intercession fight against evil

political systems must include the proclamation and assertion of Kingdom principles like servanthood and servant leadership.

Jersak (2003, 229, 219) suggests a term called “prophetic respiration” in which the follower of Christ inhales the fullness of Christ in contemplative prayer and then exhales justice and mercy into a community. Through a listening lifestyle toward the heartbeat of God for oppressed nations, intercessors can respond obediently in action. In the midst of poverty and injustice, God’s justice speaks words of hope.

Intercession that does not live incarnationally among those who are suffering is faulty and does not represent Jesus to the full. Suffering is commonplace in oppressed nations. Effective intercessors stand beside people’s miseries, suffering, and oppression. They are not afraid to go into the lives of people and just be there with them, being the literal hands and feet of Jesus. Practically, this is carrying one’s cross with Jesus’ promise of an abundant life. Foster (1992, 221) suggests asking the question: “How do I enter into the suffering that is in the world in a way that is redemptive and healing?” It is the crucial question that intercessors must answer.

Conclusion

God desires his people to sense his heart for justice and mercy and to follow him into action. Then they can bring a message of hope into situations where nations are filled with an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. Effective intercession is highly practical, leading followers of Christ to “defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and need; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:3-4).

Oppressed nations call for intercessors to wake up and go; to walk and live among those who are suffering, to listen to God’s heart and follow him into loving and peaceful action. Effective intercession includes both action and proclamation, while walking into the world of the oppressed.

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About the Author



Benjamin Froese resides in Abbotsford, BC, Canada. He is completing his MA in Cross-cultural Ministries at ACTS Seminary in Langley, BC. He has experienced eighteen months of cross-cultural ministry, including the seven months in the Democratic Republic of Congo that inspired him to write this paper. He is looking forward to marriage in the summer of 2007 to a beautiful woman of God, Melissa Hartman. Together they hope to serve alongside God's activity in a cross-cultural setting whenever and wherever.

A Call for Leadership¹

By Javier Comboni

Comboni, Javier. 2007. A Call for Leadership. *Common Ground Journal* v4 n2 (Spring): 30-33. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

In 2001, several evangelical development agencies from around the world met in Oxford, England to form the Micah Network. They issued a ‘Declaration on Integral Mission’ which stated that:

Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world.²

This definition could be taken a step further, to state that when changes start to occur as a result of Integral Mission (e.g., spiritual revival and gospel proclamation interacting with social involvement) they must result in holistic transformation: spiritual revival, internal change, social transformation and political transformation. Integral Mission must also have political repercussions and a change in the way government is led; not because it should be an end in itself, but because it is the natural consequence of the search for the kingdom of God. The transforming grace of Jesus Christ will have not only social, but political effects in societies where holistic transformation takes place.

The history of spiritual movements demonstrates that they are accompanied by profound effects in societies. These effects can be seen in the primitive church, in the Apostle Paul’s Roman Empire, in the Protestant movements in Europe after Luther and Calvin, through the social changes that accompanied the gospel in England and North America, and elsewhere in the world. The gospel works as the small mustard seed that grows to a big tree where birds lodge in its branches. Internal changes experienced by

¹ These ideas come from my participation on the Ward consultation in Anápolis, Brazil. Although not everything is a transcription of what was said and shared there. I want to thank Charlie Cook and Linda Cannell for the invitation to the event, and to our Brazilian hosts who were so caring and lively.

² “The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission,” in Tim Chester (ed.), *Justice, Mercy and Humility: Integral Mission and the Poor* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002) p.19

individuals have external repercussions, which include the transformation of society and its political organization and leadership.

It is not that the church has to compete with government in the control of power, but rather that church transformation and growth would affect government and rulers. This will happen in the measure to which Christians conform to the saving grace of Christ and understand and follow the rules of the kingdom of heaven. The new priesthood introduced by Jesus not only generates a new covenant, but also affects us as we start to resemble Christ. Christ living in us will make us “Kings as Priests to God our Father” (Rev. 1:6). Not only priests, but also kings, as he is our High Priest, Prophet and King.

