

Unfinished

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Reaching the least reached

Escorting the gospel to fresh destinations in Asia

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Our vision: The Kingdom of God advancing among all peoples, bringing redemption and reconciliation through Jesus Christ;

Our mission: To facilitate obedience to the Great Commission by the Body of Christ;

Our strategy: To create self-reproducing, indigenous, discipling Christian communities by mobilizing cross-cultural witnesses for Christ in partnership with nationals.

Join us in The Mission

When you partner with The Mission Society, not only do you join us in The Mission to offer Christ to the world, but you join us in embracing our core values.

INCARNATION

The Mission Society seeks to minister to others by following the example of Jesus, who fully entered the human experience. In our cross-cultural ministry, we are committed to learning the local language, living among the people, ministering in culturally appropriate ways, demonstrating love for God and neighbor, and disciple-making among the nations.

INTEGRITY

The Mission Society desires to reflect the holiness of God in all we do. Personally and corporately we endeavor to make the character of Christ manifest in our lives and our ministry.

PASSION

We are not complacent about the One who matters supremely or the work God has given us to do; nor is our ministry prompted simply by duty, or even obedience. Our life together and our ministry are marked and motivated by passion for God and God's mission. We are passionate about Jesus, our mission, and all those involved in the journey with us.

PEOPLE

The Mission Society believes that people are of primary value. Because people matter to God, people matter to us. Our cross-cultural workers, staff, donors, volunteers, prayer partners, and those we seek to reach are of greatest worth to us. Because "relationships" and not "formulas" are our method, The Mission Society exudes an entrepreneurial culture where every member is encouraged to discern and pursue God's unique direction for his or her ministry.

PARTNERSHIP

Since it is the Kingdom of God that we are called to express and extend throughout the world, our ministry is about more than ourselves and our organization. We believe that working together enhances our witness and strengthens our ability to make disciples of all nations. The Mission Society therefore pursues partnership in ministry endeavors – with churches, nationals, Christian organizations, and individuals.

PRAYER

It is only through the power and presence of the Spirit of Christ that we can live up to the high and holy intentions embodied in these values. We acknowledge our absolute dependence on God and seek both His guidance and His strength each day. Therefore, The Mission Society is a praying community.

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– Romans 15:20, NIV*



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What matters most?

President Dick McClain identifies five core commitments that shape The Mission Society



The Mission Society is currently expanding its work in India, a country which has a high population of least-reached people. India is home to nearly 1.2 billion people, of which 80.5 percent are Hindu, 13.4 percent are Muslim, 2.3 percent are Christian, 1.9 percent are Sikh, and 1.9 percent practice another religion or are unspecified.

People often ask me what The Mission Society is all about. “What do you do?” is how the question is usually put.

Over the past year or two we’ve given considerable attention to that question. As a diverse organization with something of an entrepreneurial spirit, The Mission Society has more than 200 workers serving in more than 35 countries who are doing a lot of things! Medical and healthcare outreaches. Evangelism. Community development. ESL. Bible translation. Feeding programs. Pastor training. Education. Agricultural ministries. The list isn’t limitless, but it’s pretty long!

In the process of identifying the many ministries and activities that your Mission Society missionaries are

carrying out today, we found that we had to ask a more fundamental question. “What are the core commitments that matter most to The Mission Society? What are the things that drive everything else we do?”

The answers to these questions provide probably the clearest and most significant statement about the priorities and ministries of The Mission Society. They are guiding us as we develop strategies and objectives and goals.

The Big Objective: Mobilizing the Body of Christ

“Missions” isn’t the responsibility of mission agencies alone! It’s the job of the whole Body of Christ globally. So mobilizing people and churches is not

just a program we conduct. It’s at the very heart of our ministry, because all who follow Jesus are called to join Him in His mission “to seek and to save the lost.” Mobilization includes recruiting and deploying of missionaries, something we have always done. But it also includes helping churches be strategic and effective in reaching their communities, their countries, and the nations for Christ. So in addition to sending cross-cultural workers, The Mission Society has developed and implemented a proven and effective plan for helping local churches both in the United States and internationally become more strategically engaged in Jesus’ mission around the world.

The Aim: Reaching the least reached

There are 6.8 billion people on planet earth. Roughly 2.3 billion are Christian. That means 4.5 billion are not. They include 1.4 billion Muslims, nearly one million Hindus, and more than 600 thousand Buddhists. (In the pages that follow, you'll read about some of The Mission Society's ministries among all three major religious groups.) Of these, 2.7 billion have been exposed to the gospel, although they have not trusted in Jesus. That leaves 1.8 billion people who have little or no access to the gospel. Some researchers postulate an even larger number. The bottom line is that whatever else we do and wherever else we go, these are the people we most want to engage. Reaching them is not intended to preclude following Jesus to areas of the world where strong, established churches invite our collaboration. But at the end of the day, our priority in selecting new fields and deploying new workers is to take the Good News to people who have had little or no opportunity to hear it, or who have been most resistant to embracing it.

The Method: Engaging people and communicating the gospel incarnationally

Start with the question, "How did God come to us when God came in Jesus?" The answer is simple: He became one of us. Not just a generic human being, but a first-century Palestinian Jewish man who spoke Aramaic with a Galilean accent. In other words, God went to incredible lengths to enter our world. Paul said we should follow his example when he wrote, "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking upon Himself the form of a man. And being found in

human form, He humbled Himself ..." This means for us, as Jesus' followers, that we should also live "incarnationally." Our missionaries seek to live as much as possible like the people they're trying to reach. Following Jesus' example also means working very hard to communicate the Good News in ways that are relevant and meaningful to people in light of their unique ethnic, cultural, and religious background, rather than assuming they should understand and embrace our country, culture, and religious traditions as part and parcel of following Jesus.

The Objective: Making disciple-makers

We really don't get a vote on this one! Jesus told His disciples (and us!) to go into all the world and make disciples of every nation.

We call this the Great Commission. Not the "Great Suggestion" or a "Great Idea." What He did was give us our marching orders!

So making disciples (followers of Jesus) is what it's all about. And if they are really followers of Jesus, they in turn will do the same, which makes them disciple-makers. (We add the "-makers" part just to remind ourselves that we haven't really made disciples if the people we have led to Jesus aren't doing the same thing.)

The Bigger Picture: Practicing and proclaiming God's mercy and justice

Living incarnationally and making disciples happens within a broader context, and that context is the Kingdom of God. Jesus announced the Kingdom, and He talked about the Kingdom more than anything else. Living under His teaching for three years, the apostles knew the importance of the Kingdom message because they went on to teach it themselves. Clearly, Jesus' objective was not just to get people to heaven, but to usher them

into His Kingdom. And His Kingdom touches all of life. Jesus didn't segment people into their constituent spiritual, emotional, and physical parts. His life and ministry focused on whole people. As a result, He healed the sick, fed the hungry, lifted up the poor and marginalized, and delivered the possessed. In a word, he showed mercy and compassion to the needy and (like the prophets before Him) ushered in God's justice for those who were oppressed.

Jesus' ministry is the only adequate model for ours. So helping expectant mothers and, later, their newborn babies receive adequate nutrition is important. Standing up against human trafficking and rescuing young girls from sex slavery is Kingdom ministry. Providing clean water along with the Living Water keeps us from proclaiming a gospel that only makes a difference after people die!

In the interest of candor and accuracy, let me clarify that sometimes these five statements reflect what we desire to be and do more than what we are. Perhaps it's enough to say that these five things that drive what we do are commitments into which we are seeking to live. †

***The Rev. Dick McClain**, an elder in the North Georgia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, is the president and CEO of The Mission Society.*

Where is your church headed?

These four commitments provide a roadmap for every local church and for the life of every Jesus follower, not just for "missionaries." Our church ministry department helps local churches review and prioritize their ministry options. We'd love to be a resource for your church. Call us at 1.800.478.8963, ext. 9046.



In places all around the world, Muslims are becoming 'Jesus followers' while remaining in their own cultural contexts. In his book, Carl Medearis, international expert on Christian-Muslim relations, offers story after story about Muslims who are grounding their lives in Jesus.

