



WHO NEEDS • Mission Agencies? (And Who Needs Local Churches?)

Ralph Winter and George Miley

Church-Based Missionaries: Has It Ever Worked?

Ralph D. Winter

This is one of the most delicate issues today, and no doubt will continue to be into the near future. Some church traditions have emphasized the sole validity of the local church structure so strongly that any kind of denominational or mission agency type of collaboration is seen as extra-biblical. (Even family structure is seen as secondary – instead of family elders making up the church eldership.)

This is one of the most delicate issues today – and will continue to be into the near future.

For different reasons many large congregations in the United States with thousands of members have established their own mission boards. These congregations add to

the number within the long-standing traditions, such as the Churches of Christ and the Plymouth Brethren, which have all along emphasized the idea of missionaries being under the authority and support of only one congregation. The same emphasis is common, too, in the case of thousands of new congregations in the independent Charismatic Center movement, and among similarly independent Chinese congregations all over the world.

Unfortunately, the nature of cross-cultural mission is much too complicated, as well as often geographically too distant from a supporting congregation, for home congregations to be solely responsible for the field strategy and supervision of effective mission work. If each missionary or small mission team on the field is directed by a different congregation back home, coordination on the field between missionaries and/or mission teams is that much more difficult.

The direct interest of congregations in a particular missionary certainly needs to be maintained, but it is patently obvious from the historical record that direct congregational supervision is a rather unlikely method for the effective deployment of missionaries when compared to the work of standard mission agencies. But if that is the only way some missionaries will get to the field, so be it. Missionaries under that kind of direction are not as likely to be as well cared for or as effective in the long run. Very likely what is being called “synergistic” collaboration between local sending congregations and existing mission agencies is a far superior way to surmount this problem.

Yet, many brand-new local churches are bursting into glories which they feel may be almost unique to themselves. They cannot see entrusting their missionaries to standard agencies which may not appear to have the same special insights and emphases. Thus, far too many new congregations are



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struggling and perhaps lagging with the mission challenge.

Many are simply making amateurish forays into foreign lands that often accomplish little, and often repeat mistakes mission boards have long since learned to avoid. Some accomplish overseas a kind of renewal of existing churches planted by someone else. This kind of “supercharging” ministry is not without value in some circumstances, but just because it is foreign does not make it *mission* in the classical Pauline sense of not building on anyone else’s foundation, or of going where Christ is not named.

Such congregation-based outreach rarely delves into pioneer tribal work, for example. When the Assemblies of God decided to go into that kind of work, they wisely sent such workers out under Wycliffe Bible Translators. If a major mission entity like the Assemblies of God could not effectively direct specialized outreach in pioneer areas, how in the world is a local congregation likely to be successful at such a task? International “renewal” of existing congregations, yes; cross-cultural pioneer mission, not so likely.

Seeking Initiation and Consolidation Among All Nations

George Miley

Antioch Network agrees – missionaries are best sent through mission agencies. In fact, in the relatively few cases where churches can do or have done this well, they have established their own sending structures or parachurch organizations or sodalities. It is also the case that where churches have done this effectively, there is not an attitude of “we don’t need anybody else” but an attitude of humility and a heart to walk in spiritual unity with the rest of the Church – to honor and learn from, or together with, the rest of the Body. The spiritual pride that produces the “lone-ranger” mentality will not carry the spiritual authority required to penetrate entrenched walls of spiritual darkness. Having missionaries in place does not equal Kingdom breakthroughs. Antioch Network’s

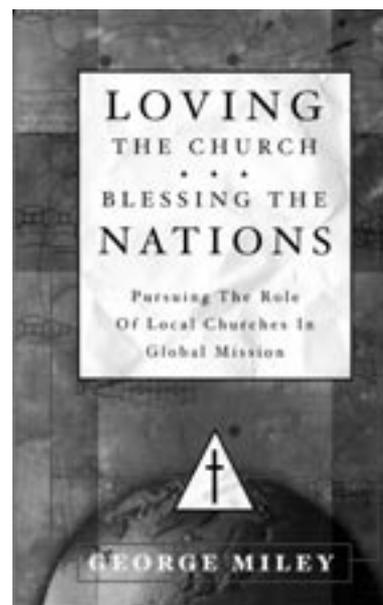
most expanded statement on this is in my book *Loving the Church, Blessing the Nations*. In my serving of churches over these years, I find one of the most difficult areas is the identifying, developing, and releasing of apostolic leaders. (We could also use the term “initiating” leaders, or “entrepreneurial” leaders.)

