

CMS was founded in 1799 by Anglicans who recognised the energising effect the London Missionary Society was having on Baptist and independent churches. They wanted the same for the Church of England. A mere 52 years later, Charles Perry declared in Melbourne that: 'The means best calculated for increasing the health of the local church is a vital commitment to world mission'.

Here are some statistics from CMS Victoria: we have contact with 600+ churches; 117 have link missionaries and contribute financially to our work (down from 154 last year). We have 7000+ household or personal contacts; 2919 households give to our work. Ten years ago, 70% of our financial support came from churches, 30% from households; today those percentages are reversed. The connection and commitment of local churches to global mission is weakening.

1. The local church is the basic unit of organisation of the people of God

The church is the fullness of Christ, and the visible evidence of Christ's power and authority over everything (Eph 1:22-23). The church is the means by which God makes known his wisdom and proclaims his glory to the world. (Eph 3:10, 21). The power of the gospel to unite Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female meant that NT believers were therefore called to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the one church in their respective cities (Eph 4:3-6).

Church history has developed such that we now have multiple local churches in the one city. Each is still the fundamental unit of organisation of the people of God. Each still bears the burden of loving unity with each other while pursuing the fullness and power of Christ in itself.

2. Global mission is the responsibility of the local church

God's promise is that the church would receive gifts in people – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers – so that the whole body might be equipped for works of service and brought to full maturity in Christ (Eph 4: 7-16). These works of service to God include the church's participation in the *missio Dei*: that all the peoples and nations of the world might hear the gospel and be gathered in to worship the Lamb around God's throne of grace (Rev 7:9-10).

Put another way, God's plan that the nations hear the good news of Christ, is instrumentalised through the church. Eugene Stock, in his *History of the Church Missionary Society*, was first to use the phrase 'The Great Commission/s'. He observed the four distinctive verbs of the Great Commissions of the Gospels: make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20); preach to the world (Mk 1:4, 14-15; 16:15,20); bear witness to all peoples (Lk 1:2, 24:48; Acts 1:8); send into the world (Jn 17:18, 20:21). The followers of Jesus, organised into churches, have the responsibility of responding in faith.

3. Local churches can choose to cooperate and organise for scale and expertise

The entire history of global or cross-cultural or non-local missions is one of inter-church cooperation. Paul and Barnabas and the first missionary team in the NT may have been commissioned and sent from Antioch (Acts 13) but they were funded and supported from across the network of believers who were associated with them.

Missionary societies emerged in response to the call to missions in contexts outside the immediate expertise and knowledge of local churches. It made sense for key enthusiasts to pool their resources and expertise together to focus on their chosen target context. The China Inland Mission (today OMF) and Sudan Inland Mission (today Serving In Mission) are good historic examples of this.

Local churches today are not large enough and have insufficient expertise to go it alone in global mission. Even the largest of our Victorian mega-churches lack the specialist skills, historical reflection and sustained theological praxis of our missionary societies. Churches therefore can choose – even if they do this reflexively rather than deliberately – to cooperate and organise around a chosen missionary society to take advantage of its embedded expertise and scale.

I often say that CMS has been around since 1799, and all this means is that we've made every missionary mistake in the book. If we've learnt from half of them, it still puts us miles ahead of those putting their hands to work in global mission more recently. We know where many of the pitfalls are and what best practice might be.

4. A key risk is that churches abrogate their responsibility for global mission

The pressure on local churches in our context is enormous. Adherence to Christian faith is declining across the Minority World, past abuses haunt our present reputation, secularism and expressive individualism are our local gods. Churches are having to work hard to make disciples, preach, witness, and send just in their own postcodes. The main focus of most churches' energies and programmes and resources is firmly local.

A key risk is that, under this sort of pressure, churches abrogate their primary responsibility for global missions to the experts in the missionary society or agency: 'We'll pay and pray, and you guys get on with it', is the unspoken perspective. This is effectively outsourcing our responsibility to our Great Commission from God.

The senior minister's or vicar's enthusiasm and personal commitment to global mission is critical to how a church as a whole relates. Even in the best of our CMS link churches, where the vicar is publicly and demonstrably committed, the pattern we see is that connection to global mission and missionaries is located only in a small handful of church members. Most of the energy and passion for ministry is focussed more locally.

5. Is God's heart, your church's heart?

It is striking that Jonah son of Amittai served during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25) one of the kings who did evil in the sight of the Lord. There were plenty of unregenerate, unfaithful Israelites for the prophet to preach to, disciple, witness to, be sent to – but God sent him to the enemy Assyrians in Nineveh. The cliffhanger ending of the book of Jonah asks, 'Should our hearts not also have care and concern for the Assyrians of Nineveh, our mortal enemies, those furthest away from God, just as God's heart cares for them?'

'God's will is that none should perish, but that all should come to eternal life' (2 Pet 3:9). 'All' has a global perspective, for all the nations and peoples of the world are the objects of God's fatherly affection and longing. 'All' is as universal as 'every knee will bow and every tongue confess' (Phil 2), and all the kings and rulers of the earth (Ps 2).

Is God's longing, our longing, the longing of our local church? Or are we guilty of a more myopic view of who God loves?

6. Re-imagining the local church and global mission

Our heart's longing is of course, expressed in our liturgy, our hymnology, our prayers, our preaching and teaching; our stewardship of resources, our encouragement of others into ministry, our care and concern for those in missionary service. Let us imagine our local churches...

- fully committed to discharging their fundamental responsibility to take the gospel to the nations
- regular in weekly praying for global missions in public worship and in private prayer
- regular and excellent in weekly communicating news and prayer needs from missionaries and about as yet unreached and gospel-poor peoples of the world
- singing songs that express God's heart for all and our desire for the nations to come to know Christ
- setting apart an annual month for a preaching and teaching focus on global mission and giving missionaries the space and time to participate
- deliberately generous in giving financially from the church budget to global mission, and with the senior minister/ vicar leading the way in encouraging each household's private generosity as well
- enthusiastic about encouraging attendance at missionary events and gatherings, to be stimulated and instructed by news and reflection on what the Lord is doing across cultures and places
- informed and growing in its capacity for local cross-cultural ministry because of its active, ongoing engagement with the work of global mission
- eager and effective in encouraging members forward into missionary service
- filled with prayerful, generous, committed disciples, full of the passion of God's heart for all the peoples of the world, forming here even now worshipping communities made up of every tribe and tongue and people and nation

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