

Mission Leaders Pursue Global Opportunities

Leaders focus on relationships as they listen and pray together for God's purposes to be accomplished among the people of the world.

Approximately 200 Christian leaders from all over the world gathered in Malaysia April 28 to May 1 for a meeting of mission networks and leaders. The leaders came to build relationships among themselves and their networks and to discuss how to collaborate effectively in the common mission of making Christ known to all peoples.

The Great Commission Roundtable (GCR), formed in 1999, brings together numerous networks and ministries to cooperate in world evangelization and fulfillment of the Great Commission in the 21st century.

It seeks to include networks from the developing world and networks of women and youth in keeping with its stated values. (For a description of the Roundtable's values, see the February 2000 issue of the *MARC Newsletter*.)

Participants in the Malaysia gathering considered models and principles for creating enduring strategic alliances, discussed and developed new forms of partnership by region and ministry specialty, and worked together to plan the best ways of facilitating the future connection of ministry networks worldwide.

The leaders of the GCR believe that the quality and closeness of relationships among the missions leaders will have a direct impact on the response of the watching world to the truth of the gospel.

Plans for the three-day meeting at a secluded hotel on the west coast of Malaysia included time to hear from the Lord in worship, God's Word and prayer, to share stories from their nations on

how God is working to bring about fulfillment of the Great Commission, and to get to know one another more deeply while working on the issues that concern all of them.

The GCR facilitation team took the risk of creating a gathering built around relationships rather than a prearranged agenda because it wanted to chart a new way forward in world mission. GCR leaders are convinced the Lord is the one who wants to guide the mission leaders' time together and to give birth to initiatives God has in mind for the leaders to pursue together.

As the participants remained open to the Spirit of God and to one another, they hoped to:

- Build relationships with leaders and their networks from throughout the world and grow in the love, trust and

unity that build a deeper sense of being Christ's body in a shared mission.

- Learn about the best practices and innovations in mission and adopt a code of the best practices for network-to-network relationships.

- Share resources (ministry models, research, databases, Web sites, training helps) as they heard presentations and reports of what God is doing in various regions and ministry networks.

- Identify areas of collaboration to connect partners for joint projects and multiply partnerships and alliances for greater synergy and ministry impact.

- Worship together and pray for one another.

Please pray for the GCR and the relationships formed and strengthened during this significant gathering.

✦ John D. Robb

Pray for Haiti

Earlier this year I was privileged to serve on an international prayer team that visited Haiti to participate in a prayer initiative for this Caribbean island and its people. The initiative brought together all segments of the body of Christ, both Protestants and Catholics, to pray together for the nation for the first time.

As a result of this prayer initiative, World Vision Haiti gained a new and higher profile as an agent of reconciliation. It has been asked along with some of the church leaders to consider mediating the electoral crisis in the country.

Please pray for the Christians of Haiti as they continue to intercede for healing and transformation throughout their troubled country. Pray for the

restoration of peace and security from 200 years of violence and senseless, random crime.

Pray for the ongoing security of the initiative's participants, their families, World Vision staff members and the prayer coordinators who are handling the follow-up of the initiative.

Also pray for just, honorable leaders to come to power and serve the nation with faithfulness and integrity. Ask God to expose and eradicate the destructive corruption of the drug cartel, its grip on the island and its trade links with Colombia and the U.S.A.

In short, pray that there will be major changes in the political situation, bringing relief and benefit to Haiti's people.

✦ John D. Robb

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Reflections from Bryant Myers

The World in Which We Live — Part 2

In the last issue, I described some of the driving forces in the world today. These drivers, like ocean tides, sometimes reinforce one another and sometimes collide, creating turbulence. The results are global trends.

1. Growing gap between the rich and the poor One of the flaws in the free market system is the fact that it is very uneven in terms of who enjoy its benefits. Between 1980 and today, some 15 countries have enjoyed remarkable economic growth, and their 1.5 billion citizens have seen their situations improve.

During the same period, more than 100 countries experienced economic decline, and their 1.6 billion people, almost half of whom are children and youth, suffered through recessions, currency devaluations, abuse by their own governments, crushing international debt and structural adjustment.

The poor often live in the unofficial shadow economy estimated at US\$9 trillion. The shadow or informal economy is the rawest expression of capitalism, existing on barter, bribes and illegal activities, devoid of the protections of regulation and law.

Illicit drugs, street children, child labor, sexual exploitation of children and illegal small arms trade flourish unhindered in this shadow economy.

2. The invisible poor and the lost Sadly, the poor and the lost often are invisible to the Christian church. Within a band reaching across Northern Africa, including most of the Sahel, through the Middle East and into the Central Asian provinces, the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and Western China, live 1.3 billion people who have little chance to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ unless someone goes to tell them.

Eighty-five percent of the world's poorest countries are located in this same part of the world. Yet only 1.2 percent of Christian mission giving is being invested there.

3. Increasing internal violence and conflict In 1997 there were 52 civil conflicts and wars going on around the

world. More than 540 million children are estimated to live in unstable or violent contexts.

