

Developing Mission Mobilization Movements in Local Ministries

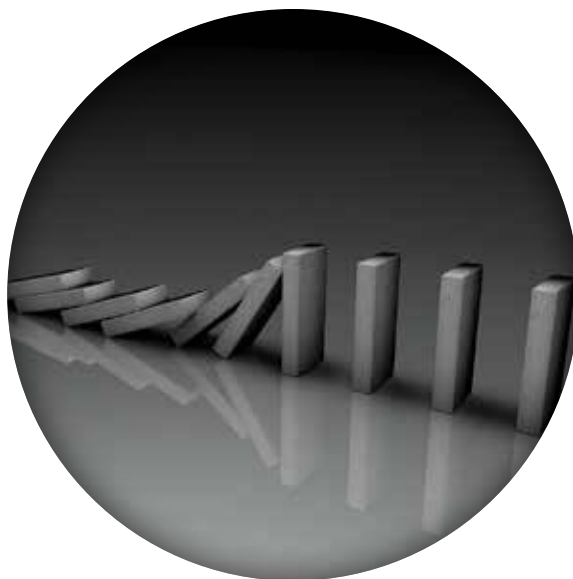
By **RYAN SHAW**

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There is at present a generally low standard of responsibility in local ministries to mobilize and equip believers for cross-cultural mission both near and distant. When looking around the world, grappling with the large number of Unreached People Groups remaining in the world (over 7,000) and a relatively small number of professional missionaries serving around the world (430,000 full-time workers),¹ we must conclude our concept of mission mobilization has been too thin, needing change and giving way to a comprehensive viewpoint. It is time for a shift—a new mobilization paradigm in our local ministry settings.

Over the last decade, I have been asking the Lord a question, searching Scripture and Church/mission history for answers. Just as we may be familiar in mission strategy with “saturation church-planting,”² is there a corresponding concept of “saturation mission mobilization?” I have come to believe there is. I am convinced part of the answer is working toward the multiplication of Mission Mobilization Movements (MMMs) across every level of the body of Christ in every nation.

This is possible now for the first time in history because as Todd Johnson affirms “Christians can be found today in every nation of the world.”³ A friend once told me, “The laborers are already in the harvest.” What he meant was the significant *harvests* (coming to Christ within



present unreached peoples and nations) in time produce kingdom laborers who themselves become scattered, crossing cultural barriers, among remaining unreached peoples within their own countries (near-culture) and beyond (distant culture). This process relies on effective mobilization implemented within local ministries which are planted through the present harvests across the peoples coming to Jesus.

Mobilization directly empowers local indigenous ministries, full of these harvested laborers. This potentially massive harvest force, from all nations, is made ready to be “thrust out,” primarily among near-culture peoples. They are mostly lay leaders, lay people—regular, normal disciples, growing in experiential knowledge of God, empowered, and anointed by the Spirit, acting as conduits among every unreached community, seeing transformation impacting the spiritual, societal, ecological, relational and physical realms through the kingdom of God.

What Are Mission Mobilization Movements?

Mission Mobilization Movements can be defined as any entity (whether a local ministry, denominational, organizational or church network structure or national evangelical or mission association) where the Spirit of God is emphasizing the message, vision and strategies of the Great Commission. And then, as a natural overflow of whole-hearted abandonment to Jesus, He activates every member in assigned Great Commission roles, spreading mission mobilization in a contagious way to other local ministries.

¹ Missionary Statistics - <http://missionaryportal.webflow.io/stats>.

² <https://ocresearch.info/sites/default/files/DAWNpercent202.0.pdf>

³ Todd Johnson and Sandra Lee, From “Western Christendom to Global Christianity”, article in *Perspectives Reader* Fourth Edition (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2013), 387.

Many years ago, mission practitioner Roland Allen affirmed, “Far from being an indifferent or secondary matter, the ministry strategy used in cross-cultural work is of the utmost importance.”⁴ Not from the perspective of implementing a formula guaranteeing fruitful results, but embracing biblical principles the Holy Spirit emphasizes and the Word of God advocates. Strategy of itself does not produce fruit, yet strategic models aligning with principles of the kingdom, produce great fruit. Many don’t like the concept of methods as it is thought these somehow limit the Spirit. In fact, it is quite the opposite. The Spirit used means and strategies (not rigid formulas) throughout the New Testament and mission history, mobilizing the Church in global mission. We need to grasp what some of these strategic models of mission mobilization look like and seek to emulate them accordingly.

Characteristics of Movements

A professor and mentor of mine at Fuller Seminary, Dr. Bobby Clinton, has studied movements for many years. Not only Christian movements, but secular movements, religious movements, historical movements and social movements—looking for common principles. His conclusion is that movements have similar characteristics, no matter their type. Clinton defines a movement as a “groundswell of people committed to a person or ideals and characterized by the following important commitments” with five common commitments made on the part of those involved:

- 1) commitment to personal involvement
- 2) commitment to persuade others to join;
- 3) commitment to the beliefs and ideals of the movement
- 4) commitment to participate in a non-bureaucratic, cell-group organization
- 5) commitment to endure opposition & misunderstanding.⁵

We can apply these five commitments as we seek to multiply Mission Mobilization Movements as well.