Hebrews gives us a description of the new order of priesthood that was introduced by Christ, being he himself named “...priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:17). His priesthood abolished the old priesthood made after the order of Aaron because of its weakness and unprofitableness (see verse 18). In Genesis he gives the nature and mission of Melchizedek: “And Melchizedek the king of Salem brought forth bread and wine. And he was the priest of the most high God” (Gen 14:18). The word Melchizedek means king of righteousness and Salem means peaceful or perfect. We then, as imitators of Christ, are called to show these same characteristics in our daily lives: to be kings of righteousness, peaceful and perfect. This will establish the basis for our authority and leadership.

This return to the original Priesthood had vast and far-reaching consequences, as we know from Christ himself. Not only because he changed the ministry as our new High Priest, but also because “the Law of Christ is the manifestation of the love of God in the power of the Spirit that produces in the believer the resemblance of Christ.”³ Christ changed the practices and responsibilities of the old priesthood, and as importantly, introduced new competencies to all of those who have been affected by this new priesthood, and his saving power. Believers are now a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a people for possession, so that you might speak of the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

The final result will be that Christians should and will become authorities in whatever business or area of society they participate in. The issue then becomes whether

³ Trenchard, E. “Hebreos” Editorial Literatura Bíblica, Madrid 1974. (Translation by the author)

the church is prepared to train these new leaders so that the transformation of society is performed in a kingdom-like and effective manner. The transformation of society will come not because Christians stay within the church walls, but because we go out and permeate the world by being salt and light. The renewed Christian will go to the world and transform society, making use of the power of the gospel—not only as preachers, but as blessed people ready to share this blessing and bless others.

John Stott notes that “The vocation of the church is to be occupied with God and with the world. God has constituted his church to be a worshipping and witnessing community.”⁴ And worshipping is not only done within the church and with the lips, but “in spirit and in truth.” In fact, much, or probably even most of the witnessing is done by truly worshipping God in everyday activities.

Another thought from John Stott supports this idea:

We often give the impression that if a young Christian man is really keen for Christ he will undoubtedly become a foreign missionary, that if he is not quite as keen as that he will stay at home and become a pastor, that if he lacks the dedication to be a pastor, he will no doubt serve as a doctor or a teacher, while those who end up in social work or the media or (worst of all) in politics are not far removed from serious backsliding! It seems to me urgent to gain a truer perspective in this matter of vocation. Jesus Christ calls all his disciples to 'ministry', that is, to service. He himself is the Servant 'par excellence,' and he calls us to be servants too. This much then is certain: if we are Christians we must spend our lives in the service of God and man (sic). The only difference between us lies in the nature of the service we are called to render.⁵

In other words, we are all called for the mission field, although not all of us have the calling to go to the “end of the earth,” which in this globalized world might mean to go to those who are more detached from modern life: people dwelling in the slums of big cities, and also the rural poor. Some might have their calling in “Jerusalem,” where both the political and the religious establishment are, but also where government is and where many decisions concerning society are made. Some might go to “Judea,” to work with those who are part of our same culture, “cultural Christians” who lack the transforming life of Christ within them and who haven’t experienced the power of God in their lives. Some might have a call to go to “Samaria,” possibly to hostile and secularized people

⁴ Stott, John. *Our Guilty Silence*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), p. 59.

⁵ Stott, John "Authentic Christianity", Inter Varsity Press, 1975, p. 247.

who might even have a different religion or god. These three categories probably account for most of today's missionary field.

Wherever the call might be, we need to train kingdom people so that while we are being an integral part of society we can draw from the kingdom to convict of repentance and foster transformation. The task of today's church is therefore to provide support and vision to all who are in the mission field, not just to those who are at the 'end of the earth.' The more detached we become from our societies, the less the impact the church will have. We need to train today's Christians as kingdom missionaries, so that it becomes natural to possess the gates of the enemies (Gen 22:17). In the meantime blessing and eternal life will come as we seek the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.

