

Frontiers

Great Things from a Small Beginning: Celebrating 25 Years of Ministry to Muslims

by Greg Livingstone

We had no idea how to organize a new mission agency. What practices should we take from other agencies? What innovations were called for? In the early days, some critics exclaimed, "Frontiers! Isn't that the group that doesn't believe in training? Isn't that the irresponsible mission that will have 'bodies strewn across the Muslim world'? They send people out with one way tickets!" We were not highly esteemed in those days. At least our bureaucracy was minimal. We told new workers already on their way, "After you get to the field you can finish the paper work!"

In those early days at the US Center for World Mission, the entire Frontiers staff was myself, plus Bob Sjogren, his brother Jack, Debbie Greenawalt, Donna and Beth (two single ladies Bob picked up on his way to Pasadena) and Gary Taylor. Gary left his posh job in Washington, D.C., a sacrifice I'll never forget.

We rented two rooms on the US Center campus. Bob, back from Libya, slept in the shower room.

In May 1982, the North African Mission (Arab World Ministries) decided, "Greg, you must stop recruiting; we're full." Their system could only take so many applicants at a time. I thought, "Cut off my right arm, but don't tell me to stop recruiting." What was clear to me was that God was making His move to launch a harvest in the Muslim world.

So I walked the beach in Ventura for three weeks seeking God's green light to start a new mission agency. "There are already many good agencies; why another, Lord?" I realized that there was no agency committed to ALL Muslim peoples,

Greg Livingstone founded Frontiers at the US Center for World Mission in 1983. He recalls how it all began.



Greg Livingstone (center)

focused on church planting with ONLY Muslims. The need was focus.

I was 42—old enough to know it was not going to be fun. We didn't have any money. I alone had experience among the staff. Being new (and from California) was not helpful to get donors or prayer partners!

Returning to the USCWM, I was immediately approached by Steve Holloway who invited me to take over the newly formed MIO-Maldives Islands Outreach. But I was an Arab World guy. I didn't know much about the other Muslim regions.

In the meantime, Rick Love was looking for an agency for his vision. "Hey bro!" (he was from the beach community). "We're going to the Sundanese." I said "Great, I have a heart for Sudan." Rick frowned, "Not Sudan, the 30 million Sundanese in Indonesia." "Oh, right." Then John announced that he was going to China. "This is a mission to Muslims." I responded. "Yeah, we're going to the Muslims in China!"

Bob Blincoe is US Director of Frontiers. He and his team opened the work for Frontiers in northern Iraq in 1991.

The parade of young people at the Center was determined to go where the Church wasn't. They wanted to go to India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Sulawesi, Bahrain, Mauritania. Could they join Frontiers?

As self-appointed General Director all I did was see where the parade was going and run around in front of it.

Was there attrition? No more than any other agency. Most who stumbled, bounced back. As Dick Scoggins says, "Good people bounce back." Most all of us in Frontiers have gone through disappointments and difficulties; what would one expect in pioneer church planting in new territory of Muslim lands? Did we fail to "be there" for some colleagues when they needed us? Of course. But we were committed to upgrading, and we did. Still today, we keep asking, how can we do it better?

Too soon to celebrate; too soon to quit.

I'm thankful that the 1100 adult members of Frontiers today are just as dissatisfied as I have always been. We will be until we see our Lord honored by a great harvest of Muslims bowing the knee to the Lord Jesus. Our third International Director, Tim Lewis is himself a "son of the USCWM." He will push us "farther up, further in." Why? Because if we are honest, this is no time to be satisfied with 160 house churches established among Muslims from Mauritania to Mindanao.

The Remaining Task

by Bob Blincoe

We still ask the three questions that Greg Livingstone challenged us to answer on the first page of his book, *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities* (1993, Baker Academic):

- Why are Muslims the exception to the success the church of Jesus Christ is experiencing worldwide?
- What is the God of the Bible intending to do about it?
- How is it possible to establish the first congregations of redeemed Muslims where today they do not exist?

Greg Livingstone's call to the "frontiers" in 1982 was to begin bringing the hope of Jesus Christ to Muslims. We coined a phrase: "Muslims, it's their

turn." Many fine agencies have since then caught the vision: Consider that 18 agencies with missionaries among Muslims met in Thailand in March of 2007. At this meeting a clearer understanding of the "most fruitful practices" in Muslim church planting began to emerge, and more agencies than ever before are adopting these fruitful practices.

Today Frontiers team leaders are being appointed from 18 different countries. With 800 field workers on 160 teams, Frontiers has begun work among more than 100 Muslim people groups. I was privileged to begin one of these works, among the Bahdini Kurdish people in Northern Iraq. But this brings us to the "dissatisfaction" that Greg Livingstone still feels: We are restless to begin new work where it is needed most, that is, among 247 utterly unengaged Muslim People Groups with populations greater than 100,000. This is the Task Still Unbegun. Every one of the "247" will need a special effort by a dedicated person or team. There are literally some American Christians who are not supposed to be in church next Sunday; God is calling them to move into neighborhoods where there is no church.

We still feel dissatisfied with the progress of the Great Commission in the Muslim world. We can see the 'frontiers' more clearly now. The 'frontiers' are in the hard places: Pakistan, Afghanistan, north India, Chad and Sudan, the island of Sumatra. We are stirred in our hearts by the work of the Gospel that remains unbegun. And we sense that we are not alone. Many will hear their hearts thump loudly when they read Paul's words, "It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written, 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand'" (Romans 15:20-21). 🌐

