

BACK TO MISSION: A POSSIBILITY CENTER APPROACH TO REVITALIZING AFRICAN-AMERICAN SENDING

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Introduction

The Black Church is a unique phenomenon in the universal church because of its origin. It evolved among African slaves in search of a collective identity in the midst of slavery. Though the slaves and recently freed African Americans, due to necessity, and later African Americans due to tradition, created a form of Christianity with a “distinctive style, sensibility, and theology,” the Black Church was and is “decidedly Christian, and Christocentric.”¹ Nonetheless, the Black Church, similar to the overall universal church, is not engaged, on a large scale, in global missions despite Scripture requiring Christians’ involvement in making disciples. Though there is not a non-ending supply of missionary candidates from any ethnic group, there is an obvious disparity between the number of African American missionaries and Caucasian missionaries involved in global missions.

After involvement in mission efforts, beginning research and study of missiology, and attending missionary forums, the question that repeatedly arose in my mind was where are the African American missionaries?

Research revealed there are many African American missionaries serving who are not accounted for in sending agency statistics, but the overall number of African Americans participating long-term (1 year or more) are few. Responses from sending agencies and current and past African American, African and Caucasian missionaries led to the conclusion that there continues to be a dismally low number of African American missionaries involved in global missions. According to figures in 1999, of the over 30,000 North American missionaries serving around the world, only 200 were African Americans.² These numbers do not account for African Americans who go independently or are sent by local churches. Nonetheless, even estimating an equal number or even double the number of African Americans went independently as the number that were sent via agencies, there would be a total of 400-600 African American missionaries compared to 30,000 total missionaries from North America in 1999. “If 500 exist, and if there are about 43,000 Protestant missionaries serving from the US, this represents one percent of the missionary force while blacks comprise 13 percent of the US population.”³

The underlying problem is the failure to carry out the biblical mandate of sharing the gospel to the ends of the earth as the body of Christ. The method or process of sending and the methods used while sent have not focused on unity and partnership among the body of Christ. If we are indifferent about diversity and embracing other cultures within our own mission structures, will we truly embrace other cultures thousands of miles away?⁴ This paper is intended to focus attention on the underlying problem and to assist in the efforts of African Americans, churches, sending agencies and others to address the challenging question of what methods can be used to increase involvement of African Americans in global missions.

The low number of African American missionaries involved in global missions today can largely be explained by reviewing the history of African Americans in missions, the relationship between sending agencies and African Americans, and the perceptions of the Black Church. Determining what is being done and can be done to increase the number of African Americans in global missions is a much more difficult query to answer. Lack of statistical data and research, reluctance to acknowledge there is a problem, and tendency to assert blame on either African Americans for their disobedience to God’s command to go to the remote parts of the world or Caucasian agencies for their lack of commitment to address the issue, contribute to the difficulty.

To address the issue, within the scope of requirements for conference presentation, the paper will address methods of getting African American believers to the mission field and for utilizing African Americans here and abroad as part of the united universal church’s global mission of reaching the lost. After a review of historical data concerning African American involvement in global missions and the current status of the issue, the paper will briefly review the theological basis for partnership and unity in church sending. From that foundational focus, the paper will take a cursory look at the methods used by four organizations attempting to revitalize African American sending. Finally, the paper will suggest the use of a possibility center approach, which uses key principles from early church sending and current revitalization efforts, as a method to revitalize African American church sending.

How Did We Get Here?

During the early years of the evangelistic movement, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, British missionary focus was on three things: “civilizing” the barbarians to adopt the values of European or Western civilization; “Christianizing” or fulfilling the moral duty of helping the people of Africa become Christians; and the unspoken goal of economic exploitation. Many Caucasian missionaries, whose focus and programs evolved from the British missionary movement, believed it was their responsibility to give Africans the Christian message they were spiritually equal. Nonetheless, though Africans could receive the spiritual blessings of Christianity, they could never attain the standards of Western civilization—so went the common missionary thought process.⁵

Congregationalist, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, and Presbyterians sent missionaries in the nineteenth century and most raised funds by portraying Africans as uncivilized, immoral, ignorant, unclothed, and diseased.⁶ Nonetheless, some of the earliest American missionaries were African Americans.⁷ When Caucasian leadership in mission sending societies refused to use African American Christians as missionaries after reconstruction because of fear of negative responses by colonial governments to freed African Americans and fear of race mixing among missionaries, African Americans started their own sending societies.⁸ African Americans who felt called to serve in the mission field were sent by African American denominations or went independently when they did not meet denominational requirements.⁹ African Americans also focused mission efforts in areas where there was not a lot of activity. During the time Caucasian churches and organizations focused on Africa, Black churches worked in the West Indies and Canada. Many went to Haiti to search for freedom and shared the gospel as they went.¹⁰

