

*A Growing Global Network of Centers for World Mission*  
By Darrell Dorr

The past decade has witnessed the development of new forms of collaboration between ministries in the global Church. Local congregations are establishing ties with sister churches in other parts of the world, and Western mission agencies are entering into partnership agreements with emerging missions from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Broad-based evangelical alliances on the national, regional, and international levels are tied to corresponding associations of mission agencies. Numerous mission conferences, a few specialized newsletters, and a growing number of mission journals have spawned a wide variety of informal networks through which communication and cooperation have begun to flow.

#### THE NETWORK OF MISSION CENTERS

One such network now links a growing number of "centers for world mission." These centers are formally independent, yet they often share ideas, people, and other resources. From 1979 to 1981 Ben Jennings, while serving on the staff of the U.S. Center for World Mission, began to coordinate correspondence between a small group of centers for world mission. I, after a four-year hiatus, picked up this responsibility in September 1985. Since then the CenterNet newsletter has been circulated each month to a growing number of centers.

What do these centers have in common? A brochure prepared for distribution at the July 1986 International Conference for Itinerant Evangelists describes four broad areas of similarity:

1. These mission centers share a common concern for cross-cultural evangelism, or missions. ... All mission centers seek to help Christians look beyond their own cultures and to see the importance and urgency of missions. Some ... have a special concern for ministry to "unreached peoples," societies still without a strong church movement in their midst. Other centers focus more on how Christians of one culture can best help existing churches of other cultures. Those with "church growth" in their name stress the growth of the church where it is already strong.
2. These mission centers view their own countries or regions as both mission fields (needing to receive missionaries) and mission bases (needing to send missionaries). Therefore, each center performs dual functions: (1) helping Christians from other parts of the world to understand unmet needs in that country or region, and (2) helping local Christians to become strategic missionaries in other parts of the world.
3. These mission centers are involved in mission research, church mobilization, mission training, or certain other specific services. Extensive

research is necessary for the Christians of the world to identify the remaining mission fields and recruit the mission forces to finish the job. Church mobilization prompts God's people to back missionary efforts with both prayer and finances. Training may take the form of mission courses for lay people who never intend to go as missionaries or specialized programs of study to prepare those who are en route to the field. Other services include the production and distribution of books, audio-visuals (slide shows, movies, videos) and other mission tools of value for Sunday Schools, mission conferences, and private study.

4. These mission centers model cooperation between Christians from many backgrounds. Since none of the Centers is set up as a denominational mission base, they see themselves as servants to all believers, churches, and Christian organizations which acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and seek to serve Him in faithfulness to His Word. Many were founded and are now operated by Christians from diverse theological, denominational, and sociological backgrounds who share a common devotion to our Lord and a common commitment to His Great Commission. World evangelization requires nothing less!

These similarities exist alongside major differences. Some centers subscribe to evangelical doctrinal statements, others do not. Some perform all of the above functions, while others are more specialized. A small minority have been active in seeking working relationships with their counterparts, while most have been content with occasional interaction. These organizations also vary widely in their origins and principal audiences of ministry. Nevertheless, they have found enough in common to want to talk to each other with increasing regularity.

#### A PARTIAL LIST

But just who are these centers? And how many are there? No one claims to have a comprehensive tally, and new discoveries are made each month, but the list includes at least the following 28 organizations:

- \* Africa Centre for World Missions (Walkerville, South Africa)
- \* Andrew Murray Centre for Prayer, Revival, and Missions (Wellington, South Africa)
- \* Billy Graham Center (Wheaton, Illinois, USA)
- \* Brisbane Centre for World Mission (Brisbane, Australia)
- \* Canadian Centre for World Mission (Toronto, Ontario, Canada)
- \* Chinese Church Research Centre (Hong Kong)
- \* Chinese Coordination Centre for World Evangelism (Hong Kong)
- \* Church Growth Research Centre (Madras, India)
- \* Daystar Research Unit (Nairobi, Kenya)
- \* East-West Center for Mission Research and Development (Seoul, Korea)
- \* German Center for World Mission (Bonn, West Germany)

