

Guest Editorial: The Face of Missiological Societies

By Greg Parsons

Conferences can be interesting... or a waste of time and money.

I have been to a number of conferences that didn't quite accomplish what I thought they should. You know, that seminar on "How to delegate" that gives you a few good ideas but doesn't really help that much.

When it comes to missiology conferences things are different. Certainly some people think they are not worth the time or are made up of merely arm chair missions thinkers who do more theorizing than real work toward "the task." But I've never been disappointed at missiology meetings.

It's not that everything that I thought should be said was said or that every subject that I felt should be discussed was discussed. But there is a multiplying dynamic in meeting to discuss how to keep moving forward in God's purposes. When we get together with others of like mind and heart (even if our approach or ministry or age may be different), there is a synergism. Synergism is defined as "the combined action which is greater in total effect than the sum of their individual effects."

I've seen that type of dynamic at various types of meetings. One of the best dynamics happens when people of different ages are participants. In recent years, the grand-daddy intergenerational conference was the World Consultation of Frontier Missions in 1980. A number of things happened as a result. One was that a simultaneous younger conference was arranged: the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions.

That is where this journal came from... with a bit of delayed action. It started out sputtering with infrequency, run exclusively by younger people. Now it is determinedly intergenerational, and it has been right on time for the last two years, four issues a year, with a bright new format and a lot of good stuff, including ponderous grey-haired stuff as well as brash young voice stuff! The IJFM is loosely connected with a society that started later called the International Society for Frontier Missiology. The ISFM is young at six years old and the make up of its conference each year reflects a mixture of mission agencies and ages.

A few days ago, a major panel focused on "Bridging the Generation Gap in Missions" at the Kansas City meeting of the Evangelical Missiological Society. Passing the baton, the younger generation in missions seems to be the talk of the town these days.

At 36 I don't think I would have been made the CEO of a mission project the size of the U.S. Center for World Mission if there had not been some rather unusual policies built right into the organization. The same thing applies to me as the Treasurer of the International Society for Frontier Missiology. I don't know if I would have been an officer of the grey-haired somewhat equivalent Evangelical Missiological Society.

That's the point I am trying to bring out. The ISFM is different from the EMS not just in its exclusive focus on the frontiers (the classical meaning of missiology) but in its deliberately intergenerational make-up. The ISFM-highlighted in this issue of the IJFM-was indeed started by the older men, but they had it in mind from the start to make it intergenerational, as is its executive committee to this day.

The EMS meeting in November had about 140 people-the biggest ever! The ISFM had almost as many in September in Denver. But what a difference! One was mainly professors (the EMS still reflecting its earlier name, the Association of Evangelical Professors of Missions, which it was until two years ago). The ISFM was, by contrast, at least half younger people-probably 10% professors-plus a lot of missions executives headed for the EFMA the week following. (Next September the ISFM will meet in the same city as the IFMA-just after the IFMA ends. The ISFM is happy for professors to be part of its interaction, but, unlike the AEPM/EMS, it was not started with the thought in mind that only professors would be members.)

This issue is a reflection of that intergenerational make up. One of the very best presentations was that of Ted Elder, a younger leader of the Caleb Project, a group which was there in force again this year. At the same time, slightly older mission leaders like Gary Corwin, and still older mission leaders, like Ralph Winter, also participated and brought experience as well as new ideas. This is further illustrated in the animated discussion following the Corwin, Elder, and Winter presentations. Here, a spectrum of ages dialog on crucial issues in frontier missions. These are four of the items discussed in this issue of the IJFM. The Purpose of the ISFM itself was highlighted this time: the relentless focus on frontiers as defined in the Unreached Peoples term from the famous definition of the March 1982 conference adopted also by the IFMA Frontier Peoples Committee and the Lausanne Statistics Task Force. Included is the concern for goal structures which take full advantage of the year 2000 as history's most prominent goal date. Many other issues were discussed, some of which are included in this issue.

My point here is not to say that one group is not needed or is more important

than the other. Rather, different societies are needed to further that synergistic activity. We would do well to continue to give opportunity to people of different and people in different ministries (hands-on or strategy or mobilization or training) to continue to come together and focus on finishing the task. The intergenerational team, society, journal has a future!

I have both grown and been given opportunity to step out by exposure and commitment to leaders from that grey-haired generation. They have experiences that I don't have to help my ability to serve so I depend on others who have those. The things I have learned can be of help now. I'm glad I don't need to wait till my hair is grey or gone and I'm glad there are people around the missions world that have experience upon which we can all draw, and that in some sectors people my age are being given significant responsibilities.

The WCFM/ISCFM, the IJFM, and the ISFM are all determinedly intergenerational.

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