

Mission Perspective of a Tentmaking Agency

This article takes key thoughts and phrases of the mission statement of Mission to Unreached Peoples agency and details the vision in words and examples of tentmaking missionaries.

by David M. Hupp and Danny D. Martin

Mission to Unreached Peoples is one of several newly formed mission agencies who, in one form or another, serve as a missionary sending agency for tentmakers. Our “tentmaker” missionaries come in many varieties. We do not differentiate between vocational personnel, support personnel, and more “traditional” missionary personnel. All are considered part of the same team.

What makes a tentmaker-sending agency different from traditional sending agencies? By and large it consists in the need to seek creative ideas and ministry platforms and a willingness to be flexible, creatively customizing support and care packages as needed.

To portray the operation of a tentmaking agency this article takes you through some key phrases and thoughts gleaned from the mission statement of Mission to Unreached Peoples.

Investing our Lives...

God has given us many things. He has given us control over those things and then asks us, “What do you want to do with what I’ve given you?” Are we willing to invest these things in Kingdom work? We talk about investing our lives because that is all encompassing, and so that is the first thing we invest. But what about *our gifts*, our practical gifts. Giftedness includes accounting, nursing, management, computer sciences and much more. We use the gifts that God has given us, and with them we give Him glory.

We also invest our *resources*. This may imply giving up the right to receive something we think we deserve, including a good salary. High paying

jobs for tentmakers overseas do not exist. Sometimes you get enough to get by, maybe enough to live on. We do not always know what God is going and what He requires of us—our home equity, our cars, our right to life insurance and retirement benefits, etc. However, we are saying as a people, and as an agency, that we put our resources on the altar.

We also *identify our vocational skills*—skills that are needed in developing countries where most of the unreached peoples are located. We look for people who have vocational skills because that is one of our best strategies to gain access to unreached peoples around the world.

We send doctors who give up six figure incomes to live and work in Nepal, ministering under cooperative agencies such as United Mission to Nepal and International Nepal Fellowship in hospitals and clinics. CPA’s walk away from secure careers and join hands with Mission to Unreached Peoples teammates and travel by bus the mountains of Asia to make a difference in the practical operation of missionary hospitals, other mission operations as well as developing churches. Architects are penetrating “closed” countries as business consultants. Engineers are working in community and industrial development projects. They have chosen to invest their lives in God’s work to reach those who have not heard.

Modeling Christ...

We not only preach Christ, we not only talk about the change that He has made in our lives, but we put flesh and bones on what it means to be a fol-

lower of Jesus Christ.

Mike and Mary and their three boys live on the frontiers in Nepal where they manage a TB Leprosy clinic and hospital, caring for the health needs of rural Nepali families. Before going to Nepal both obtained their Master’s Degrees as Family Nurse Practitioners and served for several years in a rural health clinic. This was excellent training, as in Nepal they live, worship, and weep with the people. In Mike’s words, “We have grown close to our church body here. Their burdens are great. They are the poorest of the poor. It is a privilege to encourage them.”

God’s Grace in our Midst...

God’s grace is the leveling process throughout Mission to Unreached Peoples. We do not have great missionary statesmen. We have lots of missionaries, but we do not view some as “great” or “greater” than others. All those doing what God called them to do are filling a role in the Body of Christ. A secretary in Seattle in Missions to the Unreached Peoples is as much a part of God’s work serving by typing eight hours a day and going home and taking care of her children and husband, as a missionary who is bringing one hundred people a week to the Lord on the mission field. We do not differentiate. All of us are what we are by God’s grace. Also we are absolutely awed at the power of God that He chooses to work through us to touch the world for Him.

We serve shoulder to shoulder with co-workers of different educational levels, different skin, color, and different countries. The seminary graduate and the high-school graduate can and

do work together, respecting each other's gifts and callings. One of our teams includes a psychologist (Ph.D.), several university level teachers, English teachers, as well as a computer engineer, computer consultant, elementary and middle school and high school teachers, a high school chaplain, and church pastors. At least three nationalities are represented.

The Potential of Lay People...

This is one of the best parts of the vision that Mission to Unreached Peoples has to offer. No longer is it only the seminary graduates and the Bible college graduates who have the right to serve overseas and proclaim the Good News. Also the carpenters, plumbers, and accountants go. Lay Christians are saying, "Suddenly, it's our turn!" We believe this is a partial fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2, "*I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind, both men and women.*" Our organizational calling is to mobilize Christians and churches for missions.