- \* Hong Kong Centre for Frontier Missions (Hong Kong)
- \* IMDELA (San Jose, Costa Rica)
- \* Kansai Mission Research Center (Kobe, Japan)
- \* Mid-Atlantic Center for World Mission (South Eastern, Pennsylvania, USA)
- \* Midwest Center for World Mission (Oak Park, Illinois, USA)
- \* Misiones Mundiales (Santa Fe, Argentina)
- \* Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center (Monrovia, California, USA)
- \* New England Center for World Mission (Boston, Massachusetts, USA)
- \* Northwest Centre for World Mission (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada)
- \* Norwegian Center for World Mission (Oslo, Norway)
- \* Overseas Ministries Study Center (New Haven, Connecticut, USA)
- \* Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (Oxford, England)
- \* PUENTE (Quito, Ecuador)
- \* Scottish Centre for World Mission (Glasgow, Scotland)
- \* Singapore Centre for World Mission (Singapore)
- \* U.S. Center for World Mission (Pasadena, California, USA)
- \* WEC International Research Office (London, England)

Some centers operate extensive facilities, While others are based in small offices or homes. A few enjoy the benefit of large staffs, but most are manned by 5-10 people, including volunteers.

#### THE SINGAPORE STATEMENT

In June 1986 five representatives of centers for world mission met between sessions of the World Evangelical Fellowship's Eighth General Assembly in Singapore. After discussion of common convictions and aspirations, these representatives produced and signed "The Singapore Statement on the Global Network of Centres for World Mission." The Statement was commended to the WEF Missions Commission, which is now conducting its own survey of mission research centers around the world.

The Singapore Statement, which five additional signatories have since affirmed, is the foundational document for the fledgling network of centers for world mission. Prominent is a concern for frontier missions among unreached peoples. The Statement reads,

In this era between Pentecost and Parousia God is reconciling the world to Himself through Christ, and He has given us the ministry of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:18-19). We are working toward that day when there will be a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb (Rev. 7:9). We

believe that at this time in the history of world evangelisation a strategic role can be played by Centres for World Mission, a role that will hasten the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24:14 that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

## 1. Definition

A Centre for World Mission is an interdenominational, inter-mission organisation working in a support role for the cause of World Evangelisation and especially for the reaching of the unreached peoples. A Centre for World Mission is intended to fill a gap not being filled by other mission organisations.

We expect the various Centres to have different histories, to have different organisational structures and links, to have different missiological perspectives and to emphasise different tasks. We welcome this diversity.

A Centre serves churches, mission agencies, mission associations, and others in one or more of the following ways:

- (a) By serving as a Missions Research Centre: conducting, publishing, distributing and/or guiding missions research, especially that related to the unreached peoples and how to reach them.
- (b) By serving as a Missions Training Centre: building missions awareness and involvement among Christians, preparing missionaries for cross-cultural service, and/or offering specialised training in specific areas.
- (c) By serving as a Missions Mobilisation Centre: seeking to awaken those who are asleep to missions, seeking to mobilise those who are awake to missions, and seeking to facilitate those who are moving in missions.
- (d) By serving as a Missions Resource Centre: distributing from a centralised place a wide range of missions books and media resources to churches, students, leaders, laypeople and mission organisations.
- (e) By serving as a Missions Development Centre: acting as a catalyst for the formation of structures necessary for the advancement of world evangelisation.

## 2. The Global Network of Centres for World Mission

We desire to join ourselves together in a network that will provide a way for us to:

- (a) help each other with practical matters related to our unique type of work.

(b) inform each other about available missions resources and help each other acquire them.

(c) link together in a united, global missions research plan.

(d) gain a greater credibility and audience, and

(e) stimulate, inspire and encourage each other.

Each center stands alone governmentally and organisationally. Each centre should be fully indigenous to its own country or region. For example, the other centres are not under the control, domination or direction of the U.S. Center for World Mission in Pasadena, California and are not "branch offices" of it. At the same time, we praise God for the USCWM and are not afraid to welcome it and other North American Centres as equal partners in this network.

