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Mission Capacity Building

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Introduction

“**W**e are responsible for our generation and its evangelization. We have such opportunity to reach the world for the Lord Jesus Christ—with the means to travel, a multiplicity of tools, a motivated global workforce and the information we need to identify the most needy. Above all, God has given us clear directions as to what we must do, and his Holy Spirit empowers us to accomplish it. Will we grasp this opportunity ...?” With this “burning question” Patrick Johnstone ends his magnum opus, *The Future of the Global Church*.¹ Said another way, we have the capacities available to us for world evangelization and the completion of the mission task—will we develop them in our circles of influence and use them for their intended purpose, making disciples of all nations?

In this generation there is a new awareness of the multiple challenges before us. We are more aware than ever before that the *nations* to be discipled are not 206 geo-political states, but rather 9,751 *ethne*, or ethno-linguistic people groups.² We are more aware than ever before that global allocation of resources for mission are severely imbalanced. One example will suffice: 90% of foreign missionaries work among already-reached people groups; 10% work among unreached people groups.³ We are increasingly aware of the hostility felt by certain religions, or at least the growing radical elements among them, toward Westerners in general and Christians in particular. Although responding to another challenge, that of the rich entering the kingdom of God, we may be tempted to repeat the disciples’ question, “Who then can be saved?” (Matt. 19:25).

It is my conviction that we live in the most amazing time in history when it comes to carrying out the Great Commission. Never before has God used so many resources through so many Christians from so many churches in so many lands! There is a new

missionary army arising from the majority world that is allied with existing forces from the west. “More missionaries are now sent from non-western churches than from the traditional mission-sending bases in the west.”⁴ There is an unprecedented movement of peoples across cultures, borders and even oceans. There are missional implications in these migrations, many of which include non-Christians moving to places of Christian witness, and others including Christians moving into unreached populations (such as the thousands of Filipinos working in the Middle East). A third example of new resources is that of mass media. From the availability of the Bible online in dozens of languages, to internet chat rooms for seekers, to discipling new believers in restricted access countries through satellite television ... we have entered a new chapter in the communication of the gospel.

The mission capacities we speak of must be embraced and activated. By “mission capacity building” we mean *coaching one another to actively engage in the missionary task, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

We coach each other in a variety of ways for a variety of engagements in God’s mission. This is a biblical activity. God instructed Moses to *call* the people into a covenant with him, part of which is to be before the nations a “kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:5-6). The psalmist (possibly David) *instructs* the people to “declare his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (Ps. 96:3). Isaiah *prophesied* that the suffering servant, first Israel and then the Messiah, was to be a light to the Gentiles and to bring salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa. 42:6, 49:6). In the New Testament, mission capacity building happened as the disciples *apprenticed* with Jesus, as the believers devoted themselves to *apostolic teaching* (Acts 2:42 ff.), and as church leaders gathered to *worship, fast and pray* (Acts 13:1-4). Missionary Paul *reminds* the Ephesians that leaders are given to the church “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (4:12). For the Colossians he *prays* they would “bear fruit in every good work” (1:10). His life makes crystal clear he was not merely referring to service and fruit among believers. The author of Hebrews offers a *blessing* that the God of peace “equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him” (13:21).

As a missionary movement now engaged in mission for over 150 years, the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church has also been coached along its missionary journey. How so? As a people of the book, the reading and study (individual and corporate) of Scripture has been a primary influence. While open to other “winds of the Spirit,” the MBs never forgot their spiritual forefathers of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement, including their sense of missionary responsibility and urgency. In earlier years, other missionary movements such as the Lutheran Pietists

(from which came the Moravians), and the German Baptists (which led to an early sending of missionaries to India) provided not only inspiration but also models and structures. In the twentieth century, the evangelical missions movement has provided the primary coaching influence for MB missions from North America. Over the years, a variety of methods have been instrumental in building mission capacities among the MBs, including literature (such as missionary biographies), visionary preaching, missionary conferences, personal witness, evangelistic preaching, women's missionary societies, regular missionary reports, mission-focused Bible institutes, and proactive mission boards or agencies.⁵

Mission capacity building can further be understood as coaching in three spheres of operation. These are the church, the training center, and the agency. To these three we now turn to better understand the strategic role of mission capacity building.

