

ORGANIZATIONAL RESET: AGENCIES PRIORITIZING TO REACH THE UNENGAGED.

AN INTERVIEW WITH BRENT PRESTON, TEAM; D. RAY DAVIS, IMB;
BOB BLINCOE, FRONTIERS; FRED ELY, SIM



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Editor's Note:

Recently leaders from four mission agencies shared with Mission Frontiers the "reset" issues they have faced in prioritizing the sending of new workers to unengaged Muslim people groups. Here is what they had to say.

MF: YOUR AGENCIES HAVE LED THE WAY IN PRIORITIZING MISSION TO UNENGAGED PEOPLES. WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES YOU FACED?

Brent Preston, Senior Director of TEAM's leaders in South East Asia

At TEAM we have wide open doors to work among Muslim people; but a primary challenge is our own lack of getting the message out. We are taking strong action to right this and I look forward to seeing a turn-around in the number of people we send. There is an attitude of openness among people today to use their lives well for the Lord's purposes. But they need to know of the opportunities and they need to be coached through those doors.

D. Ray Davis, Associate Vice President for Church and Partner Connections at IMB

In the past, IMB primarily placed new personnel where existing field teams had needs—new personnel followed existing personnel. We entered new unreached and unengaged people groups, but slowly.

Our vision, based on Revelation 7:9, includes "a multitude from *every* language, people, tribe, and nation..." The word "*every*" became prominent, prompting our "reset." The task remaining is strategically more important than past accomplishment. With that

biblical vision in focus, our leadership rallied IMB to see beyond where we currently had engagement to unengaged peoples. We transitioned from a focus on countries to people groups in geographical regions. In 2009 our vision led us to recognize globalization's impact. Focusing on affinities has helped us to develop strategies that keep us moving toward the unengaged wherever they live.

Bob Blincoe, US Director of Frontiers

The “reset” problem was me; I had to reduce the number of leaders in the office that reported to me (from nine to four); that freed me up to do one “reset” thing: leading a new effort to recognize and release new leaders who would “preach the gospel where Christ is not known,” where the unengaged are. Five years ago US Frontiers had no team leaders in Chad or Sudan; today we have nine because there are more than 100 unengaged Muslim peoples in Chad-Sudan. This same trend is happening in the other key areas where the unengaged are located in Asia and Africa.

Fred Ely, Deputy US Director for SIM

Several issues within SIM make it difficult to prioritize a specific vision such as focusing on the unengaged. These include: our organizational structure in which ministry strategies are developed on the field level and are not pushed down from “the top” central mission leadership; the fact we are a “general” mission with many types of ministries—medical, education, development, radio, translation, etc., etc., not just work among the unreached; we work among other unreached people groups in addition to Muslims—Buddhists, Hindus, animists, etc.; and, we work closely with local church partners that have grown up out of our work in the past and they often have other priorities which we have to consider. *What we have done is designate a “champion”* within SIM to raise awareness about MUPGs, one who encourages our field leaders to consider those people groups in their areas and begin by focusing on near neighbor people groups to those we are already working with, or that we are working with in other countries. Our International Leadership has also encouraged field leaders to refer to the list of MUPGs developed by the global Muslim ministries network many of us are aligned with as they develop their strategies. We also realize that the growing missionary force from the majority world can have great impact in this effort and so are facilitating their efforts wherever possible. This has not resulted in a total shift of our organization in this direction but has definitely highlighted and put more focus on the unengaged.

MF: HOW ARE MISSION AGENCIES WORKING MORE CLOSELY BECAUSE OF THIS NETWORK FRED HAS MENTIONED?

Bob Blincoe—Frontiers

Working closely on *church planting research* has given us the “fruitful practices” results. It turns out that there are some common practices which, when followed, increase the likeliness of churches actually being planted. And we are all grateful for the data that the IMB is collecting on the names and locations of the remaining unengaged Muslim peoples. It is truly possible to know where the need is the greatest and to challenge the next generation to go where there are no push pins in the maps.

SIM—Fred Ely

The network has provided an excellent forum for exchange of ideas and fruitful practices, sharing research done by IMB and others, encouraged focused prayer and mobilization efforts and provided encouragement to those involved in reaching MUPGs.

TEAM—Brent Preston

It has helped numerous agencies connect. The wonder of it all is that mission agencies, which in the past did not partner with other agencies, are now ready to do so. This global collaborative effort is helping us identify much more clearly where the need is, join forces where we can, and share resources. On top of that, the conferences are a source of encouragement and have become a great resource in identifying fruitful practices we can all use to bring the light to the lost in a gracious way.

IMB—D. Ray Davis

The network provides two benefits for IMB: research and collaboration. First, when research is shared we all know what is yet to be done. Research gives practical expression to vision; it defines the term “every” in Revelation 5:9 and 7:9. Vision is not driven by what has been accomplished but by who is yet to be engaged. Shared research provides that clarity. Second, organizational collaboration is invigorating and enlightening. Partnering motivates us all to keep focused on the goal. The collaboration makes us all better. Iron sharpens iron and, through networking, our strategies are sharpened and our methods are shared. We benefit from each other as we continue toward the vision to see unengaged Muslims gathered around the throne.

If anyone would like to receive information about this global network of churches and agencies serving in the Muslim world, please contact John B. at outreach.io@aimint.net. 