Prior to the end of the twentieth century, a lot of the mission boards sent African Americans to Liberia and other places in Africa because they looked like those being evangelized and many thought African Americans could withstand diseases and the hot climate better than Caucasian missionaries.¹¹ After 1900, Caucasian mission boards, with Jim Crow laws being the law of the land and concern about Marcus Garvey’s popularity (“Africa for Africans”) influencing African Americans to teach Africans about freedom, changed from desiring African Americans to go to Africa to refusing to send African Americans as missionaries.¹² In addition to the changes in Caucasian sending agencies attitude towards African American missionaries, African colonial governments began refusing or discouraging the use of African American missionaries. The only countries where African Americans were allowed to continue organized missionary efforts were Liberia and Sierra Leone.¹³ As late as the mid-20th century, several prominent Caucasian Bible colleges and seminaries refused to admit qualified African Americans and evangelical mission boards including Southern Baptist refused to accept qualified African American candidates for missions.¹⁴

Sending from the 1960s to 2000 remained the same. Nonetheless, African Americans continued to go to Kenya, Uganda, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Liberia, Nova Scotia, southwest India and other countries.¹⁵ In 1983, thirty-three evangelical mission boards “expressed willingness” to accept African Americans; but, as late as 2003 there numbers had not increased. Moreover, as of 2003, the largest African American denominational organization, the National Baptist Convention, USA, only had about 20 missionaries.¹⁶

Nonetheless, the future looks brighter. African Americans have made substantial strides towards increasing awareness about global missions. With courses such as Perspectives, a 15-week course to encourage participation in missions, the paradigm is slowly shifting. There are about 125 African American mobilizers--some work for Caucasian sending agencies, but many work for African American agencies, churches, or independently. Though there are less than 300 African American serving two years or longer (according to sending agency records), there have been 40-50,000 African Americans who have gone on short-term missions. From Lausanne in 1974 to Cape Town in 2010, Caucasian evangelical organizations, African American organizations, and missionaries of all races have discussed African American participation in global missions developing strategies to increase participation.¹⁷ Before a viable solution can be reached, however, the source of the problem must be explored.

There are and have been many hindrances to African American participation in missions which have been generally described in terms of past and present hindrances. In the past, the main hindrances were slavery and subsequent Jim Crowism.¹⁸ In the present, residue from the realities of the past along with economic and worldview hindrances cause many African Americans and the Black churches they attend decide not to participate or to limit participation in global missions.

What is referred to as the “mixed agenda” was a hindrance in the past and has residual effects on African American sending today. Historically, mission societies had a “mixed agenda.” Many wanted to help convince the local nationals to accept conquest using biblical stories to tie salvation with a focus on better things in the world to come and divert local national’s focus from how they lived and were treated in this world. The “mixed agenda” also was geared towards dealing with recently freed slaves. Black churches in the mid-19th century wanted Africans and others to become Christians, but restricted attempts by Caucasian organizations to participate because many mission societies were really “colonization enterprises.” The main intent of some mission agencies, such as the American Colonization Society (ACS), was to make Liberia a colony of the United States. Others wanted to get rid of freed slaves who would give slaves the idea that freedom was possible and who had the “effrontery to expect to be treated as equals in society.”¹⁹ Many African Americans wanted no part in or association with mission agencies because of the methods used to carry out this “mixed agenda.” The colonization efforts of the ACS and similar organizations certainly had a component of missionary goals, but the overarching plan regarding African Americans outweighed that purpose. In fact, even though many African Americans were sent to Africa during the early 1800s, Africa was not declared a distinct mission field until 1856.²⁰ In response to the methods used, African Americans who were financially able sent their own missionaries or sent financial support to missionaries. The historical “mixed agenda” resonates with many African Americans today, less than 200 years later, and serves as a stumbling block for many African Americans to even consider participating with a Caucasian sending agency or otherwise participating in sending.

Another hindrance to African American participation in global missions was the treatment of local nationals. Beginning with the signs of the end of legal slavery in the United States, some missionaries went to Africa and other places to acquire servants and live a good life using Christianity for their gain.²¹ This sad but true fact occurred more than anyone would care to admit. Even today, some returning missionaries give the perception that rather than a focus on serving the local nationals, their focus was on sharing the gospel and using local nationals to make missionaries’ lives more comfortable in the process.²² From the author’s limited research, this attitude of obtaining service rather than providing service on the part of missionaries is rare today and may have been the attitude of only a small number in the 19th and 20th centuries. Nonetheless, the impact of this negative attitude, about which stories continue to be told, is still evident.