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The Missionary Training Assessment: A Best Practices Case Study in Missionary Training

By Steve Hoke and Jim Roché

Hoke, Steve and Jim Roché. 2007. The Missionary Training Assessment: A Best Practices Case Study in Missionary Training. *Common Ground Journal* v4 n2 (Spring): 34-45. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

A Missionary Training Partnership is Forged

In response to the book, *Too Valuable To Lose* (William Taylor, ed. World Evangelical Fellowship, 1997), the late Woody Phillips, while general director of United World Mission, initiated discussions with leaders from mission agencies, churches, and formal and non-formal education institutions about partnering to provide training for missionary candidates—particularly for the benefit of smaller agencies unable to provide their own in-house training. Over 50 early-responders attended an exploratory meeting in September 1997 and concluded that communicating more openly as partners about the availability of courses or training modules, organizing local gatherings across the country, and sponsoring a larger annual national conference would be an effective strategy.

The NEXT STEP: Partnership for Missionary Training was birthed. Missionary sending churches, mission organizations, and training institutions were the three major stakeholders in the partnership. Theory soon proved much easier to formulate than a genuine partnership was to forge. While seeking to build a nationwide organization, we quickly found that the time and effort demanded to promote local or regional meetings actually discouraged participation in the larger national gatherings. We found that opening up training modules to other partnering agencies was too difficult to communicate and to schedule conveniently. We discovered that many agencies were less than enthusiastic to expose their self-recognized weaknesses in training to participants from other organizations, and some found much of their training was too unique to their own agency culture or fields.

Rather than getting entangled in scheduling training opportunities from “provider” to “recipient” agencies, we recognized the greater need in North America was to improve the entire discipline of missionary training. Critical evaluation of both

effective and ineffective programs might be the critical entry point. To create improvement required a renewed spirit of transparency among colleagues as to what was working and what wasn't. We believed in the need and potential of The NextStep, but we clearly needed a new strategy to encourage improvement and the needed levels of transparency and trust to become catalysts for improvement.

In January, 2003, NextStep sponsored *The National Missionary Training Forum (NMTF)*, a three-day conference with pre-conference seminars. Over 120 missionary trainers attended. Relationships were easily initiated within this larger group and hoped-for trust emerged due to providing ample time for networking. Such representative participation in that and the next NMTF provided NextStep with the financial capability to sponsor a task force to address improvements in missionary training. Fourteen highly qualified and experienced missionary trainers and educators, representing each of the stakeholder groups within Next Step, were invited to explore the best way to identify 'best practices' and to establish standards of excellence in missionary training.

We asked the task force to produce a tool to evaluate educational practices without the judgmentalism usually associated with academic accreditation criteria. However, the tool had to forthrightly state criteria capable of distinguishing that which was excellent from that which was poor. The assessment tool had to be capable of informing trainers of the priorities that required attention in their educational practices. We wanted the criteria to be free of bias toward the size or nature of the organization (whether school, church, or agency). We wanted the tool to serve as a guide to our Next Step conference planners when considering topics for our annual conferences. We wanted the tool to identify excellent programs, or strong components of programs, so those program developers could competently serve as peer consultants to other organizations requesting help. Finally, we wanted the tool to be free of complexity so it could be easily self-administered. These were the complex demands that we asked the task force, guided by Dr. Steve Hoke, to address on behalf of the partnership. In January 2004 the NMTF Task Force was launched.

At the January 2005 *National Missionary Training Forum* annual conference, we introduced the concept of 'best practices'—an evaluative and improvement process familiar to businesses and non-profit organizations. Best Practice is a new name for an old practice. When we taste a great cookie at the church potluck and ask the cook for the

recipe, that is recognizing a best practice. When we hear a great sermon and order a tape or CD, that is wanting a copy of a best practice. When *Christianity Today* gives awards to the best 10 books of 2005, that is another way of recognizing best practices.

‘Best practice’ has become a hot-button idea in business and industry in the last 20 years. Organizations exist to help companies improve their planning, budgeting or manufacturing processes so that they are efficient and model the most effective methods. Consultants charge \$2000 a day to advise companies how to improve their business practices. This nuts and bolts approach to quality holds particular appeal in the current business climate of increased competitive pressure from around the globe. In the secular world the bottom line is the overriding concern—return on investment (ROI); improving the process or product until it is the best.