The Church

Healthy churches are missional churches. Missional churches are missionary-sending churches with vision for reaching both their Jerusalem (local) and the ends of the earth (global), and the peoples in between. So the first question to ask toward mission capacity-building is whether our churches are healthy. By *church* we include both its local and other expressions (regional and national conferences, etc.). One of the most helpful tools in diagnosing church health came out of an international research project by German missiologist Christian A. Schwarz.⁶ In his research of 1,000 churches in 32 countries, he discovered that healthy, growing churches seem to share eight quality characteristics. These characteristics are:

1. Empowering leadership. In a healthy church, leaders are more concerned about equipping others for ministry and releasing them, than they are about their name or their territory.
2. Gift-oriented ministry. In a healthy church, ministries are led and conducted by those who are gifted and passionate about precisely those ministries, not by those who lack these qualifications.
3. Passionate spirituality. Church members reveal an eagerness to worship, to grow, and to serve. They are passionate about the Lord and his people.
4. Functional structures. Where groups and ministries are contributing to the growth and well-being of the church, they are blessed and strengthened. Where they no longer serve the direction the church is moving today, they are graciously terminated.
5. Inspiring worship service. Worship services are characterized by variety, quality, relevance, sincerity, and congregational participation.

6. Holistic small groups. In a healthy church, there are a variety of small groups that meet regularly and address the daily concerns of their participants.
7. Need-oriented evangelism. In a healthy church, the gospel is indeed good news in the sense that it touches people where they are hurting today, in addition to bringing assurance of eternal life.
8. Loving relationships. The “one another” commands of Scripture are known and embraced. People know they are valued, and in turn express love and appreciation to others. This atmosphere is attractive.

Many of these characteristics also apply to the conference level of the church. The Canadian Conference of MB Churches has made healthy churches a priority. This has led not only to an articulation of church health in their mission, vision, and values statement, but to making church health a strategic service offered to their 250-church conference.⁷

Building missional capacities in the church goes beyond seeking healthy churches, though this basic ingredient is essential. One must also ask the question, “Is there a vision for mission?” If the Antioch experience is not a standard, it certainly is an inspiring model ... have the leaders seen or heard something while they were seeking God and his purposes? Is it a vision from God? Is the vision clear and has it been written down? Is it owned by the church leadership? Has it been shared with the members so they own it? Jesus saw fields ripe for the harvest (John 4:35). Peter needed to see the vision which would open up a new mission three times, but he got the picture. Paul saw a vision of a Macedonian asking for help (Acts 16:9). It is true that without a vision people perish, but with a vision people are ready to charge hell with a water pistol.

If, like Moses, you have been to the mountain and received a word for God’s mission, you can’t stay there. Life happens in the valley, and the vision needs to get translated into effective systems and structures. By systems we mean a coordinated plan including people, methods and procedures. Examples of mission systems in the church include a plan for prayer, a plan for mobilizing resources, and a plan for training. Systems work well when there are gifted people to work them and structures to support them. A prayer system to intercede for the lost and the missionaries sent to reach them needs a prayer warrior to lead the charge (and prayer is a battle). This leader will need to create structures including communication tools (prayer bulletins), gatherings for corporate prayer, and prayer teams. Well-developed and well-operated structures will also be needed to support systems that mobilize finances, that recruit missionaries, that train those who will go, and so on.

As Anabaptists and Mennonite Brethren, we understand from Scripture that mission is *from* the church and *unto* the church. That is, essential to mission is the gathering of new believers into church communities, and where such do not exist, to plant new churches. Thus, mission capacity building in the sphere of the church must include coaching toward the planting of new churches. This may be in your church's immediate geographical or cultural sphere (your Jerusalem). Or it may be in your nearby district to a near-culture people (Judea). Both within many countries and in neighboring countries are people groups that are different but not distant (Samaria). Examples would be some immigrant groups in your own city who are somewhat acculturated. Or a same language and culture group, but living in a neighboring country. And then there are those groups that are distant from us, either geographically and/or culturally (the "ends of the earth" people). With the growing migration movements, many of these are closer geographically than we realize. However, many more are distant and need cross-cultural mission workers to cross many frontiers to reach them. All this to say that central to the mission capacity-building role is the coaching of churches to send mission workers and plant reproducing churches, from their Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

Two reminders are necessary here in regard to Acts 1:8. We do well to remember that this is a prophecy that Jesus is giving to his disciples, not a command nor a suggestion. Therefore, it is assumed that indeed the Holy Spirit will come and that indeed the disciples will in fact be witnesses. Secondly, the connecting word between these spheres of witness is *and*, not *then* or *thereafter*. In other words, Jesus is not saying that witness must be sequential, or that we cannot go to the ends of the earth until we have passed through Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. The evidence of this is in the fact that soon after this prophecy, on the day of Pentecost, witness was given to visitors (both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles) "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). In fact, one could say that on this first day of Spirit-filled witness this prophecy was fulfilled all at once, since people from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth were present.

