

# Singapore '02

## Advancing Strategies Among All Unreached Peoples

by Greg Parsons

Often global-level meetings address everything from recruitment to long-term member care, from language learning to ongoing missionary training. While these issues are important or even crucial, they can readily squeeze out deeper reflection on the strategic nature of our mission work.

But such deeper reflection was the focus of a consultation held in Singapore October 28-31, 2002. The convening committee (which I led) built its efforts on the belief that mission structures with a focus on the unreached people groups of the world must network effectively in order to effectively address issues at a global or "macro" level.

### Approaches to Singapore '02

The plan for "Singapore '02" was to invite a cross-section of field-based church planters as well as mission agency executives to consider *advancing strategies of closure among all unreached people groups (UPGs)*. The intent was to foster the cross-fertilization of ideas and plans toward ultimately the reaching of all UPGs.

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each other (on the one hand) or making sure that a particular people group isn't neglected (on the other).

Some might wonder, "Do we need to solve this problem?"

Mission leaders have noted that the majority of workers in India are working in the same places—mostly in South India or with tribal peoples and nominal Christians. Meanwhile, the vast Hindu belt remains largely untouched.

Some might wonder, "Is this really something we can change?"

In the last 15 years, various ministries have attempted to foster better global collaboration. The AD 2000 and Beyond Movement probably was the most pervasive in many countries. The Great Commission Roundtable is seeking to advance some of the AD 2000 missions emphases, and for this we can be thankful.

Nevertheless, "missions" discussions can sometimes be too broad.

It is more and more difficult to effectively coordinate mission efforts among unreached peoples. With missionaries now coming from the same countries where other nations are *sending* them, the complexities are staggering. Without even considering the additional complications of current global events, the logistics are daunting—trying to keep from tripping over

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overarching ideas drove consultation preparations:

- We wanted to be challenged and to challenge each another.
- We wanted to be progressive and provocative in our joint sessions and workshops.
- We wanted everyone to think new “Holy Spirit-empowered” thoughts in mission.

Thus, 212 participants from 129 organizations were invited to attend and to reflect on three levels:

**1. Macro-sphere**—To think “big picture”; to learn from each other; to listen to each other; to “peer over the wall” into each other’s domains to see what we might learn from one another.

**2. Mega-sphere**—To learn from lessons, successes and failures in each of the major blocs of UPGs: Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Tribal, and Nomads; to remember and learn from the varying ways God works through different people and ministries; to explore details, trends, and new avenues of outreach.

**3. Micro-sphere**—To consider how these insights might impact our day-to-day activities; to consider changes of priority and approach because of our time together.

We came to ask fundamental questions: How are we doing? What could we do better? Are we pushing enough in one area, or too much in another area? Can we get this job done more effectively? What are we doing that is working? What might we do to advance our thinking and actions to further the spread of the gospel in every unreached people group?

While a theme of *advancing strategies of closure among all unreached people groups* raises questions of



definition, it was not the purpose of Singapore '02 to hash out new definitions, for previous gatherings have given us foundations to build upon. (Yet note: The Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies – of the USA – plans to focus its annual meeting in September 2003 on the Unreached – both the concept and applications to missions today.)

### Why Closure?

However, the idea of “closure” has not been as well defined as other concepts related to frontier mission. Perhaps the place to start is to distinguish between finishing the “cross-cultural mission task” and finishing the “discipleship task” in each people group. None of us knows the fullness of what God desires and plans in relationship to any given people group; we are not in a position to say when a group is disciplined according to Matthew 28:19-20 and other Biblical passages.

But we *can* clearly recognize that the task of making the gospel accessible and the forming of growing, replicating fellowships of disciples is that uniquely *mission* task. We want to see this dynamic, often described as a “viable, indigenous, church-planting movement,” at work in each UPG.

Matthew 24:14 ties “the end” with the preaching of the gospel to all nations, but the missiological concept of “closure” is not predicting the end of redemptive history. It is talking about the beginning of the church in a new people group. It is *closure* of the uniquely *mission* task.

### The Results of Singapore '02

Most of the consultation schedule was given to small group interaction. Significant “unscheduled” time was also set aside for networking and nurturing relationships. The first two evenings of small-group discussions generated the following list of the *top five tasks* participants believed they should pursue together:

1. We should convene a worldwide network for UPGs.
2. We should share models and resources for UPG ministry.
3. We should empower church-planting movements among UPGs.



4. We should integrate research and strategic thinking about UPGs.

5. We should engage the whole Body in holistic ministry.

In addition to dozens of results from special tracks as well as from personal reflections, consultation leaders agreed upon *three global outcomes*:

#### 1. Secure Communication Options

Many participants – especially field missionaries – shared their need for ongoing communication. How to do this securely was discussed in various groups. Most from the West have access to secure communications (even if they don’t use it yet), but others can’t afford the extra costs associated. Therefore, a subset from the “Singapore ’02” facilitation team agreed to later invite those with skills in this area to come together to work on this issue specifically on behalf of missionaries among UPGs.

#### 2. Ongoing UPG-focused Gatherings

Another common recognition growing out of the consultation was that it is extremely valuable to occasionally gather with others around the focus of reaching UPGs. Therefore, participants concluded that a global, broadly-based, informal network focused on world’s UPGs must continue.

