

INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS

THE KEY TO THE FINISHING THE TASK NETWORK

During the last ten years, one of the fastest growing missions movements has been the Finishing The Task (FTT) Network that has been challenging local churches toward the unengaged people groups of the world. During this time 1,447 churches and organizations have pledged to send workers into people groups that have been previously unengaged. Only one in four have so far met their goal, but the 327 ministries who have fulfilled their commitment have sent 19,873 full-time workers into these groups. And these workers have reported 97,897 new churches planted.

In attempting to assess the reasons for this progress, five major factors are evident:

1. An emphasis on Indigenous Partnerships
2. A “help without hurting” philosophy of resourcing the efforts
3. A continually updated list of the unengaged groups verified locally
4. A rise of independent churches without a mission-sending framework
5. A growing commitment to a common agenda and system of measurement

Indigenous Partnerships: When we look at what Jesus told us to do in relation to the Great Commission, we see his commands, “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest” and “you will be my workers in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends

of the Earth.” Therefore, we conclude that it is our responsibility to reach and disciple people groups both locally and globally and the Lord has called all of us to work together so that no one is neglected. Experience has shown that those who are most available to go to the people groups that have not been engaged are those who live closest to them. So FTT encourages churches from within the country or from outside to find believers close to the unengaged people groups who will become their partners in mission.

FTT recommends five steps in the process:

1. Pray about which group to select. Believers are commanded to go to all of the groups so there need be nothing mystical about which one is selected; we just need to be obedient to go.
2. Schedule a survey trip for the pastor and key church leaders to visit the unengaged group.
3. Find a potential partner to work with and sign a Memorandum of Understanding on what the responsibilities of each partner will be.
4. Develop the strategy with your partner of what will be done and what resources will be needed—workers, training, Bible translation, evangelism, discipleship materials, etc.
5. Set up a resource team in your church who will mobilize prayer and logistical support for the group you have selected.

BY PAUL ESCHLEMAN

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Paul Eshleman is Vice President of Networks and Partnerships for Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ International), and consults on major evangelism strategies. Paul founded The JESUS Film Project and served as its Director for 25 years. He also serves as Director of the “Finishing the Task” Network, seeking to be obedient to the command of our Lord by encouraging ministries and churches to reach the thousands of Unengaged, Unreached People Groups throughout the world who have never heard the name of Jesus.

The constant publishing and presentation of the list of unengaged people groups brings back new updates and information. FTT has presented the list to over 27,000 Christian leaders in the past ten years and their feedback has led to much greater accuracy now than in the past.

The indigenous partner has the responsibility to recruit the workers, train them, supervise them, encourage them spiritually and provide reports of ministry progress. Therefore, finding the right partner is crucial. FTT has helped to connect scores of local churches with trustworthy indigenous partners. One of the very encouraging developments over the last ten years has been the dramatic increase in indigenous networks that are working to reach all of the people groups within their country or continent. These would include MANI, South Asia Peoples Network, Serve India, Indonesia Peoples Network, and many, many more.

There are many theories on how the partnership should be conducted, but the objective would be for the engaging ministry to be self-supporting within three years. The FTT emphasis on signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the indigenous partner helps to put a time limit on any resources that might be provided and to guard against misunderstanding and unrealistic expectations.

Help without Hurting Philosophy: There are a wide variety of opinions on what causes dependency and how much help should be given to a new effort. In general, these cautions are a result of continued outside funding, long past a time when local believers should be supporting their local churches. However, some missions have carried this to such an extent that new areas are not engaged because there are no believers to support the first workers. Most of the FTT engaging ministries are generous in their allocation of ministry

tools and equipment but careful regarding personal salaries. Because the FTT rule of engagement asks that workers live within the group, somebody will have to come in from outside the group. Therefore, they may need some outside funding for a period of time. However, in many places, workers will not be accepted within the new community if they have no visible means of support. Some groups are doing an excellent job of helping these workers to be self-supporting through micro-enterprises. In fact, FTT reports over 68,000 bi-vocational and part-time workers who are engaging these kinds of groups.

The Unengaged People Group List: Out of all the things that mission researchers do, few things are more controversial than publishing a list of unreached or unengaged people groups. There are probably fewer than 100 global researchers in the missions community trying to track the activity, or lack of activity, of 5 million local churches and 43,000 denominations. But the constant publishing and presentation of the list of unengaged people groups brings back new updates and information. FTT has presented the list to over 27,000 Christian leaders in the past ten years and their feedback has led to much greater accuracy now than in the past. In addition, these lists have been published in eight global languages, which also provides opportunity for much more input.

Along with the people group list, the FTT research department also seeks to collect information on every group that has been reported 'engaged' by network

partners since November of 2005. The current count is 1,898 distinct people groups "engaged" by 2,295 teams of full-time workers who are:

- Living within the group
- Speaking the local language
- Seeking to do evangelism and plant churches

Some of these people groups have a number of teams working within them located in various geographic areas.

Independent Churches without a Mission Sending Framework: One of the changing factors in the landscape of the American church has been the drift of congregations away from their denominational mission roots. And there are many more independent churches being formed each year. In addition, there are new networks of churches being created that are aggressively building their international outreach.

Antioch Community Church in Waco, Texas is a superb example. To these new networks, FTT Conferences provide a place to gather resources, make connections, and share the latest mission strategies. The next national conference is scheduled from December 6-8, 2016 at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California. Registration information is available at www.FinishingtheTask.com

A Common Agenda and System of Measurement: Finally, FTT has sought to encourage its network to work toward a common agenda with regard to reaching these people groups that have never been engaged. A second goal has been to develop common definitions. The challenge for the future is to keep track of those statistics that are most helpful for the worker in the field and to convert the research being done into action plans that will result in yet more people coming to faith in Christ. 

THE FINISHING THE TASK NETWORK REPORTS THE FOLLOWING SINCE NOVEMBER 2005

1,898 Distinct people groups engaged

3,295 Ministry teams

19,873 Full-time vocational workers sent by 327 engaging ministries

68,021 Bi-vocational and part-time workers

97,297 Churches planted

2,380,835 Estimated Believers

Many more workers are needed for these groups, but we praise God for His blessings thus far.

*Reported as of September 1, 2016

S P E A K E R S



Francis Chan, Author

"If I could re-live my life, I would have spent more time focusing on this." – FTT Conference 2015



Rick Warren, Pastor Saddleback Church

"There's no more important topic than this, than Finishing the Task." – FTT Conference 2015



Paul Eshleman, Director Finishing the Task

"We're getting close, now's the time to re-double our efforts." – FTT Conference 2015



Finishing the Task

How much longer must they wait to hear the Gospel?

DEC. 6 – 8, 2016

7:30am – 5pm

Saddleback Church
Lake Forest, California

A B O U T

VISION: After 2,000 years, it seems unthinkable that there are still people who have never heard the Gospel, but the fact is, even with advances in technology and transportation, there are still people groups that have NEVER heard the Gospel and have NO believer working among them. Join us in learning to pioneer a new way to reach the remaining unengaged people groups in the world by selecting a group and taking the first steps to send workers where there are none!

W H O S H O U L D A T T E N D ?

- Pastors + Local Church leaders
- Missions and Denominational Leaders
- Resource Providers
- Marketplace Leaders

R E G I S T R A T I O N

Early Registration: \$140/person (Ends November 14th)

Registration: \$165/person (Ends December 2nd)

Register at www.finishingthetask.com