Lack of trust of Caucasian’s motives also leads to a lack of participation by African Americans. Some African Americans question how Caucasians can truly mean Africans or other local nationals any good given the way they treated and/or treat African Americans.²³ The written rules and societal practice of non-acceptance of African Americans-- many Caucasians do not want to worship with or share the gospel with those of African descent that live on the other side of town from them--led to distrust. Caucasians, from the view of those who distrust, went to the ends of the world as commanded but bypassed Jerusalem which was only a few miles away. The advocates of this argument dispute there is a problem with African Americans’ willingness to serve. African Americans were not invited for many years, so African Americans supported by making financial contributions and starting their own agencies. Now many have the attitude that they do not need Caucasian agencies.²⁴

Moreover, advocates of this viewpoint contend many that do want to share the gospel with those of African descent here and abroad have no interest in discipling the new converts which would require an investment in relationship. This phenomenon is not limited to Africa or only geared towards people of African descent. The same problem, lack of desire to build relationship and be incarnational, is evident in mission fields such as Turkey.²⁵ Missionary methods that focus solely on telling the gospel story rather than living out the gospel story lead to this perception. Lack of involvement in the lives of new converts may not be necessarily tied to a racial issue; nonetheless, the perception that Caucasians lack true commitment to serve those of African descent is a stumbling block for African Americans considering participation in missions.

Racism and limited resources were the catalyst for many churches to turn their focus inward. With Jim Crowism, the Black Church was the only place where many African Americans felt true freedom. Terror from the Klu Klux Klan and others caused African Americans’ mission to be survival rather helping others around the world. There were very few Black churches that were “open to missionaries being involved in evangelism and discipleship.” Most that are engaged have “home missions” to evangelize and do outreach in their local area.²⁶ Black churches do not focus on global missions because of the feeling of not having enough. Feelings of not having enough are rampant in the African-American community. Many African Americans want to see that their churches are “doing well” meaning outward signs of prosperity rather than focus on how many souls they have

helped lead to Christ.²⁷ With the perceived need for the outward show and the local needs, many pastors do not feel there is enough money or resources to give to overseas missions. With all the race issues and problems that exist in the United States, churches do not want to turn their focus outside.²⁸

Also with the civil rights movement came the shift from the fringes of society to the possibility of the American Dream, a possibility hard for some to forego.²⁹ Many African Americans feel since they had to work harder than most to get the little that they have and their ancestors gave their lives for African Americans to have more, it would be ridiculous to give it all away to go and serve somewhere else.³⁰

Liberalism is viewed as a hindrance to African American participation in missions. Liberalism and the resulting prosperity gospel pervade many churches today. A 1997 random survey of 400 pastors of predominately African American congregations indicated 40 percent of the pastors said their churches are theologically liberal. Whether the definition of “theologically liberal” was agreed upon by the pastors and those asking the questions is an unanswered question. Nonetheless, it is opined that evangelicals’ refusal to accept African Americans in their schools and worship in the first half of the 20th century created an opening for those who accepted African Americans and spread liberalism and prosperity gospel.³¹

A final barrier to African American sending is lack of awareness and a lack of initiative to address the issue. If African Americans do not see missions as a possibility through information about serving as missionaries, are not engaged by people who are truly interested in seeing diversity rather than fulfilling a politically correct requirement of having a diversity program, and do not see someone that looks like them engaged in mission work, the low numbers will not change.

Despite all of the hindrances, the current impediments are based on perceptions that can be changed. African Americans are culpable at least for the last 20 years [now 30 years] when many hindrances were removed. African Americans, as other members of the universal body, are without excuse for not obeying the “Great Commission.”³² The biblical foundations for participation in missions should form the core of methods used to change the perceptions that hinder African American sending.

A Theological Basis for Partnership in Mission

The solution to the low number of African American missionaries involved in global missions is for everyone to accept and embrace each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Ephesians 2:19 is not a reality, yet. All members in the family should go together.³³ Missionaries in the classic sense are agents of the church universal whose responsibility to go and make disciples is the same as those members of the church universal whose going is limited to closer geographic locations. Local churches as part of the church universal are partners, which entails much more than sending (approval of the journey, prayer and perhaps some limited financial support) and receiving an annual report or the receipt of missionaries and support by indigenous churches.³⁴ “Partnership in mission is not merely a question of practical convenience but the necessary consequence of God’s purpose for the church and for the whole of humanity...Because there is *one world, one church and one gospel*, the Christian mission cannot be anything other than mission in partnership.”³⁵ Only a unified church, “in which the mission of Jesus Christ is placed ahead of denominational wranglings, [as well labels and actions that separate and make adversaries among churches, mission agencies and parachurch organizations] will be adequately prepared” to carry out the mission of God in a biblically consistent manner.³⁶

Just as Tenney declares “lack of unity in the Church is one of the reasons why revival tarries in the United States” and “calls for unity in the Body of Christ” to bring about long awaited spiritual results in the United States,³⁷ this chapter posits that unity among the members of the universal body will bring about long awaited spiritual results in global missions. This portion of the paper will explore the biblical basis for this partnership, how it was evidenced in the early church and how the church is participating in biblical missional partnership today.