The World Christian movement, started in the book of Acts, had each of these five. Those exalting Jesus are part of a movement with committed roots. It is difficult to claim to be committed believers yet withhold ourselves from the global Christian movement as a whole. The most effective Mission Mobilization Movements have been, and will be, among those who buy into these five characteristics with zeal and sacrifice. Mission Mobilization Movements are based on the fundamental

principle that God is interested in not only mobilizing individuals but mobilizing and equipping entire local ministries. As many of the world’s cultures are communal in worldview, it is necessary to mobilize them as “communities.”⁶

Mobilization from the Outside

It is helpful to analyze the global Church’s progression in mobilization emphasis in history. Mission mobilization over the last 50 to 60 years has consisted primarily in effective mission education courses and mission conferences being offered to those already having some kind of interest in global mission. We call this *mobilization from the outside*. These tools are a significant part of any mobilization effort.

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Yet an observable problem arises in these situations. A believer has participated and been inspired in some way about global mission. They want to continue to grow. But how and where? Sometimes there are further steps through mobilization from the outside. At some point, however, that person returns to their own local ministry where the leadership isn’t necessarily engaged with these same interests. No one from their local ministry experienced what they did. The enthusiasm they had is often squelched within the local ministry because others don’t yet share the mission vision. Their vision for the nations is dulled because there was no ongoing mission fuel at the local ministry level. They had to go outside the local ministry to be mobilized for mission.

Mobilization from the Inside

How much better for these and other mission mobilization tools to be experienced within the life of local fellowships instead of needing to go outside the local ministry. We call this *mobilization from the inside*. This is when a growing mission emphasis takes root within an existing local ministry, where that ministry is developing wholehearted disciples understanding their redemption as including partnering with Jesus toward the fulfillment of the Great

⁴ Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 6.

⁵ Clinton, *Clinton’s Biblical Leadership Commentary*, 535.

⁶ This is the premise of Charles Mellis’ landmark book, *Committed Communities: Fresh Streams for World Missions*, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2013).

Commission. The ministry is geared toward every disciple grasping the Great Commission and internalizing it. They may offer mission education courses and other tools, but in the context of the local ministry, not going outside to gain mission clarity. I am confident the Spirit is seeking local ministries and overarching ministry structures to progress from reliance on mobilization from the outside to prioritizing mobilization from the inside, while utilizing outside tools as supplements.

Campus ministries during the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) of the late 1800s and early 1900s were of this sort. They had large student mission conferences happening every three years. At these conferences, and the much later Urbana conferences, students signed commitment cards pledging their lives to spreading the Gospel to peoples where Christ had not been named. In between conferences, campus fellowships engaged their fellow students with Jesus' heart for the nations through Bible studies revealing the theme of global redemption in the Bible. Their prayer groups pleaded with God to raise up laborers for the unreached. Distributing information about what was happening in global mission, including mission strategy, was the norm. As a result, the SVM movement saw a huge number of message bearers (alternative term for missionary) scattered out. They engaged in mobilization from the inside, not relying only on mobilization from the outside.

Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with an outside mission education course or conference. These have a tremendous place in the overall mission mobilization process. The point is making sure the primary context for mission mobilization is within the local church itself, where the group is together growing in being educated, inspired and activated. This foundation is then supplemented and developed further through mission conferences and education/envisioning courses.

The Moravians as a Mission Mobilization Movement

AD 1750–present witnessed the greatest thrust forward in Protestant mission through the “great centuries” of mission. We find a significant increase in mission and mobilization overall during this era. It is necessary to reiterate the progressive development of history. Since the 1700s the widespread restoration of the Great Commission has been growing in camps across the Body of Christ, aided by the important restorations across the evangelical Churches through the Reformation. That restoration is not yet complete. It will continue to take place, culminating in a crescendo, into the next generation.

The famed Moravian movement, starting in 1722, paved the way for the modern mission movement launched by William Carey in 1792. Every generation has pioneers in mission that the next generation learns from and reads about. This is how God has wired His people, influenced by the zeal and abandonment of those before us. The Moravians and Zinzendorf dynamically influenced the mission movement over the next 300 years. William Carey, in the 1780s, was familiar with the Moravian missionary example, using it to fire his own imagination. John Wesley visited Herrnhut and was profoundly influenced through a mentoring relationship with Zinzendorf.⁷ He was marked by the spiritual depth and disciplines of the community itself, in particular, the Moravians' understanding of personal relationship with Jesus through faith, freedom in the Holy Spirit, radical commitment to prayer and their zeal for the lost.

The Moravian community at Herrnhut (the Lord's Watch), in Bavaria (modern day Germany) is a representation of core principles of effective Mission Mobilization Movements. For a local church, network or denomination desiring to practically engage their members in mission mobilization, the Moravian spiritual community is essential to study and emulate. Let's consider these core principles up close.

