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Thy Kingdom Come: Four Key Mission Principles to Help Guide Effective Cross-Cultural Mission Efforts

B. Steve Hughey

Abstract: Based on the author's fifty-plus years as a cross-cultural missionary, mission executive, mission agency director, mission board member, and mission consultant, and applying St. Paul's missionary method, this paper describes important mission principles to help guide effective cross-cultural mission efforts. The article focuses on one key mission commitment, two necessary mission strategies, three desired mission outcomes, and four essential mission values in order to successfully fulfill Christ's Great Commission. The mission principles presented in the article are based on the author's critical reflections of his years of mission service in Venezuela and on the Southwest border and a desire to share a concise summary of key mission principles learned and applied during the author's ten years of service as executive director of the Central American Lutheran Mission Society (CALMS) from 2006 to 2017.



Rev. Dr. B. Steve Hughey is a graduate of Concordia Seminary and served for ten years as a cross-cultural missionary and executive director of the Spanish Lutheran Hour. He also served for another ten years as a missionary pastor in El Paso Texas on the border with Mexico, where he trained cross-cultural workers, helped establish the Ysleta Lutheran Mission, and served on the Rocky Mountain District mission board. From 1988 to 2006, he served in various mission roles with LCMS World Mission, including as director of mission education, mission communication, and mission partnerships. From 2006 to 2017, he served as executive director of the Central American Lutheran Mission Society (CALMS). He also founded the Association of Lutheran Mission Agencies (ALMA) and presently serves on the ALMA board and as a mission consultant in Mexico, the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, and the Atlantic District. He is an elder in his local congregation, ACTS Church Leander, one of four new churches that are part of the ACTS Network in the Austin area of the Texas District—LCMS. bstevehughey@gmail.com

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Figure. 1. Four Key Mission Principles to help guide effective cross-cultural mission efforts

One Commitment: Making Disciples and Growing God's Spiritual Kingdom

As my mission colleagues and I worked in many at-risk Central American communities during the period of 2006–2017, we came to believe that our number one commitment as mission representatives was to help make more committed disciples of Jesus and to help usher in His kingdom of grace to as many people as possible.

God wants to reign in our hearts and to rule over our lives, and He wants His kingdom to come to everyone! And because each baptized Christian is called to help usher in this kingdom, in our cross-cultural ministries, we sought especially to involve gifted laypeople in partnership with Central American partners.

When we speak about the “kingdom of God” and when we maintain that God wants His kingdom to come to all people, we are following Martin Luther’s usage and teaching in the Large Catechism. The “kingdom of God” for the Large Catechism is

Simply what we heard above in the Creed, namely, that God sent his Son, Christ our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, to bring us to himself, and to rule us as a king of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience. To this end he also gave his Holy Spirit to deliver this to us through his holy Word and to enlighten and strengthen us in faith by his power.¹

“The kingdom of God” is, of course, God’s kingdom and comes as it pleases God. The coming of God’s kingdom does not need our prayer. But we are not praying for the kingdom of God in the abstract. We are praying that it come to us, but not just us—but to the whole world. As the Large Catechism continues:

We ask here at the outset that all this may be realized in us and that his name may be praised through God’s holy Word and Christian living. This we ask, both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it and also in order that it may find approval and gain followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world. In this way many, led by the Holy Spirit, may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of redemption, so that we may all remain together eternally in this kingdom that has now begun.²

As we pray that God’s kingdom might come, our prayer is for God’s name to be praised through the preaching of the Word and that it might be received through faith and lived out in faithful, godly living—and not just for ourselves, but all people throughout the world.

Thus, in these passages from Luther’s writings, we see the connection between prayer and fulfilling God’s mission to bring His kingdom to more and more hearts. As we repeat the words, “Thy kingdom come!,” each time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we are in effect declaring that we know and accept that God is in charge of His mission. And yet God is also inviting us to be part of His plan to bring His kingdom to people of all cultures, languages, races, and classes of society. So when we pray, “Thy kingdom come!,” we’re saying in effect, “Rule over my heart Lord so that I can help usher in Your kingdom of grace by proclaiming Your saving rule to others around me.”