"Do you mean I can use my experience as an engineer in the utility and degree in Electrical Engineering as a tentmaker missionary in Mongolia?" Steve worked as an engineer, for four years after college and was delighted to learn that a position in the utility industry in Mongolia would provide a platform for his missionary service there. As with many others, he was able to put his vocational skills and gifts together using them for a missionary call and vision.

After serving with a sending church for two years to gain ministry and outreach experience, Steve is on the way to Mongolia to work with youth and with the church.

Rick and Lisa both graduated with degrees in computer science and spent several years working in industry in various roles in computer and information systems. They were challenged to establish a business platform to help

Christians in their target country in three ways: (1) to demonstrate Biblical business principles, (2) to provide employment for Christians, and (3) to raise funds, for ministry outreach. Within the first year of arrival on the field they started one business of importing in bulk and packaging popcorn for the people in their country. This is now operated and owned entirely by believers. A second business venture began when they saw a lack of board games in their country so they began designing and marketing their own. This has grown into a business selling approximately 100,000 games a year in local market that is both profitable and is meeting the original goals of their vision.

At the same time Rick and Lisa are able to have a tremendous impact on the local church in several towns in the region where they live. Through their English teaching, summer camps and youth ministry, numerous youths have become Christians and are being disciplined. Their pioneer and entrepreneur spirit has opened the door for other tentmakers to follow them, and as they continue to establish themselves, additional doors of ministry are opening. Rick and Lisa are lay people making a difference in obedience to the Great Commission.

Recruit, Train, and Care...

For the people God leads into a tentmaking mission we serve to recruit, train, place, facilitate, and care for them. This includes providing pastors and counselors and handling financial, logistical, prayer letters, and other administrative needs. We do this in cooperation with the local church, so our role is to be a communications link back and forth between the church and the tentmaker, keeping track of the funds, promoting prayer, and understanding what is going on.

The core of our ministry as a tentmaking sending agency is to identify potential tentmakers who are willing to step forward in response to a mission

"call." Our *recruiting* department not only advertises opportunities for ministry, but also fills a role of screening for those with both the vocational and spiritual skills to be a successful tentmaker missionary. *Training* is an important part of the process, and includes our own cross-cultural orientation plus customized training as needed in either the home church or specialized missionary training courses.

The *placing* of missionary candidates in overseas tentmaking positions means we need to keep current as much as possible on overseas jobs and placement opportunities. Our first choice is to place new candidates in the vicinity of current teams and field leadership. Field leadership often plays a significant role in finding placement opportunities. We network with a significant number of other ministries to identify placement opportunities, and we research and identify placement opportunities to match specific candidates as needed.

But getting candidates overseas in a tentmaker position is just the start of the process. As a mission we maintain a continuing relationship with the tentmakers, processing newsletters, handling financial contributions and financial transactions, and a host of other logistical matters. Another vital part of the relationship is the provision of pastoral care with both field-based and itinerant pastors to minister to the tentmaker missionaries.

The joy is to see men and women from a diversified background, age, and giftings catch the vision of personal involvement in reaching the unreached of the world, and then carry it through by means of training, support raising, job placement, and transition to the front lines.

David and Diane were well settled into their church in the Midwest. David taught in High School, and they had just begun their family of two children. Missions was not in their

thoughts, but God moved sovereignly in their lives and they found themselves headed for the mission field to teach in a missionary school. Our role, in addition to helping them locate and secure the position, was to be there beside them to help with the logistics before departure and after arrival on the field, as well as providing a support team and pastoral care for them on the field. They served a fruitful five years that dramatically changed their lives and worldview .

Another young couple, Dan and Sherri, in missions. Dan has a High School education and his wife is a Bible College graduate. The Lord challenged them for missions and directed them to Mission to Unreached Peoples. Through their application process and orientation training, their eyes were opened to a completely new world and an excitement that the Lord could use them also. We worked with them through the support raising process, found jobs and housing for them in their country, and as it were held their hands through the process. It continues as we process their finances and newsletters monthly, and as both field leadership and our member care (pastoral staff) mentor them in a growing mission vision and responsibility. They are working with a local church specializing in youth ministry while both teach English as tent-makers.

Through the years we have worked with many singles and families with placement as TESOL teachers in China and other closed countries. Our role is to secure a teaching position, connect them with a supportive team, and to work with them through training, TESOL course certification, and continuing "member care."

We are working to internationalize Mission to Unreached Peoples so that we model Christ by modeling that Americans and Filipinos and Koreans can work together harmoniously on the same team with Jesus Christ as Lord. This

in and by itself says a lot more to people than just a North American team telling them about God and the Gospel. It really does make a difference.