Leadership Embodying the Vision

First, they had leadership infusing the vision of the Great Commission into every element of church life, in the person of Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760). Zinzendorf had spiritual foundations in the Pietistic revival in Germany and became bishop of the Herrnhut Moravian community. Zinzendorf felt Jesus' heartbeat for the world, believing every church community, because of all Jesus had done, should be ready to go anywhere, accepting any sacrifice to take the Gospel of the kingdom to the world. He was one of the greatest missionary statesmen of the last 300 years and a passionate mission mobilizer.⁸ Cross-cultural mission and mission mobilization was no side issue for the Moravians at Herrnhut, but at the forefront of why the church community existed, constituting their core identity.

Rooted In Spiritual Awakening

Second, the Moravian community experienced a significant spiritual awakening in August of 1727, binding them together, consuming them with love and obedience

⁷ Tucker, Ruth A. *From Jerusalem To Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1983), 192.

⁸ Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 70.

for their Master, wherever He may lead. They referred to this revival as their Pentecost.⁹ The spiritual fire fueled their hearts for obeying Christ's commission. God uses seasons of corporate refreshing at pivotal times to spiritually empower His people to respond to His guidance. As Paul Pierson reminds us, spiritual revival and renewal are always precursors to growing mission vision gripping a community, aligning their hearts with the Lord's.¹⁰ This principle reveals the importance the Moravians placed on spiritual maturity as a foundation for effective mission. They taught and lived wholehearted devotion to Christ, expressed through their mission-sending movement.

Every Believer Has a Role

Third, the Moravians recognized every member of their church community was called to global mission, whether they ever left the confines of the community itself or not. This is a core principle of mission mobilization—every believer expressing their role in the Great Commission with zeal and dedication. Lay leadership in mission is crucial. The task is just too big to rely on a few professional missionaries.¹¹

Devoted, Ongoing, Consistent Prayer and Intercession

Fourth, devoted prayer sustained the community and its global mission work. Through careful planning, the Moravian community facilitated what has become known as the "100-year prayer meeting." It was an unbroken, around the clock, chain of prayer for wholehearted devotion in their community and global harvest among the nations. Devoted prayer literally went on (day and night) for 100 years, breaking every 24 hours into one-hour prayer slots, with two members of the community engaged in intercession every hour.¹²

Movement of Lay People

Fifth, cross-cultural ministry was not just for clergy in the community. The Moravians believed a large percentage of lay people in their community should go to near or distant cultures planting small, simple and culturally relevant churches. They were a scattering community, deliberately choosing the hardest, most hostile, out of the way places of the day—the West Indies, Greenland, Labrador, American Colonies, South America, South Africa. One of every 13 people in the Herrnhut community (which never numbered more than a few hundred) went to a distant culture with the Gospel,¹³ a total of 216 by


the time Zinzendorf died in 1760, while many others went out from the community to nearer cultures within Western Europe itself. The Moravians spiritual battle cry was, "May the Lamb receive the reward of His suffering!"

Choosing a Bi-Vocational Funding Model

Sixth, the Moravians sustained scattering a large number of laborers by not relying on the church to fund their mission endeavors. Zinzendorf believed cross-cultural message bearers should take their trade with them to the unreached,¹⁴ understanding voluntary contributions alone were not adequate to fulfill the Great Commission. The sheer numbers of message bearers necessary, made relying on home churches to finance them unfeasible. They followed the well-worn footsteps of Paul the apostle as a bi-vocational tentmaker. Moravian message bearers influenced the local communities to which they went with the Gospel, while helping their local economies through their example and expertise in various trades.

The Moravian teams took this approach everywhere they went, implementing it as soon upon arrival as possible. The message bearers pooled their funds, understanding that their finances sustained the team, not only individual persons and families. Some had agricultural skills, farming land, while others started small entrepreneurial businesses and still others used their education and training to bring in an income.¹⁵ All was then brought together to serve the group. Moravian teams demonstrated the power of prioritizing Gospel proclamation amidst bi-vocational funding. History cites the Moravian denomination as some of the most effective cross-cultural workers in mission history.¹⁶ Their financial model ought to be considered by many today, particularly in emerging mission-sending nations.

For more articles on core topics directly related to mission mobilization please visit the Mission Mobilization Bulletin here - <https://www.globalmmi.net/blog>

AUTHOR'S NOTE—This article has been adapted from the author's book, *Rethinking Global Mobilization: Calling the Church to Her Core Identity*. The book lays foundations of a biblical missiology of mobilization while providing a practical framework to mobilize and equip the global Church in mobilization. The publisher, IGNITE Media, has given permission for portions of the book used in this article. Find more info about the book at RethinkingMobilization.com or search for it on Amazon. 

9 Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian Mission*, 190.

10 Pierson, 230.

11 Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 69.

12 Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian Mission*, 190.

13 Pierson, 191.

14 Tucker, *From Jerusalem To Irian Jaya*, 69.

15 Ibid.

16 Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian Mission*, 190.