

Emerging Roles of Mission Initiators and World Mission

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Introduction

From 1998-early 2005 I worked in the Worldwide Ministries Division of the PC(USA). During the last years of that time we went through two major downsizings. When I left in April of 2005 we were facing and preparing for yet another one. As we went through those difficult times staff often talked about the changes in structures and staffing as “rearranging the chairs on a sinking ship.” Our perception was that we were often shifting responsibilities to the shoulders of fewer and fewer staff, while not addressing the major systemic changes that needed to take place. Then a little over a year ago, as I reflected on all of this while senior staff were trying to fill positions in the latest structure, a new picture came to my mind.

I think it is more accurate to see our denominational structure as being like a smaller church in a changing neighborhood. A small church that is aging, losing members by death and attrition, that is trying to exist in a neighborhood that has changed over the years, that hasn't changed to meet the “new” neighborhood, and that is struggling to keep on doing what it has always done, all the while dreaming of and wishing for the “good old days.” That small church has two choices—continue struggling until it dies, or make drastic changes to meet the new situation. The GAC is in a position, I believe, where it must make the drastic changes needed to adapt to its new “neighborhood” or it will continue to gradually die out and be replaced by other structures that have arisen, are arising, and will continue to arise. It must find its place in the new day; it can't continue with business as usual--trying to be better at it or work harder at it--or trying to recover the “good old days.”

When Hunter Farrell was in the process of accepting his new position as Director of World Mission (WM), I shared this analogy with him. His response was, “I like that, because it gives the possibility of hope.” It is with that “hope of hope” that I share my thoughts with you today.

Let me add that this picture doesn't just apply to the denominational structures. Many if not most of our mission-related organizational structures have to deal with the same issues and deal with the realities of a changing world. We all live in a new neighborhood! So in getting at my assigned topic I want to first try to set the context in which we as a church are living. In other words, what is the nature of our new neighborhood? Then I will make some suggestions of possibilities (note the tentative language!) for ways of working in that context.

Before beginning, though, there are some assumptions underlying what I will say. One is that Presbyterians have a history of experience in mission, through which we have learned many things from our mistakes as well as successes. A second is that good missiology is essential, no matter what structures are carrying out mission. Flowing from that, I believe it is essential for us to think of the content of this paper in terms of contextualization. That is, we must understand the times in which we live and seek to follow our Lord into the world of our times, seeking to proclaim and live out the gospel message in ways and through structures that are clearly understood in our own context. And as we seek to help our church engage in God's mission, we must seek to engage people in ways that make sense to them. While doing that we must also help the form of their engagement in other cultures make sense there. Doing all this at the same time is not an easy task, but a necessary one, from my perspective.

I. The Context in Which We Live as a Church

In order to make any suggestions regarding effective ways of working together as Presbyterians in God's mission, we must first understand the context in which we are working. I would like to suggest several aspects of our context. These are not at all exhaustive, but are some which I see as being particularly relevant to our discussion.

World context

First is the world context. Today we live in what Thomas Friedman (2005) has described as a "flat world." There is a free flow of people and information aided by quick transportation, standardized computer systems, wide-spread access to information, etc. This means Presbyterians from the US travel widely and frequently, both on business and on short "mission trips." They can research quickly using the internet and become instant "experts." They can communicate quickly and cheaply with people around the world. When I went out as a missionary in 1989, we had an email system that was pretty much limited to a few people in Louisville and on the field. We didn't have a telephone in Kinshasa. Even in Ghana in 1994-97, to send email we had to go into town, find someone whose phone was working that day, call to Accra, hope the server at the university there had both power and telephone service that day, then send and receive email. Today, 10 years later, I can call people on their cell phones in that same part of Ghana, and they can go to an internet café if they don't have a computer and phone at home.

Another important part of the flat world is that people are working together no matter where they live. Communication systems, computer software and internet access mean we don't have to be in the same office to work together effectively. It is easy and cheap to have email groups and chat rooms, conference calls (including video), and online collaboration on documents—all involving people anywhere in the world!

World church context

Just as we are living in times of major shifts in the world in general, we are also living in times where great changes have taken place in the world church. As Philip Jenkins (2002), among many others, makes clear, we have experienced massive church growth in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, now often called the “Majority world.” It is estimated that today two-thirds of all active Christians live in that Majority world.

And that world church takes many different forms. Some reflect very closely the forms of their own cultures, others are closer to the forms brought by missionaries from the West or from Korea or other places. The Pentecostal movement has impacted even many of the mainline churches in other cultures, sometimes helping them become more contextual. For example, while we were in Ghana the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) began to take seriously the fact that it was beginning to lose members to the independent churches that were springing up. Those churches had a heavy emphasis on dealing with witchcraft, demons, and spirits—all part of the traditional culture and not addressed by early missionaries who started the Presbyterian work (Young 1997). But the PCG had theologians in the early 90’s who began to develop Biblical perspectives on those realities, and the church began holding conferences in various Presbyteries on how to deal with them. That, combined with an earlier movement to include traditional music forms, had a good impact on the local churches. As a result the PCG still reflects a strong Western influence in its structures and liturgy, while at the same time reflecting elements of the traditional culture.

At the same time other growing movements of followers of Jesus look completely different than what we are used to seeing. Muslim followers of Isa continue to meet in mosques, led by Imams who teach from the New Testament. The lowest level of the Dalits in India experience explosive growth (10,000/mo. the last I heard) in Uttar Pradesh. They first called themselves “followers of the untouchable incarnation of God;” now they use the phrase “followers of the resurrected incarnation of God.” Many new communities of faith in China reflect the Confucian culture rather than the Western one.