Finally, according to biblical patterns and our own mission story, we must coach churches to partner with each other as they engage in mission. The New Testament from Acts forward is the story of local churches working together to accomplish what no one could do alone. Jerusalem workers were sent to help Antioch grow as a fledgling church, but later Antioch sent workers and funds back to Jerusalem to help with famine relief. In Paul's letters, we see numerous references to inter-church cooperation for the sake of assisting the needy, offering encouragement and instruction, exchanging workers, etc. The outstanding expansion of the early church

did not happen by churches acting independently of each other. Moreover, the global expansion of the Mennonite Brethren Church could only have happened by local churches and national conferences cooperating to accomplish much more together than anyone could do alone.

The Training Center

Whether we are thinking about missionaries preparing to cross the seas, church planters preparing to cross the city, pastors preparing to lead missional churches, or many others such as teachers or administrators needed to support mission activities, there is a need to have systems and structures focused on training mission workers. Here we are thinking much more broadly than a few missions courses in the Bible institute or seminary curriculum.

Rather, we need a multi-faceted system of training that has a number of delivery approaches, one of which is an *intentional structure devoted to the training of mission workers*. The larger system of training in a local church, or a family (conference) of churches, could include informal, non-formal, and formal approaches to training (see in this reader the chapters devoted to the non-formal and the formal). *Informal* training happens spontaneously during the normal activities of living, or for our discussions, the journey of the Christian life. Learning a language in daily conversation, spending time with a mentor, or observing appropriate behavior patterns are examples of informal learning. *Non-formal* learning is intentional and organized, but is outside the formal educational or school system. Seminars, non-accredited courses, and ministry apprenticeships are included in the non-formal approach. *Formal* learning is the approach we are most familiar with in literate societies. Whether centralized in a school or decentralized in an extension program it includes an academic curriculum, a course syllabus, a recognized teacher and leads to certification, usually accredited by a reputable organ. What follow are some recommendations for the development of the *intentional structure* of mission worker training referred to above.

Whether the training center is formal or non-formal, that is, whether it leads to a degree or not, in most cases is a secondary matter. What is primary is whether desired learning outcomes are accomplished. Outcomes should be identified and planned for in both formal and non-formal training structures. Whether the worker is a young adult just beginning his/her mission service, or a seasoned veteran that is committed to lifelong learning, training outcomes are essential both for learner and trainer. The following are a list of outcomes that are pursued in the Missionary Training and Equipping (MTE) program, a non-formal training center operated by MB Mission in Abbotsford:

- **Word Of God**
 - Understand the depth and uniqueness of the gospel message for personal, communal, and universal transformation.⁸
 - Learn to apply and experience the gospel's transforming power in all areas of one's life (spiritual, emotional, social, physical, and relational).
 - Learn to interpret God's word (Bible study, spiritual gifts of wisdom and discernment) and communicate his message to others (preaching, teaching, prophetic words) for transformational impact.
- **Prayer**
 - Grow in passion for God's abiding presence, hearing his voice (through Scripture, prayer, and community), obeying promptly, and experiencing the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
 - Grow his/her heart for the nations and practice the principles of strategic intercession.
- **Team Life**
 - Understand one's own and the team's primary passions, spiritual gifts, personality styles and leadership styles.
 - Understand how his/her family/singleness fits into this covenant community.
 - Grasp team development dynamics and acquire skills in healthy conflict resolution.
- **Church Planting**
 - Understand the centrality of the church in God's kingdom mission and grow in love for the family of God.
 - Learn to appreciate the relational principles of authority, mutual accountability (submission), and servant leadership.
 - Grasp the multiplicative dynamics of discipleship and church planting best practices:
 - Make disciples through personal faith-sharing experiences.
 - Lead small groups to foster spiritual growth and mission.
 - Disciple others so that they might make disciples.
 - Understand church planting cycles.
 - Understand and develop a philosophy of ministry.
- **Spiritual Engagement**
 - Learn the principles of and practice strategic intercession for the least reached.

- Be equipped for spiritual warfare through biblical study and the exercise of authority over the Evil One.
- Learn the principles of laying apostolic foundations among the least reached.
- **Cross-Cultural Engagement**
 - Learn to value incarnational ministry, “bonding” relationships.
 - Learn the importance of language learning in cross-cultural ministry and acquire skills for language acquisition.
 - Acquire skills for host culture exegesis (demographic and ethnographic research).
- **Evangelical-Anabaptist MB Values**
 - Learn to value and own Evangelical-Anabaptist values such as discipleship, community hermeneutics, covenant community, the priesthood of all believers, servant leadership, sacrificial service, kingdom of God theology, personal and social ethics, stewardship, peacemaking, and global mission.
 - Appreciate the stories and the missiological contribution of the MB Mission legacy.
 - Own the MB Mission values (interpersonal and organizational) and solution model.
- **Church-Based Mission**
 - Understand the value of being sent by local communities of faith.
 - Learn to communicate regularly and effectively for God’s glory.
 - Learn to mobilize people (short- and long-term), prayer and finances for the furtherance of God’s mission among the least reached.⁹

The advantage of using an outcomes-based approach to training is that outcomes such as those listed above can be embedded in any number of delivery structures, from the local church-based leadership center to a pre-service mission training center to an accredited Bible college. Each of these delivery structures can potentially become a mission training center with the right outcomes, and of course, the right trainers.