As a specific follow-up, Sealink—a network of ministries focused on UPGs in Southeast Asia—will convene a worldwide committee, including some from the Singapore ’02 leadership team, to continue to



foster the process of a worldwide UPG network in serving the various tracks. The plan is to convene a follow-up global gathering within three years, allowing many who were not able to get to "Singapore '02" (because of the short lead time) to be able to participate.

### 3. Global Network of Mission Agencies

The idea of networking or partnering of mission-focused entities on a global level was discussed at various levels in Singapore. The third outcome was to task a group from this consultation to explore the need for a global network of mission agencies (perhaps with a focus on UPGs). Ralph Winter will be seeking to communicate with consultation participants and others to discern the level of interest in such an association. (See his editorial on pages 4-5 of this issue of *Mission Frontiers*).

We know we didn't accomplish all that we sought to do in Singapore. There were some significant short-comings to the event. At the same time, we also have heard stories of success, especially regarding the one-to-one relationships fostered by the consultation. For example, Beth, a field worker among Arabs, wrote

about the value of cross-track understanding and vision:

I was just called back from the field to work in the leadership team of my mission at "home." In our work on the field, we interacted on a daily basis with Muslims from different countries and various commitments to Islam. But we never met a Hindu. Since being back, we have seen Indians all around us, but my heart was not burdened for them. At Singapore 2002, we met, worshiped with, prayed with and developed friendships with Indians, former Hindus and workers among them. This was my first real exposure to Hinduism. Through excellent seminars, teaching and conversations, God began breaking our hearts for this people group. Now that we are back, our focus has enlarged. Not only do we desire to develop friendships with Muslims, but we are on the look-out for Hindus whom God is sovereignly bringing to our doorstep! ☺

## Joint Sessions at Singapore '02

The purpose of these combined sessions in the mornings was to look at issues from a "macro" view and to challenge participants to think "beyond" their normal worlds. Each of the three speakers brought a different style; the three combine for more than 100 years of mission experience! The full papers of their addresses can be found in issue 19: 4 of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* ([www.ijfm.org](http://www.ijfm.org)), or see the back cover of this issue of *Mission Frontiers*.

Ralph Winter gave the first address, titled "From Mission to Evangelism to Mission." Winter described how areas we consider reached with the gospel might actually be unable to see the gospel spread throughout the culture because the church there is really just a transplant of the church in the West.

... [This is] a sequence not often recognized, in which mission work produces a national church that unfortunately is not much more than a projection of the Western-style

church in the missionary's homeland, and then after awhile the mission realizes it must go back and start over with a more indigenizing kind of mission effort which can produce a much more indigenous church than the one-call it a first try—which has inherited much of the missionary's culture.

The second morning K. Rajendran, Executive Director of the India Missions Association, presented a paper (read in his absence by J. N. Manokaran) on "A Vision and a Venture," talking about the need to reach the Hindu (non-Dalit) world both in India and beyond. He noted,

...new mission leaders [of the past] have had an unquenchable fantasy to reach out to tribals and Dalits. These ideas came from their predecessors, who often equated missions with the uplift of the poor and downtrodden. Compassion was needed, but missions were frequently connected only with "civilizing" peoples.

Rajendran added, "If this trend continues, missions will continue to leave the major unreached people of the world unreached!"



On the final morning Malcolm Hunter (missionary with SIM to nomadic peoples for more than 40 years) shared his burden for believers around the globe to be part of "The Omega Connection." He observed that many in the Church want to *start* something or to get in on the ground floor, but relatively few seem eager to be part of *finishing* the task Christ has given us.

How about an Omega part of the Body that is focused only on the last and least likely ethnic groups to become members of that Body? This can easily be dismissed as a wishful dream, but Joel tells us that it is OK for old men to dream dreams. I leave it to the young men to catch the vision and work out the details. ☺

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## Tracks at Singapore '02

The track sessions were grouped around the major unreached blocs, including Muslims, Tribals, Hindus, Buddhists and Nomads. Tracks for Research and the Global Network of Centres for World Mission were also convened. Each track got up to 10 hours of time together during the three full days of the consultation.

A track to consider advancing strategies in China was planned, but conflicting events prevented more than 10 participants from attending. However, this smaller huddle became a platform for planning future activities and networking related to China.

## Workshops at Singapore '02

After each joint session in the mornings (and a major break for networking) the workshops gave opportunity for cross-track interaction and "ideation." Workshops explored ideas, methods, and experiments that might be helpful for someone working in other peoples or blocs. Topics included:

- The Power Of Partnership and Collaboration in Reaching the Unreached
- Communication Bridges to Oral Cultures
- A Country Mobilization Strategy: From 21 UPGs Served to 94 UPGs Served in 10 years.
- Breakthrough: Connecting with Unreached Peoples
- Why Are Nomadic Peoples a Major Challenge?
- The Strategic Use of Contextual Media
- Problems and Promise in The Emergence of Still Newer Frontiers
- The Role of Research In Strategy
- How We Planted 5000 Churches in 15 months in One People Group in India



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