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There are many ways to proclaim God's saving rule in Christ; yet, in whatever ways we share the Good News of Jesus, we will want to be both faithful to Scripture and relevant to the target culture. This means not taking it for granted that familiar or long-used ways continue to be appropriate. For example, North American churches do not always clearly distinguish between "congregational membership" and "committed discipleship," as if belonging to a congregation automatically implies committed discipleship. This reality certainly can affect our witness, teaching, and worship.

My eleven-year experience with CALMS helped me and my co-workers to appreciate the importance of constantly asking ourselves about our aims and our efforts. In addition, this experience led to some new mission insights regarding strategies, desired results, and values that may well be helpful to all who pray, "Thy kingdom come" and who are seeking to advance God's mission.

Before turning to these insights, let me share a couple of instances of how an intentional focus on preaching and teaching the Gospel and urging and modeling godly living according to God's Word could change lives, produce new disciples of Jesus, help transform communities, and in the process help usher in God's spiritual kingdom.

In the small, economically challenged village of San Miguel, Guatemala, where as Executive Director of the Central American Lutheran Mission Society, I helped initiate a seven-year partnership between the village leaders and my home congregation, ACTS Church Leander, Texas, we saw a number of examples of spiritual transformation as we worked together.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of transformation in the village was the change in attitude between the religious leaders of a small evangelical church and the larger Roman Catholic congregation which I believe was a direct result of our deliberate approach to fostering healthy cross-cultural relationships. When our mission began working in this village, we could see right away that there were tensions between the leaders of the two churches.

We learned that several years before we arrived in the village, the Roman Catholics had tried to run the evangelical leaders out of town after they moved to their community to start a new church. Many of the Roman Catholics had also forbidden their children from attending the evangelical Sunday School run by the pastor's wife. The evangelicals, for their part, often spoke negatively about their Roman Catholic neighbors and thus helped to fuel an ongoing feud.

Based on previous experiences with similar villages and our focus on our commitment to the kingdom of God, we began our work as we always did in a new village by meeting with the village elders. We explained that we were not there to change their religion or denominational affiliation, but to help them grow as disciples of Jesus. We further explained that we also wanted to help our North American mission

volunteers grow in their commitment to Christ and to develop hearts of compassion and love through opportunities to serve alongside of the village leaders.

Because we knew that both the evangelicals and the Roman Catholic leaders in the village of San Miguel would be suspicious about our motives and concerned about more competition, we assured both groups that our ministry among them was meant to unify the community and not to bring division. Over time, by keeping our promises and focusing on building authentic relationships, we gained the confidence of the leaders in both churches.

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We not only offered to help them with leadership training and biblical resources, but in our subsequent visits made sure that we worked closely with both religious groups. By faithfully sharing God's Word and serving alongside the spiritual leaders to bless their communities, in time we gained their trust and, most importantly, we saw the Holy Spirit heal some serious divisions and open the door for spiritual renewal in the village.

By focusing on Jesus and His rule over our lives and theirs, we saw clear evidence of how God was changing their hearts. Today, the son of the Roman Catholic deacon works closely with the evangelical pastor, and many of the children in the village now attend the evangelical Sunday School. The Roman Catholic deacon and catechists have learned to value the message of the Gospel and no longer seek to discredit the evangelical church.

CALMS staff and our short-term team members consistently taught and shared our faith from a Lutheran/biblical perspective without seeking to convert the people to a new denomination. And today in San Miguel, as in a number of other villages where CALMS worked during my time of service, we saw the Holy Spirit move in a powerful way to bring unity and love where before there had been resentment and suspicion. We have also seen evangelicals and Roman Catholics focus more on their common faith in Jesus and serve their communities in unity and peace.

In La Union, a municipal region of Guatemala, where we eventually worked in more than two dozen at-risk communities following a devastating landslide in 2008, we began our ministry by visiting the Roman Catholic priest who was responsible for the large parish in the county seat as well as 72 separate communities spread throughout the mountains of that region. He was the only priest serving over fifty thousand people, and so he had a huge challenge.

By showing respect for his role and offering to serve alongside his village deacons and catechists, we gained the priest's trust. He even publicly encouraged his village

leaders to accept and work with our ministry and volunteers as we helped them study and apply God's Word to their lives.

