

The Beginning of Another 40 Years:

From 1979 and the US Center to 2019 and Frontier Ventures Centers

By now I am sure many of our *Mission Frontiers* colleagues and family have heard about the decision to sell part of the WCIU campus and a small portion of Frontier Ventures' Pasadena property to EF, Education First (www.ef.edu). The sale has now closed and includes the nearly 15 acres of the campus itself, the field we refer to as the soccer field and an additional 16 housing units that were right next to the campus. That leaves more than 130 housing units and Hudson Taylor Hall (HTH) still under the ownership of WCIU (the houses) and FV (HTH).

For some, among our colleagues, friends, and members, including people who gave funds for the purchase, there have been questions about our original purposes and whether this sale has moved us away from those purposes, or even whether the sale represents a fundamental violation of why we purchased the campus to begin with. Some among this group of stakeholders in our vision say that selling this portion of the property means we were selling out the vision.

However, other colleagues, friends, and members, including some who gave funds for the purchase of the property, have told us they see this as a wise and even natural step. Some have used the word "bold." These friends see the decision as a response to changing conditions globally, in the mission world, in trends in collaboration, and in how organizations function today, more than 40 years after the original purchase and vision. Some in this group of stakeholders say that selling this portion of the property means we are investing in the continued future of the vision.

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Looking Back 40 Years to Look Ahead for Another 40

With the help of colleagues, I have compiled some of what Dr. Ralph Winter said about the campus and the founding purposes of our movement. Drawing from older *Mission Frontiers* articles stretching back 40 years to 1979, I have pulled some of Dr. Winter's reflections about the purposes and vision of our movement. And I will weave around those comments statements about at least some of what we see as our purpose and focus moving forward.

While there are new elements in what I will share, there is a deep continuation of the original as well. I am inviting you to walk with me from the past into the future.

BY KEVIN HIGGINS

Kevin Higgins PhD, President, William Carey International University; General Director, Frontier Ventures; Muslim Ministries Facilitator, Global Teams.

Kevin served in the Muslim world in two countries in South Asia. In one country he helped develop a work that has resulted in emerging movements to Jesus within more than a dozen language groups, and in the other he served alongside the leaders of a growing movement to Jesus. Kevin served as International Director of Global Teams from 2000 to 2017, during which time GT grew from 11 to over 600 people serving cross-culturally, sent from more than 30 bases globally. He continues to serve with GT as Muslim Ministries Coordinator for the Asia region, including a number of Bible translation projects. He received a PhD in 2013 from Fuller's School of Intercultural Studies, in the area of translation. In 2017 he was appointed to be the President of William Carey International University, and in 2019 also became the General Director of Frontier Ventures (formerly, the US Center for World Mission). Kevin and Susan have three grown daughters, Rachel, Sarah, and Emma.

From 1979:

Speaking of the original vision, Dr. Winter said it was to:

...establish a center in the U.S. which will study, evaluate, and assist all mission efforts in a constructive and helpful way, to move dynamically and decisively to push back the barriers limiting present efforts and penetrate the last 16,750 human groupings within which there is not yet a culturally relevant church.

The vision for refocusing the attention of believers in Jesus to see clearly the status of the least reached has always been and remains the central defining point in our vision and action.

Today we can give thanks that almost every major agency and many smaller and lesser known agencies, have as a central purpose reaching the unreached. The tide of awareness turned in a major way.

However, at the same time, as we have described in recent communications in *MF* and on the Joshua Project site, there remains a startling reality: what we are calling “Frontier Peoples,” those unreached peoples with fewer than .1% believers, and no known movements emerging among them.

One of our primary objectives is to form collaborative communities that will innovate and mobilize and train in such ways **that movements will emerge in the 31 largest of these Frontier Peoples, including four such movements by July 2020.**

That is a purpose that will continue beyond 2020, shaping our path for the next 40 years.

In the same writing, Dr. Winter referred also to “sister centers” and went on to say:

We are not presuming for a moment that Americans will be or should be the only answer to the unfinished task of missions. It is a wonderful fact that we can confidently assume that Christians in every land are as willing as we are to try and fulfill the Great Commission.

