Adopt-a-People: A Proposal for Churches and Mission Agencies

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*In January 1987 the Frontier Fellowship, a ministry of the U.S. Center for World Mission, first circulated the following proposal to the 65,000 readers of the U.S. Center's monthly bulletin, **Mission Frontiers**. This initial version of a proposal for a comprehensive "Adopt-a-People" program is addressed primarily to North American churches and mission agencies, but here the authors submit the proposal to the critique of the **IJFM**'s international readership in recognition that Christians from all continents must participate in such a program if it is truly to be comprehensive and effective.*

*In that spirit, the **IJFM** is making a call for papers in response to the "Adopt-a-People" proposal. Readers are invited to share their perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, and selected responses will be excerpted in future issues of the **IJFM**. Responses should be received by the editor by September 1, 1987, and should explicitly address one or more of the following questions:*

1. What do you like best about the proposal? What are its major strengths?

2. What do you like least about the proposal? What are its major weaknesses? What errors of commission or omission do you detect?

3. Do you agree with the assumptions that appear to undergird the proposal? Why or why not?

4. Do you think that such a proposal would be well received by members of your church, denomination, or mission agency, or by churches, denominations, or mission agencies with which you are familiar? Why or why not? Do you think that the decision-makers would respond differently than others within these parts of the Church? Why or why not?

5. How would such a proposal best be distributed within the churches, denominations, or mission agencies with which you are familiar? In what format and through what channels?

6. Are there similar programs or initiatives of which you're aware? How long have they been in operation? What have been the results? In what ways are these other programs similar or different? Do these similarities or differences compare favorably with the elements of this proposal?

7. What practical steps must happen before such a proposal could be implemented on either a national, regional, or international level? Do you think that the proposal could be implemented on one level but not on another? Why or why not?

*The "Adopt-a-People" program and its counterparts are part of the larger process of reaching unreached peoples. One description of this process, representing wide consensus within the North American evangelical mission community, appears in "Reaching Unreached Peoples: Guidelines and Definitions for Those Concerned with World Evangelization," as reported by Edward Dayton in the January 1985 issue of the **IJFM**. This report divides the initial process of reaching an unreached people group into six stages:*

> *Stage 1—Reported: Someone has reported a group as possibly unreached.*
> *Stage 2—Verified: The group has been verified as a people group and as an unreached people group.*
> *Stage 3—Evaluated: Adequate research has been completed to permit interested Christians outside this people group to make a decision to attempt to reach it.*
> *Stage 4—Selected: Someone(s) or some agency(s) sufficient to the task has made a commitment to reach this people group.*
> *Stage 5—Supported: There are adequate resources (usually provided through church/mission partnership) for the agency to move ahead.*
> *Stage 6—Engaged: Initial field work has begun with the intent of planting an evangelizing, culturally indigenous church.*

The "Adopt-a-People" proposal, then, represents an attempt to assist with stage 5; "adopted" is a synonym for "supported."

*All respondents to the **IJFM**'s call for papers should clearly indicate their names, addresses, and positions of responsibility within church or mission structures. Submission of a response implies permission for the **IJFM** to print part*

or all of the response in future issues. The editor may choose to interact further with some respondents in order to promote clarity and accuracy.