

# Retaining the Excitement That Motivates Missions

Each of these six congregations has developed ideas for creative missions involvement. You may want to adopt some of their innovations and refire missions enthusiasm.

*By Michele Buckingham*

**T**oday, more than at any other time in church history, Christians have the means, the technology and the manpower to carry out Jesus' command to "go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15, NIV).

Highly organized national (and sometimes international) missions societies are making human contact in areas of the world that have been inaccessible until now. Large satellite ministries are using the airwaves to touch millions in Third World countries with a single message.

How can local churches get excited about an outreach to the whole world? In an age of high-tech, "bigger is better" ministries, what does it take for a congregation to grasp the hope that they can make a dent in the tremendous task of fulfilling the Great Commission?

It can be done! In fact, the task is being tackled right now in churches all across the country. Not only are congregations giving liberally to support full-time missionaries on every continent, they are setting up missions committees, organizing training programs, running missionary retreat centers and even raising up their own people to send into the field.

A church's approach to missions is influenced by many factors, such as the size of the congregation, the vision of the leadership, the church's chronological and spiritual maturity, past experience—not to mention the church budget.

For as many churches as you contact, you will find about as many different "missions policies."

To find out what some local churches are doing to help carry out the Great Commission, *MINISTRIES* commissioned Michele Buckingham to conduct

a panel-by-telephone with staff members at six churches from across the country.

While these churches vary in age, size and philosophy toward missions, there was a characteristic common to all: an involvement of lay people, not only in giving financial support, but in having input into selecting which missionaries would be supported. From this involvement emerges a willingness to relate to the missionaries—to write to them, pray for them, even to journey to where they are to construct buildings for them. And, yes, sometimes to become committed to part-time or even full-time missionary service.

The panelists included:

**Anne Beall**, wife of pastor James Beall of the 4,000-member Bethesda Missionary Temple of Detroit, Michigan. Bethesda's 1985 missions budget was \$150,000. The church is helping to support two single missionaries and four missionary couples.

**Wylene Hughes**, corresponding secretary and member of the missions committee for the Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Florida. With about 3,500 members, the Tabernacle spent nearly \$176,000 on missions in 1985. The church currently helps support 25 missionaries.

**Bob Bishop**, co-pastor of the 2,500-member Liberty Church in Pensacola, Florida. The church spent \$269,000 on missions in 1985 and is helping support approximately 70 missionaries, including several missionary couples.

**Mark Van Gilder**, associate pastor of the Desert Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Lancaster, California. With an average attendance of 1,000 to 1,100, the Vine-

yard supports five full-time missionaries; its 1985 missions budget was \$36,000. These figures do not include funding for the church's training and missionary retreat programs, however, and also do not take into account the large number of local members who are involved in short-term missions work.

**Dick Blackwell**, pastor of the 500-member Grace Covenant Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia. The church spent \$38,000 on missions in 1985 and provides partial support for 15 missionaries.

**Jim Garrett**, administrative pastor of Tulsa Christian Fellowship in Tulsa, Oklahoma. With an average attendance of 400-500 on Sunday mornings, the church spent over \$91,000 in 1985 on missions and is now helping support approximately 105 missionaries.

**MINISTRIES:** *What is the missions policy of your church and how do you get it across to your congregation?*

**Jim Garrett:** At Tulsa Christian Fellowship, we teach that the Great Commission is an obligation, in some measure, to every born-again Christian, whether it be through prayer, financial support or serving on the mission field. Our leadership is dedicated to helping those who feel called to the mission field to discern and clarify their calling and receive the necessary training.

**Mark Van Gilder:** Our goal at Desert Vineyard Fellowship is to expose as many people to the mission field as we possibly can. We want to spread the burden of missions throughout the whole church and get the "little guy" involved.

**Wylene Hughes:** The Tabernacle had been sending relatively small amounts of support to a number of missionaries all over the world but we changed during the past three years. We realized we didn't really have any kind of relationship with them beyond the check. We felt the Lord was saying that our giving was good, but there had to be accountability.