Best practices simply describe excellent ways of getting the job done, whether it is manufacturing the best car, recruiting strong staff, ministering effectively to children and families, or even training missionaries. These standards of excellence can be created by a group of experts working in isolation, or established by qualified professionals who are engaged in the actual process they want to describe.

The task force recognized the value of this approach to their project as it is non-judgmental, focused on the positive, and capable of being employed by any type or size of organization. There are many churches and agencies who want to do a better job of planning, managing, and providing missionary training. Yet we wonder what ‘better’ looks like. We don’t want to set up a competitive atmosphere in which different churches are competing to be known for doing the best job in training their missionaries. Rather, our motivation is based on our desire that God be glorified in all we do in whatever context he has placed us. Our stewardship responsibility toward all participants and partners in our missionary training programs is that we serve them to the highest standards possible. The concern for ‘best practices’ does not necessarily indicate current achievement, but rather makes clear our aspirations towards high standards in missionary training practice.

So, why have we been so slow to take evaluation seriously in the area of missionary training?

Why Missionary Training is Important

The people God calls into cross-cultural ministry are the primary resource for world evangelism. Mission senders only can be effective in advancing God's global cause as the people sent are effective in ministry. The training and development of missionary personnel is critical, therefore, to Kingdom expansion. To fail to attend to training and development is to fail in our stewardship of the Great Commission.

Training is a comprehensive function which includes ministry preparation, ongoing personal and professional development, and re-training for new ministry opportunities and challenges.

The context and realities of agencies, churches, and mission training institutions as well as strategies for missionary training vary widely. Opportunities and resources also vary between small and large ministries. While some organizations provide training internally and others outsource most training functions, stewardship demands assessment and evaluation of both.

We wanted our members to consider the following *benefits*:

- No longer comparing against ourselves
- Enabling best practices from any industry to be creatively incorporated
- Breaking down ingrained reluctance to change
- Identifying technological breakthroughs that not have been recognized
- Catalyzing a cycle of improvement as we seek to identify the 'best' or...
- Contextualizing 'best practices' to the missions setting—we are looking not so much for 'best' as for 'excellent practices' we can borrow.

Identifying and Transferring Best Practices

The *Missionary Training Assessment* (MTA) instrument¹ was designed by trainers from churches, agencies, and schools working together who share a concern for improving the quality of missionary training for North American missionaries. It is designed for individuals and teams engaged in missionary training to evaluate their own training efforts. We hope it will catalyze further discussion and exploration within

¹ The *Missionary Training Assessment* instrument appears at the end of this article.

churches, mission agencies, and schools as to how effectively training equips prospective missionaries. Several drafts were distributed in a constant effort to achieve clarity of thought and intent from all stakeholders.

The assessment tool which follows is built around seven *assumptions*, criteria, or standards of excellence, i.e., ‘best practices’ in missionary training. We propose that

- An excellent program of missionary training *identifies the learning and performance needs* of the trainees, the organization, and other stakeholders.
- An excellent program of missionary training is *aligned with the values, mission, and vision of the parent organization*.
- An excellent program of missionary training *intentionally promotes spiritual formation, dependence on God, and Christian community*.
- An excellent program of missionary training *employs adult learning theory and methods*.
- An excellent program of missionary training *makes careful use of spiritual, human, and financial resources*.
- An excellent program of missionary training will have a *clear, measurable, and feasible evaluation plan*.
- An excellent program of missionary training is *accountable to stakeholders and peers*.

Under each standard are statements of critical areas contributing to that standard (e.g., “*I. Needs Assessment: A. We have a process for regularly identifying trainee needs.*”). You may respond to the degree to which your training demonstrates each statement in terms of these response categories: YES!; Yes; Needs Work; HELP!; or N/A.