The Mission Agency

While the formation of a mission agency is not an essential, the last two hundred years of mission sending from western churches, and now more recently the church sending from “everywhere to everywhere,” has confirmed this recommended approach to mobilizing and sending mission workers. Some mission agencies were

begun to focus on a particular region or people group (e.g. Sudan Interior Mission). Others were begun to advance a certain kind of mission ministry (e.g. Wycliffe Bible Translators). Most denominational missions begin to advance the whole gospel of Christ by obeying the Great Commission, including evangelism, discipleship, church planting and other supportive ministries. Mission agencies allow for a greater focus of attention, a greater employment of expertise, and a more effective administration of resources than most local churches or denominational boards are able to handle on their own.

Here some examples of the roles a mission agency can play as a church or denomination develops mission sending capacities:

1. Mobilize and channel resources from the local church to the mission field. These resources include prayer, vision, missionary candidates, and finances.
2. Discern, together with the local church, the giftedness, readiness, and placement of missionary candidates.
3. Train, together with local church and training center, those approved for missionary service. Part of this training includes the discernment and development of missionary teams.
4. Provide field-appropriate and experience-based ministry supervision to missionaries. This includes on-field needs such as language learning, acculturation, context analysis, strategy deployment, and cooperation with national partners.
5. Care for, together with the sending church, the missionary family and their many needs.
6. Request, prepare, and provide relevant and inspiring information between missionary work and supporting churches.
7. Learn from and share best practices in relation to other mission agencies.
8. To serve and lead the church in the discernment of opportunities, in developing missionary strategies, and in suggesting goals and plans.

Conclusion

Church, mission training center, and missionary agency are partners in the mission task. Each is a key player in the building of mission capacities. Some recent examples serve to illustrate how we might *coach one another to actively engage in the missionary task, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.*

The mission department (agency) of the Democratic Republic of Congo MB Church recently sponsored distance learning seminars (training) for church health and church planting in Bandundu province. The trainers are also teachers

at the *Centre Universitaire de Missiologie* (University Center of Missiology), an interdenominational mission training center in Kinshasa. Some 400 pastors and leaders participated in this non-formal education reaching men, women, and youth. They are eager for more training because they sense an empowerment to bring the whole gospel to their communities.

The Khmu Mission, a MB church planting movement, has its center in Northern Thailand, called the Changing Life Center. It provides leadership, mission, and community development skills to Khmu workers coming from numerous locations. Semester-long courses are offered for resident youth and week-long modules for adult learners. Some are for credit and others only for capacity-building. Informal coaching is given to all. The movement is spreading to other people groups and countries.

The Colombian MB Church has sent out over ten missionaries in the last decade. Many of these workers joined teams supervised by the North American agency, MB Mission. Recently the conference took a leap of faith and appointed a former missionary to develop a mission agency. It is called *Heme Aqui* (Here Am I). The church is supporting the agency, but the agency is coaching the church to become more missional, to plant more churches, to care for its missionaries, and to send out its own missionary teams.

It's a great day to be alive and active with our Lord in his mission. With blood, sweat and tears, the whole church is taking the whole gospel to the whole world. One of the newer apostolic leaders coming from the majority world (India), K. P. Yohannan has declared, "The single most important hindrance to world evangelization right now is the lack of total involvement by the Body of Christ."¹⁰ Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Notes

¹ Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church* (Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2011), 239.

² "Global Statistics," http://joshuaproject.net/global_statistics.

³ Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, "Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 4th ed. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 543.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 531

⁵ G.W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1984), 7-28.

⁶ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream: Churchsmart Resources, 1996).

⁷“About CCMBC,” <http://www.mennonitebrethren.ca/resource/our-operations>.

⁸ Each missionary candidate is paired with an experienced personal mentor during training, thus including the informal aspect of training also.

⁹ These outcomes have been developed by MB Mission staff Ray Harms-Wiebe and Tim Klassen.

¹⁰ K.P. Yohannan, *Revolution in World Missions* (Carrollton: GFA Books, 2003), 85. Also available online, http://www.eaec.org/bookstore/revolution_in_world_missions.pdf.

Recommended Reading

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Study Questions

1. Of the eight characteristics listed of healthy churches, which would you say describe your local church? Which need special attention? What might God be calling you to do?
2. Give one example of access you could have for mission training for each of the methods (informal, non-formal, formal).
3. What are the advantages of a missionary being sent out with a mission agency as opposed to being sent out directly by his or her local church?