Muslims, Christians, and Jesus

Every once in a while a book comes along that is so pertinent, so significantly on target, and so clear in its presentation of an important subject that you want to buy cases of it and pass them out like a clown passes out candy at the circus. It is a book that you had been searching for, believing that "someone must have written a book about that." This is how we at The Mission Society feel about *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus: Gaining Understanding and Building Relationships* by Carl Medearis.

The Mission Society believes it is important for people to discover Jesus within their own cultural context, rather than to have them adopt someone else's culture in order to understand the biblical message of salvation. Over the past several years, God has been revealing to us the exciting way in which many Muslims are becoming followers of Jesus. Since approximately 23 percent of our missionaries serve among Muslim populations, the subject of this book is something that has been prominent on our radar screen for quite a while. Medearis provides a concise and readable account of a truly thrilling aspect of the advance of God's Kingdom in the world today, illustrated with stories from his extensive experience in the Middle East. Thus, we offer this excerpt from his book.



"There are a growing number of Muslims around the world who maintain their cultural identity as 'Muslim' but choose to align themselves with the spiritual and moral teachings of Jesus."

The most serious heresy for a Muslim is to leave Islam. Those who do are often abandoned, ostracized, cut off, and in some places, executed. To leave the path of God for anything is to invoke His wrath, and Muslims live in fear of this; this is where some of their devotion comes from.

As a result, I have come up with specific guidelines for talking to my Muslim friends about Jesus. The first thing I do is toss aside "the gospel of terminology." A case in point:

"I'm still a Muslim, though," a friend [Ali] told me when I asked him if following Jesus meant he had become a Christian.

"Oh?" I said, curious.

"Yes," Ali said. "I am a Muslim who follows Jesus."

"How does that work?" I asked him. "What does your family think?"

He looked at me strangely and said, "They think nothing of it. I am a Muslim. What should they think?"

I had to ponder that for a minute, and then it hit me: Accepting Jesus as his teacher had taught Ali to make Jesus his leader, and in turn, had taken him to the revelation of who Jesus really is – Savior and Master. At no point had Jesus ever said to my friend, "You must change your name, go to a Western-style church, and give up your family and tribe."

Instead, Jesus said the same two words to Ali that he'd said to a couple of men in the same region about 2000 years ago: "Follow me."

Hope

Truth be told, there are a growing number of Muslims around the world who maintain their cultural identity as "Muslim" but choose to align themselves with the spiritual and moral teachings of Jesus, becoming His disciples while becoming what "Muslim" truly means: submitted to God.

I know there is quite a bit of controversy over this issue. Some Christians may find it to be a disagreeable one, so we need to ask three questions:

1. Is it theologically viable for a Muslim to refer to himself as a "follower of Jesus" and still be a Muslim?
2. Is it culturally feasible for a Muslim to remain a Muslim

and follow Jesus?

3. Is there a need to become a "Christian" in terminology in order to follow Jesus in both theological and cultural fashion?

In all, we need to know if this concept lines up with the Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus himself, and if it will actually work in Muslim culture. Question #3 is the least important, but exploring whether or not the terminology of Christendom is important may be a bit of a pill for some people to swallow. It may be that Muslims in the Middle East can understand Jesus' parables more immediately than we; they certainly are closer to the culture of Jesus' day than we are. Furthermore, "Christian" in America looks a lot different from the way Peter understood in first-century Palestine. Upon hearing the testimony of Cornelius, Peter was able to say that God accepted the Gentiles just as they were, by their faith in Jesus. When Peter's colleagues heard this, "they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life'" (Acts 11:18).

In the context of history, a Muslim's identity is major. If he becomes a "Christian," the rejection will be immediate and final. If he can retain his cultural identity and yet follow Jesus without having to convert his religious title to Christianity, he benefits in that he can keep his family and his normal healthy relationships. He can also begin what I like to call "an insider movement toward Jesus as Christ."

There are some historical instances that seem to be exceptions to Muslims accepting Jesus as only a prophet, however great.

I was recently reading my friend Christine Mallouhi's book *Waging Peace on Islam* (which I've quoted already in this book; it's a mainstay in my personal library), when I came across a chapter entitled, "The Mystical Influence in Islam." The following information is drawn from her work.

Christine wrote about the Sufi Muslims, originally monks who lived in seclusion from what they viewed as a widespread corruption of Islam. Many of them lived in intentional poverty, instead seeking nourishment spiritually, and many of them were

completely dedicated to living according to the teachings of Jesus.

I was fascinated by this – fascinated by the way Jesus’ wisdom and compassion had managed to find its way into the very heart of Islam.

So the question is, would Jesus require a Muslim to “convert” to Christianity?

In actuality, Jesus never used the word *Christian*. For that matter, neither did Paul. Peter did once, telling others they might be insulted because of the name of Christ: “If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed ...” (1 Peter 4:14-16). *Christian* appears one other time in the Bible – in the book of Acts – where Luke says, “the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Even so, the origin of the word – “little Christs” – may have been used by non-Christians in Antioch in a derogatory way.

We are never commanded, exhorted, or encouraged to use the word *Christian*. It is, after all, a word, and for that matter a loaded word, weighted with hidden meanings and historical grievances. A much better phrase, one I use myself, is “follower of Jesus.” This defines. It explains. It’s dynamic and real. We really are following Jesus.

The reality is that Jesus was born a Jew and became a thorn in the side of the religious community, all the while developing a grassroots followership, for which he died in order to sacrifice Himself for their sins.

It then follows that his personal mission was not to found a new religion called Christianity but rather to, as he said, “seek and save the lost.” So, however we define this, we can agree that His identity, at least his teaching and his lifestyle, was not “Christian.”

Paul pushes it even further. He stated in Galatians 3:28 that “there is no longer Jew or Gentiles ... For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (NLT), showing us that obligatory cultural terminology does not carry any weight in the eyes of God. Those who are in Christ are in Christ; those who are not, simply aren’t.

A story of faith: Being a Hope Broker

I met Mohsen one night at my friend’s house. We were having

a gathering of top-level Lebanese political leadership to discuss how these men could work with us in bridging the Arab East and American West. Mohsen was a Sunni Muslim parliament member and a striking man in every way. He was articulate, handsome, well dressed, and I later found out, spoke seven languages and sang Italian opera. He gave me a five-minute appointment at his office the next week.

When I arrived at the time scheduled, he was just leaving. He had forgotten our meeting. Embarrassed, he invited me to join him for lunch – at his house.

If you know anything about Arabs, you know their hospitality is famous. Typically, only the most basic small talk is engaged in until coffee and sweets are served. But in this case, after entering his house, he slouched down, put his head between his hands, and sighed. “Life’s hard.”

I asked him what was going on. He simply replied, “I have no hope. No hope for Lebanon whatsoever.”

“That’s pretty serious since you’re a leader in the country. That’s probably not good.”

“Well, enough about me,” he quickly said. “Tell me something about you. What do you do?”

“I’m a hope broker.” (I had never said that before and have never used it since, but it seemed appropriate to the situation.)

“Hmm. What does a hope broker do exactly?” Since I wasn’t used to this line of questioning, I didn’t really know what to say other than the obvious: “I deal hope.”

“Well, where do you get it? The hope. Where do you get your hope?”

“First, tell me more about why things are so bad in Lebanon and what it’s like to be in your position. Then I will tell you where I get hope.” So he did. But within five minutes, he remembered what I’d said and came back to it.

“So explain this ‘hope thing’ that you mentioned.”

I began: “It’s so simple it’s almost silly. Here’s the idea. It’s very small and quite unorganized. We gather a few people from various segments of the society and meet about once a week. We do a few basic things. First, we try to pray for the country. We have university students, kids, professionals,



“Once again, I saw that while Muslims are often afraid of Christianity and maybe even Christians, they’re more than willing to look seriously into the life of Christ.”

businessmen, poor Palestinians, and anyone else who wants to meet. These groups reflect Lebanon’s society, so they’re a mix of Muslim, Christian, and Druze. We all say we believe in a God who can save people, so we thought we’d start where we agree – prayer! But lately we’ve realized we need more than prayer. We need something to bind us together. Something to focus on. To study. So we decided to study the life of a great person who we could all agree on.”