By focusing on the commitment to help extend the kingdom of God through a focus on teaching and demonstrating the Gospel, we not only defused a potentially conflictive situation, we also saw how God opened doors to help make new disciples and disciple-makers. Significantly, we were also always able to share our Lutheran, biblical perspective focused on God's grace through faith in Jesus with both evangelicals and Roman Catholics and did not have to compromise our beliefs.

Two Mission Strategies

We learned that there were two overarching mission strategies that helped foster our focus on making more committed disciples of Jesus and extending His kingdom of grace: (1) Equipping leaders and (2) Impacting individuals, churches, and communities with the Gospel.

As we developed mission plans for a village, we eventually sought to align all projects and efforts with these two strategies. Anything that was proposed that did not follow one or both of these strategies was discouraged.

1. Equipping leaders

In our work with Central American villages and communities, we came to see that whatever we did as cross-cultural missionaries needed to leave the leaders stronger and more capable than when we found them.

Missionaries and volunteers need to make a long-term commitment if they expect to see any significant transformation, since eventually they move on. Yet we came to see that moving on after serving for five to seven years in a village was helpful for two important reasons: (1) to reach more people with the Gospel and help the Kingdom of God come to more people, and (2) to avoid harmful dependency and release local people for ministry.

As we followed this approach, we came to recognize that we were more in sync with St. Paul's missionary method and so learned to live in the tension of staying long enough, but not too long.

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We can see in the New Testament book of Acts how St. Paul selected and appointed spiritual leaders in each place and then moved on to bring the Gospel to yet another community. Interestingly, Paul also did not insist on working alone, but always had younger leaders working with him as apprentices. We see this mentoring process described in Acts 12:25, where we read about Barnabas and Saul, who, after taking gifts to the church in Jerusalem, returned to Antioch “taking with them John, also called Mark.”

St. Paul expected new leaders to act on what they had learned from him and to put into practice what God was already showing them as they ministered. Paul saw younger leaders, like Mark and Timothy, as spiritual sons and trusted them to deal with some very difficult issues in the emerging churches.

And interestingly, Paul did not insist that young leaders be perfect in knowledge and practice before he turned them loose to serve new communities of faith. Rather, he instructed them and expected them to begin serving as leaders from the very beginning of their service. Paul continued to monitor their progress, and much of the New Testament includes letters like 1 and 2 Timothy and 1 Corinthians that share his advice to church leaders to help address ministry issues and challenges and to remind them of what he had taught them when he was with them face-to-face.

In our work with dozens of mission teams over the years in Central America, we always encouraged the volunteers to focus on leadership development as an essential strategy to help make disciples and extend God’s kingdom. And by focusing on that emphasis, in community after community, we saw how God blessed our efforts to help leaders grow in their capacity to lead.

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We were committed to respect and work closely with village leaders; yet we often found that our Central American village partners had received very little training in how to lead. So, as often as possible, we provided leadership training for village leaders. These training events always included biblical leadership principles found in Scripture, such as those found in the Book of Nehemiah.

One example of successful leadership development as a mission strategy is CALMS’s formal mission partnership with the Ministry of Education that took place from 2011 to 2017 in the country of Belize.

For seven years, volunteers from Concordia University Nebraska and experienced teachers from Lutheran schools in the USA helped us equip approximately seventy-five regional and national supervisors for the Ministry of Education. After receiving their training, the Belizean educators in turn equipped early childhood and high school

teachers in their regions throughout the country. Thus, we were able to multiply our mission efforts as we equipped local leaders who applied what they had learned to their own culture and local realities.

Amazingly also, we were allowed and encouraged to share biblical principles in our annual training events and to incorporate God's Word into our curriculum, including ideas and resources for helping Belizean teachers share the Christian faith in their classrooms. Thus, with a handful of qualified teachers and professors, together with our CALMS staff members, we were privileged to have an impact on the early childhood and high school children and youth of an entire country.

2. Influencing individuals and communities with the Gospel

In addition to equipping local leaders, we learned to be very intentional about making sure that any planned ministry would have an impact on individuals, families, and communities with the Gospel. Such an approach was important, because it distinguished us from secular organizations and helped explain that our motive for serving was to honor God and both to tell and to demonstrate the Gospel.

In the many at-risk communities of Central America, with their typical characteristics of high unemployment, medical challenges, inadequate housing, food shortages, and limited educational opportunities, it was always easy to identify and focus on the physical needs of people. On the other hand, it was often more challenging to identify appropriate ways to integrate intentional sharing of the Gospel with needed community services. In any case, we always tried and were successful more often than not.