Now we give larger amounts of regular financial and spiritual support to those missionaries who are willing to come under the Tabernacle as their primary spiritual covering—our "active" missionaries. They are more responsible to us, but we are also more responsible to them. We still help the others—"associate" missionaries—as we can.

**Bob Bishop:** At Liberty Church we're deeply concerned with putting the gospel forward and bringing in the end-time harvest. That's how our people have been trained, and this basically expresses our missions policy. The missions we get involved with are generally those which involve overseas evangelism and church planting.

Our burden is to see that missionaries are accountable, that they have a spiritual as well as financial covering. In its early years, Liberty Church was giving money to support a number of independent missionaries. But when our pastor, Ken Sumrall, went to visit some of these missionaries, he found "lone rangers" who were doing their own thing.

In particular, Pastor Sumrall found that people who had experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit were working without oversight because they were often not welcome or comfortable in traditional missions societies. So God challenged him to start Globe Missionary Evangelism to be a vehicle through which missionaries might be covered and accountable.

**Anne Beall:** In the last few years, we've come to feel that the climate for missions is changing, and our policies at Bethesda Missionary Temple have changed accordingly. There is a move toward getting nationals more involved.

We have missionaries all over the world, but our thrust in recent years has been toward those missions that train up nationals to minister to their own people. For example, this year we've begun supporting a couple who've been working in Japan for 20 years. They start a church, train up a native pastor to oversee the flock, then move on to another area. They've really been doing a tremendous work.

**Dick Blackwell:** We are a young church in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and our missions policy is still being formulated, but we have identified some very definite things we support. Right now, we are taking about 10 percent of the general offering and putting it into a separate account for missions. Other monies specifically designated for missions go directly into this account.

**MINISTRIES:** *Do you have people involved in a missions committee of some sort?*

**Jim Garrett:** Yes. We have a missions task force, which is the investigating and recommending committee for the elders. The elders establish the guidelines for the task force and make the final decisions.

**Dick Blackwell:** We have a missions board of six to eight people who meet at least once a month. The elders are members automatically, although they do not often participate in the regular meetings. The missions board is responsible for the allocation of all missions money.

**Wylene Hughes:** Our missions board is made up of five couples from the congregation. In the past, the board included husbands without their wives or wives without their husbands, but we've decided we can be more effective by having both spouses involved. As a committee, we have total freedom and responsibility in deciding what to do within the missions budget. The church elders, however, have the final say in adding or dropping a missionary, or in any disciplinary action that may be called for.

**MINISTRIES:** *How does your missions board select which missionaries you will support?*

**Dick Blackwell:** Anyone in our church can make a proposal that we give to a certain mission or missionary. There is a procedure they must go through in writing up who they think we should give to, how much and why. For a known outreach, such as YWAM (Youth With a Mission), we don't need much explanation, but for a less-known group or missionary, we ask for more information about what they're doing and why we, as a church, should help them. Even the elders must go through this procedure.

**Bob Bishop:** All the missionaries we support, whether from our fellowship or elsewhere, are under Globe Missionary Evangelism. We believe in missionaries being overseen and having someone to answer to. We don't support any independent missionaries.

**Wylene Hughes:** The missionaries we've formed alliances with have come to our attention through the travels and contacts of our senior minister, Jamie Buckingham, and other members of the staff or eldership. The missions committee prays over each one and makes recommendations to the elders.

**Mark Van Gilder:** We have usually visited the areas and have not only been introduced to the individuals involved, but also to what they're doing. After experiencing their ministries first hand, we come home and discuss and pray about how we can help them.

**MINISTRIES:** *Do you relate to larger missionary organizations or boards?*

**Bob Bishop:** Yes and no. Our situation is rather unique. We support our missionaries through Globe Missionary Evangelism, a missions organization that was initiated by Liberty Church and incorporated in 1973. While we are closely tied to Globe, it is a separate organization serving the entire body of Christ and particularly those in the charismatic movement. It is supported by churches and individuals from across the country, not just those with the Liberty fellowship.

