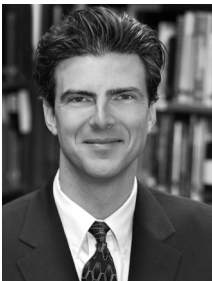


The Cultivation and Production of Student Missionaries

By Laurence Burn

Recently I had the privilege of attending an event showcasing academy, college, and university gymnastics teams from across North America. The discipline, strength, balance, and agility of these amazing athletes were truly inspirational. Not all the teams exhibited the same level of excellence, but it was clear that each one was made up of an elite group of young people who had been selected to represent their school in a unique way. Many hours of practice, coaching, and repetition resulted in a spectacular demonstration of the capabilities of the human body when dedicated youth and their mentors work together.



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As I reflected on this event I asked myself the question, “Is it not time for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to make a similar investment in the creation of teams of young people specially equipped to face one of the greatest missiological challenges of our day—reaching the unreached of the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Would it be possible for those who take Matt 24:14 seriously to make significant inroads into the realms of the unreached, if the Church was really focused on training and equipping the special forces of frontier missionaries?” This question is especially critical when one considers the magnitude of the task of reaching the unreached and the tremendous dearth or scarcity of pioneering missionaries to accomplish it.

The Magnitude of the Task

According to the Joshua Project (<http://www.joshuaproject.net/>), a website dedicated to highlighting the unevangelized people around the globe, there are 6,599 unreached ethnic and tribal groups in the world today representing 2.68 billion people or 40 percent of the world’s

population. This presents a tremendous challenge, especially when considered in the light of the following statement that has inspired Adventist Frontier Missions' (AFM) vision of "Reaching the unreached in this generation."

Success in any line demands a definite aim. He who would achieve true success in life must keep steadily in view the aim worthy of his endeavor. Such an aim is set before the youth of today. The heaven-appointed purpose of giving the gospel to the world in this generation is the noblest that can appeal to any human being. It opens a field of effort to everyone whose heart Christ has touched (White 1903:262).

sion can be compared to air force bombardment, and evangelistic efforts can be likened to Special Forces operations. Church planters are like the ground troops, and it is the ground troops that eventually decide the outcome of the battle. This analogy is limited and potentially provocative, but the point I am making is that there are no shortcuts to the work of church planting; (3) at least one church-planting movement will be started in each unreached people group with an average of two church-planting couples per people group; and (4) a significant percentage of the church planters will need to

About 1,056 teams will need to be deployed per year for the next 25 years to reach the goal of reaching the unreached in this generation.

If indeed it is the heaven-appointed purpose to give the gospel to the world in this generation, then the question is, What kind of church-planting force would need to be mobilized to accomplish this aim? In order to make a rough calculation, I will use the following assumptions: (1) this present generation ends in 2033 A.D. or 25 years from now; (2) a people group will be considered reached if at least one church-planting movement has been launched among that ethnic or tribal group (Radio and televi-

work cross-culturally in order to accomplish this objective.

If these four assumptions are made, then about 1,056 teams will need to be deployed per year for the next 25 years to reach the goal of reaching the unreached in this generation.

To put this into perspective, at the end of 2005 the Seventh-day Adventist Church had 15,735 ordained ministers in active ministry and a total of 185,993 active employees (*143rd Annual Statistical Report* 2005:55). An addition of about 1,000 new

frontier missionary teams every year would represent significant financial, tactical, and administrative challenges. Considering the fact that cross-cultural frontier church planting requires specialized training and skills, the bigger question is, where will the Adventist Church find the qualified personnel to accomplish this enormous undertaking since AFM presently sends out 5 teams per year and the General Conference sends out about 100 individuals per year, but few of them work for the unreached?

AFM's Mission

It was to meet the challenge of mobilizing the activities of a group of people toward a specific goal (of reaching the unreached in this generation) that AFM was founded. The very clearly defined nature and sharp focus of AFM's mission statement reflects this task: "The mission of Adventist Frontier Missions is to establish indigenous Seventh-day Adventist church-planting movements among unreached people groups."