One concept in the criteria—employing adult learning theory and methods—proved to be particularly unclear to members. To address that need, Next Step contracted Dr. Jane Vella (<http://www.globalearning.com>), a highly regarded educator and prolific author in the field of adult learning, to introduce her training to the membership at the January 2006 *National Missionary Training Forum* conference. This was a clear example of how the tool could be used to guide our conference programming to raise our training standards.

The MTA was distributed among the partnership at the January '06 conference and posted to our website, <http://www.thenextstep.org>. We specifically identified and recruited volunteer training directors within our partnership to rigorously self-evaluate their training programs and allow external evaluators to evaluate them.

Additionally, the task force developed an *Action Planning Guide* to follow the assessment process. The assessment asks for responses to each of the criteria and accompanying contributory statements as either a firm “YES” indicating they have truly met the criteria, a qualified “yes” in which the criteria was met but improvements could be made; “Need Work” to acknowledge identifiable weaknesses, and “Help!” The *Action Planning Guide* uses those responses with the following guides to take the next step toward improvement:

What “YES” successes do we want to celebrate?

- What are the key contributors to this strength?
- What does our pattern of “Yes!” statements tell us or what can we learn from them?

What qualified “Yes” or new successes can we both celebrate and build on?

- What does our pattern of “Yes” statements tell us? What can we learn from them?
- What do we need to keep improving in this area?
- What are the key contributors to this strength?
- Delegate or find ‘champions’ to research, plan and implement corrective action.

What are the “Needs Work” areas of our training?

- What does our pattern of “needs work” statements tell me?
- What do we need to do to improve in each area?
- Rank order the priority in which we should attack these issues.
- Delegate or find ‘champions’ to research, plan and implement corrective action.
- Find ‘champions’ to research, plan and implement corrective action.

In what areas do we desperately need “Help!”?

- What does our pattern of “Help” statements tell us? What can we learn from these?
- What *root problems* can we identify through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis?
- What do we need to do to improve in each area?
- Rank order the priority in which we should attack these issues.
- Find ‘champions’ to research, plan and implement corrective action.

Distribution

We have included a copy of the MTA instrument with this article so that you might pilot test it in your church or organization. Distribute the MTA to any persons in your church who have a stake in your training outcomes—including missionaries, staff, training colleagues, pastoral staff, receiving field team leaders or former trainees. Ask them to complete the form as honestly as possible, providing additional suggestions or input as they desire.

- Self-evaluate your existing training against these seven standards
- Develop your own Follow-on Action Plan of areas to work on

When used as suggested in the following guide, this assessment tool will help you clarify aspects of an effective training program, discover differences in staff perspectives, build consensus among trainers regarding assumptions and goals, develop or refine training goals, identify key areas for improvement, and contribute to achievement of your organization's mission. The purpose of assessment is to improve all our training programs so that missionary personnel are well equipped and Christ's Kingdom is extended.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What ideas used in your church/organization came from an outside source?
- What are the most likely sources you would turn to for new ideas?
- What specifically can you learn from other churches and organizations?

Being willing to change assumes a "Pro-Sharing Culture" within your church or organization, a willingness to learn from others. A mission team looking to improve its training can learn from surrounding churches and other model programs in the Initiative360 network. Learning from others, and translating that learning into action is your competitive advantage.

Barriers

There are obvious limitations and barriers in implementing such an improvement process within missionary training in churches and organizations. Consider which of the following might be present in your church:

- Ignorance of what other churches, agencies, and schools are doing in training
- No absorptive capacity for new ideas
- Lack of motivation to improve, change or grow, or to adapt the practice
- Lack of willingness to share any of your present practices with other churches or agencies
- Fear of borrowing something from outside that “*isn’t Christian*”
- Lack of awareness of how to adapt practices to “*our situation*”
- Closed culture: “*Not invented here*” culture
- Hesitancy to ask someone else for help

Recent Innovations in Missionary Training

But things are changing in missionary training! There is a new spirit of innovation and cooperation evident in the North American missions community. The following recent projects illustrate the range of cooperative efforts we are seeing multiply across the country:

