

THE CALL TO OBEY THE GREAT COMMISSION REMAINS BEFORE US



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EDITORIAL

Wow! Forty years. So much has been accomplished and yet so much remains to be done. In this issue we pause to look back on the legacy of faithfulness of people like Ralph Winter and others who with vision and passion in their hearts for God's glory in all peoples, risked so much and worked so hard to launch the USCWM/Frontier Ventures and the unreached peoples movement. They made all the progress of the last 40 years possible. We stand on the shoulders of giants, but in many ways they were just people like us whom God chose to use because of their faithfulness and availability—and God honored their faith. As we seek to reach the unreached peoples in our day, we must believe that the God who was faithful in providing for the Winters will also be faithful in providing for us.

GREAT PROGRESS!

But where are we now? What have we accomplished in these 40 years?

See the article by Dave Datema and Dan Scribner starting on page 29. They do a great job of documenting the tremendous progress we have made. Thousands of people groups have been reached for the first time and we have a clearer picture of the remaining task than ever before. This picture will become ever clearer as we get out into these unreached peoples and see what is happening and how best to initiate a movement of disciple making and church planting in each one of them.

Tremendous efforts by Ralph Winter, Luis Bush and thousands of others on behalf of the unreached peoples led to unprecedented progress as we approached the year 2000. Datema and Scribner quote veteran researcher, Patrick Johnstone, on page 31: "The peak in the 1990s reveals that that decade saw more evangelical converts to Christ than any other in history. It may prove to be the greatest decade of harvest there will ever be." Great progress was made in the 1990s, at least in part because of a determined collaborative effort focused on "A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000." This was the motto of the AD2000 and Beyond Movement

in which Frontier Ventures and this publication were pleased to be active participants. The AD 2000 and Beyond Movement gave birth to multiple networks ranging from the country or regional level to the global level—most focused on reaching the unreached peoples. The Finishing the Task network featured on page 36 is just one of these networks that continue to focus the Church's attention on the unengaged and unreached peoples.

Over the last 40 years the brightest spot in mission mobilization on behalf of the unreached peoples has been the Perspectives course. Birthed in the summer of 1974, it has now grown to be a powerful force in casting vision for God's glory in all peoples. It will engage over 8,700 students in 248 classes around the country just this year. There are now existing or potential Perspectives Study Programs in **46 countries**. The Perspectives curriculum has now been translated into seven languages with two more in progress. Thus far nearly 150,000 students have taken the course in the U.S. and 60,000 more overseas. With the U.S. course attendance growing at around 6% each year, it appears that the vision for reaching the unreached will continue to grow with it. See the article starting

on page 18 for the amazing story of the Perspectives movement.

BUT WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Datema and Scribner also point out in their article that an ominous trend has developed since the year 2000. The tremendous advances made during the 1990s have begun to regress. The number of workers on the field has actually decreased by 10,000 over the last 16 years. Datema and Scribner speculate as to the cause for this regression, but one thing is clear: *If we are to regain the lost momentum of the 1990s and reach the unreached peoples within our lifetimes, a major new commitment by the global church will be required.* Hundreds of thousands of new workers will be needed and the overall church must make obedience to the Great Commission its highest priority. For this to happen, a revolutionary change in our understanding of who we are in Christ must occur.

WHAT IS OUR IDENTITY?

What is our identity in Christ? Is it only as sinners saved by the grace of God, who are looking for Jesus to bless our lives here and in the life to come? Or rather, is our identity also tied to the fact that Jesus has given us a mission that all of us have been called to participate in? When was the last time you heard a sermon at your church on the Great Commission, Matt. 28:18-20, where every Jesus follower, including you and me, is called to live on mission with God to be a disciple maker and to do so in all nations? I came to understand my responsibility to obey the Great Commission by attending Urbana 79, not because a pastor taught it to me. These were Jesus' last words of instruction to us before His ascension, and He expects

us to obey them (see John 14:21). The Great Commission passage, describes our identity as followers of Jesus. It describes the mission we have all been given of making disciples, baptizing, and teaching these new disciples from all nations to obey all that Jesus has commanded. We are a called-out people to whom the King of Kings has assigned a mission.


But how many believers in our Evangelical churches see themselves this way and are living intentionally and strategically to accomplish this mission? It is very hard to imagine the Church making great progress going forward in bringing the gospel to every tribe and tongue if our pastors do not regularly teach the Great Commission and the average believer does not see themselves as bearers of this mission. In large part what the average believer has received is a private gospel of personal salvation and self improvement, with little focus on those who are lost without Christ—whether they be friends and relatives, or those of other cultures and languages. This is why the global church struggles to make progress in world evangelization; too few believers are living out the mission that Jesus has given to them. They are depending on the professional pastors and missionaries to do the job for them.

RECOVERING THE BIBLICAL MODEL

In order to succeed at reaching the unreached, we must also do ministry the way that Jesus intended. Biologically, the human race survives and grows by way of parents giving birth to children and then raising them to maturity. Likewise, God has designed the Church to grow organically and exponentially by means of well-equipped disciples

passing on their faith to others who are also well-trained to make disciples generation after generation. This is the model that Jesus taught and the one which the apostle Paul used until “there was no place left” for him to work. It is the biblical model of ministry that the Church must employ if we are to have any hope of reaching the unreached peoples and providing access to the gospel to every person. If we continue to have 1 out of 100 or 1000 believers (i.e. pastors and missionaries) be the only ones actively involved in ministry, then we will not have the equipped manpower we will need to succeed.

CAN WE REACH THE UNREACHED?

When Ralph and Roberta Winter founded the U.S. Center for World Mission, now Frontier Ventures, in November of 1976, they had no idea whether they would actually succeed in purchasing a \$15 million dollar college campus in Pasadena, California and launch a movement on behalf of the unreached peoples. As the article, “Three Miracle Years,” on page 11 demonstrates, they often came very close to losing it all. They just knew they had to do whatever they could to raise the Church's awareness of the unreached peoples. If, like the Winters, we each commit ourselves to obeying the call of Jesus to make disciples of all nations, and do so using the model of ministry Jesus gave us, trusting God for the results, then we cannot fail. 

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