I paused, not wanting to do all the talking, and asked if he could suggest someone to study.

[Mohsen first mentioned Mother Teresa, then Gandhi. Then Carl asked if there were anyone else.] He must have thought for a full minute. All of a sudden he pounded the table – scared me half to death – and said, “I’ve got it. It’s Jesus!” He nearly yelled it. Then he explained: “Muslims like Jesus. Druze like Jesus. Even Christians like Jesus.” (I’m not making that up – that’s exactly what he said, “Even Christians . . .”)

“Of course,” I replied. “Really, Jesus, eh? Hmm. Could be. I think you’re on to something here. Are you saying that you think everyone loves and respects Jesus, although possibly not the religion of his followers?”

“Exactly!” he burst out. “That’s what I’m saying. We would all love to meet and discuss Jesus. Hey, we should do one of these groups in the parliament. You can lead it.”

And so we did – we started a little gathering in the Lebanese parliament. It didn’t change the world. It didn’t change Lebanon. I don’t even know if it changed us. But it was good. We didn’t meet every week, but we met often, and when we were together it was wonderful. We studied through the gospel of Luke.

Once again, I saw that while Muslims are often afraid of Christianity and maybe even Christians, they’re more than willing to look seriously into the life of Christ.

A story of faith: A man as a bridge

Abou Hamza (not his real name) is a friend of mine. He is a Sunni Muslim who lives in an extremely conservative Arab country. Most would say he lives in an Islamic fundamentalist context, maybe in its heartland.

I met Abou Hamza in Beirut, around 1998, at a gathering of mutual friends. He was fun, smart, articulate, and very wealthy. We talked now and then over the next year when he came to Beirut, but our friendship didn’t grow much.

In 1999, though, I helped point his son to Jesus. That changed things. His son immediately and dramatically changed in all ways good. Abou Hamza was forever indebted.

It’s actually a long story of patience and friendship (on both our parts). He saw me as a fairly typical Christian preacher, despite my best efforts to wear neither label. I saw him as a rough-and-tough rich businessman, politically connected and entrenched in everything Sunni. He was nearly 20 years my elder. I was in over my head. He was not really someone I felt qualified to mentor or disciple. But God is clever.

Soon we were spending time together all over the world. In his country. In Lebanon. In the U.S. and England. In other Arab countries. In his words, he “started loving the teachings of Jesus” and soon found himself “loving Jesus.”

My Christian friends were all excited for me. I’d done it. I had led a prominent Arab Muslim to Jesus. My first convert to notoriety.

In fact, Abou Hamza himself has a funny story related to this. I was with him when he gave a lecture (in English) at a renowned Arab university about business ethics. I was so proud of him as he talked about following the way of Jesus Christ in all dealings. The audience of 30 or so young professionals seemed surprised but encouraged by the talk.

Two newspapers wrote stories about his lecture the following day. The one with a Christian staff used the “Christian” word in Arabic for Jesus (Yesua), saying that Mr. Abou Hamza taught from the life of Yesua. The other paper, with a Muslim staff, used the Qur’anic word for Jesus (Isa).

You can almost guess what happened. He was quickly inundated with phone calls from his friends. His Christian friends, who had read that version of the talk, called and said, “Ya Abou Hamza. Welcome to the club. You’ve finally seen the light and become a Christian.” His Muslim friends, who read their newspaper, congratulated my friend that he had finally let

those Christians know and understand a few things about who Jesus really is.

How funny is that? Everyone thinking they own Jesus.

Abou Hamza continued to grow in his love for Jesus – first in his teachings, and then it seemed to take on new life as Abou Hamza began to want to live and act and talk like Jesus. His words and actions changed. He softened. Business dealings were even more different. He was a changed man from the inside out.

When we were in the West together, he would talk about Jesus so passionately and personally with my friends that they couldn't help but ask, "So when did you become a Christian?"

He would smile and try to explain. "I'm a Muslim, but I follow Jesus, I believe in Jesus. I live for Jesus. He is everything to me."

They would push and ask questions like, "Yes, but when did you pray the prayer of salvation and ask Jesus into your heart?"

At first such inquiries would confuse him, as he had never heard the language before, but he soon caught on to cultural nuances and would reply with something like, "Jesus has captured me in stages. But I'm still a work in progress. Are you finished yet?" Then he'd flash a disarming smile and my friends would melt, knowing they had possibly asked the wrong question – or the right one in the wrong way.

The real issue for Abou Hamza was in trying to figure out how to live out this new life in Christ within his context. It seems that one of two things happens when a Muslim in a conservative country comes to Christ. He either moves to the West, where he can live out his faith within Christian surroundings, or he stays and lives with his faith undercover, in fear that he will be ostracized or even killed.

But is there a third way? Can they stay in their own country, not have to live in hiding, and still talk openly about Jesus? It is possible! Abou Hamza has done it well.

Between two worlds

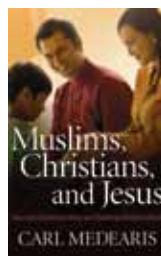
What Abou Hamza has done so well is to make every attempt to live out his life in a way that feels culturally Muslim to his

friends while still being bold about his commitment to Jesus Christ. He lets everything go that would seem to be Christian in culture. Some of those things would be (according to him, at least): praying with head bowed and eyes closed, singing worship songs, quoting the chapter and verse when saying a Scripture, going to a church building on Sunday, etc.

When people hear Abou Hamza's story, they often ask if he still goes to mosque on Fridays and reads the Qur'an. Good questions. He does not attend the mosque infrequently because it's the center of all things cultural. Weddings and funerals, as well as general community gatherings, happen at the mosque. To not go there would mean that he no longer values his friends and family. There's no reason to not go.

He feels that reading the Qur'an is tantamount to other Christians reading some other good book. It's not bad, but it doesn't bring the life that the Bible brings. Frankly, I think he reads the Qur'an less and less as he finds more and more fulfillment in the 66 books we call the Holy Scriptures.

Abou Hamza has become a bridge by his very life. He stands between two worlds. It's a precarious place to live. But it's the "new citizenship" of the people like Cornelius in the Bible. They join with Jesus and people of every culture to become what the book of Acts calls the people of "the Way" (9:2; 19:23; 24:14; 24:22). He is from a culture and of a religion that has little tolerance for someone changing their way and joining another religion and culture. He is Muslim with his Muslim friends and can look and feel Christian with his Christian friends. But in the end he is a follower of Jesus. He translates Jesus into his culture and translates a new vision of Jesus into ours. ☩



This was adapted from chapter seven of *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus: Gaining Understanding and Building Relationships* by Carl Medearis, Bethany House Publishers, a division of Baker Publishing Group, copyright 2008, used by permission. For more information about Carl Medearis and his ministry, visit www.carlmedearis.com.



Buddhism, the world's fourth largest religion, has a widespread following in East and Southeast Asia.

Reaching the Buddhist heart

Tables are set for genuine conversation

They meet in hotel restaurants – neutral territory. Dressed in business suits, they sit around beautiful tables with Bibles open in front of them. They share Scripture and pray – Christians and non-Christian “seekers” together. It’s a peculiar sight in the land of Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, but it’s becoming more and more common. These groups call themselves the International VIP Club. By VIP they mean Very Important Persons in the Eyes of God (Isaiah 43:4). Who are they? Japanese Christian business people. Their purpose? To reach out to the unreached in the Japanese business world.

The VIP Club began in 1993 with the aid of a Christian American businessman and a group of Japanese Christian lay leaders who believed God was directing them to witness to other Japanese business professionals. At first there were only a handful of groups meeting in Tokyo and Osaka. Now 158 chapters meet weekly in cities throughout Japan and in 45 other chapters internationally, and hundreds and hundreds of Japanese are coming to Christ. At a December 1, 2009 VIP Club gathering, 600 of Japan’s business and government officials met at the New Otani Hotel in Tokyo, in which one-third of the group was non-Christian.



