

Two Case Studies on Church-Agency Partnerships

Excerpted from the March 2002 edition of the ACMC Mobilizer

From "A Partnership Made For Heaven"

by Mark Struck, who has served with United World Mission and the local church



Mark Struck

UWM is philosophically committed to winning nationals to Christ and training them to plant churches. This is the end goal of every partnership with an American local church. But every partnership is custom-designed. And while a church may not be prepared to engage in direct evangelism and church planting, it can bring many different gifts

and strengths that support that ultimate goal. It's important to help churches understand their role in light of the big picture.

My job as Vice President of International Partnerships is to facilitate such partnerships with local churches. It may sound like a church calls UWM out of the blue and I jump on a plane to sign an agreement a week later. But the process of partnering with a church is actually a lengthy one that usually follows six distinct stages:

1. Listening. After a lengthy phone conversation, we travel to the church and usually spend an initial 3–4 hours with its key missions leaders and church staff. We realize that when a church calls UWM, that church has traveled a journey shaped by many factors. We listen to its story and discern its "DNA"—its gifts, resources, hopes and vision for what it believes God is calling it to accomplish globally. UWM normally pays the cost for this initial meeting.

2. Stimulating. Once we're convinced as an agency that the church and UWM are a good fit, we assist the leaders in stimulating church-wide vision for its future missions involvement. We paint pictures for the congregation of what is occurring in the area where it wants to work, and the real opportunities that lie before it.

3. Envisioning. When the church is on board, we work together to establish a clear vision for what the partnership will accomplish.

4. Serving. We next serve the church by lending our expertise to equip it with tools, skills and training essential for the task ahead.

5. Engaging. The church begins its initial ministry. The church must be committed to praying for its people group and helping to research a strategy for starting a church planting movement among the people group.

6. Advancing. Ideally, over time the church will send its own missionaries and short-term teams, and will develop a prayer movement for the target area, country or people group.

Imperative for our entering a partnership agreement is the church's commitment to see the work through to completion. It must understand that a commitment to a people group may require 5, 10 or 20 years.

Some churches' leaders wonder if the church can keep such a commitment for five or more years. We remind those leaders who are married that they once vowed before God that they would love and cherish their spouses "until death do us part"—regardless of what the future held. Leaders then often agree that they can make that same long-term vow for the sake of bringing the gospel to the peoples of world.

Once we are convinced that the church possesses this sort of commitment, we are willing even to begin work in new fields on basis of a church's proposal. Our ministries in [two countries in Asia] began because local churches initially proposed them. In some cases when local churches initiate proposals for UWM's ministry, we do decline the offer and point them to other agencies....



From "We Found That We Needed Agencies"

by Porter Speakman, Missions Pastor, Central Church of God, Charlotte, NC



Porter Speakman

We decided to send our missionaries directly to the field without the help of an agency. Looking back, we were quite naive. We essentially believed that sending people for longer terms would not involve any particularly different challenges than sending them on short-terms. We were wrong.

We first sent two women to Panama. Immediately we encountered numerous com-

plicated background checks and bureaucratic paperwork in order to acquire their visas. Then we needed to consider where to secure medical insurance and a pension plan. Once our workers arrived on the field we had to furnish their office, which raised another question. What if our missionaries returned home soon? What would we do with our office furnishings sitting in Panama?

We also sent my youngest, grown son to minister in Ecuador. He coordinated our incoming short-term teams. One day while he was traveling on a bus, bandits hijacked the bus and forced everyone out for a couple of hours. While we were thankful that no one was hurt, we realized that we could encounter even more difficult political upheaval. We knew that if our missionaries were ever taken hostage, we lacked the expertise to negotiate with terrorists or foreign governments.

We decided that we indeed needed mission agencies through which to send our people. Agencies offer the church wise placement of workers, expertise on the field, and contacts in the host country.

So we earnestly began looking for agencies willing to partner with us. We found one in particular that is proving to be an excellent fit for us.

This agency approves Pentecostals for service. It also has developed ways for missionaries to receive quality training in shorter stints, closer to home. This agency does not work exactly where we have developed relationships, so this was our area of compromise. But we are willing to sacrifice in this area in order to benefit from an agency's strengths. Our church still autonomously sends missionaries serving for terms of one year or less. But we send long-term missionaries (which we define as service for more than one year) through mission agencies.

I would encourage the church that is considering sending longer-term missionaries without an agency's help to exercise extreme caution. Such a church is shouldering a tremendous responsibility for its missionaries' safety,

health and supervision in ministry. It's a big task for which not many churches are prepared. As mentioned previously, we are a church of 8,000. We are well staffed and financed for missions, yet we found that we weren't equipped for the job of mission agency. I'm not sure how smaller churches would pull it off successfully.

Yet I would also want to exhort mission agencies. On behalf of churches that want more involvement than sending paychecks, I encourage you to understand that we do not abdicate responsibility for our missionaries to you when they go. We have invested much in them and want to remain vitally involved. We want feedback from you and interaction with you. We are looking for good training borne out of your expertise on the field.

Finally, it frustrates me to see such need around the world, yet to see agencies erect unnecessary and artificial barriers that stifle cooperation. Please keep the big picture in view. Let's find ways to accentuate what we have in common, and let's complete the task of world evangelization together.



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