This vision of multiple centers is something very much at the fore of our vision still. We have a goal of establishing at least **three new Regional Hubs**, which will be the locus points of what continue to be the hallmarks of our ministry: **collaboration, innovation, mobilization and training.**

We are already well under way towards a first Asia Hub, the first of perhaps many such hubs in Asia, and a Hub in the northeast USA. We are also reorganizing in Pasadena to form a Southern California Hub (a distinct group of our members from the normal operations located in Pasadena) focused on three main tasks:

- + selecting a UPG from one of the diaspora peoples here and collaborating with others to see a movement begin
- + forming a team to come alongside those in the area working on the frontlines with other UPGs
- + and encouraging ongoing research to learn more about the other UPGs here



We have always sought to mobilize the Body of Christ to focus on the least reached, and we continue now to do the same, including new devotion to mobilization closer to where the remaining unreached peoples are, mobilization focused on the newer sending movements we see in the majority world, and mobilization focused on the newer movements to Jesus emerging in proximity to remaining UPGs.

From our earliest days, we have had the vision of Pasadena as one of many “centers” and today we are pressing forward intentionally towards that end. Keeping a footprint here is necessary for that. Having a different footprint here is also necessary for that.

« We have always sought to mobilize the Body of Christ to focus on the least reached, and we continue now to do the same. »

From MF in 1983:

Dr. Winter drafted an “Open Letter” in *Mission Frontiers* to answer a question he posed, “Why do you need a campus?” His first answers have to do with knowing Him and knowing ourselves more deeply through the process of the purchase:

Our struggling efforts to secure this campus as a frontier missions base have pressed us close to His breast, we better see His greatness, His majesty, His holiness, His sufficiency, His love for the nations, and His determination to bless the peoples through men and women He has earlier blessed.

And: Our growing knowledge of Him has provided us with the fresh opportunity to see ourselves... The experience has not always been pleasant, for we have discovered our weakness, our fickleness, our lack of discipline, and our sin, but He has been faithful... The cleansed community will be ‘an Instrument for noble purposes’, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

This resonates deeply with me today.

In recent years, within WCIU and FV, we have been on a further journey into these two dimensions: knowing more of Him and more of ourselves. We are re-visioning what it means to be a missionary-religious order (one of Dr. Winter’s main aims for us) in this season of our life. For long we have been a very task oriented order, but we are being pressed closer to Him, and seeing His call to be a people who are formed and transformed, people whose very “beings” and not just “doings” are being made instruments for His purposes among the nations.

This emphasis is a key part in our training for new staff. There is a deep focus on the spiritual formation of our members within community.

International University

39

Speaking of those purposes, Dr. Winter went on to say:

Out of such lessons has come a new grasp of the purposes of God. Indeed, these purposes have grasped us. We press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of us. As sons and daughters of Abraham and joint heirs with his glorious descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, we accept no mandate less than one to bless all the families of the earth, to make disciples of all nations. This dominating theme of Scripture has become our mainspring.

As in the past so now, this takes specific shape. In specific actions and programs.

Related specifically to this desire to press in to knowing Him more deeply, and ourselves more accurately, we are reforming our organizational life around what we call “covenant communities.” These are small bands of members and non-members, sprinkled around the world, who share the same values and who seek together to pursue spiritual formation as a bedrock from which our purposes among the unreached are pursued.

So far, we have formed seven such covenant communities, and our aim is for 15 by July 2020.

From MF in 1985:

Dr. Winter once again highlighted the vision of multiple centers:

... it is expected that if this Center succeeds, similar centers will no doubt spring into being in other countries (both Western and non-Western) where substantial resources and interest in missions exist, and it will be part of the mission of the United States Center for World Mission to encourage such centers and to relate to them.

I have already spoken above about these and our goal of Hubs. But I want to say more here about one of the main reasons for these Hubs.

« There is a deep focus on the spiritual formation of our members within community. »

We have always sought to be innovative and to do what others were not doing (also a legacy from our origins), but today our innovation efforts have a more intentional, spiritual, and developed process to them, given structure and form in the “Launch Lab.” The Launch Lab is an initiative devoted to an intentional, collaborative process of innovation in which a barrier to the progress of the gospel is identified, and new possible solutions proposed and launched in order to overcome that barrier.

How does this connect with our multi-centralization closer to the action among the least reached?

In April, we began collaborating with the leadership of a large movement in South Asia, working with them to identify barriers in reaching a proximate frontier people group, and develop new approaches to reach them.

In 1985 Dr. Winter also made reference to WCIU, as “...a university dedicated specifically to world need.”