Furthermore, the missionary movement has taken on a new face—or faces! Paul Pierson (2006) quotes several studies which show that the number of missionaries from the Majority world exceeds those from the West. I have seen the following statistics quoted: Nigeria has over 5200 missionaries; Latin America went from 1635 cross-cultural workers in 1987 to 8000 today in more than 150 nations; Korea has some 15,000 missionaries; 4500 congregations are established in the world every week; there are over 4000 Majority world sending agencies. Pierson goes on to show that changes have taken place in Western missionary sending as well. Where in 1918, 82% of North American missionaries were from “mainline” churches, today that number is less than 6%. The great majority of missionaries from North America and from the Majority world as well, are from the more evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic groups.

Much more could be said about all this, but there are three significant things we need to understand. The first is that we aren’t the center of Christianity in the world. We in the West are in the minority in the world church. It is estimated that by the year 2050 only 20% of Christians in the world will be non-Hispanic Anglos! The second important point is that we as Westerners, who tend to think of ourselves as the center and pinnacle of Christianity, must exercise humility

as we move forward in this new reality of being the minority. The third is that we must learn to work in new ways in God's mission. It isn't that we should refrain from sending missionaries, it isn't that we are irrelevant—it is that we have a new role to play, that role will be different in each context (Sunquist 2006), and we must be humble in filling that role.

As Harold Kurtz said to me in a recent email message,

If Philip Jenkins is correct—and I believe he is—then we need to face more realistically his statement that there is a reformation going on in the world that is greater than the first reformation—meaning among other things that it is also within the non-Catholic world which is our world—and his other statement that there is a revolution going on in the world church-wise, and we are not participating in it. I don't believe we are participating realistically or creatively in the revolution God is about in our world today. If this issue is not addressed at the consultation we are going to be continually sidelined in God's agenda in our modern world. I believe we are still consulting about how to relate to our historic sister churches—churches patterned after the west for the most part—while God is doing a new thing. How do we relate to establishing and relating to communities of Jesus people living out their lives of faith within the animistic, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu cultures? And what about the new communities of faith in the more indigenous Chinese culture being more Confucian in expression? It seems to me that we are still doing too much consulting about the backwaters of international mission and we need to move into the middle of the river where the flood waters of mission are raging. We need to find our way to where the real action is. That really, in my mind, ought to be at the heart of any mission consultation in the western world that expects to have any significance.

And Paul Pierson (2006) says, “The changes in the worldwide church today are probably greater than those that took place during the sixteenth century Reformation. The transition today is analogous to the shift from the Jewish to the Gentile Church in the first century.” We need to do our thinking and planning and praying in the light of these realities in the world church.

Worldview context

The third part of our context which I believe it is important to take note of, is our own Western cultural situation. We live in times of sweeping change in the way people view reality; that is, in their worldview. Terri Martinson Elton (2007) tells of a group on a weekend backpacking trip, led by a guide through the forests and trails of a national park. On the fourth day the leader, for the first time, seemed uncertain. He reached into his pack and pulled out a map, unfolded it, and began to study it—from time to time looking up and around with a puzzled expression on his face. Finally someone in the group went forward and looked at the map with him. Jumping up, she exclaimed, “This will never get us where we are going; it's a map of downtown Kansas City!” This story illustrates the way many people in the church feel about what is happening today, both in our denomination and in the culture around us. The maps they are used to using don't work any more because their surroundings have changed.

We in the West are in the process of moving as a culture from the Enlightenment-influenced “modern” world to the “post-modern” world. Reams of material have been written about this, and I won't go into great detail, but it is important for us to understand that we are in a period of great change. Elton has a good, brief description of what this is all about. The modern world has

shaped the thinking, ideas, and way people have understood things ever since the Enlightenment. That includes the church. But now the very foundations are being called into question. The tremors that presaged the earthquake took root in the 60's and 70's and were firmly planted by the 80's. Today they continue to bear fruit. She describes the difference as being primarily a shift from common foundational assumptions to the lifting up and celebrating of local, particular, and diverse lines of thinking and expression.

I believe that there is very little in life today that has not been influenced by the changes. While people in various parts of our country and in various sub-cultures have been influenced to different degrees, all are influenced. Some rural areas or areas with little population change except outflow of young people may hold on to the modern worldview longer. However, from the push for multi-cultural understandings, to the high value placed on diversity and inclusiveness, to the position that all religions and beliefs are equally valid, to many other parts of our lives, things have changed in the West over the last 40 years and are continuing to change.

Let me hasten to say that I am trying to be descriptive in what I am saying here. I don't think any worldview is purely Biblical. All cultures and worldviews have elements which are in harmony with God's ways and elements that are not. Neither the modern nor the post-modern worldview is exempt from the need of examination in the light of Scripture and its values.

Several aspects of the changes in our culture today impact more or less directly our recent (and I use this word intentionally) traditional patterns of mission. People are suspicious of institutions. Membership in an organization isn't important (including in a church denomination and even the local church itself); involvement is what is important. People would rather be involved themselves than pay for someone else to be involved. Furthermore, membership and tradition are not what hold people together; relationships within the group are what connect people. And membership in a larger organization (again including the church) doesn't hold smaller parts of it together; it is the relationships people in one local church, for example, have with people in another that tie them together--not theoretical but real relationships. People expect quick results and have a hard time working from a long-term perspective. And people expect measurable results and accountability when they invest money. (Pierson 1998)

All of those aspects clash with where our denomination is today in its structures, as we will see in the next section. But all of this says we need people and structures to lead us into new places as a denomination. Today's leaders must have a map of the national park—our context—not of downtown Kansas City!