More than 2 million children died as a result of armed conflict in the 1990s and more than 6 million were seriously injured or permanently disabled.

Local warlords, unable to extract money from superpowers or governments, turn to exporting local

“ The great majority of refugees are women and children ”

natural resources to pay for their armies while turning children into soldiers. There are 300,000 child soldiers in the world today.

The long-term effects of traumatized young men and women for the well being of these nations is a tragic future reality. These local upheavals are a major contributing factor to increasing numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees.

4. Movement of people Conflict, disasters and environmental collapse have dramatically increased the number of refugees from 2.5 million in 1975 to 22 million in 1998, although it is pleasing to note that this is down from a high of 27 million in 1995. To this one must add the 21 million internally displaced persons who have migrated to another part of their own country.

The great majority of refugees are women and children. These movements raise a range of human rights issues, including the right of protection for women and children, as well as the need for better international coping mechanisms.

5. Toward three centers of economic power and the growing power of Asia Asia and the European Union will join the United States to form the three global centers of economic

power in the near term.

In time these shifts will call into question the current hegemony of the U.S. dollar, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

India and China will become major players on the global stage.

6. Marginalization of Africa Africa is being marginalized as the North shows signs of becoming disheartened with the seemingly intractable problems of uneven political leadership, wars, declining agricultural production and increasing population. The social impact of the AIDS pandemic is threatening to reverse 30 years of development effort.

At the same time, Africa also is the home of the world's fastest growing Christian community. In the light of recent events in Liberia, Rwanda and Burundi, Africa's leaders are struggling openly with the question of the kind of Christians their churches are producing.

7. Polarization of power Economic and political power is polarizing global and local institutions. Global power is exercised by global institutions, such as the United Nations, World Bank, the IMF and transnational corporations, each acting out its international role in the global economy, playing god in the lives of the poor.

Locally, power is held by local strongmen or warlords who manipulate local situations by force of arms paid for by providing gold, diamonds and oil to the global economy.

The poor find themselves powerless in the face of these largely unaccountable centers of power.

8. Shifting patterns of governance Not too long ago governments were the primary and sometimes only source of governance, policy and accountability. This is changing.

Governments are increasingly under challenge for corruption and bad policy. Both their citizens and the international community no longer accept that governments can do as they like and take what they please.

While democracy seems to be a

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guarantee against major famine, it is less clear that democracy is the answer to poverty eradication that some thought. There is more to a democratic society than elections, it seems.

The role of non-government organizations (NGOs) as part of civil society is being rethought. Governments are resisting the direct connection of NGOs with local communities and the fact that the international community circumvents the role of the state when it directly funds NGO programs.

The international community, while still enamored with NGOs, is realizing that this stance runs the risk of undermining the state to a point that threatens the rule of law and the usefulness of regulation.

The NGO community, the media-entertainment industry and transnational corporations are the only important international actors today that are democratically unaccountable.

9. The changing shape of the Christian church The center of gravity of the Christian church is in the developing world, where more than 50 percent of today's Christians and 70 percent of today's evangelicals live.

Latin America is the largest continent of Christians, with dramatic shifts taking place between historic Roman Catholic dominance and free-wheeling Pentecostalism.

Africa has the fastest growing church. The churches of the Pacific Rim — Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China — are experiencing significant growth. Although Christianity still is a minority religion in this area, the churches are becoming centers of missionary sending and compassionate giving.

This good news of church growth in the 20th century is accompanied by profound contradictions. The growth of the church in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the continuing strength of the church in the U. S. have not been accompanied by widespread changes in social, economic and political behavior reflecting the values of the kingdom of God.

On the contrary, we see more poverty, injustice, immoral and unethical behavior, materialism and violence. Everywhere, for every church, the critical question is: What kind of Christians are we making?

10. The emerging power and place of women Those who study

human development now know that women — their education, involvement and leadership — are unarguably linked to much of the good that social change seeks.

Female literacy correlates highly with reduced child mortality, lower fertility rates, improved nutrition, better children's education and successful microenterprise development. Particularly among the poor, women do much of the work, produce most of the food and raise the children

No agency can escape the demand that women be taken seriously and their needs addressed, particularly if change is to be sustainable.

All of this creates an interesting irony

// The center of gravity of the Christian church is in the developing world //

when it comes to the girl child. Girls still receive less food, less health care and less education than do boys. Girls still are subject to harmful traditional practices.

If women are the key to transformation, a greater emphasis on the care, nurture and development of girl children must become a priority.

11. The public health divide The divide between the rich and the poor in terms of public health is stark. Infectious diseases kill more people every year than do natural disasters.

Since 1945 it is estimated that 150 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses, tuberculosis and malaria, in contrast to the 23 million who died in wars over the same period. Children are especially vulnerable.

The extent of HIV/AIDS in Africa and Southeast Asia threatens millions of lives and the social well-being of whole nations.

Asia is a time bomb waiting to explode. Unless a radical new medical option emerges, Africa will lose one-fifth or more of its adult population during this decade.