Over the eleven years of my ministry with CALMS, the mission agency and our North American partners built over two hundred houses for people who had lost their homes as a result of natural disasters, such as floods and landslides, or who simply could not afford a home. We focused on the very poor who had no or little income, giving priority to widows and single mothers.

As we built homes, we always looked for ways to share the Good News of Jesus with individuals and their families and neighbors. Workdays always began with a Bible reading, devotion, and prayer. North American construction teams, joined by family members, local volunteers, and members of nearby churches, including our own Central American Lutheran churches, always participated in a dedication service. When there was a Lutheran church nearby, we invited the pastor to lead the

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celebration to show respect for his role and to encourage ongoing spiritual help for the family that was receiving a new home.

As we followed this principle of making an impact on individuals and communities with the Gospel, in time we came to describe our desired outcomes as “proclaiming and demonstrating the Gospel.” With this description, we emphasized human care and Gospel proclamation as being intimately connected—and wherever possible, we tried to do this at one and the same time.

Three Desired Results: (1) Committed Disciples, (2) Dynamic Churches, and (3) Healthy Communities

Through experience, we came to see that invariably communities were healthier when there was a cadre of committed disciples of Jesus present. Local churches were more dynamic when they were made up of committed disciples who were equipped to share the Gospel in word and deed with each other and the rest of the community. And where there were community leaders who served from a deep commitment to Christ and avoided favoritism, those communities invariably demonstrated characteristics such as unity, peace, cooperation, spiritual growth, and more economic progress. Thus, we came to see how the three desired results of committed disciples, dynamic churches, and healthy communities are intimately connected.

1. Committed disciples

A major challenge for the church today in the Western world, including our own Lutheran churches in North America, calls for us to move from a focus on church membership to making and growing committed disciples of Jesus. Such a focus on making and growing committed disciples of Jesus in our congregations will help mobilize God’s people for service, whereas focusing on church membership can lead to entitlement, spiritual stagnation, and a consumer mentality. This crucial desired result requires a renewed effort on the part of pastors to help their people understand their baptismal calling as disciples of Jesus and to exercise their spiritual gifts to build up and extend the Body of Christ.

One of the key characteristics of committed disciples is that they make new disciples and are seen by others in their sphere of influence as representatives of Jesus. Yet, it was our experience that this self-evident truth was not always immediately understood by our North American volunteers who had been conditioned to confuse being disciples of Jesus with church membership.

Interestingly, by focusing on making and growing disciples with our Central American partners, we saw new Central American disciples being raised up, as well as evidence of many North American volunteers becoming more mature in the faith.

Many volunteers shared that they had become more committed to Jesus and His mission because of their experiences as short-term volunteers in Central America.

In our Central American ministry that linked partners from North American congregations with at-risk communities for a period of approximately seven years, we also came to see that discipleship is a long-term effort. Transformation generally does not happen overnight; it is a gradual process. Thankfully, by reemphasizing the importance of a deliberate discipleship process, we were usually able to overcome the common temptation of our Western culture to seek immediate results.

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Another important discovery was the fact that growth of new disciples in Central American villages required regular direct contact with other Central American disciples and could not be accomplished solely by volunteers from outside the culture and community, no matter how often they returned and how dedicated to the task they might have been. It had to be a team effort with volunteers from North America complementing the efforts of local disciple leaders.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit working through CALMS's Central American staff and partners as well as North American volunteers, we saw growing numbers of disciples and disciple-makers in Central American villages.

Yet another discovery from our intentional focus on making and growing disciples has been the growing conviction that we've often inverted the process in our Lutheran church-planting efforts. Lutheran church-planting efforts commonly start with a focus on structure before introducing a more relational discipleship process. The typical process includes things like developing a constitution, acquiring a church building, advertising, and inviting the target audience to an inaugural event.

Observing the results of both approaches, I have come to believe that starting with church buildings and a structural approach can actually discourage biblical discipleship, hinder lay leadership, and foster a pastor-centered ministry model that generally leads to less commitment and involvement by the laity, who may end up seeing themselves as the supporters of someone else's ministry instead of as invested participants.