The Requirement for Unity in the Body of Christ

A study of the unity of the church, as completed by Padilla, which includes an analysis of oneness as an expression God’s desire “to unite all things in Jesus Christ,” and a survey of how this has occurred in the early church, proves helpful in developing a strategy for partnership in mission that is biblically consistent.³⁸ From the oneness of Israel (twelve tribes that did not always see eye-to-eye) united by one covenant to the one church (from various tribes, nations and language) united by Christ, the principle of unity is a characteristic of God’s

people. The people of God are “inherently one.”³⁹ “The one church of Jesus Christ [the universal church], ministering out its spiritual unity in Christ and rooted in core orthodoxy, can best serve Christ’s mission.”⁴⁰

Similar to the partnership among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit which can be seen as “supernatural unity,” no one should be able to see divisions among the body.⁴¹ Jesus offers believers spiritual partnership in the Kingdom of God with authority to bind and loose. Matt 16:19. Fellowship (*koinonia*) conveys partnership and communion. Just as we are to partner with Jesus, we are to fellowship or partner with other believers. 1 John 1:3 All parts of the body of Christ should be using their particular talents and fruits towards the same goal partnering together through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ teachings regarding oneness and unity in Himself is evident throughout the New Testament. The Ephesian church was told that the unity in the church is God’s eternal purpose. The universal church is to move towards harmony or partnership in which “all the parts shall find their center and bond of union in Christ.” In the universal church, a community of believers, “reconciliation to God and to one another is possible on the basis of Christ’s work.”⁴² In the early church *kerygma* referred to formal preaching and proclamation of *the gospel* through exhortation of and living a godly life and carrying the gospel to others—far and near.⁴³ Interestingly, this move towards partnership is not something that occurs as the church is perfected or matures. It is not the result of the gospel, but is said to be *the gospel*.

The church is a royal priesthood in which all members are equal members of the community, and therefore, all parts are to work together in partnership towards the goals of the community. The “new humanity” created in Jesus requires that the body of Christ exemplify partnership consistent with God’s intention to restore the unity of the human race. The oneness in Jesus that forms the basis of partnership among members of the universal body was summarized in one line in the 1950s: “The unifier is Jesus Christ and unifying principle is the Gospel.”⁴⁴

The point of unity which results naturally in partnership is “*for the sake of mission*.” Jesus’ declaration recorded in John 17:20-21 is the central theological framework for partnership in mission.⁴⁵ Described as Jesus’ unanswered prayer, Jesus prayed in His last recorded prayer before the cross *that they may be one*. Disunity and the resulting lack of partnership hinder the credibility of the body of believers and tarnishes God’s reputation. The refusal of members of the body to act in unity is often based on a desire for self-preservation and self-promotion.⁴⁶ An emphasis on self and individual well-being, whether by the individual believer or the individual local body, mission agency, or parachurch, is counter to clear biblical guidance concerning the interconnection of all members of the universal body of Christ.

Examples of Early Church Partnerships

The early church put unity and partnership into practice. The early church was focused on the spread of the gospel rather than on who was spreading the gospel evidencing a sense of partnership in the overall mission of the church universal. Paul mentioned working near and in areas where other apostles were working (1 Corin 15:7; 9:5; 12:28). He encouraged them to speak boldly for the Lord (Phil 1:14-18). Rather than concentrating on the sending agent, Paul seemed to focus on the unified purpose of the spread of the gospel in a certain area as a team effort by Christ-followers.⁴⁷

When Paul spoke of the Corinthian church partnering with those missionaries who were spreading the gospel in “parts beyond” the Corinthian church, he tied the work of the missionaries “to the practical fellowship of that church.” When their partnership with Christ became stronger, he “would be set free for work in the regions beyond” and the church would partner with him in those efforts.⁴⁸ This process of creating a firm doctrinal foundation within the church (inward focus) and manifesting an outward focus insured a connection between the local body and the missionary, and more importantly, a connection between the local body and the mission.

In Acts 8, we learn of a partnership between the evangelist Philip who was working in Samaria and Peter and John who were sent there by the Jerusalem church. They used their gifts and talents to help the Samaritan church grow. Rather than a paternalistic mindset, Peter and John went to Samaria to “join in the work being done.”⁴⁹

Similarly, after hearing of the evangelistic effort to the Gentiles in Antioch, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas. They chose an “encourager” who was prepared to handle the then uncommon work of intercultural evangelizing. Barnabas was also a Cypriote Jew and thus was culturally sensitive. It is notable that Barnabas then took it upon himself to travel to Tarsus to get Paul to help him in mission. Also of interest is the fact that Paul and

Barnabas taught but did not take over and only stayed a year.⁵⁰ They fellowshiped and communed with the Antioch church and actually became “members.” The Antioch church became their “sending” church to which they returned after mission trips.

Apostles and laymen served wherever the need arose and were not tied to serve only in their local house church or within their regional church. All local churches gave financial resources and of their talents to other churches in the universal church. They viewed the mission of the universal church as a mission in which all members of the body participated.⁵¹

Case Studies

Among many that are addressing the issue of African American sending, I will note four organizations that are revitalizing African American sending using the principles gleaned from the early church models in which partnership and unity of the body of Christ are cornerstone.

Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA)

What occurred with C&MA, which was founded in the late 1800s, provides excellent information about what a committed team has done to address the issue. The C&MA see themselves as representing the mosaic God intended which is a “group of believers formed of every nation, language and socioeconomic class.” From 1890 when the first team of C&MA missionaries began serving in the Congo, Caucasian and African American missionaries served alongside each other. In fact, from 1890 to the early 1930s, there were at least 21 African Americans serving with the C&MA. Despite their great beginnings, the C&MA yielded to pressure and began hindering African-Americans service as missionaries. The C&MA does not track its international workers by ethnicity. Nonetheless, the numbers of African Americans serving with C&MA remain low in comparison to Caucasians, which number 809.

The C&MA’s intentional efforts to address the issue of their low number of African American missionaries have already proven fruitful. With initiatives such as Bridge Senegal in 2009 which included a reconciliation service that addressed the policies that were implemented to prevent service of African American missionaries and gave twenty African Americans an opportunity to experience what being a missionary is about through a short term mission trip, African-Americans and Caucasians began to work together again in the C&MA to share the gospel with the world.⁵²

Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM)

CRWM is an example of a church sponsored sending organization that is actively seeking to address the issue of African American’s involvement in global missions. Started in June 1888, the CRWM exists to glorify God by leading its members to “witness to the good news of God’s Kingdom and make disciples of all nations.” Of its global missionaries, they have one Kenyan but no African-American missionaries. They have a robust recruitment initiative that includes efforts at colleges, seminaries, teacher fairs, churches and conferences. Through those venues, they provide awareness through electronic and print brochures; seek minorities interested in missions; and offer internships and mentorships to help individuals discern their calling.

CRWM is intentionally engaging minority communities “by building relationships and identifying ways to grow an interest in missions in young adults.” An example of their initiatives is a mentoring/leadership program for young men of color which includes a short-term mission trip to West Africa. They have also contacted key Black Church leaders to learn from them and work with them to encourage participation in global missions. They also offer scholarships for mission training and development courses such as Perspectives. Looking at the structure of the organization for solutions, they hired a person of color for a key leadership position in their headquarters and have increased the number of minorities on their board of directors.

Though a small denomination, which is traditionally mono-ethnic (until recently mostly Dutch-American), with limited resources, they have intentionally addressed the issue partnering with other agencies to increase diversity in global missions. Reaching out to people outside the traditional CRC background and denomination, they have increased participation by people of color in home missions (missions in the US and Canada) and hope to see the same increases in global missions. They have gone beyond hiring a person of color to recruit persons of color. CRWM’s senior leadership is also intentional about active involvement in this area. CRWM has a deliberate broad scale effort to include African-Americans in the work of spreading the gospel.⁵³ Fundamental Baptist Fellowship Association (FBFA) and Association of Baptist for World Evangelism (ABWE)

Partnership between the FBFA and the ABWE began by development of personal relationships. Members of the FBFA had been historically denied when they requested to participate in missions with the ABWE. The FBFA and ABWE presidents built a partnership relationship. They met in 2006 to develop a partnership agreement which includes opportunities for ABWE missionaries to do their deputation at one of the 28 FBFA churches, ABWE's agreement to accept qualified missionary candidates from FBFA churches, FBFA members working at ABWE headquarters, and partnership initiatives in the field.

The organizations have developed a true partnership. ABWE members now attend black churches for worship without a specific program, conference or agenda. Members of both organizations are developing friendships and relationships that are crucial in working together as a team. The partnership is "based upon a foundation of repentance, trust, long-term friendship and respect for gifts and competency on both sides."⁵⁴

Revitalization Efforts of Diamond Hill Baptist Church

Diamond Hill Baptist Church started 140 years ago in Lynchburg, Virginia, and "provided not only spiritual sustenance" but social interaction as well. Dealing with the after-effects of slavery and subsequent Jim Crow laws, the church worked diligently to improve the lives of its members and members of the community at large. From 1958 to 1963, the church became a destination for civil rights activists and church members coordinated the participation of Virginia during the historic march on Washington. Diamond Hill was "where leaders strategized and activists planned campaigns to register and turn out voters, desegregate lunch counters and protest discriminatory hiring practices."⁵⁵ Reverend Haywood Robinson, the pastor of Diamond Hill for many years, was an advocate for what was called inter-church cooperation and founded the Lynchburg Community Action Group.⁵⁶ Lyn-CAG is a community outreach organization in which community partners work toward "the prevention, reduction or elimination of poverty and adverse situations" in people's lives. This outward focus of the church, through inter-church cooperation and Lyn-CAG was a continuation of the church's commitment to "go out" sharing the gifts they had in order to point people to Christ. Key to the success of their outreach efforts was the input and involvement of diverse community partners, a focus on the entire community (not just blacks in the community), and representation and participation by the citizens of the communities in the policy-making and management of the efforts. Because of the guiding principles, comprehensive services were provided that increased the citizen's ability to live better lives.⁵⁷

Though members of Diamond Hill remained active in community outreach, the focus of the church as a whole turned inward. The church continued to provide money to various community efforts but active involvement by a unified church body waned. Difficult financial times, moves by many in the congregation out of the downtown community and contentment with past achievements without focus on the future have been cited as reasons for this change from an outward focus to an inward focus. The church consists of about ninety percent "senior saints." The congregation that once boasted in the Lord of having over eight hundred members now has approximately two hundred fifty members. The inward focus has resulted in a diminishing visible presence in the community and a lack of perceived relevance to the community.