Thus, he was already signaling the shift from his earlier vision of WCIU as a “seminary in a suitcase” to a university offering high quality, distance based, degrees to enhance the effectiveness of scholar practitioners in the field of transformational development.

Dr. Winter always envisioned this as including BA, MA, and PhD levels. Currently we are working very hard to complete what it takes for the MA to be accredited.

WCIU has vacated the campus itself, but not Pasadena, shifting our academic team across the street to Hudson Taylor Hall. And we continue to pursue quality and innovation as a university.

For example, our Translation Studies focus is one of the few programs in the field rooted in the “cognitive inferential” theory of communication and translation. This program was developed with significant input from the field, not just field workers, but from leaders of movements who need such translations and whose leadership include those who need the training we are offering.

From MF in 1993:

In a series of questions and answers Dr. Winter touched on several areas.

When asked, “what was your founding purpose?” he replied,

From the very beginning we have had no other purpose than to promote missions to the ends of the earth, especially where Christ is not named, and to do so by promoting the existing mission agencies, helping them in every way possible and mobilizing American churches behind them.

We still focus on mobilization in this vein but have now included as our foci, as we described above, some of the newer sending movements in the majority world and some of the emerging movements among unreached peoples. This is why we are pressing out to multiple centers globally, to be closer to where those movements are happening.

Dr. Winter was also asked, “How did you plan to do that?” He replied,

We set out to buy a former college campus in Pasadena, California as a base, where missionary staff, on loan from many agencies, could work together and do many things in common, without duplicating efforts, serving the mission industry.

That collaborative vision, in its original form, faced unforeseen challenges as every bold step does. It is instructive to see how Dr. Winter reflected on those challenges 20 years after the initial launch.

« This is why we are pressing out to multiple centers globally, to be closer to where those movements are happening. »

From MF in 1999:

Dr. Winter expressed his recognition that to a great extent this collaboration vision of different organizations and loaned missionaries did not materialize.

The potential errors of judgment in the area of cooperation are best known to me in the area of the U.S. Center for World Mission and our own nearly-25-year attempt to catalyze all kinds of inter-agency cooperation... when we began we thought that for us to do 'generic mobilization and research' for all agencies would be an idea that would be instantly heralded and supported. Pastors and people in the U.S. were enthusiastic--and that is how we were enabled to acquire this campus. The agencies? We assumed agencies would lend personnel to work with us if we just got a large enough set of facilities. It did not fully happen the way we expected.

For a season, there were some organizations which came to the campus to collaborate, but over the years this became too expensive an option for most. Organizations began to depart for other cities. There have been more recent examples of attempts at collaboration, but with varied definitions of what the word collaboration means and expectations for how this related to a presence on a campus.

This is yet another reason that we have elected to respond to changing realities by repositioning ourselves globally.

We are not decentralizing as much as *multi-centralizing*.

We will remain with a large footprint in Pasadena where we continue to collaborate, innovate, mobilize, and train. At the same time, we need to adjust our organizational approach to respond closer to the action in places closer

to the least reached (including where the unreached are within reach in diaspora contexts). Thus, our focus on a first Asia Hub.

Another reason for the original purpose was the desire to become self-sustaining through the income from the rent earned. While this is still viable for the housing we continue to own, over time it became less viable for the campus. The sale proceeds provide an endowment in a different form that still gives the same aim of a sustainable income stream, in a different and blended financial model.

And now...?

I have stated explicitly three of our main short-term objectives: four movements among the 31 largest Frontier Peoples, three regional hubs, and 15 covenant communities.

But of course, we are doing more. I will close with just one example.

I am very aware of a large group of friends, well-wishers, and stakeholders with whom we have not maintained the sort of ongoing communication that is deserved. This includes those who were part of the "Last Thousand Campaign" which enabled the final, miraculous push to complete the original purchase.

We made promises to those who gave in response to that push. And I intend for us to keep those promises. Towards that end, I am assembling a team and we are already at work synchronizing the databases we have so that we can begin to reconnect.

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Meanwhile, if you were part of the Last Thousand Campaign, I invite you to communicate directly with me at kevin.higgins@frontierventures.org.

Finally, I am aware that in our earliest years, everything we did was bathed in and offered up to Him in prayer. Please join me in continuing that high calling and priority as we turn towards our next 40 years. 