I came to this conviction after seeing many examples in existing Central American congregations where the pastor did most, if not all, of the ministry. This ministry model produced little numerical or discernable spiritual growth. In contrast, as we intentionally helped people understand what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus, connected them with other young Christians, and equipped them to boldly share their

faith with their peers and serve their communities, we saw more people demonstrating the characteristics of committed disciples of Jesus like those described in Acts.

By beginning with disciple-making and focusing the ministry of the missionary pastor on equipping lay leaders to use their gifts to bless others, new disciples can grow not only in faith but in maturity and commitment to make other disciples. As they gather with other growing disciples to study God's Word, pray, and share each other's burdens, a more organic form of the church can emerge that is more often sustainable and replicating. This was our experience working with young disciples in Central America.

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2. Dynamic churches

In CALMS's ministry with at-risk communities in Central America, we always worked with existing local churches. We did this because we saw these churches as God's means to help transform their communities. Furthermore, we realized that they had been in their communities before we arrived and would likely be there after we eventually departed.

To help our North American volunteers work effectively with these churches, we developed resources to assist team members in evaluating the relative health of the Central American churches and determining how they should concentrate their ministry efforts.

For example, knowing that a church was not dependent on outside resources and was able to support its own ministry helped the North American team avoid introducing new resources and programs that could have created unhealthy dependency. If the village congregation did not have trained Sunday School teachers, that discovery suggested the need to develop a plan to help the local church leaders find and equip such teachers from among their own people. Interestingly also, this evaluation process often helped the US leaders to identify aspects of their own North American churches that needed attention.

As we looked at the relative health of Central American churches, we emphasized to our volunteers that, just as there is no perfectly healthy the human body, there is no perfectly healthy church; we are always moving toward or away from health. And just as eating properly and exercising regularly can help keep the human body healthier,

so also with the Body of Christ: A dynamic church that is moving toward health demonstrates characteristics such as, (a) having its own leaders and being able to equip those leaders; (b) making new disciples and demonstrating God's mercy to those in need around them; (c) finding their support from their own congregants and not being dependent on outside resources; and (d) being both biblically-based and culturally relevant in their teaching and preaching.

As noted above, we came to see that inevitably there is a very tight relationship between dynamic churches and committed disciples, since churches with a significant number of committed disciples will more often reflect the above characteristics. Dynamic churches, in turn, invariably tend to influence their communities in positive ways through their service and faithful witness to Christ and the Gospel and by fostering a spirit of unity.

3. Healthy communities

Having worked in dozens of Central American communities for many years, I have found it interesting that some communities with the same economic and social conditions function better than others. Over time, we were able to discover some of the characteristics of healthier communities and to gain insights into the reasons why some fare better than others.

As with more dynamic churches, having healthy leaders was one of the most important characteristics leading to healthier communities. In almost no cases did we find leaders who were totally equipped, yet we did find natural leaders who were eager to serve, who worked well with others, and whom had God-given leadership gifts. Natural leaders were also invariably creative and more eager to learn and grow in their leadership skills.

A major characteristic of a healthy community is the presence of leaders who work together with other leaders and who demonstrate by their actions that they care about their fellow citizens. Healthy communities have leaders who serve the whole community and don't use their role to serve only their own family or a particular group of people.

We saw this characteristic demonstrated recently in the village of Capucalito in the mountains of western Guatemala. Even though there were economically advantaged Americans working with their village, the community leaders, rather than ask outsiders to do the job, took the initiative to fix the drainage of their elementary school that had caused the classrooms to flood every time it rained.

The village of El Progreso had a school with overcrowded classrooms, and they really needed more space. Recognizing the problem, the village leaders on their own initiative organized all the men in the community to dig the foundations and construct a new classroom, rather than wait for months or years for the government to respond

to their requests. While this approach may seem logical to us as North Americans, it is not at all normal behavior for community leaders who are predisposed to seek help from outside their communities instead of looking for solutions within their own community.

Healthy communities also more often than not care for their infrastructure and environment and take initiative to address their water needs, waste management, and play space for their children. Since Central American social structures are top-down and centralized, many communities default to the common approach of petitioning the municipal or state government to address issues instead of exploring ways to resolve their own infrastructure problems. Thus, helping community leaders learn to address their own issues instead of waiting for outside help was a major contribution to helping communities become healthier. This focus, of course, required discipline on the part of CALMS staff and our teams to avoid the temptation to solve their problems for them.

