

# INTRODUCTION

## RETHINKING CORE VALUES: WORLD MISSION FOR THE TIME BEING

There is a lot going on in world mission in the Evangelical Covenant Church. Let's look first at how it fits into the big picture of world mission activity generated in the United States and Canada. Unless otherwise noted, the following numbers come from the Mission Handbook; U.S. and Canadian Protestant Ministries Overseas, edited by Dotsey Welliver and Minnette Northcutt. It is published by **emis**, Wheaton, Illinois and it is the 2004-2006 edition. The core data was actually collected in 2001, so the numbers are for that year.

The total number of full-time, on location Protestant missionaries sponsored by churches in the U.S. or Canada was 112,490 people, just to give you an idea of scale. In addition, mission agencies sent 349,620 people for one week to one year of short-term service, bringing the combined total to 462,100 people sent into international mission. Included in this number were 1,748 bi-vocational or "tent-making" missionaries.

There are 690 denominational and non-denominational missionary sending agencies in the U.S. and 110 more in Canada.

The amount of money raised to support Protestant world mission through reporting agencies was \$3,752,306,193.00. (An important note: The total monies reported as raised for international mission includes funds raised for international relief and development by agencies like World Vision, MAP International, Christian Aid Ministries, Samaritan's Purse, Compassion International, Food for the Hungry, World Relief International and many others. These figures are not a description of missionary's salaries!) So, you can see that this is a pretty big deal. Yet, it is still only part of the story.

### What these numbers do not include:

1. Work groups and mission teams sent by local churches independently of sending agencies are a phenomenon that is growing at an amazing rate. Researchers are trying hard to catch up with it. They all agree that it is large and growing, but a consensus about how to count participants has not been reached so the statistics are all over the map. The winter, 2007 "Leadership Journal", published by the folks that put out "Christianity Today" included some tentative statistics about the rapid growth in the number of people involved in week to ten-day mission trips.

In 1979, 22,000 Americans went on very short mission trips.

In 1989, 120,000.

In 2001, 350,000.

Some other 2005 statistics report that, for 13-17 year olds, the estimate is of more than 2 million young people in that age group that went on mission trips that year. (Mark Galli, p.33)

2. Missionaries from the European countries are not listed in this data.
3. There has been a notable increase in Protestant missionaries from the rest of the world, particularly the Southern hemisphere. In fact, the number of missionaries from the rest of the world may now outnumber those from the U.S., Canada and Europe, combined. As we will note elsewhere, the center of gravity of the world Christian movement has moved to the Southern half of the globe.
4. All of the above are Protestant (widely defined) mission. Roman Catholic world mission is very substantial but not always parallel in how it is described or how it functions so numbers alone would not provide a clear picture. For example, U.S. Roman Catholics alone support missionary orders serving in 136 countries. Their involvement in world mission should not be discounted.
5. Then there are groups like the Orthodox churches. The U.S. Greek Orthodox Church reported some 450 missionaries serving internationally.

So, what is the point to all these numbers? In a broad, sweeping way, they show that world mission is very important to the Church in all its denominational “flavors”. It deploys a lot of people and a lot of resources.

## **New Agencies**

Protestants show a great deal of vitality and creativity in the way they organize for world mission. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century, in particular, was notable for a substantial increase in non-denominational mission agencies and agencies for specialized mission – Bible translation, outreach to university students and ministries to orphans of war, to name a few. When these ways of doing things were new on the scene, they were somewhat controversial. On one side, some denominational loyalists argued that these outside-the-box agencies would drain resources from denominations and their mission agencies and lack the appropriate oversight of the church. On the other side, new agency supporters argued that they could be more agile and focused since they would not be burdened by denominational politics or ecclesiastical bureaucracies. Well, the dust settled and Protestant churches and people voted (with their resources and prayers) to support both non-denominational and denominational mission agencies.