Cycle of “rebirths”: Mission Society missionary, Mari Hicks, is a native of Japan. Her husband, Neal, was introduced to Christ by Mari’s father, Mr. Akasaka, who grew up in a Japanese Buddhist home. When, as a young man, Mr. Akasaka encountered Christ and felt called to go to Bible school, his Buddhist father disowned him. Mr. Akasaka later became a Methodist pastor. After years of estrangement, the now-Rev. Akasaka introduced his own father to Christ, who then became a Jesus follower. Today, the Rev. Akasaka’s witness lives on through his family. His daughter, Mari, and son-in-law, Neal have served as missionaries in Japan since 1981.

At the weekly fellowship meetings, “We go around the table,” says Neal Hicks, “and the Christians read a verse of Scripture and share a brief testimony about what God has recently done in their lives. Next, we allow time for unbelievers to share whatever is on their hearts. Then we take prayer requests, and ask, ‘How can we help you?’ Unbelievers feel loved, they come back, and very often we hear how God has answered their prayers.”

In addition to these hotel fellowship meetings, there are also weekly all-night VIP prayer meetings throughout Japan. Then twice a year, at Christmas and in the summer, all of the groups gather for a “festival,” an evangelistic meeting and celebration. These meetings are held in a large hotel ballroom. One of the more recent festivals was so well attended the ballroom could not hold them all.

The VIP Club not only reaches out to business people; it has also begun targeting Japanese politicians. “Several politicians who are VIP members are very upfront, sharing with people in the political world about their relationship with Christ,” says Hicks. “More and more Christians are being appointed to governmental posts in Japan. The Lord is using Japanese Christians in the political and business worlds to impact other leaders. It’s amazing.”

A move of God

This is an important time, says Hicks. Japan has historically been a difficult field for Christian missionaries. He reflects, “Every kind of evangelistic maneuver that you can think of has been done in Japan for hundreds of years, and with little result. It makes you wonder, ‘Why, Lord?’ But today we are

beginning to see something: The Japanese are really hearing the gospel.

“The Japanese are born servants. They are faithful, obedient, and loyal. So when they become connected to the Body of Christ, look out! They will turn the world upsidedown!” ✝

This article has been adapted from an article by Jean Healan which appeared previously in The Mission Society publication, Heartbeat. Jean and her husband, Randy – an ordained United Methodist minister – served as Mission Society missionaries in Costa Rica and Mexico.



Among the International VIP Club activities are intensive Bible studies, like the Christmas Bible study shown here with Mission Society missionary Neal Hicks.

The attractiveness of Jesus

Missionary Neal Hicks describes the appeal of a living deity to a Buddhist heart

What would people be surprised to know about Buddhism in Japan?

One of the things that surprised me was that Buddhism was not an original religion of the Japanese. It came from India and worked its way to China, Taiwan, and Korea and then, in the 6th century, finally to Japan. So Buddhism is not indigenous to Japan and, in fact, Buddhists were heavily persecuted, even martyred.

Then, in the 1600s, an emperor's edict closed Japan to the outside world. It remained closed for about 300 years. During that time, Tokugawa Iemitsu, a Japanese warlord, forced every family to join their local village Buddhist temple. So for those 300 years when Japan was without outside influence, Buddhism found a home in Japan.

What do you think accounts for the appeal of Buddhism in the West?

There has always been a fascination with Asia and the Orient. Even the Beatles were into Eastern religions. People in the West are attracted to the natural, herbal medicines introduced from the East. And I think, because of our fast-paced culture, meditation is becoming more and more attractive. So Buddhism is finding its niche in Western culture. There are some qualities in Buddhism that mirror Christianity. Buddhism teaches respect for family and nature. And Buddhist monks and nuns renounce worldly things and take on a life of compassion, humility, and meditation. These are also teachings in Christianity.

So there are some ancient stepping stones in Buddhism that can help us introduce Christ to the Japanese.

What is the appeal of Christianity to Shintoists and Buddhists?

Buddhism and Shintoism are religions full of ritual. The fact that a person can have a personal

relationship with a living deity is a new idea. So when they come to our International VIP meetings one of the first things we tell them is that they can have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We tell them that they don't have to do any ritual to achieve this, that they don't have to try to gain this by their own merit. So the gospel is very appealing to them because they learn they can simply believe and experience God for themselves. And God is faithful to prove His own existence to them. So the assurance of salvation is good news to them. That's something that Shintoism or Buddhism do not offer.

The Japanese have such a hunger now. The downturn in the economy has brought increased uncertainty to many and a greater search for meaning. They are looking for something that will give them lasting peace, harmony, and joy.

And we've seen time and again, when Japanese come to the Lord, the spirit of fear is broken. They have a peace that can't be shaken. And that's probably something that appeals to the Japanese more than anything – a peace that cannot be shaken, regardless of whether the economy goes up or down. And they have joy. I have seen that time and time and time again: Japanese who come to Christ are so happy.

So the gospel, respectfully presented, is good news to a Buddhist?

Oh yes, it is good news to a Buddhist. And we don't even know the half of it. For example, because all Japanese have

to join the local Buddhist temple, they have to continually pay large, large sums of money to be part of the temple, and to have their family name and records kept there. So when they come to the Lord, they're financially delivered, too. So Christianity is good news to the Japanese Buddhist on so many different levels. †

"Buddhism teaches respect for family ...compassion and humility ...So there are some ancient stepping stones in Buddhism that can help us introduce Christ to the Japanese."



“The meek shall inherit the earth”

Why meekness is essential in ministry to Buddhists

By Chris and Dora Barbee

Meekness. By definition, to be meek means to be patient, humble, gentle, easily imposed on, submissive. In Thailand, meekness is a way of life.

We are about to embark on a journey to serve with Nantachai and Ubolwan Mejudhon, a Thai couple who have been working among Buddhists in the northeastern region of Thailand, known as the Isarn region. Nantachai and Ubolwan travel village to village to teach English, build relationships, and introduce young people to Jesus Christ. Their passion is to live out the meekness of Christ in a culture that esteems this virtue above all others. We recently asked Dr. Nantachai to answer some questions about the ministry.

What is your definition of meekness?

The quality of your attitude towards Buddhists, showing through your life, your mind, and your heart. It is the mind of Christ in Philippians 2: 5-8: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus; Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God

something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

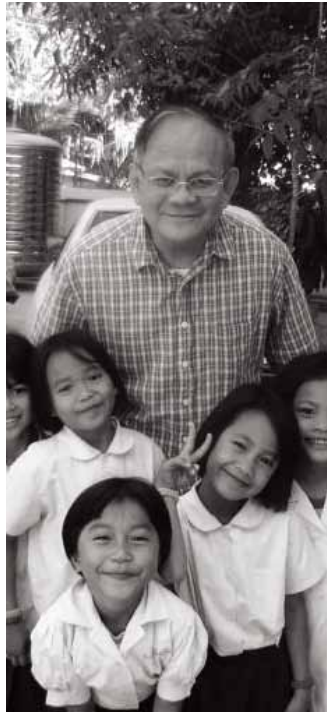
Meekness is also what Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 9: 19-23: “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews....I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

How are you using meekness to minister?

I look for glimpses of Christ’s essence already in the Thai culture, and walk through my life with the attitude of meekness. I relate to Buddhists as a meek learner, and this attitude draws people to Christ naturally.

What would you consider the unique challenges of ministering to Buddhists in Thailand?

It is challenging to know how to shine Christ’s goodness



Nantachai and Ubolwan Mejudhon, for whom Thailand is home, are graduates of Asbury Theological Seminary. Through their studies, they identified the meekness of Christ as a leading connector to the people of Thailand, who value meekness so highly. The Mejudhons' ministry is marked by humility and high regard for the people among whom they serve.

Chris and Dora Barbee will be working with the Mejudhons, teaching in several village schools and spending time investing in the lives of the local children and youth. For more information about the Barbees, see page 20.

through our own lives, and through the bridge of unique and genuine relationships with no strings attached.

What do you love the most about ministering to the children and teens in Esarn?

I love to see the hope in the eyes of each child. They are precious to me. Their hope-filled eyes seem to say, "I can love God," and "I can be a great man or woman of God." I always think of their lives as representing bricks. Each brick was not made to just be a brick forever. Each brick dreams of being a pyramid, the Great Wall of China, the Taj Mahal, or St. Peter's Cathedral. God is using me to encourage and enable them to be more than just bricks.

