

One Agency's Contribution to Reaching Unreached Peoples

■ Here are some valuable lessons. This transcript of an address given at the last ISFM meeting in Kansas City clearly shows what one agency can do to reach the unreached peoples of the world. Today we need to follow in the footsteps of by-gone pioneers such as Frederick Franson who constantly reached out to disciple the least evangelized peoples on the face of the earth.

By Richard Winchell

We seek to answer the question: What can one agency contribute to reaching the unreached peoples of the world?

I. LEARN FROM HISTORY.

In the first century, God had uniquely prepared the world for the coming of Christ. Language, culture, economy, a whole infrastructure including roads, trade relations and a monetary system were in place and covered the then known world. All this accelerated the spread of the gospel so that within fifty years there was a church in every major city in the Roman Empire, and within 250 years half the Empire's population had bowed the knee to Jesus Christ the Lord. Edward Gibbon, in his monumental work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, says:

While that great body [the Roman Empire] was undermined by slow decay or invaded by open violence, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men; grew up in silence and obscurity; took new vigor from opposition; until at last it raised the triumphant banner of the cross on the ruins of the Capitol.

Some are seeing in our own society the same seeds of decay as those which existed in the Roman Empire. Perhaps the church of today can raise the triumphant banner of the cross on whatever ruins may survive this age.

II. USE THE LANGUAGE BRIDGE.

Certainly we are facing opportunities, opened up to us in the last three years, such as we have not experienced during decades of closed and closing nations. New doors have opened and we must enter. We will have to do this with a renewed

determination to use what I call the "language bridge."

Language is not a barrier, it is a bridge. It is not a wall, it is a door. It is not a fence, it is a gate. It isn't something that keeps you out, it is something that lets you in. Some of us learned this in South Africa where resistance to a white face can be overcome by a sensitive approach. This can best be done by honoring a person's dignity and addressing him politely in his own language. Even one's accent can be a plus as they realize that we have taken the trouble to learn their language.

Tom Brewster used to say that North Americans study second languages and never learn them, but that other nationals learn second and even third and fourth languages yet never study them. This is a major concern which we must address. We have to quit the "quick fix," short-term, "do it through an interpreter" mentality and realize that there is no way to replace the old fashioned approach of the need to "learn the language and the culture" method of our predecessors.

III. GO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE.

One of our former TEAM administrators, a missionary to Japan and a World War II paratrooper chaplain, recalls that he was discovered by a commanding general at the front lines in a particularly bloody battle. "Chaplain, what are you doing here?" demanded the general. The chaplain's response: "The men are here, sir."

This is a legacy from the pioneers of a by-gone era. They went where the people were. TEAM is an "inland mission." As Ralph Winter has pointed out, most of the mission agencies that arose toward the end of the nineteenth century were committed to go inland.

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century missions had followed the world-wide colonial expansion and established churches and other ministries along the coastlines.

Our founder, Frederick Franson, was committed to reaching the unreached. In the first two years of TEAM'S existence he sent missionaries into unreached people then recruited missionaries to go to them. He was involved in the founding of at least fourteen missions agencies that are still in existence. In 34 years he ministered in 56 countries in Europe, the Middle East, West Africa and the Far East. And he kept sending out new workers. He said in 1892:

Our common goal must in every case be the salvation of souls and their continuing growth in grace and in the work until the Lord returns. The essential task thus will not be to set up mission stations but to get living congregations into being whose continuing joy it will be to send out missionaries from their own midst till all of China shall have heard the good news of redemption.

Then he sized up the situation in the world of his day—1.5 billion people. He said: "Let's assume, for instance, that each Christian should be able to evangelize, disciple and then shepherd the new converts in an area of 1500 people. To do that we would need today an army of one million missionaries. The answer turns, then, on how many more than a million spirit-filled believers there are in the world today."

With vision and motivation like that Franson sent out thousands. The result has been that in only one of the decades of our 102 years of history have we not entered some new field.

IV. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE TIMES.

When World War II came to an end, I was in the classroom, about to enter college for missionary training. Doors were opening once again as shipping resumed and travel was a possibility. Europe was in shambles, Japan had been destroyed. The giant continent of Africa was awakening to roll back its 400 years of colonial expansion. From four independent countries then we have seen it grow to over sixty now. During those days, India had begun squeezing missionaries out. We had over a hundred there then and only five now. By 1951 the last missionaries had been expelled from China. In South America the persecutions were coming to an end and it became safer if not easier to preach the gospel there.

We had to do what we could with the world God had prepared for us. It was a time of harvesting. The spirit of Franson made us want to enter new fields and find more unreached people groups. We entered 22 more fields and grew from only two hundred missionaries to over a thousand. And in spite of hundreds of missionaries retired and retiring, we have been able to keep up the total number of missionaries so that nearly half of our staff have joined us in the last ten years.

Also almost half our overseas staff works in the 10/40 window where the largest number of unreached peoples

are to be found. Fourteen of the countries in which TEAM has ministry are considered to be among the most spiritually needy nations on earth. We are presently working in 141 people groups and seeking out others to add to our goals.

The world is once again uniquely prepared by God for the gospel. The unbelievable events of the past three years have opened the doors to thousands of people "hidden" from the gospel. The most apparent is the former Soviet Union. We are told that they have discovered 120 million "hidden" people in the former Soviet Union. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as it is now called, no longer is thought to have 288 million total population, but closer to 400 million. And there are 160 people groups of ethnic minorities with their own languages and cultures and their own need for the gospel. To list just a few examples:

2,898,000 Tadjiks - a few Christians
 2,028,000 Turkmen - a few Christians
 1,908,000 Kirghis - just 18 Christians
 1,371,000 Bashkir - no known Christians
 756,000 Chechens - no Christians
 483,000 Avars - no Christians
 353,000 Buryats - no Christians
 303,000 Karakalpaks - no Christians
 287,000 Dargins - no Christians
 228,000 Kumyk - no Christians
 211,000 Uigurs - no Christians
 186,000 Ingush - no Christians

147,000 Kalmyk - no Christians
 131,000 Karachai - no Christians

And the list goes on and on. There are scores of unreached groups of people to be found and reached by some "Fransons" of a new day. God has uniquely prepared the world for a renewed thrust to reach these people and we can do something about it. We began with the question, What can one agency do to reach unreached peoples? Our answer is:

- I. LEARN FROM HISTORY.
- II. USE THE LANGUAGE BRIDGE.
- III. GO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE.
- IV. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE TIMES.

We have the know-how, we have the people, we have the technology, we have the resources and we even have the money. We must only mobilize ourselves as a church and demonstrate that we have the will. We must have the will to give of our substance, the will to give of our supplication, the will to give of our sons and daughters, and the will to give of ourselves. ■

Richard Winchell is the General Director of TEAM. He has held that responsibility since 1975. He served as a missionary in South Africa among the Zulu for 18 years. He and his wife Marjorie reside in Wheaton, Illinois.