

Jonathan Lewis has been on staff of the Mission Commission since 1991. As from 2005 he is a staff member of WEA and he continues to be involved in International Ministry Training

Jonathan P. Lewis

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL MISSION MOVEMENT

The discussion of stages of development of national missions movements is fairly straightforward. The **first stage** might be called “mobilization” — the initial time when a leader or a core group of leaders give themselves passionately to raising awareness of missions and winning other leaders to the cause. The **second phase** might be described as “equipping.” Churches, institutes and denominations seek to put into place programs to help develop vocation and train missionaries. The **third stage** is that of **developing missionary sending and support structures**. Individual churches tend to take the lead, but limited success (or perhaps overt failure) forces the issue of structures that are fully dedicated to the field support of the missionary.

The initiation of the **mobilization** stage might be labeled a “gestation phase” where organizations like Operation Mobilization (OM) and YWAM play a role in exposing majority world young people and leaders to missions. My involvement in the Argentine missions movement came at the invitation of Federico Bertuzzi, a pastor who was initially exposed to mission through a brief voyage on one of the OM ships. He later resigned from a successful pastorate to dedicate himself full-time to missions mobilization. Federico would mark the beginnings of his fledgling mobilization organization, Misiones Mundiales, to the visit and challenge of Louis Palau when he spoke at a national pastor’s conference.

Undoubtedly, this earliest of phase of mobilization is marked by significant outside influences.

With his new calling to mobilization, Federico traveled indefatigably around the country, meeting with church leaders, preaching in churches, and launching literature initiatives. When my young family and I joined Federico in June of 1986, it was just prior to the first Argentine congress on world evangelization to be held in Buenos Aires. Thousands of believers came together to hear the challenge of cross-cultural missions from world-renown authorities. Hundreds of young people came forward at the invitation to give their lives to this great enterprise. In some ways, that congress marked the birth of the movement for that nation.

I soon joined Federico in organizing city wide pastors’ retreats to consider biblical claims for the church’s involvement in missions. We also traveled extensively, promoting the great continental missions congress, COMIBAM ‘87, to be held in Sao Paulo, Brazil. With a strong response from those willing to go, **the immediate next step—training**—becomes apparent. I recall clearly the Saturday morning that with Federico, we convened and addressed in Buenos Aires a representative group of women and men from the best known theological training institutions. At that point, there were no courses offered in the area of missions. We let them know that the “wave” was coming and that the schools that offered missions would



capture the new students. Within a year, almost every school had instituted some kind of missions program. (One even put together a marvelous M.A. program which was clearly premature since it garnered no students.)

The COMIBAM Congress in 1987 marked the coming of age of the continental movement with the declaration that Latin America was shifting from being a missionary receiving continent to a missionary sending continent. Many leaders who attended that congress were marked by it for life. It changed hearts and generated a wave of missions mobilization. Significant mobilization events were held in places like Mar de Plata (over 2,000 participants), and other major cities around Argentina. Conferences and congresses were clearly the hallmark of this the mobilization phase.

With all this activity, isolated instances of people actually being sent as missionaries began to be registered. But adequate missions structures weren’t really in place. Many churches attempted to be the sending agency. Some succeeded in sending them off, but most failed to either equip their missionaries for the challenges of cross-cultural ministry, or to provide them with constant financial support once on the field. Many missionaries returned disheartened.

To begin to fill the need for more stable **sending and supporting structures**, some existing missions agencies came into play. Some were international agencies with an Argentine base, such as YWAM, which quickly filled the void for those wanting a short term experience. YWAM organized short trips for pastors as well, thus greatly increasing the understanding and commitment of church leadership. PMI, a Latin American missions agency founded by Mexican missions pioneer, Pablo Carrillo, became a vehicle of choice for many Latin Americans going to North Africa. Some denominations also took an interest in raising up missions sending structures with varying levels of effectiveness. Perhaps the most successful was the Union of the Assemblies of God (UAD) that today reports over 140 Argentine missionaries on foreign fields, supported entirely by Argentine churches. This third phase is thus marked by the development of stable sending and supporting structures.

The second continental missions congress, COMIBAM '97 was held in Acapulco, Mexico in November, 1997. As part of the ten-year evaluation effort, three kinds of institutions were recognized as essential to a viable national movement: Missionary Churches, Missionary Training centers and programs, and Mission Agencies. Perhaps these are the fruit of each stage of a movement. These stages are sequential, but once in place, all three kinds of structures are needed simultaneously. And underlying these three structures is the work of mission mobilization, which is never done! It is also useful to remember that the ultimate measure of the movement is the number of effective missionaries serving on fields around the globe. Perhaps that is why COMIBAM in its recent assembly in Bogota, Colombia, added a field workers network. This network and the nurturing of the movement by returning veterans represents, perhaps, the last but greatest phase of a national missions movement ●

GLOBAL DIALOGUE, Responses from leaders of mission movements:

How have you had to change in recent years to be more effective, and what changes are on the horizon? (With the two movements in the USA, many people around the world wonder why there are two, and what the future might bring to both of them).

Marv Newell, CrossGlobal Link, USA

We changed our name two years ago to reflect our new direction. We are no longer an association solely of mission agencies, but are open to ... missions, schools and churches, reflecting the reality of who is participating directly in missions today. We have close collaboration with The Mission Exchange and continue in dialogue as to how to continue to do so

Silas Tostes, Antioch Mission, Brazil

We have just one mission association in Brazil, which is strong. Right now, our experience is of unity, as we challenge, train and send missionaries. There is also the Mission Teachers Association, but this one is well linked to AMTB.

Decio de Carvalho, COMIBAM, Latin America

We have approved changes to our structure and strategy. We have simplified our internal structure, while new focus areas are being developed to meet the needs.