Is there a Bible passage that really has cultural significance for you and the Thai people in general?

Matthew 11:28-29: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls," (NIV); and

Matthew 7:7-8: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (NIV), apply specifically to the Isarn people.

What would you like people to pray for?

His guidance in our lives – that we will seek Him and be faithful to Him especially when we encounter hardship in ministry.

Through this ministry in the Isarn region, the Thai are experiencing the Creator of the universe – an all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present Savior who continually manifests Himself as a meek servant. ✝



Further along the Indian Road

Tracking the allure of Jesus in the world's second most populated nation: *an interview with India's Peter Pereira*

Christ of the Indian Road, published in 1925, is the groundbreaking account of E. Stanley Jones' missionary experience among the people of India. In it, he describes the gospel's universal appeal and Indians' hunger for Christ. "...Standing among the shadows of Western civilization," wrote Jones, "India has seen a figure who has greatly attracted her."

Today, 85 years later, Peter and Esther Pereira (*see page 20*) minister in their homeland of India, doing leadership training, church planting, and compassion ministries. Echoing E. Stanley Jones, Peter Pereira reports, "There is a tremendous hunger among the people – non-Christians, as well as Christians – to hear about the truth of the gospel." Even among the threat of persecution, India's attraction for the person of Jesus is overwhelming. When we asked the Pereiras what they most want people to know about ministry among the people of India right now, Peter and Esther said: "Our nets are breaking. Come and help!"

Do you think Christians in the States have misconceptions about what it's like to minister in India?

When I tell people that Esther and I are missionaries in India, most people are surprised. They say, "Why do you want to go to India for ministry? It's so far away." Most U.S. churches we're ministering to don't have any missionaries or evangelists in India. And yet something like 43 percent of the world's unreached people live in India.

An Indian man in the States came to me and said, "I cannot go back to India. I won't go back to India. But thank you that you are in India. We will pray for you. I know that you are reaching out to the

most difficult parts of India." People have often thanked me, and I don't know why.

Do you think it's because we see India as a very difficult place to minister?

Absolutely right. And conditions in India are very difficult. Keep in mind that 65 percent of India's people live in rural communities. There are two parts to India: the modernized India (India is considered one of the high-tech countries; most of our big U.S. companies have back end technical support based here), and the ancient part of India. Camels pulling carts on the side of the highway is a common scene.



“Every nation has its peculiar contribution to make to the interpretation of Christianity. The Son of Man is too great to be expressed by any one portion of humanity. Those that differ from us most will probably contribute most to our expression of Christianity.”

– E. Stanley Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*

What are you most excited about right now with what God is doing in India?

At a recent leadership conference, we had nearly 100 young people in attendance, and 70 percent of them were non-Christians who have come to the Lord.

And this is happening despite the fact that persecution of Christians is still significant right now in India?

Very significant. We have to be watchful, guarding ourselves constantly. In all the time I’ve been in India, I’ve not seen as much persecution as I have in the past couple of years.

So when these people come to Christ [and attend a Christian leadership conference] knowing the threat of persecution that is around them, that’s a very bold thing for them to do.

It is a bold thing, and it’s God’s grace. So when people want to understand India, they need to know that there is a tremendous hunger among the people – non-Christians, as well as Christians – to hear about the truth of the gospel.

We were doing a seminar for the young people in North India, at Alahabad University. And when we gave an altar call, God just poured out His Spirit, and more than half of the students came

forward and were just weeping in front of the altar, reconciling with God. There was a spark of a revival in that service. The faculty felt it. The students said, “We don’t have this kind of experience. We know that it was God’s presence.”

“The tremendous question presses itself upon us: Will the present Christian Church be big enough, responsive enough, Christlike enough to be the organ through which Christ will come to India?”

– E. Stanley Jones

And so this kind of thing you are seeing nearly everywhere you go?

Yes, people are open. And it’s significant that people are hearing from Esther and me [both are from India]. The people of India are seeing that the gospel is not alien; it is part of people’s lives all over the world.

I know your ministry in India is multifaceted. Can you tell more about it?

I’m focusing on and very passionate about three areas of ministry. One is leadership training. I’m passionate about this, because there is such a hunger.

People are not just accepting the material we are presenting; they are implementing it into their lives. (See page 19.) And they are volunteering their time to do more for that leadership training. So I’m seeing how God is multiplying our efforts. Last year we trained more than 2300 leaders known to us. By that I mean that there are probably another 1,000 who are trained outside of our knowledge and are using our materials to train other people.

The people who come for training range from the highest level of medical doctors to tribal people in tribal regions. We have so many requests for training, but we don’t have enough people to respond to them all.

I’m also very passionate about church planting. Like you know, home groups are taking hold in the States, but in India, generally speaking, everyone goes to the house of worship or prayer or sacrifice. The Muslims go to the mosque; the Hindus go to the temple, and the Christians go to a church. It may not be a four-wall church. For example, we have a ministry with the street people, called Rag Pickers. (That’s the official name sociologists have given this group of people who pick up recycling materials from the streets.) We started a ministry feeding them, caring for them, and eventually we had to find a place for them to worship. So we rented a place from YMCA, and now we are



“But standing among the shadows of Western civilization India has seen a figure who has greatly attracted her. She has hesitated in regard to any allegiance to Him, for India has thought that if she took one she would have to take both – Christ and Western civilization. . . .” “Do you mean to say” said a Hindu lawyer “that you are not here to wipe out our civilization and replace it with your own? Do you mean that your message is Christ without any implications that we must accept Western civilization? I have hated Christianity, but if Christianity is Christ, I do not see how Indians can hate it.” – E. Stanley Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*

meeting at YMCA every Sunday night. We are averaging about 150 street people who come to worship the Lord. Recently, two of these guys have started a ministry on the other side of the town also for Rag Pickers. They did not ask for any money, donations, anything; they just did it on their own. God is doing a wonderful work. It’s just multiplying by itself. God is doing that.

The third component to our ministry is compassion ministry. Esther is the leader in that and under her ministry, we started a soy milk plant about four years ago, and now we’re feeding 300 children soy milk every day. Also, we have 67 children, who had been living on the streets, in our Alpha Home. Out of that, today, we have about seven kids who are going to junior college, and then two of them are going to professional college, that is engineering college. Some of them want to be pastors. It is God’s grace. Each one of them has a dream, and God is fulfilling that dream.

Also part of the compassion ministries is a sewing ministry. Many women in India live very difficult lives, so we’ve started this sewing center, and we have graduated more than 1,500 women. Women now are able to make their own money, which is very liberating for them.

And then we have a medical ministry. We go to rural areas and set up medical

camps where we see about 300 to 400 people who come for basic medical checkups and primary care.

What do you notice about India’s Christian population that you wish those of us in other parts of the world could learn?

What we can learn from Indian Christians is how they sacrifice to reach people who have never heard of Christ. There are many pastors who sacrifice beyond the call of duty every day. Generally, Christians in India are very zealous about reaching the lost, in spite of their having much fewer resources. I’m renewed every time I go to India. I’m renewed just by their spirit of care and their heart for spreading the gospel.

After 14 years of ministry in India, how do you avoid becoming overwhelmed and discouraged by the enormity of the task in India?

It’s very important to switch gears from time to time to be refreshed and renewed. I come here to the United States for a retreat with friends once a year. And that retreat is primarily spending time with the Lord, listening to God. It’s good to just be away from the “ministry zone” for a while – from the pain and difficulty in India. But even when I’m in the United States, I get dry within three weeks or so.

When I preach in U.S. churches and tell my stories, I start weeping, and I begin to feel inside my heart, “No, I should go back. What am I doing here?” My heart just begins to hunger again to go back to India to do something. †

Forming leaders in India

In leadership conferences, the Pereiras, who serve jointly with the International Leadership Institute, teach Christian believers the following eight core values:

1. Intimacy with God.
2. Passion for the harvest.
3. Visionary leadership.
4. Culturally relevant evangelism.
5. Multiplication.
6. Family priority.
7. Stewardship.
8. Integrity.

“The people who come for training range from the highest level of medical doctors to tribal people in tribal regions. We have so many requests for training, but we don’t have enough people to respond to them all,” says Peter Pereira.