- Inter-agency cooperation in training: For the last ten years, the EFMA and IFMA have cooperatively sponsored *LeaderLINK*, a leader development program for North American mission agency personnel around the world. Each year, one-week leader development workshops are offered in Africa, Europe, Latin America and North America.
- The National Missionary Training Forum has now been an annual training event since 1996. Currently held each January at the International Learning Center of the International Missionary Board outside Richmond, over a 100 missionary trainers gather to network and share the latest research and innovations in practical missionary training.
- Many churches and agencies are experimenting with new approaches to training design for adult learners taken from the innovative writing of Jane Vella (see *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach, or Training Through Dialogue.*)
- The Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance has pioneered the use of profiles to benchmark pre-training competencies, and to establish post-training competency targets (see *Establishing Missionary Training*, William Carey Library, 1995).
- Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) has pioneered a four-level Leadership Development Program for its field leaders and missionaries, drawing from the

research in leadership of J. Robert Clinton, as well as training methodologies from the Center for Creative Leadership.

- Increasing numbers of churches such as Crystal Evangelical Free Church in Minneapolis, MN and Xenos Christian Fellowship in Columbus, OH are developing extensive multi-level programs in discipleship and missionary training for prospective candidates in their congregations.

Practical Suggestions for Improving Your Missionary Training

- Pilot test the MTA with your missions committee or training team.
- Make the sharing and use of ‘best practices’ in missionary training part of the role expectation for new people you bring onto your team.
- Rub shoulders with colleagues who may have the next ground-breaking idea or who are piloting an innovative approach in training. Find out what they are learning or trying.
- Scan the web sites of other key missions-minded churches to see if they are doing things in training from which you can learn.
- Keep abreast of the latest mission’s books on innovation and SOTA (state-of-the-art) methods and technologies.
- Inquire about visiting the training events of other agencies and churches, or invite others to observe your events.

Steal Shamelessly

Competitive advantage, says management guru Tom Peters, lies in your organization’s (church’s) ability to *learn*, and to rapidly transform learning into *action*. In missions, where our goal is greater effectiveness for kingdom fruitfulness, the message is similar—borrow and adapt whatever ideas you can find! Our method is not to literally steal, but to explore, surface and identify ways in which we more effectively train candidates from our churches to be more effective in cross-cultural service. What’s your latest ‘best practice’?

This project remains in progress as we anticipate continuing improvements through this year. The NextStep is committed to the value of collegial partnership; sharing both what has worked and what has failed is critical to improvement. Expanding our emerging NextStep partnership in North America to network internationally may be a jump in our vision, but no change whatsoever to that value, and absolutely essential to our commitment to global evangelism.

We sincerely invite additional thoughts and improvements by this worldwide partnership through submitting ideas at our website, <http://www.thenextstep.org>.

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About the Authors



Dr. Steve Hoke is a Third Culture Adult who grew up in Tokyo, Japan, and now serves as Vice-President of People Development with *Church Resource Ministries*. His passion is to equip and encourage front-line cross-cultural workers to minister with spiritual authority in the difficult places of the world. He is author of over 50 popular articles on missions, and co-author with Bill Taylor of *SEND ME! Your Journey to the Nations*.



Dr. Jim Roché, while serving as Associate Dean for Extension Education at Columbia International University, was a founding board member of *The NextStep*, which he currently serves as board chairman. Jim is director of operations for *Crossover Communications International*, a mission agency which trains and mobilizes church planting pastors in the least-reached countries to reach the unreached. Jim's passion is to remove the administrative hurdles to facilitate and encourage partnerships that matter in missions.

MISSIONARY TRAINING ASSESSMENT

An Instrument for Evaluating and Improving Training Programs

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Explanation of the MTA: The MTA is a self-assessment tool that employs seven (I-VII) standards of excellence of missionary training. Under each standard, critical areas are identified that contribute to that standard—e.g., “We regularly (annually, bi-annually, etc.) identify learners’ needs.”