This is a very ambitious mission, especially considering the size of the task of reaching the unreached, the urgency of taking the gospel to the world in this generation, and the challenge of mobilizing a movement of cross-cultural church planters. The greatest challenge to accomplishing this assignment or mission and realizing this vision is finding people. I submit that the

Seventh-day Adventist Church is uniquely equipped to meet this challenge with an excellent and well-coordinated missionary training program.

A Cultivating and Harvesting Strategy

Some years ago Clyde Morgan, AFM's founder, had a conversation with the director of an evangelical missions agency similar in size to AFM about their recruiting strategies. The director told him that their problem was not recruiting but placement. They had more people applying to be missionaries than they had calls to fill. When asked what it was that caused this "problem," the missions leader described a program for cultivating and producing missionaries. His denomination has developed missions curricula that are introduced very early in Sunday School and elementary school that continue all the way up through college. The call to be a missionary is extended in church as well as at school and is reinforced through both formal and informal interactions. According to this executive, as a result of this well-designed process, many young people go to college aspiring to prepare for cross-cultural missions and come to his agency looking for employment upon graduation.

It is my conviction that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is uniquely positioned to realize this vision. Our denomination was founded as an evangelistic

and missionary movement. An international system of parochial schools, the very best Sabbath School curriculum development teams, a well-developed student missions program, and a wide spectrum of short-term mission opportunities (both evangelistic and humanitarian) provide fertile ground for implementing a strategic and carefully targeted training program to fulfill the gospel commission.

The focus of this article is the student missionary program and the educational systems that could provide the setting for this

term may describe a person who has enrolled in a course of study designed to prepare for missionary service. It is this definition or description that is found in the book of Matthew.

In one of the early chapters of this gospel, Jesus invites a group of young people to “come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt 4:18-20). Jesus offers these young men an apprenticeship in missions and takes personal responsibility for the outcome. If you will follow me, *I will make you*—that is, you will be the measure of my

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program. There is compelling biblical/theological evidence that the purpose of a student missionary program is to develop missionaries through a thoughtful and purposeful discipleship process.

Theological Foundation

There are two ways to define or understand the term student missionary. First, a student missionary may be an individual who is enrolled in some form of higher education and commits a year or two of his or her life to the task of being a (cross-cultural) missionary. Second, the

ministry, and I will demonstrate through you what I am capable of doing. Jesus enrolls his students of missions in Matt 4:18-20 and graduates them in Matt 28:18-20 where Jesus commands his students to do for others what he has done for them—namely, to make them fishers of people. He commands his closest followers to become disciple-makers.

In Matt 5-9, the Master educator models the curriculum and educational strategy for a student missionary and concludes with the following words: “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their syna-

gogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt 9:35, 36).

Here is a picture of the Master missionary modeling the strategy and heart of a missionary and a missionary maker. Teaching, preaching, and healing with power and authority are all hallmarks of Christian mission. Matthew makes it clear that this was Jesus’ strategy at the beginning of his ministry (Matt 4:23). As a result of this activity, news about Jesus spreads throughout the region. In Matt 9, as a result of following this strategy, great crowds gathered and Jesus responded to them with compassion. It is in the midst of these crowds that Jesus made the following statement: “Then he said to his disciples, The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matt 9:37, 38 NIV).

It is highly significant that the very next words to follow this observation have to do with mobilizing a missionary force that would one day encircle the world. In Matt 10:1 we read, “He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” Jesus is not just in the business of doing ministry; he is intent on mobilizing missionaries.

As has already been mentioned, this concept is reinforced at the end of the book of Matthew. In Matt 28:18-20, Jesus describes the outcome he is looking for in the missions course he initiated in chapter 4. It is Jesus’ intention that those forged in the crucible of this mission apprenticeship will graduate fully able to make disciples of all nations by teaching them of God’s character and encouraging obedience with all of his power and authority backing them up. The ultimate mark of a graduate in Christ’s school is one whose life is devoted to the process of perpetuating a vision of missions and of making missionaries. The making of disciples (or missionaries) is just as much the responsibility of the church as is preaching, teaching, healing, and providing relief from demonic possession.

