

# The Church's Primary Role in Training for the Frontiers

by Gary R. Corwin

The January 1994 issue of the *IJFM* focused on the theme, "Training for the Frontiers. In my article subtitled "Who Does What?" I sought to outline the unique but complementary roles of academics, agencies and admonishers (mission mobilizers and researchers) in training for frontier missions. In both formal and informal responses to that article and presentation I heard some well-articulated concerns that suggested I had understated the role of the church in this all-important task. Since that was certainly not my intention then nor now, I thought a review of the article's underlying assumptions might be helpful.

The first basic assumption was that churches have the primary responsibility and are *the* most important source of mission training, including for the frontiers. They are the chief guardians of the process of character formation (the most essential of preparations), the chief venue for ministry experience, and the chief broker and quality control mechanism for all other training aspects. I wrote regarding the approach my article took that: "(it) is premised... on the assumption that local churches are the *foundational trainers* for outreach to the frontiers." And again, "Well-grounded disciples of Christ are the building blocks of any mission outreach, and only the churches can provide them. The work of academics, agencies and admonishers only builds on the most basic work that churches do of training disciples."

The second basic assumption underlying my article was that local

churches are generally not able to provide all the specialized training necessary to send and maintain well equipped missionaries on the frontiers. The training responsibility of the other players is always, as I said, "under and alongside of the churches." They exist to use their specialized skills to assist the churches to fulfill their responsibility of adequately equipping and maintaining apostles in frontier missions.

The third underlying assumption was that the academics, agencies and admonishers each have unique and complementary roles to play in assisting the assemblies (local churches) to fulfill their training responsibilities for reaching the frontiers. As the audience to which my article was presented (a joint meeting of the Evangelical Missiological Society and the International Society of Frontier Missiology) consisted almost exclusively of these three aforementioned groups, it only seemed reasonable to address the subject from their points of view. This seemed doubly so since one could scarcely have scratched the surface of the unique and central role of the churches' training task in the same short article. Hence the importance of clarifying, including looking at the last underlying assumption.

The fourth basic assumption was that forums need to be established, papers need to be written, presentations need to be made, and consultations need to be held that focus specifically on the churches' unique and crucial role in training for the frontiers. Initially, it may be difficult to get wide church participation in such an effort. Fear of being

embarrassed, or of being pressured to do what one really does not want to do are substantial hindrances. Groups such as APMC and AIMS could play an important role in overcoming such reticence. However, participation at such gathering should not be limited to the churches alone. Academics, agencies and admonishers should also be there. Together they/we should focus on the task from a specifically church-based point of view, something which the earlier joint conference was neither convened for nor sufficiently representative to accomplish.

Living as we do in an age when there is a genuine missions awakening taking place in many churches, it is understandable why a perceived lack of attention to the church's role in mission training raised some concern. The purpose of this short review and update is to say: "Amen and Amen" to both the motivation and source of that concern. Though my earlier article had a more narrow focus, due to its audience, the all-encompassing nature of the local churches' primary role in training for the frontiers cannot be treated as a simple add on. Therefore, my hope and prayer is that the forums be frequent and fruitful!

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