Our denominational context

Finally on the subject of context, let me say something about our denominational context. There are both internal and structural issues to consider.

Internal Issues

Let me make my first point by quoting from an email I received at the end of November from one of our staff after her visits to several churches:

I visited seven churches this last month, one of them being my own. Five of them had interims and had lost membership and finances in the transition. Two were on what I would call hospice. Their interims both confided in me that they don't think the churches will survive.

In one of the other two, the new pastor is youngish and made the choice to have me teach Sunday School to the over 75 group instead of preaching to a second service of young folks. The former is where "mission" interest is. Our traditional supporters are getting older and the younger generation aren't on mission committees. The whole way mission response is structured in congregations isn't going to work much longer.

Yet those younger people are, or are soon going to be, the ones who have gone on one or more short term mission trips during college and high school. ... Modes of mission mobilization are going to need to change.

The reality is that we live in an aging and shrinking denomination.

Another factor that is obvious is that we live in a denomination marked by ecclesiastical and theological turmoil. Churches have left for other denominations which are more conservative; one of the main issues is their belief that ordination standards have been weakened. At the same time, the pastor of a more liberal church in my Presbytery said that he would be under tremendous pressure for his church to leave if ordination practices are not changed. While these issues don't necessarily impact the way churches engage in mission, they do impact funding at the national and Presbytery levels. The cultural trend against trust in institutions has been reinforced as people get upset at actions taken by national staff or agencies or the General Assembly itself.

Structural Issues

We also need to realize where we are in terms of denominational organizational development. Terri Martinson Elton (2007) has an excellent brief summary of the changes in denominational structures over the years. She traces the roots of the transition in the "New World" from state church to ethnic denominations, along with the impact of the Enlightenment on this development. The second stage of development was the missionary and evangelistic activity as the frontier was explored, leading to missionary associations. Revival and the revivalist spirit arose. Denominational structures became more formal, though many were in the shape of voluntary mission societies, which operated alongside independent mission agencies not part of denominational structures.

After the Civil War Elton traces the development of a more "churchly style," led by the views of the established churches of Europe. This group pushed back against the revivalist spirit with stronger confessional identity, a focus on tradition, and a push for their own ecclesiastical identity over against the looser movements. This dynamic could be seen in the events leading to the formation of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Mission in 1837. The frontier expansion now led to a more inward focus on developing church organizations and structures to enhance congregational life. And denominations enhanced their polity, governance and structures for mission.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries denominational structures became influenced by the culture's push toward the corporate view of organizational theory. Bureaucracy, organizational grammar, and professionalism of clergy were some of the by-products. National agencies with staffs became commonplace as well as regional ones. Clear expectations for clergy were established. During this time international conferences had a great impact, with the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference a high point of the ecumenical mission movement.

Now we come to the most recent structural phase. Elton says that in the late 1960's and early 1970's denominations started to become full regulatory agencies. Professional, bureaucratic and organizational structures were now commonplace. Denominations moved to attracting people by marketing, consulting, and offering grants. Note that this happened just at the time that the beginnings of the worldview changes were becoming most visible, and that this worldview shift was in stark contrast to the nature of the denominational regulatory ethos. So as the worldview changes began to happen, the top-down, imposed, common denominational terminology began to erode and people lost their loyalty to denominations.

One other relevant structural factor is that, from the late 50's on, the denominations moved to unite all of their functions into one "mission" structure. I will say more about that later.

Implications

As in comments I made about the worldview shifts, the above is intended to be descriptive, not to express judgments. It is also over-simplified because this paper isn't focused on those issues primarily. The key thing I believe we need to see is that the understanding of church members and leaders about the nature of the church and of the denomination has changed greatly over the years, generally in response to and as a part of changes in the more general views of the culture. Which is to say, the denominational structures have been contextualized and re-contextualized over the years. How well or poorly isn't the question here, just the fact. One problem is that we seem to somehow be behind the culture in our changes, as seen in the timing of moving into a regulatory model at the same time our culture was beginning to reject that model. Huge shifts in our thinking are needed today if we are to be contextual. And our thinking needs to be directed by Scriptural understandings, not just by the culture. I believe there are elements of the post-modern worldview that the church can draw on that are very Biblical in their understanding.

There are other implications I would like to draw from where we are today. One is that the efforts of the both the bureaucratic and regulatory structures have, in many cases, created the opposite of what was intended. The centralized agency told congregations for many years that they should not get directly involved in mission, that they shouldn't support specific missionaries, that they should just send their money to one large pot for all mission. Rather than do that, many congregations have supported specific missionaries anyway. Sometimes they found ways to do this through the denomination. More often they turned to missionaries of other, independent agencies. That became one of the factors further lessening denominational loyalty.

At the same time many people who tried to serve as missionaries were told for a variety of reasons that there was no place for them. In my case, in 1978 I responded to a missionary recruitment list published in the denominational magazine by the PCUS, only to be told that there was no money to send missionaries. Others were simply not responded to at all or faced all kinds of hurdles. Things like this led many to go through other agencies, which led churches to support them through those agencies. (Again, I don't say these things to cast blame, only to point out the realities that set our context.)