The following is a suggested outline of the fundamental principles or tenants of Jesus’ student of missions program:

Calling

To be enrolled as a student missionary, one must be called by the Master missionary maker.

Apprenticeship

To be a student missionary is to be apprenticed to the Master missionary. This apprenticeship is also known as discipleship. In order for this kind of student missions program to succeed, senders need to take responsibility for the quality of the missionaries they produce. The mentor

or disciple maker must also have both the ability and the desire to invest in the development of people.

Ministry

Teaching, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease are the basic components of missionary activity.

Need

This activity begins with news spreading and ends with overwhelming crowds, which also calls our attention to the fact that there is a shortage of laborers and a need for us to ask the

of the gospel is that fallen men and woman can be remade! The measure of the message is the messengers. This is the mission of the church! Proclamation is just an invitation to join a community where making disciples is the main focus and activity.

If what has been explored above is true, then the careful and thorough cultivation of the ground that produces a harvest of effective disciple-making missionaries is not an optional add-on but the primary purpose of the church. Churches, schools, and supporting organizations

Churches, schools, and supporting organizations must be measured by the quality of the missionaries or disciple-makers they produce.

Lord of the harvest to send more workers.

Multiplication

Missionary making culminates in those apprenticed to missions being given authority by the Lord of the harvest to do what the Master missionary does (this authority includes healing the sick, exercising authority over demons [Matt 10:1], and making disciples [Matt 28:18-20]).

At the heart of this process is an uncompromising focus on developing people. For Jesus the making of men and women is the mission. The good news

must be measured by the quality of the missionaries or disciple-makers they produce. This is especially true for organizations like AFM.

Developing People Mission Critical

The mission and vision of AFM demand that the process of making missionaries be taken very seriously for three reasons. First, AFM recruits people from all walks of life. In order for these ordinary people to succeed at the extraordinary task of establishing church-planting movements among unreached people groups,

AFM must be in the business of making missionaries. Second, the success of AFM projects depends on establishing disciple making or missionary making movements. If AFM fails at this, it fails at accomplishing its mission. Finally, AFM holds that a missionary training system with its development process is a critical strategy for meeting the overwhelming need that over 6,000 unreached people groups create for effective cross-cultural church planters. AFM's student missions program was designed in part to meet this need.

AFM's student missionary cultivation or training program is a work in progress. At this time AFM's developmental system consists of the following three opportunities: (1) frontier volunteer positions, (2) world-class training, and (3) careers in cross-cultural church planting. The next sections are dedicated to exploring these three opportunities.

Providing Frontier Volunteer Opportunities (Call)

In the student mission context, a *call* refers to both the invitation to become a missionary and the place or setting in which they will volunteer. AFM has unique offerings in both of these categories.

Invitation

AFM's primary recruiting strategy is prayer. Jesus said, "Ask (KJV - pray) the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field"

(Matt 9:38 NIV). When recruiting, it must never be forgotten that this is his harvest. This is especially true when one is recruiting individuals for a cross-cultural frontier ministry. One of my first lessons in recruiting at AFM was learning that a recruiter's responsibility is to *discover* those who have been called. Over the years, I have seen God send individuals to fill specific positions or situations in response to prayer over and over again.

Context

AFM offers about 30 front-line student missionary calls a year for service positions in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Student missionaries serve in remote jungles, inner cities, and creative access countries (countries where mission outreach demands creativity and tact for such countries are often closed to traditional methods of evangelism and church planting). Student missionaries serve in a variety of capacities, including teaching English, home-schooling missionary children, doing maintenance, and conducting medical work.