We invite other like-minded Centres around the world to join with us, and we declare our desire to help in the development of new Centres for World Mission wherever local leaders sense the need.

### 3. Communication

Our publication and most important means of communicating with each other is the newsletter, CenterNet. We also consider missions journals, such as the International Journal of Frontier Missions, to be important forums for our interaction and mutual instruction. In recognition of the opportunities available in this age of rapidly-developing technology, we are exploring the possibility of communicating with each other through international computer conferencing.

### 4. Relationships

As a Network and as individual Centres we want to serve and be closely linked to as many evangelical churches, denominations, mission agencies, associations of mission agencies, Christian schools and other Christian organisations as possible. As a Network we want to work in harmony with and be closely linked to global evangelical organisations working for world evangelisation, such as the Missions Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

### 5. Next Steps

We feel the need for certain things to happen before our Network can truly take shape. Someone needs to travel around the world for a series of face-to-face meetings with existing and prospective Centres. In addition, we call for a

Conference which would help all Centres in the Network to develop closer fellowship, friendship and working partnership with each other and which would provide an opportunity for us to more fully establish the purposes, membership and structure of the Network.

We offer our thanks to Darrell Dorr for his work in editing CenterNet and in thus stimulating our Network to this point. We invite and encourage him to continue this informal leadership role, to make the world tour we feel is needed and, in consultation with all interested Centres, to convene the Conference we have called for.

For the unreached peoples,

(Originally affirmed by the first five signatories, later affirmed by the next five signatories)

John and Lyn D'Alton, Brisbane Centre for World Mission (Brisbane, Australia)

Al Hatch, PUENTE (Quito, Ecuador)

Michael Jaffarian, Singapore Centre for Evangelism and Missions (Singapore)

David Cho, East-West Center for Missions Research and Development (Seoul, Korea)

Darrell Dorr, U.S. Center for World Mission (Pasadena, California, USA)

David Bliss, Andrew Murray Centre for Prayer, Revival, and Missions (Wellington, South Africa)

Jonathan Chao, Chinese Church Research Centre (Hong Kong)

Robert Oehrig, Daystar Research Unit (Nairobi, Kenya)

Jim Robinson, Africa Centre for World Mission (Walkerville, South Africa)

Thomas Schirmacher, German Center for World Mission (Bonn, West Germany).

## PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE?

It is still too early to tell whether this networking will bear significant fruit. Discussions since the issuance of the Singapore Statement have suggested travel itineraries and other preparations for a possible face-to-face conference in Singapore in the spring or summer of 1988. Interest in deeper levels of

communication and cooperation seems to be growing. However, a number of fundamental issues are still unresolved, including the major question of whether the theological, functional, and organizational diversity within the network can sustain substantive collaborative ministry.

Nevertheless, initial reports suggest exciting prospects for the future. Many centers have expressed particular interest in participating in the Global Research Database and Mapping Project based at the U.S. Center for World Mission, and some have already begun to exchange research data. Mobilization tools, such as the Frontier Fellowship Global Prayer Digest, receive wide circulation. The Midwest Center for World Mission has initiated a pilot computer conference for centers for world mission (on the Electronic Information Exchange System) and sent one of its workers to England to install computer hardware for the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. The CenterNet newsletter has allowed directors of centers to compare notes on everything from training programs to compatibility of different videotape systems.

It has become clear that one of the greatest strengths of a center for world mission is its ability to mobilize, to implement, to act upon good ideas that fall between the cracks of more conventional structures. This strength is enhanced when centers join together in a network and develop cooperative support systems to undergird those agencies on the front lines of world evangelization. Centers for world mission have been the midwives of the frontier missions movement during the past decade, and their ministries will probably become increasingly important as we approach the end of this century.

Darrell Dorr is editor of the International Journal of Frontier Missions. He also serves as Center Coordinator for the U. S. Center for World Mission Pasadena, California, USA.