Reverend Warren Anderson, the current pastor, began efforts in 2011 to return the church to an outward focus. With renewed intentional activity towards reaching lost souls, a monthly community outreach was started. This community effort has blossomed from a program led by a church member and student volunteers from local colleges to a program adopted by the church at large. Community partners, other local churches and organizations participate in the endeavor with the goal of sharing the love of Christ and helping to transform the lives of people in the downtown community. The monthly outreach is only the beginning of the overall plan which includes a discipleship program, an educational improvement/after school tutoring initiative, boys to men/girls to women training, financial education/stewardship training, and health awareness initiatives.

To prepare for and revitalize a desire for outreach, Pastor Anderson renewed and expanded efforts towards church maturity. Similar to what was done by Paul in the early church (see early church discussion), Pastor Anderson recognized the importance of a solid, biblically sound local church to the success of any outreach/evangelism efforts. He views this as vital to the continued existence of the local church and as crucial to universal church mission of making disciples. He started a weekly mid-day prayer gathering which concentrates on praying for the lost. He reinvigorated the Wednesday night bible in which 50 to 60 members study foundation topics such as the importance of and the roles of Christ followers in their immediate families, their local church families, and the universal church and the importance of and the roles of Christ followers in evangelism. Emphasizing church unity and spiritual growth, the church has already seen fruit in increased attendance at prayer

gatherings, bible study and Sunday School. Moreover, more church members are participating in the monthly outreach efforts and are interested in interacting with the community.

The churches outward focus, though extending at times to other places in the United States, did not extend to a focus on global missions. Sporadically through the years and now on a more consistent basis, the church provides small amounts of money to missionaries involved in global missions. Nonetheless, an interest in global missions is beginning to emerge. The pastor has begun emphasizing the importance of the global church family and members who have gone on global mission trips are sharing about the importance of global missions to the universal church and why Diamond Hill, as part of the universal church, should be more involved.

Use of the possibility center model may prove beneficial in Diamond Hill's move towards more participation in the local community and, eventually lead to a desire for and action towards its and other organizations involvement in African American sending. The outward focus with emphasis on pointing souls towards Christ through efforts that involved sharing of the gifts and skill of the local body, unity with other churches, participation of other organizations in the community, as well as participation throughout the process by those being reached that was evident in all of the case studies is consistent with the key principles that form the foundation of the possibility center model.

The Possibility Center Model

An idea for possibility stations and "resource centers" was combined in the development of the possibility center model. The desire to create possibility stations was created during work while on a short-term mission trip to Burundi, in community outreach endeavors in various locations in the United States and Turkey, and while deployed to Iraq. Possibility stations were to be centers that would work in partnership with churches, agencies, businesses and local government to help people remove hindrances to creating lives of significance lives. Of course, central to living a significant life is a relationship with the Creator of life. The lessons learned regarding building capacity and sharing the gospel during those endeavors, including those gleaned in Iraq discussed below, developed into the concept for possibility stations.

Ideas regarding capacity building and partnership and how they could be used in missions were recognized while serving in Iraq. As part of the military's work in Iraq, an organization was created to help build, and in some areas rebuild, the capacity of the Iraqi people to govern themselves. This Law and Order Task Force, consisting of men and women from various nations and backgrounds, including Iraqis, had as its goal to help Iraqis in this endeavor, not to do it for the Iraqis (leaving them incapable of sustaining the improvements) and not to do it the "Western way" (imposing Western processes, ways of thinking and interpretations which the Iraqis would soon abandon, if they tried them at all).⁵⁸ The lessons learned in that endeavor create a framework for my views towards accomplishing the overall mission of the Church.

The purpose of the church can be viewed as a means to build or rebuild people's capacity to worship. Proclaiming the message provides the open door for God to do his work of salvation, creating the capacity to worship. Making disciples, which includes helping people eliminate hindrances to worship, provides a means or know how for people to sustain worship. Contextualization and participation by the people group or audience being reached provides a way for all to understand the message and incorporate the message into their lives which results in worship. Partnership among all the various parts of the body of Christ, which evidences the unity for which Christ prayed, is crucial in the process of sharing Christ with the world. It is within this context, that the possibility center model is being created, as a way to revitalize African American sending and build the capacity of African Americans and the universal church as a whole towards sharing the gospel with the world.