Some projects are known for the physical challenges they present. Remote hinterland or primitive locations sometimes require long hikes to access project sites. Health challenges can include being exposed to various tropical diseases such as malaria or dysentery. A number of our student missions calls are in creative access countries

where student missionaries serve alongside career missionaries to help maintain a reason or explanation for remaining in the country. They conduct cultural research and perform other tasks directly related to the project strategy.

Fundamental to all AFM calls is the opportunity to learn a language and become cultural insiders. This is a critical part of the training for frontier missionaries.

In order to prepare student missionaries for the task of serving on the frontlines, AFM has developed and continues to refine a very rigorous training schedule.

a-day summer training program that student missionaries take before launching into the field. This training includes discipleship/spiritual formation, preparation for cross-cultural living, team building, language acquisition skills (many of our student missionaries develop basic language skills in the field), and basic health skills. Included in this four-week intensive course is a survival weekend that is called “the crucible,” an event designed to test an individual’s ability to endure uncertainty, work as a team, and maintain a positive attitude.

Second, field missionaries conduct an orientation/training

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AFM Student Missionary Training

AFM sees the training of missionaries as a continual process of learning and improvement for both trainers and missionaries. This philosophy extends to our student missionary program. In order to accomplish the objective of preparing young people for a life of mission service, AFM currently utilizes the following training components, in addition to the preparation that student missionaries receive at their respective schools:

First, a four-week, six-hour-

session when the students arrive on site. In addition to gaining an understanding of the nature of their objectives for the coming year, young missionaries are informed of local taboos, given basic conversational tools, and introduced to the local network.

Third, students are required to spend a percentage of their time each week engaged in language learning and culture study.

Fourth, missionaries provide formal and informal instruction and mentoring to students through the course of the year.

Fifth, AFM provides a three-day re-entry program after students have completed their year of service.

The effectiveness of the student's preparation for a life of missions depends on a number of factors. The aptitude and attitude of the young adult plays a large part in molding their experience. Conditions on the ground affect the quality of their learning experience including the political stability of the country; the prevalence of and their susceptibility to diseases; team dynamics among the student missionaries and the career workers; and the ability of the

student missions program by providing career missionaries with mentoring, training, accountability, and support. The weakest link in AFM's developmental system at this point is the absence of structured but flexible training while in the field. A student's experience can vary widely from project to project.

Frontier Ministry

AFM provides student missionaries with the opportunity to be involved at the cutting edge of ministry. They receive an orientation to the excitement and adventure, the providence and

The weakest link in AFM's developmental system at this point is the absence of structured but flexible training while in the field.

career missionary to empower, mentor, and invest in the young adults.

There is an inherent tension that affects the training of a student missionary in the field. The student is responsible for creating and increasing capacity for the career missionaries they work with. With more laborers more can get done. The career missionary is responsible for adding value to each student missionary through training, mentoring, and equipping. AFM can further strengthen its

uncertainty, and the monotony and minutia of frontier work. The greatest strength of the ministry opportunities AFM provides is that students work side by side with career missionaries in groundbreaking work. Ministry opportunities include dealing with medical emergencies, mentoring a missionary's child to excellence, participating in the process of translation, teaching English, analyzing cultures and worldviews, developing curriculum, and involvement in friendship evangelism.

Over the course of nine to twelve months students develop close bonds with nationals and become increasingly aware of the overwhelming need that most live with. As is the case with many student missionary opportunities (including those outside of AFM) most students make the awkward transition from being mono-cultural individuals with strong nationalistic identities to becoming bi-cultural members of an international community. Life change is inherent in the process and AFM's student missionaries invariably remark that their time in the field has significantly changed them.

There are multiple challenges AFM faces in the process of investing in student missionaries. For one thing, AFM works in frontier settings with language barriers that often limit short-term workers' effectiveness. Then, too, just when student missionaries are beginning to understand the culture and learn the language, they leave. Then there is the very real tension between creating capacity and adding value. The level of mentoring effectiveness in the field depends largely on the missionary and the way he or she manages the project. Furthermore, students come to the task with differing levels of maturity, intelligence, acuity, and wholeness. Not every student has an overwhelmingly positive experience, and when they return to their home country they are often overwhelmed by the forces of

capitalism. However, despite the challenges, AFM is experiencing a modest degree of success, and a number of former student missionaries are now serving as career missionaries.