The process of blessing all nations must be led by leaders called by God to birth new kingdom works – to pioneer. These leaders, like all of us, are gifted by God to do what He has called them to do. These leaders, to begin with, are for the most part found in churches. Their apostolic gifting must be discerned early, then carefully and skillfully developed by older leaders who understand them. A key component to this is their character development, for gifting will dysfunction if godly character is unformed.

Church leaders can play a wonderful and crucial role in this. But so often they find this a challenge. Leaders who are gifted pastorally, or as teachers, or as administrators, can easily shut down younger leaders who are apostolic in their gifting. They don’t mean to – they aren’t “the bad guys” – they just don’t understand what is going on. Younger apostolic leaders scare them, or they don’t “fit in”. Of course they don’t! They are called and gifted of God to pioneer. They don’t fit in with our program – they have their own program!

In writing the book I began thinking I would write one chapter on apostolic ministry and how it relates to the local church. I ended up writing five! It just kept coming and coming. There is a chapter there on apostolic structures. That is my preferred term, although I am fine with the more widely-known parachurch organization, or sodality, etc. In Acts 13 when Barnabas and Saul and John Mark were sent out, they were not a local church. They were an apostolic team. This is the New Testament pattern.

There are two mega-trends in Kingdom extension among all nations – *initiation* and *consolidation*. Both have their New Testament form or structure.



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Initiation is done in the context of the apostolic team. Consolidation is done in the context of the local church. They both, together, make up the Church.

Of course, New Testament apostolic teams were one with the local church in *koinonia* – in fellowship, community and family. In our day and context we so often get these things confused. Apostolic ministry, and therefore apostolic structures, is *one* with the local church in *koinonia*, but *different* in purpose, and therefore in structure.

On Sunday (or whenever), everybody comes together for the family meeting. The rest of the week, everybody scatters into their own individual callings – housewife, businessman, farmer, cross-cultural church planter, etc. And these calling have their own appropriate structures.

Apostolic ministry is released through apostolic structures. 🌐

Apostolic Organizational Structures

George Miley

In seeking a biblical understanding of the appropriate relationship between a local church and a mission organization, there are two viewpoints we will want to avoid. The first is that the local church does not need the mission organization. “If the church had been doing its job all along, we would not need mission organizations” is the kind of statement that is heard at times.

The second is that the mission organization does not need the local church. “The church should just send us (mission organizations) its people and money and leave the rest of the job to us mission professionals. What does the church know about missions?” would represent this viewpoint.

Neither of these viewpoints is correct or helpful. They are disrespectful to both the local church and the mission organization. They fuel unkindness. They sow seeds of disunity within Christ’s body. They do not honor our Lord or advance his kingdom.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit provided for the global advance of God’s kingdom by forming two structures: local churches and apostolic teams. Most people today would see the modern equivalent of the apostolic team to be the parachurch organization, the mission organization, the sodality, or, sometimes in the United States, the 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Paul’s apostolic teams were not local churches. And they were also different, in some obvious ways, from our modern mission organizations, especially in the way they have developed over the years. This

is not meant to be critical of modern mission organizations or to say that God is not using them. He most certainly is and in awesomely wonderful ways!

If we are prepared to consider this matter prayerfully before the Lord, we may find that we want to make adjustments, which would greatly help both churches and mission organizations distribute God’s blessings among all nations.

My experience tells me there is growing interest in pursuing this subject. Time and again leaders in mission organizations have asked, “How can we relate more effectively to local churches?” And church leaders have said, “We really want to be proactive when it comes to our mission obedience, but we don’t want to reinvent the wheel. How can we work with mission organizations so both of us benefit?” Awesome questions!

Perhaps different terminology would be helpful as we consider these issues. Sometimes new words free us from old images that block us from seeing things with a fresh perspective. The term that has become my favorite in this discussion is *apostolic structure*. The term *apostolic structure* helps me focus on the core issue: what kind of organizational structure is best suited for the release of apostolic ministry (i.e., the ministry effects apostolic leaders catalyze)?

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