

The Changing Shape of Missions **Compiled and posted Bob Young***

I travel to Latin America almost monthly—usually going where there is no North American missionary presence. I interact with lots of national missionaries and ministers. I listen to their problems. I hear their hopes and desires for the future. Mission work is changing. Here I share three changing dynamics I see and suggest appropriate responses in each area, things that will be effective as we seek to redefine the future of mission efforts among us.

Mission Principles and Process Revisited

- The first “missionary mission” is church planting, beginning a new congregation. This requires evangelism.
- New churches must then be strengthened and edified. This brings the tasks of evangelism and local church development into tension.
- Local indigenous church leaders and teachers should be developed and allowed to learn by doing. This continues the tension between focusing attention externally in evangelism and focusing attention internally on development.
- Developing congregations are able to select and support their own leaders and evangelists.
- The local indigenous church assumes primary financial responsibility for the local work. Ideally, external financial support can be limited to an evangelist with wide responsibility as opposed to a local minister.
- “Every-member” evangelism is facilitated. The biblical development of the local church with indigenous leaders and financial responsibility allows the church to refocus in evangelism and additional church planting.
- Non-Christians interact primarily with unpaid indigenous church leaders and workers. This represents the redefinition of how evangelism will be done, moving from “mission work” to the work and responsibility of the local church..
- Missionary churches are developed and multiply in extraordinary places

Three changing dynamics

-1- A changing focus—from sponsoring church to local church

- From missionaries as the primary doers to missionaries as equippers of nationals
- From missionaries being in charge to being partners
- From owning and controlling the mission effort to owning nothing, controlling nothing, and counting nothing as belonging to the ‘outsiders’
- From western missionaries to global missionaries

Response: value the local church, equip and train members and leaders; church development, spiritual growth, teacher training, leader training

-2- A changing focus—from evangelism to healthy church development

- From dependency to self sufficiency
- From addition to multiplication
- From competition to cooperation, coworkers with God and with one another

- From external mission organizations to internalized local churches

Response: Help develop evangelistic tools that do more than get people to the baptistery, focus on strengthening and edifying the local church so that it becomes capable of functioning and doing what God calls it to do at its particular stage of development

-3- A changing focus—from sending to empowering

- From focus on sending missionaries to empowering nationals
- Encouraging holistic missions—integrating evangelism, development, and service

Response: Put less focus on sending and more focus on how the local leaders and members are empowered; strengthen and develop national leaders, help them do what they cannot do for themselves, set a course of independence rather than dependency.

**Materials given me by Jay Jarboe were used in the development of these points. The major shifts and many of the subpoints are his.*