The social impact already is catastrophic, as teachers, doctors and civil

servants are dying. Too many African and Thai teenagers are heads of families.

Malaria, once on its way to containment, is a growing risk again. Malaria kills 3,000 people every day, most of them children.

Debt burdens, environmental concerns and poor economic performance mean that malaria eradication efforts are being underfunded.

Global warming means more mosquitoes and malaria in more places, including areas of the world where malaria has not been a threat.

Market forces drive the decisions as to which new drugs are developed. Many research-based pharmaceutical companies have stopped investing in research related to tropical diseases because of high costs and the prospects of limited financial returns.

12. Environmental limits The world is experiencing limits in terms of what our environment will sustain. The three parallel trends of falling water tables, shrinking cropland per person and leveling off of fish production from oceans combine as a serious threat to meeting the world's demand for food, especially if population continues to climb as currently forecast.

Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are forecast to have 70 percent of the world's food-insecure people in 2010.

Population growth is high in regions least able to provide for more people. Poverty is leading to environmental degradation, which in turn creates more poverty.

Environmental refugees, estimated by some to be as high as 25 million, are moving to the cities and across borders.

Unless new and better ways of water management are developed, fresh water may emerge as the key limitation to global food production. The food supply for 500 million people today is being produced by an unsustainable use of water.

The largest water deficits are in India and China, the two largest nations on earth. Some predict that the future major wars will be over access to water.

Consumption patterns in the North make a far higher per capita impact on the environment than that of the rest of the world. A child born in the industrialized world adds more to consumption and pollution over his or her lifetime than 30 to 50 children born in the developing world. +

Spiritual Openness Pervades The World

Have you noticed? When the title of the popular “Chicken Soup” book series was changed to “Chicken Soup for the Soul,” it indicated more than just a marketing strategy shift. The title shift was one of the world’s numerous signals that it is expressing a new openness to the spiritual.

This spiritual openness does not mean people are rallying around Christian essentials that equate to orthodoxy nor that

they are showing new interest in religious organizational involvement. However, it does indicate that “matters of the soul” really matter.

The grid that follows provides a map for the post-modern maze of spiritual openness in the world today. It offers suggestions for those who want to influence people for Christ in today’s spiritual environment.

Traits	Results	Responses
Widespread interest in spirituality is pervasive; it is rampant in these times.	Issues related to matters of faith are present in the public forum (newspapers, TV, advertising, workplaces, literature).	Opportunities to engage people in “matters of the soul” abound.
Being open to personal spirituality is not the same as defining oneself as a “religious person.”	Equating spiritual interest to interest in religious organizational involvement is a mistaken assumption.	Extending invitations for people to experience life in communities of faith (churches/small groups) can be part of people’s spiritual journey.
Openness to spirituality is more subjective than objective.	People are predisposed to “try out” spiritual answers to personal problems.	Inviting people to pray about life’s concerns can turn them toward God as creator, redeemer and sustainer of their lives.
The interest in spirituality is more related to experiencing feelings than to engaging spiritual ideas.	Matters of the heart are not necessarily linked to a need or desire to develop beliefs for the mind.	Sharing one’s personal experiences with God will be more effective than offering an apologetic for believing.
“Spirituality” has the potential to be a natural integrator of life for all people everywhere.	One can count on Augustine’s assertion that everyone has an inherent spiritual capacity created by God for God.	Projecting the implications of “God as creator of the universe” has enormous consequences for witness.
The capacity to be “spiritual” is part of the human spirit’s drive to discover meaning in one’s life.	We should expect “secular meaning makers” to seek ways of fashioning life with “spiritual satisfaction.”	The Christian challenge is to “outlive” rather than “out wit” the emerging secular competitors.
There is a hunger for higher things — experiences of the transcendent.	Alternative experiments to experience the sacred will emerge, e.g., use in therapy, addictions.	Encouraging people “to give God a try” or “take a chance on Jesus” can be redemptive.

There is a human drive for divine meaning and a hunger to taste and feel the transcendent.

Accordingly, it should not seem unusual when secular prophets make references to “spiritual satisfaction in a secular way.” We should not be surprised when musicians begin their concerts with statements such as, “Here is a gospel song for secular people.” You know, spirituality without the inconvenience of Jesus.

After all, we are spiritual beings. We’ve been created to believe. And when truth doesn’t resonate with the soul, the human spirit chases after other spiritual possibilities.

Theological counselors are right to signal caution. Beware of “spiritual feelings” without “spiritual ideas.” Watch out for spirituality that is “soft and fluffy.”

Instead, filter the faith through time-tested biblical norms. Believe only what is believable. Discernment is good for the soul.

Rather than simply dissenting and critiquing people who are participating in the present “openness to the spiritual” milieu, the grander challenge is to engage people. It is to relate graciously to people and invite them to express their spiritual interest — regardless of how unorthodox it may seem.

Until we listen and accept where people are in their journey, we will not be in any position to share our experiences with the God of creation and the Christ of redemption that could prompt them to consider a relationship with Jesus for themselves.

✦ Don Posterski



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