Response Categories: You may indicate the degree to which each statement describes your training by checking () one of five response categories:

- **YES!:** This strong positive response indicates the standard is clearly in place and operating effectively.
- **Yes:** This positive response indicates the standard is recognized and progress is being made.
- **Needs Work:** This response indicates the standard is not yet fully recognized or assistance is needed in knowing how to move forward.
- **HELP!** This strong negative response indicates the standard does not exist or is not recognized and significant help is needed to know how to improve.
- **N/A:** The “Not Applicable” response only should be used when your organizational structure does not accommodate the critical area stated.

Organization: _____ Name: _____

Name of Program: _____ Date: _____

We are a: _____ congregation _____ mission agency _____ school _____ nonformal training organization

YES!	Yes	Needs Work	Help!	N/A
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I. NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

An excellent program of missionary training identifies the learning and performance needs of the learners, the organization, and other stakeholders.*

- | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. We regularly (annually, biannually, etc.) identify learners’ needs. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. We regularly identify training needs within the organization. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Our training program is sensitive and responsive to the needs of our stakeholders.* | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Our training program adapts to learners’ needs (including spiritual, emotional, physical, and financial) and ministry skills. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

II. ALIGNMENT

An excellent program of missionary training is aligned with the mission, values, and vision of the parent organization.

- | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. Our organization has clearly stated mission, values, and vision. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. We align our training program with organizational mission, values, and vision. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. We keep our training programs aligned with changes in organizational goals and objectives. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Our training leadership has direct access to executive leadership. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

III. CORE VALUES

An excellent program of missionary training intentionally promotes spiritual formation, dependence on God, and Christian community.

- | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. We model earnest prayer and obedience to God in all phases of training. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Our trainers are characterized by humility, depending on God for effectiveness and training results. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. We ensure that learning happens in a safe, “grace-filled” environment. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. We build community identity and commitment. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E. We provide varied opportunities for growth in personal and corporate spiritual life. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

* “Stakeholders” refers to everyone affected by or invested in the training program, including trainers, learners, administrators, donors, churches, field supervisors, and host national believers.

YES!	Yes	Needs Work	Help!	N/A
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IV. TRAINING DESIGN

An excellent program of missionary training employs adult learning theory and methods.

A. We respect our learners by utilizing their abilities and background.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Our training is based on an analysis of the knowledge, skills and character of effective missionaries.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Our learning activities help learners develop capacity for life-long growth in knowledge, skills, and character for ministry.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. The scope of our program assures training for all levels and roles in our organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Our staff models cross-cultural sensitivity in training methods and manners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. We expect trainers to actively engage in ministry beyond the training program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G. Our trainers stay current by intentionally increasing their knowledge and skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H. Our training values are made clear in what and how we teach.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

V. RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

An excellent program of missionary training makes careful use of spiritual, human, and financial resources.

A. Our staff's spiritual gifts and experiences are fully utilized.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Our program efficiently uses available financial resources (whether large or small).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Our program measures the cost effectiveness of training against improved ministry performance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Our leaders encourage shared learning within the organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. We share training techniques and resources reciprocally with other trainers and organizations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. We partner with receiving churches, receiving teams, sending churches, agencies, and schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

VI. EVALUATION STRATEGY

An excellent program of missionary training will have a clear, measurable, and feasible evaluation plan.

A. We have a plan for regular (e.g., annual, biannual) evaluation of our training program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Our evaluation of learners goes beyond knowledge alone to measure skills and character.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Our evaluation addresses four levels: reaction, learning, behavior, and organizational results, not degree of satisfaction only.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Our evaluation assesses the extent to which training contributes to personal and organizational effectiveness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Our evaluation looks at various program elements including time, delivery system, accessibility, user friendliness, and stewardship of organizational resources.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. We use evaluation to make program improvements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

VII. ACCOUNTABILITY

An excellent program of missionary training is accountable to stakeholders and peers.

A. We have procedures in place for reporting to stakeholders on the efficiency of our training programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. We have procedures in place for reporting to stakeholders on the effectiveness of our training programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. We periodically invite review of our training program by a panel of our peers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Common Ground Journal
CanDoSpirit Network, Inc
5250 Grand Avenue Suite 14-211
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