What has now happened is that a number of congregations have moved into direct mission initiation and engagement. Some have started sending their own missionaries. They have run into a number of unforeseen problems in doing so—problems which people who know mission sending issues could have foreseen for them. And congregations are doing multiple forms of mission on their own, from huge funding projects to short-term work projects to partnership developments to you-name-it. Some of these are done in exemplary fashion, while others have many problems from a missiological basis or in the way they actually work out. Many people in congregations have had life-changing experiences and built meaningful, lasting relationships. Meanwhile others have come away feeling good about what they have “done for” people while not really seeing lasting change in their own lives and perhaps having done more harm than help.

Meanwhile there are the issues churches face in trying to understand how to fund mission through the denomination. Suffice it to say, past high-level GAC mission staff have themselves called it the most convoluted, Byzantine system one could imagine. We have a system that has been cobbled together over many years to accomplish a variety of purposes, and it serves no one well. It is no surprise that churches and individuals who want to know where their money goes and what it accomplishes have been turned off on giving through the denomination. One result is that many have turned to either non-Presbyterian organizations or to groups like PFF. Over the last few years PFF has seen an increasing number of churches that, for a variety of reasons, want to not only send money through us for Presbyterian mission, but also have us send money directly to partners for the work they are supporting.

In light of all the above, I believe we need to realize that we have several groups of people in the PC(USA). People are at many different points in their cultural, worldview, and church identity. We have some who are still in the mentality of the regulatory church structure and accept that mode as the “Presbyterian” way of doing things. It is only the central structure that can do mission for the church, and funds should be sent there for that purpose. They see any other way as not being Presbyterian. Then there are those who are at the other end of the spectrum, who aren't really antagonistic to the denomination—they are apathetic about it. It is irrelevant to them. If the denomination offers something that can help them, it is one option of many that are out there and is to be evaluated against other options. And there are people at many places in between: angry, frustrated, pleased, loyal, congregationalist, denominationalist, etc.

Therefore I believe that it is impossible to have any one structure that is going to help Presbyterians engage in God's mission today. There are too many different kinds of Presbyterians! Is any one kind better or more enlightened than another? I think not. Each of us has our own worldview strengths and weaknesses, even within the “American worldview”—whatever that is (or those are!). What we need is to find a way to move ahead in the reality of

the times in which we live, recognizing that “good” Presbyterians come in all kinds of packages and need all kinds of delivery systems for mission engagement.

I have spent a lot of time on contextual issues. That is because I believe that none of the proposals I make in the next section will make sense outside understanding our context. Let me now move to making some proposals.

II. Today’s Roles for Mission Initiators and World Mission

Let me begin this part by repeating that I believe we need a variety of approaches if we are going to be effective in the roles Presbyterians can play as part of God’s mission. In addition, multiple mission channels or organizations can add creativity, more local and regional involvement, and more focus on particular forms of ministry. At the same time, if we don’t have a way to connect or network these multiple channels, we risk furthering what Ralph Winter calls “the re-amateurization of mission.” Note that this characterization comes from a person who has been at the forefront in calling for multiple organizations in mission!

Background

As I set out my thoughts it is important to realize that there are two threads inter-woven through them. Many who have written about these two threads have used terms such as sodalities and modalities (Winter 1970), mission orders and church structures (Watson 1992), or mission structures and congregational structures (Pierson 2006). Whatever terms we use, we must acknowledge that, in general, two different forms of structures have existed in the church from New Testament times. Those who were in leadership in the church in Antioch sent out (as the Spirit sent out) Saul and Barnabus in a mobile mission effort. I find Darrel Guder’s summary of Ralph Winter’s approach a particularly helpful picture:

He describes this tension [between two types of structures] in a less judgmental and more helpful way as the interaction between the “modality” and the sodality” of the church. By modality, Winter means the comprehensive, cross-generational, cradle-to-grave Christian community that embraces all followers of Christ, however one distinguishes between the visible and the invisible church. The sodality, on the other hand, is the intentional, decisional grouping of like-minded Christians who focus their energies upon a particular task within the larger mission of the church, which links us all to each other. For Winter, the sodality is represented by the Pauline mission, by the religious orders, by modern missionary societies, and to some degree, by the so-called parachurch movements and organizations of the twentieth century. (2000:182-183)

Paul Pierson (2006) helpfully points out that mission across geographical and cultural boundaries has rarely been accomplished without highly focused men and women who have worked together in clearly focused mission structures. He goes on to say,

It is important to point out again that such mission structures have normally if not always arisen on the periphery of the established church. And more often than not, those who created such structures and initiated new mission movements have been looked upon with some disdain, often as mavericks or even rebels, by church leaders. Indeed, one critical issue

all through church history has been the need to keep two poles in balance, in creative tension. One is the need for careful administrative leadership at the local and national levels. The other is the importance of recognizing the often surprising activity of the Holy Spirit as He initiates new movements. Normally if not always, such movements have been started by individuals or small groups who have had little or no status in the organized structure of the churches and usually did not fit the programs and activities recognized by their leaders. I have often wondered how the Jerusalem church would have reacted if Barnabas and Saul/Paul had asked for permission to launch their intentional mission to the Gentiles before they set out across Asia Minor!

The Roman Catholic Church has dealt with these patterns over the years in a way that has fit their own church structures, with orders that function outside the control of the local and regional church structures but report to the pope. (One joke among Catholic missiologists goes like this: What is the one thing that even the Pope does not know? How many orders there are!) There have been tensions over the years between the different orders, between some orders and the pope, and between orders and Diocesan structures. But that simply reflects the tensions that have existed from New Testament times between apostolic missionaries and governing structures.

The Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod offers another model with its Association of Lutheran Mission Agencies. Over 20 years ago the LCMS intentionally adopted a model of forming various mission agencies which have intentional connections to the LCMS World Mission structure. According to their web site (alma-online.org) there are currently 75 agencies in the Association with varying degrees of focus, whether on geographical areas or people groups or forms of ministry. Some send short-term teams, others long-term missionaries, others both. LCMS World Mission sponsors conferences for training and sharing information for these agencies, provides channels for agencies who desire to use them to send missionaries, and generally supports and encourages these agencies to do their thing.

Ken Bailey (1984) raises one other point that comes into play here, though it comes from a different angle. In his 1984 McClure lectures at Pittsburgh Seminary Ken traces and analyzes the changes in mission structures on the field in the 1950's. I can't possibly go into all his analysis today, but I would commend his paper to you. The point I want to highlight today, though, is the critical need to devolve mission-related decisions from the "home office" back to the "field." I believe that Ken makes a compelling point that Presbyterians made a big mistake in moving all decisions from the field to the bureaucratic structure at home. He lifts up the example of the Middle East Christian Outreach, or MECO, as a good example of how we should function. While I can't get into the details today, the point I would like to draw from his presentation is that mission works much better when decisions are disconnected from the central, bureaucratic structure and devolved closer to the actual work being done. I believe that this point fits with the development of a variety of forms of mission structures.

Presbyterians have struggled with these issues for many years, from the time they were part of founding the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission in 1810. Tensions arose over who should control mission—such agencies, or the denomination, or Presbyteries. These tensions were one of the major factors in the Old School/New School split in 1837. We can't go

into all the intricacies of the years and years of arguments, but the point is that we have a long history of wrestling with this whole subject. And my perception is that the denominational boards which emerged from 1837 on functioned in many ways like mission structures rather than national organizational structures. That is, until the changes that took place from the 1920's-1950's as they (along with the women's missionary societies in the Presbyterian denominations) were absorbed by the overall structures into one large structure. (As a side note, it is interesting that even the women's boards and societies continued for many years after the formation of the Board of World Mission—meaning that even with the denominational agency there was for many years another sending structure in the denomination.)

We shouldn't copy the Catholic model, which was developed and has evolved to fit their context, nor should we copy the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod model, nor MECO, nor any other specific example of how this has worked out over the years. Each has its own context and factors involved. However, what is critical is that we learn from these and others as we seek to shape our own model for our own context today. What I will set out now are some thoughts to, hopefully, help us begin moving in that direction.

Missionary Sending

I believe there is a role today for a missionary sending agency on the national church level. We still have congregations and members who want to send missionaries through such an agency, and we have many faithful and effective missionaries serving through our current Presbyterian World Mission. However, I believe that significant changes are needed in how the agency functions. In light of what I said a few minutes ago, an effective sending structure is one that has the freedom to function as a sodality without the constraints of a modality. So we all need to encourage current efforts by leadership to reshape, in whatever ways are needed, not just World Mission but all the GAC staffing and systems so that sending can be done more effectively. As only one example, major changes are needed in the funding system so there is a simple way to support missionaries without the myriad of options and restrictions currently in place that confuse and frustrate supporters. (That applies to more funding than missionary, but that is for another time!) Changes are needed in the recruiting plan and strategies, moving to helping people fulfill their calling rather than primarily respond to requests from partners. (Here see again Ken Bailey's paper.)

My own opinion, which I reached while working in the former Worldwide Ministries Division, is more radical than "simple" changes to the current structure. I believe that the only way Presbyterian World Mission can function effectively is to be spun off into its own structure, separate from the other parts of the General Assembly Council structure. It should have its own funding, promotion, recruiting and other support systems that are geared to the special nature of the work of cross-cultural, international mission. Perhaps the example of the model Pittsburgh Presbytery chose in 2000 for its church-planting efforts comes close to being what is needed. They set up a New Church Development Commission, empowered to act as Presbytery in starting new churches. This commission greatly increased the number of new churches and immigrant fellowships in the Presbytery. Perhaps the GAC could spin off World Mission, empowering it to act on behalf of the GAC and report to, and be accountable to, the GAC.

I believe we also need other agencies within the PCUSA who are sending missionaries. Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship and The Outreach Foundation are now doing that through their sending alliance, The Antioch Partners. The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship works through World Mission to send accompaniment personnel to Columbia. The Medical Benevolence Foundation has been working with World Mission to manage a short-term program for health professionals for the denomination. The Haiti Fund has recently appointed a couple to work in Haiti, in cooperation with the PC(USA) and the local Episcopal Diocese. I believe we need to embrace these and many other efforts and organizations as they step forward.

Why do I say other structures within the PCUSA should be sending? The denominational context issues already mentioned come into play here. For example, having multiple senders can help local congregations who are sending their own missionaries and are discovering it isn't as easy as they thought. Various Presbyterian options would help them find a place to plug in their personnel in helpful ways. Moreover, the funding channels can be much more understandable and direct. In addition to the denominational context, though, many other factors are at play.