The possibility station idea was merged with a proposal for a missionary method created by members of the mission sending agency Christar. Their "resource center" proposal is an idea for a creative platform for entry into countries to reach unreached people groups throughout the world. The resource center proposal, which focuses on urban areas as the target field, along with the foundation for the possibility station idea form the basis of the capacity building process via possibility centers strategy.⁵⁹

The possibility center model engages the "urban challenge." The cities are indeed the new mission frontier. Rural constituents are moving to the cities. Cities are beginning to swell as villagers, refugees, and immigrants move there for security and economic opportunities. Focusing on major urban centers provide opportunities "to return to incarnation as the primary missionary role model." Effective outreach must address the

urgent and critical needs of urban dwellers in areas such as education, housing, medical care, and job skills as well as their ultimate needs of repentance, conversion and reconciliation with God.⁶⁰

The Christar members that committed the resource center idea to writing described what a possibility center might look like.

Imagine a busy three-story office building in a popular section of town. The ground floor that opens to the street houses a chic coffee shop where young people catch up on the latest gossip. Floors one and two host classrooms, practice rooms and a sound studio. The third floor contains offices that manage the other floors. A steady stream of people comes to take music or language lessons, hear lectures, and participate in book clubs, join workout sessions and a host of other activities. Some ask to meet separately to probe deeper questions about how faith integrates into the rest of life.

Many communities around the world have little access to the knowledge and abilities that enable them to engage in a globalized world. This lack of resources appears to be more pronounced among least-reached peoples. A possibility center is a place where people can come to develop life skills at affordable costs in a caring environment. The goal would be to provide high quality services but also to develop discipleship relationships that grow into reproducing fellowships of believers.⁶¹

The possibility center strategy is based on comprehensive or holistic ministry. Referencing Matthew 28:18-20, Mark Russell clarifies that the church's mission is twofold: to proclaim the gospel to the world and make disciples participating in the transformation of lives. The two requirements cannot be accomplished absent fulfilling the "cultural commission" of Genesis 1:28 in which believers "live and work on this earth to God's glory." When the church is actively involved in all three, holistic ministry occurs.⁶² All three areas can be accomplished via the possibility center model and can be adapted to be a viable solution in many places around the world. Similar to what William Carey did in India, possibility centers will use every medium to reveal Christ touching all facets of life and addressing the "full range of God's concerns in missions."⁶³

The obstacles to an integrated holistic development approach which seeks "to transform people from what they are into what they are meant to be in Christ" can be overcome with the possibility center model. The possibility center model will create a network of possibility centers that are consistent with regard to the non-negotiables of sound doctrine and biblical principles while adapting to the unique cultural matrix of various urban centers around the world. Evangelism can be done by incarnational acts showing love through helping people transform or improve in the various areas of their life that hinder their capacity to worship. Verbal proclamation will occur through one on one encounters. Rather than a focus on secular economic development which encourages individualism or self-attainment, economic training for individuals and businesses can focus on economic development with a goal of making a positive difference in the world and improving the capacity of others. The possibility center model will include life training and coaching for all those serving from the capacity builders at the headquarters level to all those working in various possibility centers around the world to ensure all workers are living out transformation in their own lives. The final obstacle to integrated holistic development, the Church being a cultural foreigner in the community they are serving, will be overcome by the possibility center model in that each possibility center will be tailored to fit the cultural environment in which it is placed.⁶⁴

The first step in development of the possibility center model is forming a team. Utilizing the fourth option for development of a team discussed in *Introducing World Missions*, a team can be formed to serve as the catalyst for creation of possibility centers all over the world.⁶⁵ These capacity builders will create the structure of the organization necessary to enable possibility center teams all over the world to flourish. This band of multi-talented and multi-gifted workers with varying levels of field experience can work similar to the pioneer team in Zambia which used as its model the "Apostolic Band" of the first century.⁶⁶

As the capacity builder team is established, the team will begin to focus on researching and developing strategy for creation of possibility centers using a "process/broker approach."⁶⁷ The capacity builder team will begin to research "prototypes" that offer services in at least one of the life areas envisioned to be offered by possibility centers.⁶⁸ The research and strategy development will be an ongoing process that will require extensive time and creativity. Students can provide the needed manpower and obtain valuable research

experience. The possibility center development will engage church partners in the beginning stages who will form part of the team. In this role, a Black church can play an active role in global missions by praying for the endeavor, having members from the congregation learn about the people intended to be reached and participate in planning. As a “sending church” the role would continue in a sharing of resources. Youth and others in the church could go on short-term exploratory trips prior to the opening of the possibility center. Even churches that cannot make a significant financial contribution from their own coffers have access or can help with gaining access to churches, businesses and organization that do. Envisioned as part of this church sending role, churches will appoint a liaison who will actively participate in the possibility center creation and management on a regular basis. This liaison will engage members of the church in various aspects of the overall project. Ideally, each possibility center will have at least two sending churches along with other partner organizations that will work together as a body of Christ to create and maintain the possibility center.

