

## **Missions: Renewing the Dream—Re-envisioning the Future**

By Bob Young

*Some see things as they are and ask why; others see things that could be and ask why not.*

### **Could we do more? Could we do better?**

Those of my generation have been described as idealists. More and more, I think about what could be. I dream about what could be. I am thinking specifically about evangelism and missions. The church could multiply and strengthen its efforts in local evangelism and missions. Local churches could increase their focus on outreach. We could share the good news more effectively and more widely, we could reach the unreached, touch the untouched. Why are we not accelerating our efforts to reach the world for Christ? What keeps us from seeking the most effective methods? Why do we spend precious resources in activities that represent slow methods and meager results?

### **The Last 50 Years—Looking Ahead to the Next 50 Years**

The mission context of which I am thinking is Latin America. The mission works of churches of Christ in many Latin America countries are nearing or have just passed their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries. From its humble beginnings in Mexico where the first classes were offered in 1964, at the end of 2013 Baxter will complete 50 years of service. Golden anniversaries raise the question: What will the next 50 years hold?

I am grateful for those who have gone before and for the doors that have been opened. How do we stand on the shoulders of others and continue and accelerate the dream? How do we go beyond what has been done and answer God's call in our age?

Fifty years is a long time for an organization (or a mission work or any focused effort) to exist. The normal life cycle of organizations, as of human beings, is one of birth and development, accomplishment, and eventual decline. Organizations that remain vibrant and active, growing and developing for 50 years or more have learned how to renew themselves. Many organizations, especially churches, plateau and begin to maintain the status quo. This is often described as maintenance mode. Robert Dale (*To Dream Again*) says that organizations plateau or decline when they lose their vision and purpose.

### **Renewing the Dream**

An essential part of the challenge to remain fresh and vibrant relates to our values. Principles provide the foundation for values; values determine behaviors. Values define our self understandings and our reason for existing. Historically, we in churches of Christ have been committed to the authority of Scripture, believing that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation unto all that obey him. We have focused attention on the need to share the gospel, believing that those outside of Christ are lost. We have seen evangelism and mission work as a primary purpose of the church. I believe the successes or failures of the next 50 years for the church will depend upon our ability to maintain and live out those values, including a commitment to establish strong, vibrant and vital churches that are committed to doing more than oiling and maintaining organizational machinery.

Renewing the dream demands that each generation understand the principles, establish the values that grow out of those principles, and define behaviors consistent with those values.

### **Re-envisioning the Future**

Ours is a time of new challenges and astounding new opportunities. The technology available in our world gives us incredible possibilities for contact, training, and teaching. My dream is that the mission works we have begun will flourish and mature and that great missionary churches will come forth from within the nations so that the gospel spreads quickly to the world. I dream of new church planting efforts—not those that send North Americans to foreign lands, but those that send North Americans, Colombians and Peruvians, Hondurans and Guatemalans to their own neighbors and to the cities and villages of their own nations. I dream of indigenous churches planting churches that will plant more churches.

I am committed to strengthening disciples and encouraging them in the faith. I want to help mature existing congregations so that they can move toward biblical organization through the natural development of leaders in local churches—evangelists, elders, and teachers. My desire is to train leaders—evangelists, preachers, missionaries, pastor-teachers—who are equipped with a strong biblical foundation. Churches that are biblically organized and biblically functioning are much more likely to become self-sustaining and self-duplicating.

I dream of developing missionary churches in the mission field—churches that will accept the challenge of sharing the gospel so that they become self-propagating and self-duplicating, churches that send for their members as ministers to strengthen disciples, encourage faith, and develop leaders.