Many countries are closed to traditional forms of missionary ministry but are open to things like people in business or "secular" university teachers. Today we see those forms in many places, besides marketplace ministries, multinational teams, micro-enterprise development, human rights teams, short-term mission groups, English teachers, and many other forms of ministry. Why not have organizations who understand the complexities of some of these and who focus on effective ministry in those areas? These would be organizations that would not be seen by governments as "church" organizations. For example, The Antioch Partners is working on developing a parallel organization of business leaders who will help raise capital and mentor people called to doing business, to living out their faith and sharing it appropriately through business in other cultures. Business as mission raises for-profit vs. not-for-profit issues that are harder for a denominational agency to deal with. This is an ideal arena for a specialized organization.

Another thing we are doing is that we have begun conversations with a Brazilian mobilization organization with connections to several sending agencies in Brazil. We want to develop multicultural teams of Brazilians and Americans to go to frontier mission areas. Again, this kind of creative approach is much easier for an organization like TAP than a denominational agency, and its approach fits the reality of the church in the world today. It is much easier for new agencies to connect to the new things God is doing around the world outside the established churches. In places where new forms of church are emerging it is easier for new structures to engage them than for structures based on responding to existing partner churches.

What I am saying here, from a different perspective, is that new organizations can have more flexibility and creativity in developing new ways of working. It is like the difference I experienced in moving from being pastor of a 100 year old congregation to starting a new one from scratch. Both congregations have their place in the overall scheme of things, but the cutting edge was definitely seen much more in the new congregation!

The key thing here is not to see these new structures as doing new things and connecting to new places *in place of* the denomination, but *as part of* it. I'll say more about this later, but we need to see this as different parts of the body exercising their gifts on behalf of the whole body, with

all working together for the kingdom. Thus, neither is seen as “better” than the other, but all are necessary.

In light of what I have said, it might be helpful for the World Mission office to focus on those patterns of service or forms of ministry that most easily fit its structures and capacities. At the same time it will be necessary for them to embrace other agencies who will send through a variety of different patterns, or who may at times overlap. And those agencies must embrace the calling of the WM agency. Please don't hear this without realizing how hard it is! It is too easy just to murmur assent without thinking. The reality is that it is very hard for an existing agency with many years of working in one way to embrace new efforts. Remember Paul Pierson's comments I quoted earlier: “And more often than not, those who created such structures and initiated new mission movements have been looked upon with some disdain, often as mavericks or even rebels, by church leaders.” I saw this reality while working in Worldwide Mission. Even while some of us, including some in leadership, were trying to change ways of working, there was great resistance on many levels to the changes that would have to happen. So I am not saying these things without realizing the difficulty.

Let me suggest some ways this might happen. A little bit later I will suggest other roles and relationships for a central structure and other structures, but let me here focus on collaboration in sending missionaries.

One focus of The Antioch Partners (TAP) as we have moved into sending missionaries has been to do so in collaboration with World Mission. We do not want to undermine them, but to augment their efforts. The reality is that Rob Weingartner of The Outreach Foundation chaired a Worldwide Ministries Division committee for the GAC as one of the elected members. I served as a PCUSA missionary for almost nine years, then as WMD staff for seven before coming to PFF. Andrew Adair, the Director of TAP, was a PCUSA missionary for nine years before taking his new role. We are all committed to the “Presbyterian” principles of missiology. We are all committed to World Mission and its missionary sending efforts. Both The Outreach Foundation and PFF raise funds for, and support, WM missionaries in various ways. In fact, in 2006 we raised about \$240,000 for salaries and \$1,360,000 to support their ministry in various ways. (Besides several million dollars for other Presbyterian mission work.) And our staff helped the missionaries connect with churches to seek funding for their support. Having said all that, at the same time we are committed to the need for other channels for sending Presbyterians.

We have been working with World Mission staff on a set of principles that can shape how we collaborate and encourage the work we are each doing. That is still in process, but hopefully it can become a model for other groups as they arise. Perhaps out of this meeting we are now part of, we can all agree or move toward agreement on principles of mission which we all share, which would serve to unite us in our various roles in God's mission as Presbyterians. WM would send missionaries through its structures; PFF and Outreach would send missionaries through The Antioch Partners; the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship or The Haiti Fund would send people through WM or perhaps on their own; Medical Benevolence could focus on short-term health-related teams; other organizations may arise with other foci to send people. Perhaps the offices related to the One Great Hour of Sharing would be spun off into a separate entity which would, among other things, send missionaries, either through their own structure or through WM

(as currently happens with personnel serving the Joining Hands Against Hunger networks). Perhaps Presbyterian World Mission would even itself one day be spun off. At any rate, all these groups would share common principles of mission, and all would see the others as equally valid parts of God's mission.

And it wouldn't be just sending organizations. The World Mission Initiative has a strong role in training congregational leaders in mission and in missional thinking, not to mention training and mobilizing seminary students; they are also mobilizing adults and young people through the New Wilmington Mission Conference. Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, The Outreach Foundation, the Medical Benevolence Foundation, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, The Haiti Fund, and other organizations work with congregations to help them learn how to engage in mission. Seminary mission professors and members of the Association of Presbyterian Mission Pastors have their own roles in training and equipping for mission. Other organizations such as the Witherspoon Society are seeking their place in mission. Presbyteries, congregations, immigrant networks, country networks, and people group networks continue their missional involvement. All of these and, I'm sure, others have their own place in the overall picture of Presbyterian mission and could share an understanding of common principles.

Part of what I believe such a scenario would accomplish would be to help the various Presbyterian parts of the body of Christ put their gifts together so that Presbyterians as a whole would be fulfilling a truly holistic mission effort. More creativity could be unleashed. More people could more effectively engage in their own specific calling through structures focused on their calling. As each part contributes its own gifts, the full spectrum of mission would be seen in all the Presbyterian structures together. Everyone can't do everything. But together we can. And one structure can't do everything. Again, together we can. In other words, this is the way Presbyterians can reflect the reality that the church as a whole is a missionary body!