## The changing scene

The current controversy in U.S churches about mission structures is over what looks like a massive movement of volunteers from local congregations that ignores agencies – denominational and non-denominational – altogether. Those in favor argue that the huge and growing number of very short (one week to one month) mission trippers reflect a renewed passion for the lost and suffering of the world and a significant revival of “missional consciousness”. Critics argue that hordes of middle-class American Protestants just “parachuting in” all over the world often do more harm than good, tend to be naïve and provincial and may well be “inoculated” by the experience against a true understanding of the costs and commitments needed for sustained world mission. Our opinion is that it is likely not an either/or case and there is probably some truth in the opinions of advocates and critics alike.

That this is not a temporary trend can be seen in the responses of the two largest organizations that historically focused on non denominational missions; the EFMA and the IFMA.

The January 2008 "International Bulletin of Missionary Research" has noted two simultaneous changes that I think are interesting and noteworthy. They are,

1) The **IFMA**, the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association of North America, is now known as **CrossGlobal Link** ([www.crossgloballink.org](http://www.crossgloballink.org)) Association leaders accentuated their focus on "internal networking" among current agency members and announced a "deliberate new effort to link with North American churches, especially churches bypassing agencies as they do mission directly." Executive Director Marv Newell...added that the name change came about because "it no longer seems important to peg our identity to denominationalism" and because the word "foreign" is outdated. "Missions is no longer a matter of going the distance geographically, but...culturally." The word "cross" carries the concept of the cross of Christ - the means of humanity's redemption" and "link" emphasizes connectivity. (Individual) churches may now join CrossLink as associate members.

2) Not to be outdone, it would seem, the **EFMA**, the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association, has changed its name to **The Mission Exchange** ([www.themissionexchange.org](http://www.themissionexchange.org)) President and CEO Steve Moore says (that the new name) "captures the sense of dynamic, interactive relationships between missional entities...that is at the heart of our vision and identity." In what I think is a controversial and debatable point, Moore said, "While local churches have always been the primary stakeholders in the Great Commission, globalization has enabled them to take more aggressive action (emphasis added)." So, the Mission Exchange also now has developed an affiliate membership for

(individual) churches and small organizations. CrossGlobal Link and The Mission Exchange plan a number of cooperative events. Our own denominational program, the Evangelical Covenant Church's Department of World Mission, also affirms this historical development in its promotional material that reads, "Global Mission, Local Vision."

**Jargon:**

**Going missional** is a recently coined expression for a congregation that has decided to make mission – both global and local – its primary emphasis. In other discussions, theorists talk about "thinking globally and acting locally."  
**Glocal** is another newly invented word to describe thinking and acting both globally and locally. (Some of us think this word just sounds yucky and hope it goes away, others of us think it's just hunky-dory!)

## **Covenant World Mission Inside the Box**

Where do we fit in this "big picture"? World mission in the Evangelical Covenant Church looks proportionately like most U.S. Protestant denominations. Our denominational program, the Department of World Mission (DWM), ranks pretty close to the middle in terms of numbers of missionaries and number of countries served. Here's how it looked as of June, 2007.

Long-Term, on site missionaries (4+ years)	77
Medium-Term, Project missionaries (3-5 years)	24
Short-Term missionaries (1-3 years)	<u>42</u>
Total DWM missionaries	143
Number of countries served (aprox.)	25

## **Outside the Box**

The DWM numbers, however, as in all U.S. denominations, provide an incomplete picture of world mission in the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC). Three other sources of mission activity need to be taken into account.

1. Mega-church mission. The ECC has some 25 congregations that number more than 2000 people in attendance. These very large churches have their own unique dynamic. They tend to function like "mini-denominations" with large numbers of staff and sophisticated programs. Some of the

largest have bigger mission budgets than the entire DWM and regularly send out more people – usually on short mission trips – than the denomination does through its mission department. Some are engaging in more long-term mission around the world as their mission programs have matured.

2. Medium sized congregations and coalitions of smaller churches are not left behind. The sheer volume of mission trip participants from such churches may number into the thousands every year. It is interesting to note that some ECC churches have formed coalitions with local congregations from other denominations to do mission projects together. (These local coalitions sometimes have led religious pundits to talk about a “post-denominational era”. They prophesy the end of denominations in general, but we think that is a vastly overreaching conclusion. We think new ways of organizing simply indicate the vitality, creativity and openhearted spirit of local congregations as they move forward in mission.)
3. Most Covenant congregations support members and others who serve with interdenominational, non-denominational and specialized mission agencies not affiliated with the ECC.

