

A City-Wide Mission Movement:

Lessons from Singapore

Michael Jaffarian

In 1980 a group of Singaporean pastors, missionaries, mission agency leaders, and other Christian leaders came together to form the Singapore Centre for Evangelism and Missions (SCEM). They shared a common vision for Singapore as a strong missionary-sending country, and wanted to work together to see that vision come to reality, by God's grace. Later in the

decade SCEM leaders met the Jaffarians and invited us to come and help them.

I believe in the value of city-wide or regional mission centers. If the

question is, "How can we foment a vital city-wide or regional missions *movement*?" the short answer is, "Organize and develop an effective city-wide or regional cooperative missions *center*".

We saw that happen in Singapore. We did some things well. We made some mistakes. There are things we should have done but didn't. Let me review our experience and make recommendations under the following "how-to" plan.

1. Gather the right leadership.

SCEM had the great advantage of an excellent membership and Executive Committee (ExCo). They also had a full-time worker on loan from a mission agency (me). I think both were necessary. Before I came, the ExCo was hindered in what they could do, due to limited workforce. On the other hand, it would have been terribly difficult for me to do SCEM-style ministry without the ExCo's ideas and backing.

2. Meet people.

I made it my practice to have lunch with someone every day – a pastor, mission agency leader, missions professor, or Singaporean missionary.

There is no substitute for personal, trusting relationships in fostering inter-organizational cooperation, and there are no shortcuts in forming them. Later on, when a pastor or leader received something in the mail about a SCEM event or activity, they could say, "Oh yeah, SCEM. I know Michael. I had lunch with him." It made all the difference for their response.

3. Start a newsletter.

A simple newsletter can gather good news, ideas, and information from the local missions movement, from missions and churches and missionaries, and spread it around to instruct, inspire, and encourage all. SCEM's newsletter also promoted our projects and events, as well as other missions activities not directly connected with SCEM.

4. Organize events.

SCEM organized a lot of mission events. We had events for pastors, to help them get missions vision. We had events for local church mission committee members, to help them do their work better. We had large-scale, three-day, city-wide mission rallies attended by as many as 2,000 people, with well-known international speakers. These "World Heartbeat" events were especially geared for potential missions recruits, and included altar calls for commitment to missionary service.

I would advocate organizing mission events for all sectors of the Christian community – children, youth, students, the elderly, intercessors, professionals, musicians, artists, and so on. We were unafraid to pack the schedule with a lot of activities. Each event spread missions vision to someone new.

5. Sponsor *Perspectives* Courses.

The *Perspectives* course has been used by God in many countries to make a dynamic impact for missions, and specifically for frontier missions. It

There are no substitutes or shortcuts for personal, trusting relationships.

delivers a strong package of well-planned content that gives a powerful boost to the missions vision, understanding, and action of many sectors of the Christian community: goers and senders, leaders and supporters, givers and intercessors, pastors and laity. Beyond that, it delivers a personal impact to hearts and lives that is often life-changing.

6. Have membership open to all.

There were many Christians in Singapore excited about what SCEM was doing for missions, once things got rolling. Membership provided a direct way for them to connect and belong.

7. Attach some specific benefits to membership.

Maybe a stripped-down email version of the newsletter can be available to anyone, with a fuller version (with pictures, on paper) available only to members. Maybe members can always be invited into co-sponsorship of events, and there can be some special events open only to members. Allow members to buy books and resources at a discount.

8. Have a resource center.

Stock missions books and resources. Take and sell them at missions events from book tables. Develop a library with books, reference books, periodicals, journals, videos, DVDs, posters, children's resources, and files on world mission. This requires some space.

11. Network with other centers for world mission.

In the same way that churches and missions in one city or region can stimulate and help each other to serve God better, so also centers for world mission in a wider area, or globally, can be a blessing and help to each other. More than that, they can work together in ways that could have a powerful, global impact for the reaching of the unreached peoples.

12. Hold to the priority of frontier missions.

Most missionaries are most eager, and most able, to recruit new workers to their own fields. Thus new missionaries tend to go where missionaries already are. What about those places where there are no missionaries, no churches, or even no Christians? Regional or city-based centers for world mission should do research, learn about, teach about, and advocate the needs of such frontier fields.

13. Respond to opportunity *and* do strategic planning.

Note that strategic questions can be asked from both the positive and negative directions. Ask, "What are the present strengths of the missions movement here, and how can we maximize them?" Also ask, "What are the sticking points? What things are holding back missions involvement from our churches? How can these issues be dealt with?"

Some things can *only* be done by inter-church, inter-mission centers.

SCEM is continuing its good ministry, and others also are helping the missions movement of that city. I am not qualified to speak on SCEM's present ministry. I'm sure they, and other missions leaders in the city, have learned many important lessons since my time there.

In the total missions task, some things are best done by local churches, some things are best done by mission organizations, and some things are best done—in fact, can *only* be done—by inter-church, inter-mission centers like SCEM. Only where there is an effective center for world mission can any city or region do all it could do, and should do, for the cause of missions. 🌐



Michael Jaffarian is Coordinator of Research for CBI International. He and his wife Dawna have served in India and Singapore, and are now based in Richmond, Virginia, USA. Michael served as an Associate Research Editor of the World Christian Encyclopedia, 2nd edition, and contributed to Operation World, 6th edition. Contact him at michaeldawna@earthlink.net.