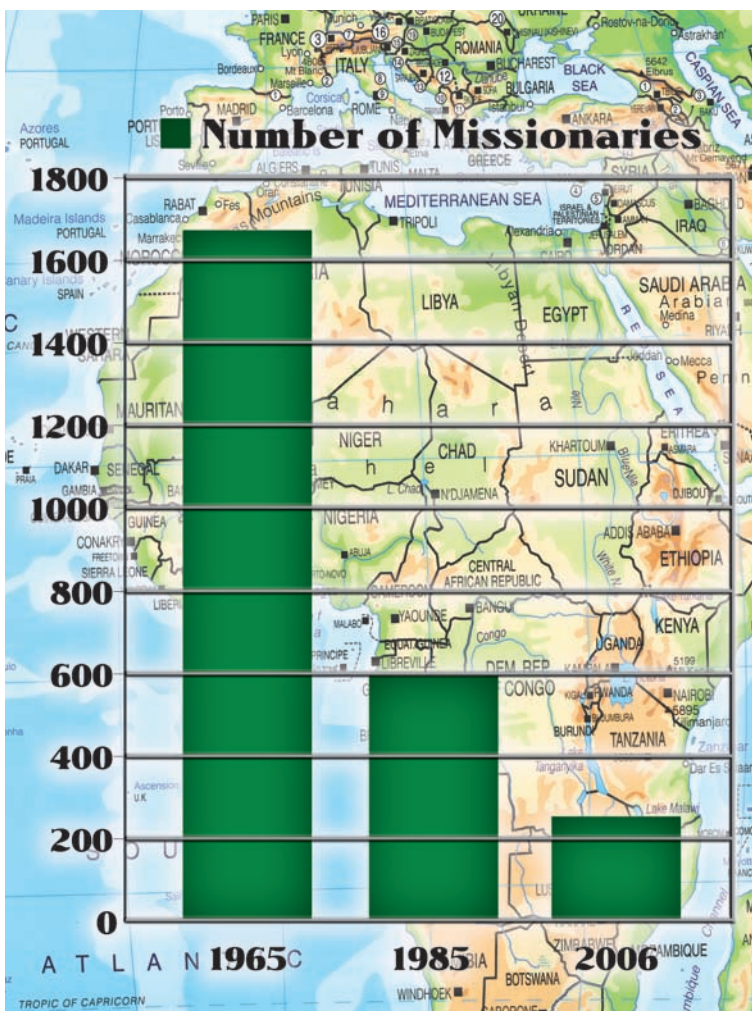


GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM



*1965 figures are for predecessor denominations

‘Go into all the world’

Let’s take a look at the numbers of overseas missionaries sponsored by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessor denominations over the last four decades:

- **In 2006 the PC(USA) had 252 missionaries****, less than one-sixth the number in 1965 (1,671).
- **Most of the drop**—more than 1,000—occurred between 1965 and 1985, when the total fell to 592 (a 35-percent decrease).
- **The church supported one missionary** for every 2,546 members in 1965; one for every 5,164 members in 1985; and one for every 8,996 members in 2006.
- **Specific countries with many fewer missionaries** today than 40 years ago include Brazil (239 in 1965; 17 in 2006), Congo (138; 8), and Japan (123; 18).

** Long-term, compensated mission personnel; excludes volunteers

Other findings at www.pcusa.org/research

Jack Marcum is coordinator of Research Services for the General Assembly Council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

What the research shows

The number of missionaries supported by the national offices of the PC(USA) has dropped sharply in recent decades. There are many reasons for this decline—too many to discuss here—but the main factor in recent years is financial. Less money has been available for international mission and, because of the declining value of the dollar against other currencies, it takes much more money to support one missionary now (\$51,110 in 2006) than just a few years ago (\$37,596 in 1999).

Two efforts are underway to provide an infusion of monies for mission abroad. Both the *Mission Initiative: Joining Hearts & Hands* and *Mission Challenge '07* have had some success, but the final tallies are not yet in. The *Mission Initiative* will fund some new positions for a few years and *Mission Challenge* will help support current missionaries, but neither is designed to provide a long-term financial fix.

As a more permanent solution, some have called for a churchwide special offering to support overseas mission personnel, either as a new, fifth offering, or as a replacement for one of the current four. In a 2007 survey sizable numbers responded “yes” when asked whether they would favor such an offering (members, 41 percent; elders, 45 percent; pastors, 59 percent). Many of the rest responded “maybe” (28 percent; 25 percent; 16 percent).

Given this level of support, a special offering for mission should be given a serious look.

Without that, or some other new, ongoing source of funds, the long-term drop in the number of overseas PC(USA)-sponsored missionaries seems likely to continue. □