So, we conclude that Covenant world mission exists vigorously both within and outside of denominational programs and institutions – and we thank God for it. It does, however, produce an important challenge for us to rethink the core values that guide us in mission.

The current situation with all of its change and bubbling activity is not the only factor that requires us to rethink core values. We must also take into account the fact that world mission, as engaged in by the Christian Church, has been going on for 20 centuries. In every moment of those 20 centuries, the human endeavors of world mission have been deeply effected by their concrete historical context; sometimes mirroring the world around them and sometimes reacting against it – but never free from its power and influence. It is, then, an essential task for us to consider our present realities and engage in an ongoing critical reflection on our core values and mission practices. That’s what I am trying to do in this material. These are not the “last word”; they are just some thoughts along the way, for the time being. I hope they are helpful.

I have tried to make this material “user friendly” for people who are not specialists in world mission, but who share a deep interest in it. So, here is a step I have taken for those who might be confused by all the jargon about world mission in books and articles that are circulating these days.

When you hear or read things like the list that follows, are you not so sure what the words mean?

- *Missio Dei*
- Holistic ministries
- International Partnerships
- Glocal
- Paternalism
- Going Missional
- LCIs, STMS (and gazillions of other acronyms)
- Insider Movements
- Incarnational Ministry
- Contextualization
- and on, and on...

Believe me, it's OK to be confused. Millions of Christians around the world are involved in mission, in one way or another. They speak lots of different languages, and even in the same language, use lots of different words to describe the same things. Many people (real experts and 'wannabes' alike) are talking and writing about world mission - and scrambling to come up with new lingo to say what they want to say. What they are talking about is not that new. After all, God had world mission on his mind and in his heart from before the foundation of the world. But people keep trying to figure out how to say things better or more clearly - so they make up new words and think up new ideas for stuff all the time.

### **Trying to help**

The point to this material is to try to make world mission understandable. I have modeled it (a little bit) on those very helpful **Idiot's Guides to ...** various computer programs and the like. They don't really think their readers are idiots (I don't either) - but mission specialist language, just like computer language, can make you feel like an idiot. So, if you want to know what all those folks are talking about, I hope this works for you.

What I have done, then, is write some things in text boxes so you can know what kind of material it is. There are eight of them and I hope they prove useful for you.

### **In the text boxes**

**A Core Value** – I have organized the material in this paper around the core values that are currently in place in the Department of World Mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church. These values attempt to get at how we evaluate our practices in world mission in our present time and situation.

**A Main Point** - Themes have central or main ideas associated with them. Without them, themes can be confusing or a reader might mistake something not very important for the main points. So, when I think it is a “main point” I put it in a box that says, “A Main Point”.

**A Key Verse** – I will try to identify the central texts of the Bible that address the theme being described.

**Jargon** - Missionaries, mission leaders, church leaders, writers of books and magazines not only use common language, they often invent new words to describe new things that are going on or rename older things that have gone on for a long time. You can find definitions for these words under the "Jargon" icon throughout this material.

**Historical Note** - Many people think that they are the first one's to discover the wheel. There's not much that is "new under the sun" and I have tried to make note of that, for humility's sake, if for nothing else.

**Stories and Such** – Well, I am a missionary and missionaries tell stories. I have included stories and opinions that illustrate the themes and/or short comments about "what I have learned about that". The useful thing about it is that if you like stories, you can follow the boxes - and if you don't like stories, you can skip them.

**Hot Debates** - Sometimes, you can get the impression from books and articles that all kinds of things are a "done deal" or without question, “the way things should be done”. They may not mention that lots of fine people sharply disagree on a lot of things. I will try to be fair about that and describe the things that folks are debating.

**Dig Deeper** - If you want to learn more about a theme, I will include books, articles, journals and web-sites where you can go to find more information.

To see what I mean, click on the next article on Core Value No. 1, “The Mission of God.”