Other Roles

Then the question arises as to how all of this can hold together. Well, the reality is that "right now this very minute" all of those things are already going on. So the question really is, how can we move beyond a grudging acceptance to recognize and embrace new ways, and then how can we strive for common understandings that help us all contribute our parts to the overall picture?

I believe that some of the building blocks we need are already in place. Over the last few years World Mission has been trying to move more and more into a role of consulting and education for congregations and others engaged in mission, as a servant to Presbyterians in mission. As one example, the World Mission office has been moving into a strong emphasis on networks. Much time and energy has gone into gathering congregations, Presbyteries, and other people and organizations with common interests into networks. Some are country focused, others are people group focused. These networks have helped those involved learn from each other—both positive and negative lessons. Leadership teams for the networks meet during the year by conference calls, and many have email groups and web sites. Now there is an annual network meeting for the leaders of networks!

World Mission has also been moving into a pattern of having Regional Liaisons. These are missionaries who focus on a specific geographical region, such as Central Asia or Central and

Eastern Europe. A large part of their role is to enable Presbyterians to have more effective engagement in mission in their region. They help Presbyterians see where to connect to what is happening in the region, provide information and support, help them understand issues specific to that region, etc. They also connect with networks that relate to their region. This type of missionary is one ideal role for WM to have as a focus for the missionaries it sends.

All of these pieces can help tie us together in what we are doing. But more is needed. What I am convinced we *don't* need is a formal organizational structure to tie all of the parts together—beyond the fact that we are all part of the PC(USA). We *must* get away from the regulatory model we currently have by the nature of our national structure. I believe what we *do* need is a system of networks and organizations that are operating both on parallel tracks and in overlapping circles, to mix metaphors. Organizations would be functioning in the ways described earlier, each doing its own thing as part of the body. Meanwhile they would overlap with various networks where it makes sense for the mission of the organization and the focus of the network.

What if the World Mission office were to see its role as being to facilitate this kind of picture? What if WM saw its task as taking the initiative to embrace, enable, expand, and empower the formation of self-operating organizations and networks with their own special focus? What if WM saw its role in appointing missionaries as being to focus on those that would enable this kind of role, such as Regional Liaisons? WM could continue to foster the formation of country networks, for example, and continue sponsoring meetings for the leaders and continue efforts toward a network web site.

What if World Mission were to now begin hosting a network meeting for representatives of groups such as those represented at this meeting? There could be plenary addresses to challenge people on missiological issues that would help them in their roles. Smaller groups could focus on other questions of narrower interest. There could be time for informal conversations between different groups of people. The WM team could involve people from some of those groups in planning the meeting, just as they did for this meeting we are now part of. The point would not be to regulate or to lower everyone's efforts to the least common denominator, but to help people learn from each other and challenge each other.

In all of this my guess is that Presbyterian World Mission could move more and more toward being the entity that does two main things: focus on partner relationships; and bring people together and help them connect with each other and with partner churches and organizations as described above. Meanwhile they would do less and less programming as others take on more of that. As a side benefit, this would help WM do what all GAC staff structures have had a hard time doing—stop doing some things! Over the years as staff have continually been cut, the work has not been cut proportionately. Here is one way to do that.

I believe this kind of approach fits the culture we now live in—more informal relationships, not a heavy emphasis on “being a member,” and a focus on participating. We need to recognize this and intentionally embrace it together, recognizing that the many parts of the Presbyterian part of the body have roles to play. What this illustrates is the point made by Scott Sunquist last year (2006), as he drew lessons for mission from Friedman's book *The World Is Flat*:

Please listen carefully as I give an important warning: this does not mean that "traditional companies and institutions" are not necessary, just that they have to work according to different patterns.... Listen to what happened: IBM, the large corporate institution, found out that the Apache guys (young 20 something geeks) were doing something better than IBM's six-figure professional techies could do. They did not try to silence them or buy them out. IBM contacted them and backed the Apache team with money, structure and they became part of the community. (p. 102) Thus, IBM avoided getting "flamed" by the internet and learned to work with young collaborators who worked with open-source programming that was offered for free! This is the important warning we need to remember. The collaboration between free-agents and corporate structures creates the best context for business and, I might suggest, mission.

Let me take all this a little further. As The Antioch Partners has begun sending missionaries, one of the things we determined from the beginning was not to create structures that would replicate what others are already doing well. At the same time we want to be very flexible in our ability to respond to people's calls and move them to the field (when appropriate). For example, we decided not to set up our own orientation and training program. Rather we have selected an organization that many sending agencies use for training. This organization does the training on a monthly basis, avoiding the need to make people wait several months if they are otherwise ready to go. This is a three-week training in principles of language learning, acquisition of cross-cultural understanding, etc. We have been talking with WM staff about this organization and what they can do. In fact, WM recently send a missionary family to the re-entry conference this organization puts on, because WM did not have one now and the family needed it.

What if we all (groups represented at this meeting) found organizations like this that specialize in different functions and shared that information with each other in annual meetings like this one or through email groups? Further, would it be possible that we might also figure out that there are a few things no group offers, and that we might have some of us put together training modules or even another organization to fill that void for all of us? Could we have a group of people whose passion is care for missionaries set up an organization to focus on that, which would serve all those who are sending? What about an organization that focuses on engaging with the emergent churches in their mission involvement?