If by God's grace, we are able to establish or plant Christ's Church, or gathering of believers in the country where we work, we do not want them to become a Mission to Unreached Peoples' church. Although we do want to establish churches, we do want them to be connected to other Christians. We take them, introduce them, make sure they know about each other and let them decide if they want to go down a traditional road and belong to a given denomination or be an independent church. We just want them to grow as an indigenous contextualized church in their country and culture.

How are these principles and visions implemented on the field? In Cambodia Chon has been instrumental in bringing Western and national church leaders together in cooperative fellowship and ministry, which has led to the development of the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia. He went into a situation four years ago of mistrust and lack of cooperation and has been used to bring much change and to foster cooperation.

Two medical professionals in Russia are working with and, in fact, are seconded to a local church planting ministry there. They are working in and with Russian health facilities, doing home care visits as part of the church's outreach, and simply serving to meet needs in the community in the Lord's name.

Our largest team is in Taiwan, located in two different cities. Outreach ministries include almost every team member connected to a different national church, teaching outreach English classes, connecting with home groups, or ministering in whatever manner they can. And in using their vocational gifts, several serve the missionary community as MK teachers, others provide computer consulting services, and

others are closely involved in the functions of the Taiwan Missionary Fellowship.

The organization reflects much international and cultural diversity. The different nations represented in the mission personnel include Canada, Taiwan, the US, the Netherlands, Denmark, Brazil, Cambodia, India, the Philippines, Singapore, and others. We are broadly interdenominational encompassing believers across the broad evangelical and charismatic spectrum.

Making Disciples Among Unreached Peoples...

Our focus is on the Great Commission, with the target being Primarily" on reaching unreached peoples. But, why not "exclusively" focus on the unreached peoples of the world as our name might suggest? Reason is that the task of the Body of Christ in missions is bigger than unreached peoples. as such we have tentmakers serving God by teaching missionary kids. They are part of the Body of Christ, doing the part God has given them in working to finish the Great Commission to disciple the nations.

At the same time as an organization we focus our efforts on the unreached peoples and nations of the earth. We involve ourselves in the research of where the unreached peoples are, and we work to be strategic in taking the Gospel to unreached peoples and to develop creative access strategies.

While this is an area that we cannot publicize or provide details about because most of the work is in closed restricted access countries, current initiatives include the development of a China team and focus in the middle of at least six unreached peoples. Another initiative is an outreach and targeting of a large Muslim people group. This includes both on site personnel and North American based advocates (i.e., non-residential missionaries). Throughout Asia and a large part of the 10/40

Window, we have targeted specific unreached people groups and are working both with current missionaries in the field and potential workers and supporting and adopting churches and agencies to reach out to those who have never heard the Gospel. Many are in countries and provinces completely closed to traditional missionary outreach.

Physical and Spiritual Needs...

We strive to be creative in gaining access. In order to do that we find out what their needs are, and then try to meet those needs in the name of Christ. We do not believe God works in pre-packaged ways. We strive to find out the local needs and the physical needs, from which God opens up doors and ideas for ministry addressing the spiritual needs. We have realized that we have to meet people at their point of need. That is what community development forces us to do. We have to listen to their hurting hearts and lives.

One unreached people group that we can identify are the Kumbaran of India, a sub-caste of the Chettians, or Adi-andhra caste, one of the secluded castes of India, which includes all who work with mud or clay (tilemakers, brick makers, and potters). Mission to Unreached Peoples missionaries are working with the Kumbaran people and operate a pottery factory in true tent-making fashion. Several container loads of pottery have been shipped to and marketed in the United States. This project has recently moved its location to an area where there are 600 potter families of which only 15% are employed. This project provides employment and training, upgrading their products to meet export market standards. Individuals have accepted Christ and we are praying and working for an indigenous church planting movement to develop from this ministry.

Mission to Unreached Peoples is one of the organizations working at doing tentmaking well, and we want to do it better. Serving tentmakers, who tradition-

ally have been an independent group, is not without challenges. But we are seeing the fruit of working and serving the Lord together in the fields which are His.

David Hupp is the US Director of Mission To Unreached Peoples. He has extensive experience in environmental, construction and development businesses. He is a CPA and has MBA from the University of Massachusetts. In 1980 David started a financial and computer ministry to provide audits, accounting and computer consulting to mission agencies. This business has grown and continues to operate in Taiwan.

Photo here
of
David Hupp

Danny Martin is the International Director of Mission To Unreached Peoples and the Associate Director of Tentmakers International Exchange (TIE). He is the Managing Director of Careers by Design which deals with Human Resource Consulting centered in Penang, Malaysia, where Danny and his family reside.

Photo here
of
Danny Martin

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