Asia and the Pacific in their hearts

Meet your Mission Society missionaries
serving in these areas

In the nations of Asia live people of enormously diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, comprising 60 percent of the world's current population. Some of your Mission Society missionaries to Asia (and the Pacific) are shown here; many others are not named because they minister in areas of the world in which security is an issue. For information about partnering with these or any missionaries of The Mission Society, visit our website at www.themissionsociety.org or call 1.800.478.8963. Thank you for your prayers for the people of these regions, and for the workers who minister among them.



INDIA

Peter and Esther Pereira

The Pereiras and their three children ministered cross-culturally among Asians and Americans in Illinois before returning to their homeland in 1992. They now live in

Hyderabad, India where they work with Hope for Today. The Pereiras are involved in church-planting, leadership training seminars, evangelistic campaigns, and preaching and teaching within churches. In addition, they also work with women and children through the Alpha Schools and Homes, a vocational training center, medical camps, and a nutritional feeding program. The Pereiras work jointly with The Mission Society and International Leadership Institute (ILI).



THAILAND

Chris and Dora Barbee

Chris and Dora are appointed to teach English as a second language, develop children's and youth ministries, and build relationships with the

people of the Isaan region in the northeast part of Thailand. The Isaan region is Thailand's poorest region, and Chris and Dora reside in Roi Et, the poorest province within that region. Although Thailand is 95 percent Buddhist and 4.6 percent Muslim, the love and truth of Christ is captivating hearts around the nation. Chris and Dora teach in several village schools and spend time investing in the lives of the local children and youth. They are also interested in eventually engaging in campus ministry and recovery ministry in Roi Et.



THAILAND
Rich and Kathy Lively

After previous terms overseas in theological education and JESUS Film training, as well as pastoral ministry stateside, Rich and Kathy, along with

their three children, plan to join Colin and Ruth Harrison and Connect to help Karen refugees fleeing Myanmar (Burma). More than 200,000 Karen people have been driven from their homes during decades of war, with another 120,000, mostly Karen, living in refugee camps along the Thai border. These refugees are in desperate need of medical care, food, and education, along with the love of Christ.



PHILIPPINES
Lem and Anna Egipto

Lem and Anna have felt a call to missions since they were both in college. Through Anna's time at The Mission Society and Lem's building

relationships with Filipino Christian leaders, a vision to train Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) emerged.

An OFW is a Filipino working and living abroad in order to earn money to send to his or her family back in the Philippines. There are more than 10 million Filipinos all over the world living in this capacity. Many of them are evangelical Christians and are living in countries where sending missionaries is difficult or impossible. Lem and Anna desire to work alongside the Filipino Church and train these OFWs to share their faith in word and deed.



JAPAN
Neal and Mari Hicks

The Hickses and their two children minister with the Wesleyan Japanese church in this nation where less than one percent of people

know Christ. The Hicks family is involved in evangelism, prayer, mission vision, and the International VIP Club ministry to the Japanese business people.



NEW ZEALAND
John and Rosalie Rentz

The Rentzes and their two daughters ministered for eight years in the Solomon Islands in the area of Bible translation by supervising

the Aiwoo translation project in the Reef Islands, located in Temotu Province. They work jointly with The Mission Society and Wycliffe Bible Translators.

John now serves in Wycliffe New Zealand's home office, as Member Care Facilitator. Rosalie teaches Bible-in-School at the local primary school, leads a Bible Study home group, and serves on the Ministry Team at their local church in Thames. They do make occasional trips to the Solomon Islands to facilitate translation and literacy work in the Reef Islands.



PAPUA NEW GUINEA
Ron and Michelle Olson

The Olsons and their children have worked jointly with The Mission Society and Wycliffe Bible Translators in Papua New Guinea since 1995. They

are involved in the work of Scripture translation for the Agarabi language in the Eastern Highlands, and are also involved in literacy training and community development efforts.



RUSSIAN FAR EAST
Sue Fuller

Sue is working in Khabarovsk, Russia with a cell church planting team there. She is also involved with public school education in the

teaching of Christian Ethics and Morality curriculum with CoMission for Children at Risk. Sue serves with orphanage children and participates in many Bible studies through which people have come to know the Lord.

In the following countries, missionary names cannot be listed due to security reasons: China (6); India (2); Kazakhstan (16); Malaysia (2)



The Mission Society's Kazakhstan field celebrated its 15th anniversary this year. From humble beginnings, the ministries of this field have grown by leaps and bounds. Churches have been planted; people have come to know Jesus and been disciplined, and Kazakhs have been sent out as missionaries.

Kazakhstan field celebrates 15th anniversary

Milestone marks tremendous growth for ministries in this Central Asian country

The Mission Society recently celebrated 15 years since the founding of its work in the Central Asian country of Kazakhstan. Mission Society staff members Dick McClain and Jim Ramsay traveled there to celebrate this milestone. Jim, whose family lived and served there from 1996-2006, writes the following report.

It was on Easter in 1994 that the first baptism was held at the Church of the Living Vine in Karaganda. Since that year, many people have experienced the love of Christ through this community. The church has even sent out its own members to help begin other churches – a daughter church in the northern city of Atbasar recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. Many of the people who were once part of this church have since immigrated to countries around the world,

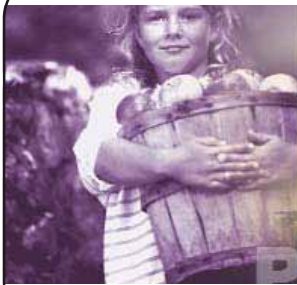
and there continue to serve God. We know of former church members who now live in Germany, Israel, Russia, China, England, Uzbekistan, Canada, Turkey, and the United States, as well as other parts of Kazakhstan.

The team in Kazakhstan has also worked in a number of practical ministry areas, including teaching English, small business development, outreach to children at risk, the operation of a primary and secondary school, and ministry to families of alcoholics. Several of the organizations created to facilitate this work also celebrated 15 years since being chartered.

When the team first arrived 15 years ago, this former Soviet country was in chaos as the infrastructure was still in collapse following the breakup of the Soviet Union. In the ensuing years, much has changed. The economy made great progress during that

time – a middle class began to develop; infrastructure in the cities was rebuilt; the impact of Kazakhstan's oil reserves began to be felt. So the team and the church has had to adjust to a very rapidly changing environment.

The Mission Society is committed to being a positive impact to the people of Kazakhstan as they continue to build their future. This involves both the practical ministries in education and outreach as well as working alongside the church. We believe the church has a very important role to play as the nation develops, and that the church is uniquely equipped to reach out across its borders to the neighboring countries. We pray that the national believers will remain strong so that they can be salt and light in Kazakhstan and beyond. ✠



PLANNING

WE'LL HELP YOU REVIEW YOUR WILL

Many estates are not distributed according to the individual's desires, simply because the estate plan was outdated.

Ask the following questions:

- Are witnesses to your will still living?
- Have you moved to another state since your will was drafted?
- Does your will appoint a personal representative who would be unable to serve today because of where he or she lives?
- Have minor children become financially independent, resulting in a change in your desires for estate distribution?
- Have tax laws changed since you last reviewed your estate plan?
- Do you need to explore the use of a trust?
- Have your charitable interests changed since your will was drafted?

- Has the size of your estate increased substantially, resulting in a need for tax planning?
- Does your present estate plan provide for management of property in case of disability prior to death?
- Are there additional methods you may employ to avoid probate at the time of death?

Your answers to these and other questions may indicate that you need to update your estate plan.

We have prepared a special *Guide To Planning Your Estate* that will be of value to you as you review your estate plan, to make sure it is up-to-date and will carry out your current distribution desires.

Please write today for your free copy. There is no cost or obligation. We just want to help.

"I'm concerned that my will might be out of date. But how do I know when it should be reviewed?"



