



# Churches and Agencies— Learning Together

Greg H. Parsons



**Y**ears ago my friend and fellow USCWM staff member Fran Patt (whose article appears on pages 8-10 of this issue of *Mission Frontiers*) presented a paper at a regional gathering of the Evangelical Missiological Society. In his paper Fran addressed problems in our present model of sending missionaries. In his leadership of the USCWM's regional office in eastern Pennsylvania and his service as an elder in a large church, he had seen the sending of many workers from that region. Yet many of these workers struggled with the task of planting the church in other cultures.

Fran began to ask himself why that might be. One reason was simple and clear: these young missionaries had never seen a church planted. In many cases they had lots of training and preparation, but they hadn't been part of churches that multiplied churches. They might have seen churches grow in various ways, but they had not seen churches started – the very task they were now expected to tackle. Fran's article on pages 8-10 elaborates this theme. Both he and I would be glad to know what *you* think.



The other day I had a conversation that may be similar to conversations you've had. The person with whom I was talking said to me, "We've got this sharp, young missionary from our church who has already been out there in (country X), and now our church wants to send him. We will even support him 100%. Do you know an agency that will channel our support and deal with the issues in sending him the money but without imposing too much control or constraint on him?"

I told this person of an agency like that and hung up the phone. But what I really wanted to do was ask him a few questions:


1. Why are you so impressed by him that you are willing to let him do what he thinks is best? How do you know this missionary is really effective – or more importantly, strategic – without any field supervision or oversight?
2. How do you keep him accountable in his work and walk?
3. What is it about agencies that make you reluctant to use them in this situation? Is it their policies and procedures that seem onerous in some way?
4. Do you support other missionaries through standard sending agencies? Has that worked well in some cases?

In effect, this church is setting up its own agency, but doesn't want to deal with issues like fund transfers and currency exchange. Many other churches have done this, even if they didn't call their new creations "agencies." Over time some of these churches may develop the experience to effectively guide the work they start, recognizing that such work is very different than ministry in their own culture. Yet many now wish, with the benefit of hindsight, that they had worked closer with others experienced in that type of work or part of the world. Agencies offer such experience.

As I think about these things, I also have a few questions for agencies to consider:

1. Have you thought of ways to engage mission candidates with field training (here or out there) early?
2. How large is your field policy manual? How long does it take to orient new missionaries to your way of doing things – before they leave and when they get to the field? Do some of these policies and procedures stifle effective efforts or introduce unnecessary complications?
3. How many decisions or policies in your manual were decided without much field input? Did those policies rise from problems that don't exist now? Would they be appropriate if you were to open work in new parts of the world with missionaries with different gift-mixes? What about those with business skills – do you have a way to enfold them in your work?
4. How much of the decision-making is done on the field? Do your workers have the freedom to reasonably experiment?

Missionaries can be effective without agencies, and they can be ineffective in agencies. Yet agencies deserve a closer look and an invitation to conversations.

I encourage you to talk with people in a mission structure that differs from yours. Dialogue and seek to better understand their perspective. And I invite you to tell me, too ([Greg.Parsons@uscwm.org](mailto:Greg.Parsons@uscwm.org)) what you're thinking and learning on these issues. 



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