**Jim Garrett:** Many of the missionaries we send out operate under the missions boards of other organizations, such as Wycliffe Bible Translators or YWAM. Tulsa Christian Fellowship is not tied or accountable to these organizations in any way.

**Wylene Hughes:** We at Melbourne have been very supportive of the work of several organizations and we currently help several missionaries who are with Wycliffe, for example, but our missions committee is completely independent. We don't answer to any higher board as many of the denominational churches do.

**MINISTRIES:** *Are there areas of missions with which you have encouraged the people in your church to be especially concerned?*

**Mark Van Gilder:** One burden that has been particularly strong for us has been to get Bibles to believers who need them in closed countries. We have focused on these kinds of efforts in Eastern Europe and in and around China—Thailand and Burma, for example.

**MINISTRIES:** *Do you send out missionaries from your body?*

**Jim Garrett:** Yes, Tulsa Christian Fellowship sends a lot of missionaries from our body. If someone in our fellowship feels the call to the mission field, he

meets with our missions task force, which does a rather extensive investigation and interview. Then, in time, he meets with the elders to work things through. It's a rather slow process. But when there is finally confirmation by the Spirit that this is God's will and God's timing, the individual is sent to the field.

We consider ourselves a missions-sending agency. In fact, we are moving away from supporting missionaries from outside our body because so many of our own people are going into the field. Right now, 75 to 80 of the 105 missionaries we support are from our fellowship.

**Anne Beall:** Two of the couples and one of the women we now support are from Bethesda. For these, we pay their fare to the field, as well as a portion of their monthly support.

**Dick Blackwell:** We've had a number of our people with YWAM. We have one couple who is preparing now to work with Wycliffe Bible Translators.

**Mark Van Gilder:** About 12 percent of the people in Desert Vineyard Christian Fellowship have been involved in at least short-term mission work. For example, our church helped to build a 120-bed dormitory for an orphanage in Mexico. Groups of people from the congregation go down there monthly, or sometimes bimonthly, to build, clean and minister in whatever way they can.

**MINISTRIES:** *Do you have any kind of training program for the missionaries who go out from your church?*

**Dick Blackwell:** We don't have any formal program yet at Grace Covenant, but we do ask someone who's interested in missions to take on some responsibilities here first. A college student, for example, might lead a college Bible study group. We want to be sure that our people are ready for mission work, because if they can't do it here, they most likely won't be able to do it on the mission field.

**Bob Bishop:** There are some exceptions, but we generally like our people to have some Bible college training or some ministerial experience before going to the mission field. Globe Missionary Evangelism then conducts classes, orientation programs and other kinds of personal training.

**Jim Garrett:** We have several avenues of training. For the last four years, we have had Tulsa Bible Seminary here at TCF, which provides a high quality of seminary training. In the congregation, we have a training program for home church leaders, which involves

six months of workbook-type teaching and then an internship.

We have another internship program which gives individuals a broad perspective of what ministry is like. In addition, the elders will often take prospective missionaries with them when they travel on ministry trips. All of this is meant to help develop the individual; he or she may still need special training for their specific field or calling.

**Mark Van Gilder:** Aside from using some of the other missions organizations such as YWAM, we also have a ministry school that is primarily geared toward preparing people for missions, although someone preparing for the pastorate might also attend. It is housed at a ranch-retreat we operate. This is a six-month program with seminars taught by a wide spectrum of speakers, either from the Vineyard churches or from agencies that are not associated with the Vineyard. At the end, the students get involved in a practicum, or cross-cultural exposure.

**MINISTRIES:** *How do you support missionaries who are in the field?*

**Jim Garrett:** Each missionary has a missions agent from within the congregation who oversees his activities and handles his funds. The amount of financial support we give to each of our missionaries varies, depending on their family needs, where they are going, and so on.