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Rev. Edgar Nelson, a Mission Society founder, passes away at 94

The Rev. Edgar Nelson, one of The Mission Society's founders, passed away at his home in Yuba City, California on January 23, 2010. Nelson was among the original 34 people who met in St. Louis in 1983 to form what was then called

Seminary, and Berkeley Baptist Divinity School. He was an ordained elder in the California-Nevada Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Reader responses

In the Fall 2009 issue of *Unfinished*, Senegal and Guinea had mysteriously "traded places" according to our map on page 18, observed one reader. Also on page 18, Africa is noted as "widely regarded as the place of origin of the human family." One reader raised concern: "[I]t appears the best scriptural evidence based upon the location of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers would place [the Garden of Eden] in the northern part of Iraq." Also in the last issue, for the second consecutive time, we regrettably left out Mark and Leslie Benton from our list of missionaries on the back cover. Thank you, dear readers, for your keen eyes and your engagement with us. We are indebted to you!

The Mission Society for United Methodists.

Nelson had a long history of mission involvement throughout his career. He was a founding member of California Redwood Christian Association Redwood Camp in Santa Cruz, California. He also held missions conferences and brought missionaries from around the world to speak at church services. Nelson served as the pastor of First United Methodist Church of Yuba City for many years, which is where his memorial service was held.

Nelson attended Asbury College, Asbury Theological



Refueling the workers

Regional gathering in ancient city provides renewal for missionaries



Jesus still reigns. This icon in Istanbul's grand Hagia Sophia, which was once a church built in the 600s and then a mosque, has been plastered over, but now its beauty beneath the plaster has been revealed again.

The city of Istanbul has had no shortage of invasions. From the Greeks and Romans to the Ottomans, this strategic gateway between East and West has attracted the attention of empires. In early November, 88 missionaries, missionary kids, staff, and guests converged on this ancient city. But while our interest was Kingdom-oriented, it had nothing to do with power and conquest. In fact, unlike empires of the past, our being there certainly did not even make a blip on the city's radar, although perhaps we did give a slight boost to the local economy!

We came to Istanbul to be together for The Mission Society's Asia/Africa/Europe regional gathering. Missionaries came from diverse countries including China, Kenya, Ghana, Kazakhstan, France, and the Middle East to participate in this four-day event. So what happens at such an event? What is it that a missionary needs that would suggest taking the time and expense to hold such a gathering? Cer-

tainly it could be justified as a way to get some R&R from the intense work in their fields of service. But there are several other reasons as well.

Professional development

Most professions have a provision or even a requirement for continuing education or professional development. In addition to offering top-notch, pre-field training for our missionaries, we need to provide opportunities to help them reflect on their ministry and grow as cross-cultural workers. So this is a primary motivator to hold such gatherings. Dr. Darrell Whiteman, vice president for mission personnel and preparation, did significant research to teach on the topic of unhealthy dependency in mission/national church relations, an important topic in contemporary mission work.

Biblical preaching

It may seem counterintuitive, but one

thing missionaries miss most is solid, biblical preaching. Often they serve in areas where the church is new or where they are the ones doing most of the preaching. Even when there are excellent preachers from the local national church, it is likely in a second language and may not always be as applicable to the life of the missionary. Tapes or DVDs simply are no replacement for live preaching. So we brought in Phil Thrailkill, senior pastor at St. Luke UMC of Hartsville, South Carolina and former board chairman of The Mission Society. Phil is well known as a serious student of the Bible who is able to translate his findings into teachings relevant to any audience. He blessed and challenged all of us.

Fellowship and connection

Missionaries love to get together, swapping cultural stories, comparing language faux pas, learning from one another, and ministering to one another. When to-



Among the 88 who attended the regional gathering (left) were several who serve in areas of the world where security is an issue, so those missionaries are not pictured here. This photo includes the 13 missionary kids who attended.

gether, they are able to share their struggles and frustrations, knowing that the others fully understand. We scheduled time for this sort of interaction to occur. Sometimes it was in the form of meal time, free time, or an excursion. We also had organized times of praying for one another and times of just having fun together. These relationships can simply provide encouragement or sometimes can lead to ministry collaboration. This part of the experience got very high marks by the participants. Pastoral care and counseling personnel were on hand to meet with the missionaries as well.

“Missionary Kids”

MKs are an important, valued part of our missionary community. Often MKs are isolated from other kids with that unique experience. Even when part of an MK school, they don’t always sense the connection to The Mission Society and to other MKs. Mission Society headquarters’

staff members Vicki Decker and Shawn Ramsay worked hard to put together an excellent experience for both the younger and older MKs. They were assisted by fellow staffer Steve Wilson, and by three members of St. Luke UMC. These volunteers came at their own expense to minister to these missionary families. (Talk about a “short-term mission trip” with a real purpose!) We already have had feedback from parents and MKs on how important these days were for the young people.

Vision and strategic planning

In the rapidly changing world of missions, this event provides the opportunity for us to work together in the larger community to look at overall vision and strategy. While each field has its own distinctions, we need to continually take stock of our overall approach and understanding of missions – a way of checking to ensure the DNA of The Mission Soci-

ety is being carried on and developed.

While the primary reason for choosing this location was one of accessibility and economy, the significance of this location was not lost on us. Turkey is the heart of the beginnings of the early Church. Paul’s journeys were heavily focused in this region; the seven churches of Revelation, even Antioch itself – the birthplace of the Gentile Church – is in Turkey. Today it is predominantly a Muslim country. Perhaps our being there seemed not even to make a blip on the city’s radar, but we trust the Kingdom impact of this rich time together will have ripple effects that will only be truly understood in eternity. †

***Jim Ramsay**, former missionary to Central Asia, is The Mission Society’s senior director of field ministry.*



Reclaiming the priority

Five ways your church can avoid drifting away from its calling

I received a letter from a missionary serving with another agency a month or so ago. One paragraph in the letter caught my attention. It read, “Missionary meetings a generation ago were usually well attended. Young people came forward to offer themselves to Christ and churches were revived. There was excitement. Sadly much of that has changed.” Unfortunately, I think the observation of this missionary is correct.

Several years ago, I completed a project management master’s certification program. In that program, we spent a lot of time talking about a common foil of projects called “scope creep.” Scope creep is the change in a project’s scope after the project work has begun. This drift usually occurs due to the addition of new elements, and results in the project moving away from its original purpose, timeline, and budget. This change in scope usually comes about from small, seemingly insignificant changes. Over time the changes become numerous enough or grow to such an extent that they jeopardize or minimize the original project.

At the close of his earthly ministry, Christ gave his followers a project. He said that we were to go into all the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Immediately before his ascension Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit did indeed come, and the Church was born. The Holy Spirit, the Church, and the

call of Jesus to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth are inexorably linked. So much so, that the call to be His witnesses (and in the process, making disciples) is the Church’s priority project.

If we were to be honest, we would agree that many local churches have experienced scope creep in reaching our communities and the nations for Christ. Other things have displaced disciple-making as our first calling. Let me suggest five steps that will help a local church avoid such drift:

“If we were to be honest, we would agree that many local churches have experienced ‘scope creep’ in reaching our communities and the nations for Christ.”

1. Be sure the entire congregation completely understands the project vision. This means that Great Commission preaching and teaching must be a primary component of church life.
2. Clearly convey the priority of helping people become followers of Jesus. While there are many important activities in which a church is engaged, nothing can be more important than disciple-making. The congregation must be challenged to be involved in some way.
3. Church leadership models discipleship within the church body to encourage church members to actively seek to follow Christ. As they are discipled, the church body is equipped to disciple others within their circle of influence.



The Mission Society's Lauren Helveston closes out the Life Commitment service at Rolling Hills Community Church's Global Impact Celebration in Danville, California.
Photo courtesy of Pat Appel

4. Develop a strategic plan for developing followers of Jesus that includes local, national, and international outreach.
5. Produce an ongoing process that ensures outreach is evaluated, communicated, and celebrated.

Primed to do more

With the concept of disciple-making as the project in mind, let's go back to the missionary's comment that "missionary meetings" have become poorly attended, lacking results, devoid of excitement. It does not have to be that way. In fact, this past year, The Mission Society assisted five churches in conducting their first annual Global Impact Celebration. All were well attended, given the number of meeting opportunities available. The results were positive as well – a total of 16 people indicating a call to career missionary service, a 170 percent increase in funds committed to missions over the previous year, and hundreds volunteering to be engaged in missions in a personal way. Some of the post-Global Impact Celebration comments heard were:

- "There is a spirit in the church that hasn't been here in a long time."
- "We are primed to do more in missions than we have ever thought possible."
- "It was more emotionally impacting than I thought it would be. Missionaries became friends I didn't want to see leave!"
- "It was a blast!"

