



Meet My Friend

By **GREG H. PARSONS (GP)**

For this special issue of *Mission Frontiers* on Women in Mission, I want to introduce you to my friend, Monica Mitchell (MM), the chair of the board of William Carey International University. Her leadership of the WCIU Board has been a profound service to the university and I personally have learned a lot from her.

GP: When and how did you come to faith?

MM: Growing up in a Catholic church, I learned about Jesus, and our family was very involved. Then, both my brother and I attended Catholic schools through high school. He was an altar boy, I served as a lector during mass. Even at that young age, I wanted to be good and do right. I even considered being a nun! But as a young adult, I began to question the religiosity, ritual-dependent, and performance-based dynamic of the Catholicism that I experienced.

My brother took a different path when he was saved after an appeal was made by an African-American priest at a special charismatic service. I saw him actually experience God instead of only learning about Him. He continued to pursue God by attending InterVarsity meetings and I occasionally went with him. But I struggled to come to terms with the realities of oppression and exploitation in the world in the face of a just God. I had not yet realized that God was shaping my heart to yearn for justice and righteousness—a reflection of His character. I wanted to combat evil in the world: to make a difference, eradicate inequity, injustice, and racism.

GP: How did you first “catch” a mission vision?

MM: Since my ancestry and racial/ethnic background is from oppressed peoples—Africa, Mexico, and indigenous communities—I longed to see the flourishing of those impoverished and neglected. I had met African nationals in graduate school who invited us to help their countries develop. God was planting the seed for a global mindset within me, which came into clear focus at our home church in central Harlem—Bethel Gospel Assembly (Bethel). While Bethel was a predominantly Black church, it included a missions-minded perspective, all in a multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic engagement. The Gospel transcended race, socio-economic class, and educational status. The church was originally planted through cross-cultural ministry in which the barrier of racism was rejected to pursue a biblical view of human dignity and value. Mission was taught at all levels, and mission engagement took place everywhere: locally, regionally, nationally, and throughout the world. We supported mission agencies and missionaries. In that context, my new faith grew in understanding that mission is a core part of my identity in Christ.

GP: Share a few ways you were led to serve.

MM: While at Bethel, I served in the clothing ministry—in effect, a store for homeless. I soon became the director of the young adult ministry, then the leader of one of our Missions Prayer Groups. I helped organize our annual mission conference, in addition to participating in outreach to the local community and we hosted missionaries in our home. All while raising five children!

With a heart and active involvement in mission, in addition to my professional work in higher education, it was clear the Lord was ordering my steps to join the WCIU Board.

After 23 years in NYC, we moved to Northern Virginia and I became the Director of the Missions Ministry at our new church. I began looking to grow the mission program and learned about the Perspectives Course (www.perspectives.org). We mobilized leadership to complete the study program and I began coordinating Perspectives and helped the church take vision trips. Regional Perspectives leaders and Frontier Ventures staff members, Fran and Sue Patt, supported and encouraged our efforts. Sue asked me to become the Regional Director of Perspectives for the Mid-Atlantic area.

This led to a breadth of diversity, including gender, race, and ethnicity, to mission mobilization in our region—seeking to bring the whole church to the global mission of God. Our regional team grew and partnered with the Baltimore Washington Center for World Missions, the African American Missions Council and the Asian American Leadership Conference. We were one of the first regions to offer a Spanish bilingual class and recently started a class in Mandarin. I also traveled to Hong Kong to help train Coordinators there—knowing that participants would mobilize the church in Asia using Perspectives.

I am honored to serve as Chair of the Board of Directors of William Carey International University (WCIU). When I first joined the Board, I had stepped down from the Regional Director position of Perspectives as I had sensed the Lord was preparing me for another work and using me in my professional field in higher education. God opened doors for me to serve as a change agent in broadening participation in the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) so that underserved communities can have access, opportunity, and experience success. With a heart and active involvement in mission, in addition to my professional work in higher education, it was clear the Lord was ordering my steps to join the WCIU Board. ☑

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**DR. DARREN
DUERKSEN**
Associate Professor of
Intercultural & Religious
Studies at Fresno Pacific
University

**DR. KANG-SAN
TAN**
General Director of
BMS World Mission; Chair
of the Global Baptist
Mission Network of the
Baptist World Alliance

**DR. HAROLD
NETLAND**
Professor of
Philosophy of Religion
& Intercultural Studies
at Trinity Evangelical
Divinity School

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