Since a major issue in Central American villages is the use of authority and power to enrich oneself or family, we also came to see transparency and a willingness to identify and incorporate new leaders into the decision-making process as another major characteristic of healthier communities.

More research would be needed to determine if these same results that we saw in smaller (1,000 to 2,500 people) Central American villages might occur in larger cities in Central America and elsewhere around the world. Living in communities where people know their neighbors and commonly work together in their villages and nearby fields no doubt affects community dynamics. I suspect, on the other hand, that where there is less social interaction, trust, transparency, and joint community efforts we could expect a greater challenge with regard to building a healthy community.

Four Mission Values

Invariably in Christian mission work, challenges often result because of conflicts and disagreements about values. Mission partnerships especially depend on an alignment of values, and ministry works best when the partners share the same values. When serving cross-culturally where there are almost always some different values at work, it is important to identify the values of a target audience and to consider the values that should drive our mission efforts as we seek to work together effectively with people of another culture.

Mission partnerships especially depend on an alignment of values, and ministry works best when the partners share the same values.

While there are many good candidates for appropriate values to help guide cross-cultural mission efforts, in our Central America ministry we came to see that the following four are of special importance. By concentrating on the values of strategic mission efforts, authentic and respectful relationships, pursuing biblical mission principles, and looking for and striving toward transformation, we were more often able to see positive results.

1. Strategic value

A strategic mission effort responds to felt needs of the target audience and is based on research, listening, evaluating, and responding to input from local experts. We came to see that activities like starting with thorough research, building the capacity of local leaders, and communicating the Gospel effectively helped us to focus our efforts to remain true to our value of working strategically.

We further came to understand that working strategically includes serving alongside local cross-cultural partners, and not independently. Professors and students from Concordia University Nebraska demonstrated this strategic value while working with Dr. Elry Orozco, a Lutheran medical doctor and pastor, in an economically challenged community in Guatemala to help with health research and as assistants with his medical service brigades.

Another outstanding example of a focus on working strategically was the partnership with the Nursing Department of Concordia University Texas as they served with Dr. Jaime Sanchez, a Christian doctor in Belize, to help provide needed health care to at-risk communities, while helping their students learn new skills and grow spiritually.

A third example of working strategically can be seen in our experience with a very at-risk community: San Miguel village in the dry zone of Guatemala. When we began our ministry there, the community had suffered multiple droughts, and the whole village was left without food or a way to meet their basic needs.

In response, we decided to go beyond relief efforts, since that promised to be a never-ending challenge. After some dialog with the community, local agricultural experts, and conducting our own research, we connected with Guatemalan agricultural and village leaders to introduce a pilot project to help a representative group of four village farmers develop a cash crop.

With proper training, they were able to successfully grow and market aloe vera, used to make sports drinks, medicines, and cosmetics. Since those plants don't require as much water as corn and beans and yet typically last for up to twenty-five years, this new crop made it possible for the farmers to provide for their families. In this way, our ministry was able to replace a less strategic approach, such as providing ongoing food

relief, with a more strategic and better solution: building the capacity of local leaders to improve their own lives and bless their community.

The strategic plan developed with the village calls for helping other farmers. The goal is to help those who have been blessed to “pay it forward” by helping another group of farmers and, in that way, to multiply God’s blessings. On a recent visit to the village, we were encouraged to learn that in the last six months they had on their own initiative multiplied the number of farmers growing aloe vera to sixteen and have since committed to raising the number of new farmers to twenty-five during the next six months.

2. Relational value

In cross-cultural ministries—and for that matter, in mono-cultural mission efforts—having authentic and respectful relationships is absolutely necessary to be successful. Since trust comes from working together and keeping our promises over an extended period of time, it’s indispensable to have point persons who guide the involvement of both the hosts and visiting servant leaders.

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I saw this value demonstrated in Belize, where we were working with an experienced dental team on a pilot project. The team demonstrated strong discipline and good coordination among themselves, but they ignored our advice to coordinate closely with a representative of the ministry of health sent to work with them. They also chose to disregard our advice about using local pastors to provide spiritual support as the patients waited for their appointments. We believed this was common sense advice, since the local pastors already knew many of the people and definitely knew the culture better than the visiting dental volunteers.

