



# In Pursuit of Effective Models of Mission

Greg H. Parsons



In June, I was sitting with a friend of mine from Asia and he shared this story with me. He is involved in mobilizing and training missionaries from a country there. He had just returned from a meeting of missionaries from his nation who work in a Muslim country.

As he shared with some 100-field missionaries there, he learned that they really don't know what to do as missionaries. They are learning the language, and some know it well. They are living their lives, which can be tough of course, but for many that is all they are doing.

But one couple was different. They too, didn't know what to do, but they decided to put their children in the local public school. It was not an easy decision, as is often the case with kids' schooling.

In the process, the school principal was honored that they enrolled. They met various teachers and of course, the parents of the other children. It has opened all kinds of relationships and connections with the people in their neighborhood. They are anticipating it opening doors for the gospel.

Why is it that I've heard of this problem before? Why would the problem of missionaries not really knowing what to do happen so often?

Here are some reasons that come to mind, reflecting on the situation in the U.S.:

We model an approach to our faith that does not train our people to think or see new fellowships of believers established in our own culture (much less another). When a church here does see new believers following Christ, we often don't plant new churches. Instead, we build more/bigger buildings because, "it will be more efficient and we can have more programs and staff." The few who do establish new churches, expect to have several committed couples and a full-time pastor or two.

---

WE MODEL AN APPROACH TO OUR FAITH THAT DOES NOT TRAIN OUR PEOPLE TO THINK OR SEE NEW FELLOWSHIPS OF BELIEVERS ESTABLISHED IN OUR OWN CULTURE (MUCH LESS ANOTHER).

---

We fight against an entertainment and vacation mentality in our world, but we run our youth programs to, well—entertain. The students aren't involved in leadership. They don't teach or learn from each other. They are not in accountable relationships that help them to grow in faith and discipline. We feel the need to compete with their text-message-Facebook world—in which they feel connected—but what we do at school or church makes them feel "talked at." As thin as relationship building can be in the "computer age," we must understand it and how to leverage it more effectively.

We in the West still struggle

with cultural superiority. We are indoctrinated to believe that living in America is the best possible option. We are told that this nation is (or was) a God-fearing nation and that is why we were blessed. We sing, "God Bless America" but do we think or pray or sing, "God Bless China" or India or Saudi Arabia? This can make adjustment to another place difficult.

We have a version of Christianity that is more focused on saving people than on what happens after

that. We tend to focus more on outward obedience and looking right morally (as we define it) than on issues like spiritual pride, which can eat away at one's spiritual life and effectiveness in ministry. Often, we have not confronted the spiritual idols that drag us down and play with our expectation of God in life and mission.

But we all know stories of those who break the mold and make a difference. A brother I know, "Bill," went to a dangerous (at the time) Latin American country and worked under a Spanish-speaking pastor in

*(continued on page 50)*

---

*Greg H. Parsons is General Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission.*



(continued from page 49)

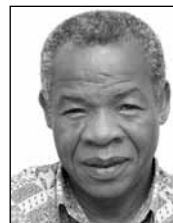
the 60s. Bill wasn't church planting, he was working with the church there and figured that this Latin brother knew more about what needed to be done than he did.

This turned out to be a wise act of submission and servant modeling which surprised the people, who were used to missionaries who acted superior and often didn't bother to learn Spanish well. Bill poured himself into language learning and became as "Latin" as he could. Since that time, he has had his devotions and spiritual journal in Spanish. He planned on staying there the rest of his life, he didn't think of it as a 2 or 4 year assignment he would reevaluate each trip home.

Later, when the older pastor left, they asked Bill to take his place. While having Americans pastor churches in other parts of the world is a pattern we would not promote, Bill had won the respect and commitment of the people as a servant. He was one of them. They even paid his salary, not counting on funds from America.

Perhaps you are from another country and you can think of other "issues" that might impact your mission workers. Feel free to share those with us. f

# Renewal for Mission in the 21st Century



Seminars for International Church Leaders, Missionaries,  
Mission Executives, Pastors, Educators, Students, and Lay Leaders

September 14–18, 2009 **How to Develop Mission and Church Archives.** Ms. Martha Lund Smalley.

September 21–25 **The Internet and Mission: Getting Started.** Mr. Wilson Thomas and Dr. Dwight P. Baker.

September 28–October 2 **Doing Oral History: Helping Christians Tell Their Own Story.** Dr. Jean-Paul Wiest and Ms. Michèle Sigg.

October 12–16 **Nurturing and Educating Transcultural Kids.** Ms. Janet Blomberg and Ms. Elizabeth Stephens.

October 19–23 **Leadership, Fund-raising, and Donor Development for Missions.** Mr. Rob Martin.

November 3–6 **The Gospel of Peace at Work in a World of Conflict.** Dr. Peter Kuzmič.

November 9–13 **The Church on Six Continents: Many Strands in One Tapestry.** Dr. Andrew F. Walls. *OMSC Distinguished Mission Lectureship.*

November 30–December 4 **Grounding Theology in Cultural Context: Lessons from the South Pacific.** Rev. Randall Prior.

December 7–11 **Climate Change and Catastrophe: Paradigms of Response in Christian Mission.** Dr. Allison M. Howell.

**Student Seminars on World Mission**  
*www.OMSC.org/january*

January 11–15, 2010 **Viewing the Atonement Through a New Lens.** Dr. Mark Baker.

January 18–22 **The Gospel and Our Cultures: Postcolonial Anthropology for Mission in a Globalizing World.** Dr. Michael Rynkiewicz.

January 25–29 **Ethnicity as Gift and Barrier: Human Identity and Christian Mission.** Dr. Tite Tiénou.

February 22–26 **Digital Video and Global Christianity.** Dr. James M. Ault.

March 1–5 **Christian Faith and the Muslim World.** Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali.

March 15–19 **Gender and Power in African Christianity.** Dr. Philomena Njeri Mwaura.

March 22–26 **Whole Gospel, Whole World, Whole Person.** Dr. F. Albert "Al" Tizon.

April 13–16 **Incarnational Mission in a Troubled World.** Dr. Jonathan J. Bonk.

April 19–23 **Models of Leadership in Mission.** Rev. George Kovoor.

April 26–30 **Music and Mission.** Dr. James Krabill.

May 3–7 **Personal Renewal in the Missionary Community.** Rev. Stanley W. Green and Dr. Christine Sine.

## OVERSEAS MINISTRIES STUDY CENTER

490 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511 [study@OMSC.org](mailto:study@OMSC.org)

Full information—including speakers, dates, content descriptions, seminar cosponsors, costs, directions, photographs, and a registration form—may be found online at:

[www.OMSC.org/seminars](http://www.OMSC.org/seminars)

200911