Re-Entry and Career Missionaries

AFM provides a three-day re-entry program to assist frontier student missionaries in the process of reintegrating into their home cultures. This re-entry event is held toward the end of the summer training session for the next group of outgoing student missionaries. Returned student missionaries are given time to teach the next generation of missionaries about the people and places that they have come to love. It is really heartwarming to hear a student missionary say, "Don't forget to go and visit the old lady that lives in the big yellow house by the mango tree. She makes the best food. And, if you mention my name she may even give you a better price!" This time of sharing concludes with returning student missionaries handing a baton to the outgoing missionaries—a poignant symbol that the outgoing team is taking up where the incoming missionaries have left off.

For some re-entry and the accompanying reverse culture shock is a more challenging experience than the initial culture shock experienced in the field. It is very helpful for returned student missionaries to share stories of their outrage against the

materialistic absorption and the apparent indifference of friends and family to the desperate need of the people they have come to know and love. An important skill a frontier missionary needs to develop is that of avoiding the dual pitfalls of apathy or indifference on the one hand and a judgmental or critical spirit on the other hand. Salvation, not criticism or condemnation, is the work of a missionary.

Students are reminded that for the rest of their lives they will either be missionaries or mission fields. The training concludes by inviting our newly graduated class of students of mission to

pressed an interest in becoming career missionaries is that of finding a spouse who shares the same vision. AFM has had a number of young adults return from mission service on fire for missions, but they have not been able to find a life partner who was willing to join them. And experience has shown that it is important for most people serving in frontier situations to not go out single.

A second challenge that diminishes the number of young adults who return to the field is the pull of a culture that defines success by an individual's ability to gather material goods. The

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consider giving a tithe of their life to serving the unreached. As has already been mentioned many of AFM's student missionaries do express an interest in involvement in career missions when they return. AFM has learned, however, that there are a number of challenges student missionaries face if they are going to follow through with this dream.

Challenges to the Missionary "Crop"

The greatest challenge for young adults who have ex-

values of opulence and ease fly in the face of a life of sacrifice and suffering that cross-cultural ministry demands. Living in the Western world is like a long soak in a warm bath. In third-world countries, it is more like taking an ice-cold shower. To answer the call to frontier ministry is counter cultural, counter intuitive, and unfortunately often contrary to the well-meaning counsel of friends and family.

A third barrier to frontier ministry is the very real need

for same-culture missionaries and the systems that support this ministry. The need of those outside of the reach of the gospel (the unreached) is often in competition with the need of those outside of the circle of the church (the undecided). Sincere administrators and leaders have been known to discourage potential frontier missionaries because foreign mission service would interfere with their opportunity for advancement in the home or local system.

Finally, while Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities encourage involvement in evangelism, provide opportunities for involvement in short-term mission opportunities, and have active and effective student missionary programs, many have unintentionally distanced themselves from focusing on the preparation of young people for careers in cross-cultural mission activities. In years gone by, one of the primary purposes of Christian education was to prepare young people for pioneering ministry. At times it may now seem to the casual (or critical) observer that the primary purpose of Christian education is to prepare students to successfully integrate into the market place. So it is not surprising then that the observation Jesus made in Matt 9:37 and 38 is still true, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are [indeed still very] few."

A Missionary Development or Training Program

The purpose of this article is not to point a critical finger at the failures of any individual or institution. It should be clear to the discerning reader that AFM's student missionary training system is not to be held up as a grand ideal to which others should aspire. Rather AFM is keenly aware that the task of reaching the unreached demands strategic partnerships and well-coordinated cooperative effort. This is especially true for the task of preparing laborers who will establish church-planting movements.