To help raise the funds, we hold an annual missions conference, with outside speakers and displays by each of our missionaries. At that time, we distribute "cards of intent" to the congregation. These are not pledge cards, nor do they represent a faith promise. They simply state what a person intends to contribute to missions over the next year. The conference has worked very well for us.

**Dick Blackwell:** We encourage most of those who are young and inexperienced, who go, for instance, with YWAM or Project Kibbutz, to invest in themselves, to save up and use some of their own money. I think it's wrong to expect the body of Christ to provide support for missionaries who are unproven. Of course, if they do well and they continue, then we will become part of their support. We are not the full support for any of our missionaries, however.

On a spiritual level, each home group in our church "adopts" one of our missionaries. They pray for them, write to them, send them gifts on occasion. In addition, a prayer group meets once a week to pray specifically for missions.

**Mark Van Gilder:** We have a formal, weekly prayer group to pray for our missionaries in Asia. Another group prays weekly for Thailand. In addition, if a special need arises, we will call a prayer meeting or use a prayer chain.

**Wylene Hughes:** When we changed our policy to have our missionaries become more accountable to us, we also purposed to become more responsible to and for them. So in addition to praying for them and sending a regular monthly allowance, we write each of them regularly and send them our newsletter, sermon notes, tapes of our services, and copies of the *Buckingham Report*. We also try to arrange for each missionary to be "adopted" by one of our home groups. Basically, we've told our active missionaries: "If you get in trouble, you can come to us and we will ride it out with you." To be honest, most of them couldn't believe that a church would stick with them through thick and thin.

**Anne Beall:** One thing we do is to make sure our missionaries understand before they go what our responsibility to them will be. We sign a contract with them for one to two years. Every time we send them a check, we say "number 10 of 12" or "number 11 of 24." At the end of that period, we sit down with the missionary and go over what they have been able to accomplish to see if our money has been well spent. If so, we renew the contract.

**MINISTRIES:** *Do you support any overseas missions projects, such as orphanages or hospitals?*

**Jim Garrett:** We've consciously chosen to support individuals rather than projects or programs. Of course, this has indirectly provided support for some of the projects our missionaries are involved with.

**Bob Bishop:** Through our support of Globe Missionary Evangelism, we have people who are in the medical and dental professions, people who are operating Bible schools, people who are doing literacy programs. These are all projects that are not strictly evangelism-oriented, although we hope they all contribute to spreading the gospel. We also have a large work in Guatemala that provides medical help, feeding and schooling for children, and an adopt-a-child program.

**Mark Van Gilder:** Right now, in addition to the orphanage in Mexico we support, 20 of our men with construction experience are preparing to travel with me to Thailand to build a pastor training

center there. Thailand is two years into a 10- year plan to eliminate all outside missionaries, so we want to get these kinds of centers built before we are disallowed entrance. The indigenous pastors who are trained there will be able to serve in Thailand and throughout Asia.

**Anne Beall:** The only overseas project we're involved with is RHEMA, a medical and church mission in Haiti which is run by my husband's sister. An elder from our church and his wife—a nurse—are also there helping to set up medical clinics.

**MINISTRIES:** *How do you relate to missionaries who are home on furlough?*

**Anne Beall:** We will usually keep up our monthly commitment to them. Everyone needs to have time at home. If they've been in the field for two years and come home for three months, they shouldn't have to worry about where their next meal will come from.

**Dick Blackwell:** If they are home for just a month or so, we continue our support. But if they are home for an extended or indefinite period of time, we do not continue it.

**Wylene Hughes:** When missionaries come through the Tabernacle, we always arrange a time when they can share with the missions committee what they've been doing and what their needs are. Sometimes we'll give them some time in a regular service to share with the entire congregation. While we do want them to rest and relax as much as they want to, we will also arrange other activities for them, such as visiting home groups, so that they have options for filling in their time.

**Mark Van Gilder:** We are in a non-city setting and operate a ranch retreat, so we accept a lot of missionaries on furlough, not just those supported by our church. They may bring some of their own food items, but we generally take care of all of their expenses during their stay at the ranch. ■



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