

Innovation Lab

by Paul Dzubinski

When the leadership of the Frontier Mission Fellowship and the US Center for World Mission decided to rebrand the organizations together, a discovery was made. The rebranding did not fully embrace a key aspect of the spirit of Ralph Winter. He created new ministries and looked for the missing pieces in our efforts to fulfill the Great Commission. The Ralph D. Winter Launch Lab was then proposed to fill this need.

The Ralph D. Winter Launch Lab exists to discover and help implement ways to bring kingdom breakthroughs to the frontiers of mission. It is founded in the spirit of the scholar-activist Ralph Winter. Discovery, innovation, and implementation are its main functions. It is designed to bring forward motion in creating these kingdom breakthroughs.

There is a lot packed into those two words, kingdom breakthrough. Simply put, a kingdom breakthrough is cooperating with God to multiply Jesus-centered faith communities and help in the growth of human flourishing.

In more detail, the full definition of kingdom breakthrough is the work of God's Spirit creating new communities of faith which are loyal to Jesus and the Bible and which express those loyalties through the paradigm of their own culture and language. Expressions of loyalty to Jesus and the Bible would include the multiplication of similar types of communities as well as the growth, in the wider society, of human flourishing that is based on Jesus' teaching.

The Launch Lab hopes to participate in this kind of kingdom breakthrough where it is least known, at the

frontiers of mission. To that end we hope to establish the Launch Lab as both an incubator and a research institute. In many ways this has been what Dr. Winter did at the US Center for World Mission. Numerous ministry startups began at the US Center and were inspired by Dr. Winter's innovations in missiological thinking and mobilization.

Two steps beyond relevant church

There is a lot to be discovered and innovated if we are to effectively make disciples for Jesus in peoples where his name is not even known. The truth is that even where Jesus' name is known some churches are not that relevant. Relevance is pretty important.

For cross-cultural workers to be relevant in making disciples and starting churches, innovative and adventurous hearts are required. Their ministry is two steps beyond starting a relevant church in their home culture because they have to do it in another culture and language. Their task is more than the success of engaging a lot of people. They even need more than spiritual faithfulness to fulfill their calling and ministry. As Tim Keller concludes in his book *Center Church*, "a more biblical theme for ministerial evaluation than either success or faithfulness is fruitfulness."¹ This requires a theological vision. Keller defines that as "a vision for what you are going to do with your doctrine [the gospel] in a particular time and place."² To help cross-cultural workers develop their own theological vision we hope to start Discovery Workshops in ministry locations. At the workshops, participants will work together, investigating ways to take those extra steps for bringing kingdom breakthrough.



Launching Well

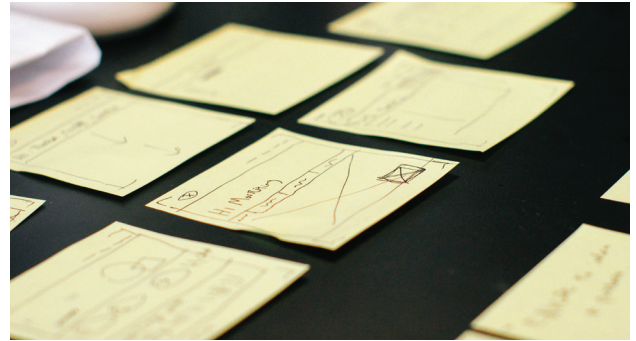
James Allen said, “Dreamers are the saviors of the world”³ but it can be difficult to bring a dream down to earth. Helping people launch their dreams has long been the work of tech and business incubators. The people at Entrepreneur.com define an incubator as “an organization designed to accelerate the growth and success of entrepreneurial companies through an array of business support resources and services.”⁴ We at the Launch Lab would like to help the dreamers realize their dreams in this same way.

Forbes reports that “niche incubators are springing up all over the country, covering a range of business types that once would have stood no chance of getting an incubator to accept them.”⁵ The Launch Lab incubator has a niche: we desire to help people start social ventures⁶ that will contribute to human flourishing in geographical areas where Jesus is not known.


Thinking well, doing well

The U.S. Center for World Mission has a long-standing reputation as a “missions think tank.”⁷ Our focus on missions is different from what is generally associated with the term “think tank.” Generally speaking, think tanks have a focus on helping political representatives evaluate and develop political policy.⁸ Since our focus is not just on missions but specifically on the frontiers of mission, we have put aside the think tank label and call this part of the Launch Lab a research institute.

The narrower focus on the frontiers in mission gets more specific. We hope to develop functional models and workable theories of mission that offer solutions



to the problems and gaps in ministries at the frontiers. Once a solution is found we will champion it, influence for it through mentoring and educational programs, and/or lead change around it.

We are delighted to announce the start of the RDW Launch Lab. Please pray with us that it will be used by God to bear significant fruit for kingdom breakthrough in the coming years. 

¹ Keller, T. (2012). *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (8.9.2012 edition.). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Kindle loc. 95.

² Ibid. Kindle loc. 231

³ Allen, J. (2013). *As A Man Thinketh*. Sublime Books. 37.

⁴ Business Incubator Definition | Small Business Encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved January 7, 2015, from <http://www.entrepreneur.com/encyclopedia/business-incubator>

⁵ “New Niche Incubators To Help Your Startup Grow”. (n.d.). Retrieved January 7, 2015, from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/caroltice/2013/03/21/7-new-niche-incubators-to-help-your-startup-grow/>

⁶ By this we do not mean social gospel.

⁷ *Mission Frontiers* - “Building Momentum: Report from the Global Network of Centers for World Mission”. (n.d.). Retrieved January 7, 2015, from <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/building-momentum>

⁸ Enrique Mendizabal from the website OnThinkTanks.org says that a specific definition of a think tank is difficult to do but he links them clearly to the policy world. He says, “I continue to find the definition of think tanks a futile endeavour (I am borrowing from Medvetz who borrowed from Simon James). Think tanks can be described by what they do (think tanks are like the bicycle chain that links the policy world with the research world, applying academic rigour to contemporary policy problems, maybe) and this should be understood within the boundaries of the context in which they exist and that account for their vast differences” Mendizabal, E. (n.d.). on the definition of think tanks | on think tanks. Retrieved January 8, 2015, from <http://onthinktanks.org/2010/10/18/on-the-definition-of-think-tanks/>