In order for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and supporting organizations such as AFM to reach the goal of establishing church-planting movements among the unreached in this generation, a massive mobilization of personnel is needed. A united and determined effort to create a coordinated missionary developmental system could result in thousands of Seventh-day Adventists seeing service among the unreached where there is only a mere handful today.

The following is a list of suggestions that could form the basis or framework for a comprehensive and church-wide missionary developmental or training system:

First, develop a K-12 curriculum for Sabbath school, church schools, and home schools. This curriculum would present the need for both cross-culture

and same-culture missions and should include the biblical foundation for the mandate, facts that describe the need, biographies of great missionaries, and stories of the providence, progress, and problems of mission. *The Adventist Mission Children's Magazine* is a brilliant start (<http://www.adventistmission.org/article.php?id=394>). Innovative communities like circle.adventist.org could provide an effective forum for people working on the front lines of education to innovate and expand ideas like the children's magazine.

Second, continue the Eric B. Hare tradition with gripping

of short-term (two to three week) mission opportunities. In addition to this, Adventist colleges and universities send out large numbers of student missionaries for nine to eighteen months. These opportunities could be integrated into a well-designed training program by making them course requirements and by recruiting volunteers for career service.

Fourth, offer majors in cross-cultural church planting. Union College, a Seventh-day Adventist institution of higher learning in Nebraska, has demonstrated that it is possible to innovate. Their major in International Rescue

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mission stories told to children. Adventist Mission is doing a marvelous job with its video podcasts (<http://www.adventistmission.org/article.php?id=206>). A wonderful addition would be to find a storyteller of the caliber of Dr. Hare to continue the tradition of telling captivating mission stories.

Third, integrate short and medium-term missions into the long-term process of developing or producing missionaries. As has already been noted, schools and churches provide a plethora

and Relief is a compelling example of the possibility of providing aspiring cross-culture missionaries formal and comprehensive training. Student missionary opportunities like those provided by AFM could be integrated into the curriculum in very meaningful and productive ways.

Fifth, provide career opportunities for cross-cultural church-planting missionaries. This could include working through the Seventh-day Adventist Church, working with organizations such as AFM, or through tent-mak-

ing careers. Such opportunities should be promoted by the career counseling services provided by Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities.

Sixth, encourage research, development, and collaboration on college and university campuses. Students could be given the opportunity to wrestle with real problems and challenges faced by cross-culture missionaries. An honors kind of program might be established where the brightest minds would collaborate and envision the future of Seventh-day Adventist missions.

Seventh, celebrate graduates of the developmental system as the “special forces” of missions. Seventh-day Adventist young people need kingdom heroes. Once the training system begins to gain momentum it *could* create a vortex that would draw young people into a life of self-sacrificing service for the King. The Adventist Church will know that it has succeeded when ordinary in-the-pews people regard reaching the unreached with the same awe as they view the special forces, and see “the heaven-appointed purpose of giving the gospel to the world in this generation . . . [as] the noblest that can appeal to any human being.”

Conclusion: A Vision Within Reach

According to the General Conference Department of Archives and Statistics, 19,347 individuals graduated from world-wide Adventist institutions of higher

learning in 2005 (*143rd Annual Statistical Report* 2005:56). If only 4.3 percent of these graduates were a part of a carefully designed cross-cultural church-planting missionary training program, Adventists could have church-planting movements established in every unreached people group within 25 years. It is within the realm of possibility for institutions of higher learning to re-introduce missions training courses and revitalize the student missions programs!

In order for Adventists as a denomination to mobilize the personnel needed to realize this grand vision, the student missions program needs to be upgraded and designed to deliberately prepare young adults for a cross-cultural church-planting mission. If Adventist colleges and universities would recruit and train the special forces of cross-cultural church-planting missionaries with the same seriousness and purpose that they are recruiting and training gymnastics teams, orchestras, and basketball teams, an army of well-trained and well-equipped young adults could be deployed—an army that would be equal to the challenge of reaching the unreached in this generation.

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