The dental team’s unwillingness to invite local leaders into their ministry led us to discontinue plans for a formal partnership and future service with them. Thus, we see in this example how focusing on our mission values can often help us evaluate potential partnerships and avoid uneven and potentially harmful relationships that can damage our reputation and hurt our witness.

A positive example of focusing on the importance of developing healthy relationships as we work cross-culturally is that of Divine Shepherd Lutheran Church in Omaha, Nebraska. Teams from that congregation regularly worked with their community partners in the village of La Avanzada, Guatemala, to conclude and celebrate their regular periods of service together with a community-wide “potluck” meal. Usually, the North American volunteers provided chickens for the giant

cauldrons of chicken soup, while local people provided the tortillas and vegetables and did their share of the cooking.

A great mission memory and important lesson for me personally was a time I worked in the fields planting corn all day with a group of twenty-five Quiché Indian farmers in a remote Guatemalan mountain village. While we men worked in the fields, women on our training team worked with the village women to learn how to make tortillas and share insights about their family lives.

That day in the fields and kitchens helped me and our team members understand more about the unique culture of these beautiful people than we could ever have learned otherwise. Our time serving with the villagers also helped build a growing trust relationship as we worked side-by-side with our new partners to learn and experience life together.

3. The value of biblical missiology

An outstanding example of following biblical mission principles is the ministry of Concordia University Irvine, California, whose teams coordinated with their various university departments to influence in a holistic way all aspects of life in the village of El Progreso, Guatemala.

Working consistently with a Gospel and kingdom focus during their years of service, they were able to build the capacities of the village health workers, schoolteachers, church leaders, community leaders, and village sports coaches. With all their ministry projects, university professors and students always included a strong spiritual component. By focusing holistically, they were also able to interact with and have an impact on all age groups in the community over time, thereby building very strong relationships with all the villagers.

This university partner prepared the teams spiritually and with disciplined orientation regarding biblical mission principles. Because a number of departments at the university were involved, they were able to share the planning and preparation responsibilities for their teams. This made it possible for them to send multiple teams throughout each year of their partnership—each one focusing on a different emphasis such as health care, biblical equipping of spiritual leaders, children and youth ministry, education, and economic development.

Because Christian professors were motivated and committed to provide continuity and leadership for their long-term relationship with the village, students were able to add their gifts and talents more effectively and in a complementary way than might otherwise have been possible.

4. The value of transformation

Real transformation requires long-term commitment, and so working closely with dedicated leaders from the host culture is very important. In time, we came to understand that short-term workers can function best when they complement and work alongside local leaders to bring about the desired result of spiritual transformation. Frank, a young man from the village of La Avanzada in Guatemala, demonstrates this value in a dramatic way.

Frank began his spiritual journey toward wholeness and service to others by reading a Bible that he had received from a mission team from Divine Shepherd Lutheran Church in Omaha, Nebraska. God's Word convinced him that he should become a more committed partner to the mother of his children. By the power of the Holy Spirit working through His Word and the witness of volunteers from Divine Shepherd, Frank moved from being an unbeliever focused on his own pleasures and vices to becoming a spiritual leader in his own family and in the community.

When he decided to get married, the Divine Shepherd team witnessed his wedding celebration and watched as the Holy Spirit guided him to become more involved in his children's lives. Gradually, Frank grew as a leader and eventually began to serve his village as a Bible teacher and mentor for youth in the community.

A key part of Frank's transformation was the influence of regular spiritual retreats led by Divine Shepherd short-term leaders and participation in regular mentoring and discipleship sessions led by a Guatemalan CALMS discipleship worker who lived nearby.

Evaluating Our Mission Efforts

Finally, as we look for examples of transformation in our outreach efforts, we are also able to evaluate the effectiveness of our mission work.

When our mission endeavors are successful, we should expect to see changed lives, more committed disciples of Jesus, more dynamic churches equipping the whole Body of Christ to serve and to make more disciples, community leaders who serve, and healthier communities that bless their own residents and those of other communities.

In the end, these are some of the things we will want to measure in order to communicate what God is doing through our mission efforts. Such evidence of change will, in turn, likely help inspire our donors and prayer partners to continue supporting God's mission.

Endnotes

¹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 446.

² Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 447.

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