Running through all of these suggestions and questions are key issues which Scott Sunquist points out (2006). The first is the issue of trust. *I can't emphasize this one enough.* Can we trust one another? Are we willing to trust and encourage each other, not take shots at each other? Are we convinced we are all serving our Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom? Are we willing to work for the good of the kingdom, not for our own glory? Are we willing to share information and ideas with one another? Are those of us from WM or from other organizations willing to learn from larger churches with their own strong mission programs some things that would help us work better in the world we live in today? Could those churches learn from others some better ways of engaging in mission? If the answer to these questions is not "Yes," then we have some work to do!

How does all this make you feel? Are you getting a little uncomfortable with what I am saying? Or do you think I haven't gone far enough? Let me interject some words from Bill Burrows, the

Managing Editor of Orbis Books and a Catholic. After reflecting in a recent email about the big picture issue of the church as a missionary body and of the desires of some people, both Protestant and Catholic, to have mission done by the official church body, he said the following, regarding the statement “Would that the church as a whole were a missionary body”:

I think it's as true in mainline Protestantism as it is Catholics that this has really not been the case. ... Only someone with rose-colored glasses can believe that that vision was realized either in Catholicism or WCC-related churches. ... Part of what I will say next fall is that this sort of thinking ignores the fact that, at every period in history I know of, mission (defined as a movement to cross the line between faith in Christ and “other” religious ways), mission has been carried on by specialized groups. The church tries to encompass them theologically; they try to use the structures of the church to get support and recruit new missionaries; but the missionary charism is fundamentally something exercised at one remove from the “everyday” work of the church, which has primarily been one of maintenance.

We are moving into a new era.

I want to close this section with a little history. This comes from an email message I received from Harold Kurtz last year. It describes the beginnings of the frontier mission program as he and Mort Taylor in the Program Agency worked together in the early 80's. Note: PFF was approved as a “chapter 29” organization by the UPCUSA General Assembly in 1981.

In the beginning when Mort Taylor and I were establishing the Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship work within the UPUSA, we had no projects, of course, and therefore only one ECO—863001. And, for your information, our “covenant”—not called that but just our agreement on starting a Frontier, Unreached People movement in the UPUSA, was just one sentence long, in longhand, written by Mort! We operated on the basis of that one sentence from the time we sat down together at the U S Center in late 1982 until we were invited to be a Validated Mission Support Group following the General Assembly in 1988.

Congregations and individuals who joined us in the Unreached People outreach just gave generally to the ECO 863001 and Mort and I worked their approval through our respective bosses—me with the PFF Board and he with the Program agency. Many of you are aware that because of the effort to keep things under bureaucratic control I was not allowed during those years, by action of a committee of the G. A., to even be given information of what congregations and individuals were supporting our Frontier Mission work! It was really flying blind, depending on the Spirit and having faith that this vision could become a part of the Mission life of our denomination no matter what the restrictions!

After we became a VMSG, things opened up and we began to work with individual congregations and individuals. They became interested in specific projects and for the first time we began to get designations. Also, at this time the special office for Evangelism and Church development—not specifically called that in the beginning, was set up. Designations were handled out of that office on an informal way with all donations going to ECO 863001. The keeping of records of designations became more and more difficult and complicated.

The project that really complicated things was the exploding Rural Presbyterian Church in India. When Jeff Ritchie came into the office first of all working with Mort and trying to help him coordinate things, we realized that designations were getting out of control of all of us and our ability to handle them informally. . . . For a number of years, we worked with the entrenched accounting office trying to get some flexibility and help. Finally when Jeff was in the office things changed and we worked out the present system of project numbers and designations.

Compare that to the fact that today I can go into the PFF online database from anywhere in the world and tell you who has given to any of the frontier mission ECO accounts, and when and how much! Times are changing, trust has been built, sharing of information takes place, and we are working together. This is what needs to happen in larger and larger arenas! Again, what we need is not so much new ways of working as to realign our assumptions and thinking to the reality of what is already happening, to embrace the new ways, and to move ahead in them.

Conclusion

Think back to my opening analogy of the old church in the new neighborhood. I mentioned there that Hunter Farrell said this is an analogy that allows for hope. As I reflect now on what is happening today, I believe that I can see reasons for hope. Beyond the changes that are already taking place, there is the fact that we are meeting here these days to talk together about how we can work together more effectively.

At the same time, I want to conclude with an earlier conversation I had with Marian McClure while I was on the Worldwide Ministries Division staff and she was the Director. As we talked about some of the difficulties faced by WMD—financial, structural, etc.—I told her that I was a life-long Presbyterian, from many generations back on both sides of my family. I was still a Presbyterian by choice. But my overall goal was not to see the PSUSA or WMD succeed. My overall goal was to be part of God's work of seeing the Kingdom grow and be established. I said that, if the Presbyterian Church (USA) collapsed, that wouldn't really bother me in the ultimate sense, because the Kingdom would continue. She said that she agreed with me. Today I would say the same thing. My ultimate loyalty is not to Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship or the PC(USA) or to making the World Mission office succeed. My ultimate loyalty is to Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. My prayer is that we, as PFF and as Presbyterian World Mission and all the other structures represented here, and the PC(USA) as a whole, will all be used by God with all the rest of the parts of the body around the world. May we be part of the Spirit's work in the world in advancing the Kingdom throughout all the nations and peoples and thus bring glory to God.

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