Our desire is to see your and other churches all across the United States have the same experience that these five churches have had. Because, in doing so, you will renew an emphasis on disciple-making and thereby impact lives in ever greater ways for the sake of Christ. As Jesus said, "When you become fruitful disciples of mine, my Father will be honored (John 15:8 CEV)." ✝

Stan Self is The Mission Society's senior director of church ministry.

For more information, call us at 1.800.478.8963 ext. 9046, or visit us at www.themissionsociety.org, and click on "For my church" on the homepage.



Red light, green light

If you are at a crossroad in your life, this article is for you.

“God tends to operate more by red lights than by green lights.” One of my undergraduate theology professors was fond of that saying. It has stuck with me over the years and has become a favorite phrase of mine as it relates to my role as a missions coach. As a matter of fact, I find myself sharing my professor’s words with college students who are contemplating the “right decision” for their summer break.

College students in particular seem to have a big concern with making the “right” decision, frequently thinking there is only one possible choice that would be pleasing to God. Admirably, they want to be in God’s “perfect will.” But experience has taught me to share another perspective. God often gives us the freedom to choose between several possible options, provided the options are within the boundaries of Scripture, wisdom, morality, and godly counsel. This choice is a gift from our heavenly Father, who loves us. But when young people see decision making as a burdensome process through which God might get angry with them if they make the wrong choice, they are filled with anxiety. However, when they learn to see decision making as a gift, they are more likely to walk in peace.

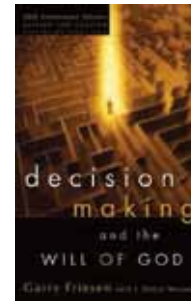
What I have described thus far is the green light. But how do we know if God wants us to change course or stop altogether? God has a way of communicating with people through natural and supernatural means. He can use dreams, visions, family and friends, and even circumstances to issue a red light. One word of caution: When one perceives that God is issuing a red light, he or she should share the situation with godly counsel and pray for God’s wisdom. The enemy

sometimes sends distractions our way to throw us off course, so we must be able to discern if “the signal” is coming from God or the enemy.

Are you considering a call to international

missions? Are you thinking about getting involved in local outreach? Ask yourself if your decision is scripturally sound, wise, moral, and in keeping with godly counsel from your community. If so, go for it. Don’t wait for a sign from heaven. As you step out in faith, God can give you a red light and/or communicate a change of course, if that’s needed. So what are you waiting for? GO! ✚

Richard Coleman is The Mission Society's director of mobilization and candidacy.



Decision-making getting you down? Check this out: ***Decision Making and the Will of God*** By Garry Friesen

This book has been around a long time, and is still getting enthusiastic reviews.



Make disciples in Asia

Despite persecution, the Church is growing in Asia, and workers are needed to disciple national church leaders and new believers. Here are a few opportunities. Read how you can plug into what God is doing among the people of Asia.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Disciple church leaders

While the faith of those believers in a country where the gospel cannot be preached openly is often strong, they do not often grow up in Sunday school learning Bible stories and memorizing scripture. There is a huge need for discipleship and teaching to help these new believers and future national church leaders grow in their knowledge of God's Word and learn how to study the Bible on their own. Terms of service range from three months to five years.

THAILAND

Work with Thai youth

In the town of Roi Et, in the north of Thailand, there is a ministry among Thai Youth through teaching ESL and building relationships. Based in one of the poorest regions of Thailand, the ministry seeks to introduce Christ in intelligible ways, to

help people survive barren living conditions, to widen their perspective, help them realize their identity in Christ and know peace through Him, and to find contentment and meaning in helping others. Come here to study the Thai culture and introduce Christ among the poor. Terms of service range from three months to five years.

KAZAKHSTAN

Youth ministry

Safe places are hard to find in Kazakhstan. The Mission Society established a place for students to gather after school where they would be safe from dangerous influences and free to foster genuine community. In addition, a feeding program is administered to supplement the meager diet of impoverished local children. Finally, substance abuse recovery groups meet to address the pressures of addiction. Come and build

relationships with the students while serving in each of these areas. Terms of service range from one to five years.

Church leadership training

Called to disciple and train the next generation of leaders? Come assist the local church and those planting churches by helping conduct seminars and conferences. Quality, biblically-based training is a real need in Kazakhstan. Applicants should have pastoral experience or seminary-level training, as this role requires a special visa. Terms of service range from one to five years.

The Mission Society serves in 36 nations. For a complete listing of worldwide personnel needs, visit us at www.themissionsociety.org.

With the good news of Jesus, The Mission Society missionaries and their families minister in 36 nations around the world. We offer their names here. How we thank you for your prayers for them!

The Mission Society missionaries:

Michael Agwanda, Otto Arango, Ed & Linda Baker, Jose & Audrey Banales, Chris & Dora Barbee, Alan & Beth Barrett, Jim & Angela Beise, Mark & Leslie Benton, Rose Blank, Liz Boggess, Reid & Lola Buchanan, Debra Buenting, Wayne Burgess, Doug & Brooke Burns, Julie Campbell, John & Sandra Carrick, Charlie & Miki Chastain, Tamlyn Collins, David & Carol Cosby, Gary & Tula Crumpton, Patrick Cummings, Travis & Lorna Curry, Adam & Jennifer Dalenburg, Tim & Daina Datwyler, Christian & Angelica Dickson, Caren Dilts, Billy & Laurie Drum, Tara Dunn, Lem & Anna Egipto, John & Colleen Eisenburg, Sue Fuller, Jennifer Gale, Cameron & Anne Gongwer, Tim & Jennifer Goshorn, Florencio & Maria Guzman, Charles & Chris Hanak, Marshall Head, John & Katheryn

Heinz, Jill Henderson, Jon & Jeanne Herrin, Neal & Mari Hicks, Ron & Bonnie Hipwell, Ronnie & Angi Hopkins, Andrew & Margaret Howell, Arthur & Mary Alice Ivey, Charles & Mary Kay Jackson, Jonathan & Amy Killen, Esaho & Beatrice Kipuke, Clay and Deb Kirkland, Sue Kolljeski, Joetta Lehman, Rich & Kathy Lively, Kristen Matveia, Ash & Audra McEuen, Steve & Shannon Mersinger, Michael & Claire Mozley, Katie Nash, Doug & Becky Neel, Laura Newton, Graham & Sharon Nichols, Ron & Michelle Olson, Donald & Carol Paige, Peter & Esther Pereira, Laura Phillips, Len & Betsy Phillips, Martin & Tracy Reeves, Leon & Vicki Reich, Louise Reimer, John & Rosalie Rentz, Ben & Jenny Reyes, John & Bess Russell, Michael & Jannike Seward, Daniel & Katie Simmons, Kirk & Nicole Sims, Rick & Debra Slingsluff, Amanda

Smith, Robert & Linda Spitaleri, Elliott & Katherine Stotler, Bryan & Beth Tatum, Ron & Belinda Tyler, Bill & Beth Ury, Bill White, Larry Williams, Dai & Neva Wysong

In addition to those listed above, 67 missionaries serve in areas where security is an issue for Christian workers. For that reason, they remain unnamed here. Thank you for praying for these dear brothers and sisters, as they face unique challenges.

For more information about The Mission Society missionaries or fields, visit our website at www.themissionsociety.org.

May we pray for you?

Each morning at The Mission Society, we start by praying. We pray for the world. We pray for our missionaries. And we pray for you. Do you have prayer concerns that you would like to share with us? We invite you to do so. Here's how: Write your request on the response card included in this mailing and return it in the envelope provided, or

- Email us at prayerrequest@themissionsociety.org, or
- Call us at 770.446.1381 (ext. PRAY or 7729) and leave your prayer request message, or
- Write us at: Prayer, The Mission Society, 6234 Crooked Creek Road, Norcross, GA 30092

Your shared concerns will be handled with care and prayed for by our staff and visiting missionaries. Thank you for the privilege of joining you in prayer.