The possibility centers, which will be run by a staff of various nationalities, will be a place of peace and refuge; an incubator where ideas for service and churches can be nurtured; a laboratory where short-term workers and student interns can contribute to an unreached people group and learn; and be an integrated partner in the community. The ultimate goal of the possibility center teams will be to develop the center into a self-sustaining local cultural entity which results in church plants by local nationals and transforms their society and the individuals in the community. This “essential missionary task” that some refer to as “missiological breakthrough” can be accomplished if the teams remember that possibility centers and resulting church plants do not belong to them and should be reflective of the culture where they are located. The reality is that the gospel often expands within a community rather than via outside efforts.⁶⁹

The possibility center in a given location should be a place where people can come to see what type of life is possible for them despite their current circumstances. With monthly cultural dinners, festivals and shows, marketable skills training, and health awareness events, the possibility center could serve as a catalyst for transforming lives. Already-established partnerships would be utilized and enhanced, if necessary. The approach will be for the team to assist the local government, local agencies, existing churches and the efforts of non-governmental agencies and mission agencies already engaged in a given community to collectively improve the lives of the local national community. The services offered will “incorporate life aspects such as family, neighborhoods, social networks, media and natural resources.” This will be a comprehensive approach which will saturate the community with gospel witness by offering “services in various segments which connect the community with believers who will help them function in a global environment but who will also share with them the true reason for life itself.”⁷⁰

Conclusion

Mission activists, pastors, and sending agencies, both African American and Caucasian, who are addressing the participation of African Americans in global missions and building bridges towards an inclusive family of believers working together to fulfill the great commission are emerging. There are many Black churches becoming more involved by sending members on short term missions which will hopefully inspire some to consider answering a call to long-term missions. They are also beginning to include global missions in or increase the portions of global missions in their budgets. The move of many churches towards an outward focus of reaching lost souls is also very encouraging. More Caucasian sending agencies are becoming intentional placing African Americans on headquarters staffs and developing focused recruiting efforts. With partnerships such as those case studies described and, perhaps, utilization of the possibility center concept, huge strides will be made towards revitalizing African American sending. As one long-term missionary so passionately described it, “God is raising up the whole church to reach the whole world.”⁷¹

¹D.R. Whitt, *With Righteousness in His Suitcase: Reflections on the Ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* 54 Villanova University Law Review 425 (2009).

² Michael Johnson, “Am I My Brother’s Keeper?: The Search for African-American Presence in Missions” in *African-American Experience In World Mission: A Call Beyond Community*, edited by Robert J. Walston and Robert J. Stevens (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2002), 12.

³ James W. Sutherland, “Time for African American Missionaries” in *EMQ*, October 2004, 500-501.

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- ⁴ Sutherland, 504.
- ⁵ Sylvia M. Jacobs, "The Historical Role of Afro-Americans in American Missionary Efforts" in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, edited by Sylvia M. Jacobs (West Port, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 6-7.
- ⁶ *Ibid*, 7.
- ⁷ Sutherland, 501; Johnson, 12; Jacobs, 8-9.
- ⁸ Johnson, 12.
- ⁹ Joseph C. Jeter, Sr., "Help Wanted: Missionaries for the Harvest" in *Evangelism and Discipleship in African-American Churches*. Lee N. June, editor and Matthew Parker consulting editor. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1999), 164-165; Jacobs, 9.
- ¹⁰ Milton C. Sernett, *Black Religion and American Evangelism: White Protestants, Plantation Missions, and the Flowering of Negro Christianity* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1975), 148.
- ¹¹ Seraile, 29.
- ¹² *Ibid*, 27-29.
- ¹³ *Ibid*, 28; Sutherland, 501-502.
- ¹⁴ Sutherland, 502
- ¹⁵ Jeter, 158, 162, 164-165.
- ¹⁶ Sutherland, 502-503.
- ¹⁷ Phone interview with African American missionary who has worked in the field and as a mobilizer for over thirty years. (February 24, 2011)
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁹ Johnson, 12-13.
- ²⁰ Sernett, 145-147.
- ²¹ Johnson, 12-13.
- ²² Information obtained from interviews with African American, African and Caucasian missionaries and is not attributed to one particular source.
- ²³ Johnson, 12-13.
- ²⁴ Information obtained from interviews with African American, African and Caucasian missionaries and is not attributed to one particular source.
- ²⁵ Susanne Geske, a missionary to Turkey, and many others said they have a lot of people who will come short-term or long-term and work to influence conversions, but will not live among the converts and share in their lives to help them and disciple them.
- ²⁶ Jeter, 157-159.
- ²⁷ Johnson, 17.
- ²⁸ Walston, 4.
- ²⁹ Phone interview with African American missionary who has worked in the field and as a mobilizer for over thirty years. (February 24, 2011)
- ³⁰ Johnson, 15.
- ³¹ Sutherland, 505.
- ³² *Ibid*, 504.
- ³³ Interview with Dr. Jones Kaleli, Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Graduate School. (February 24, 2011)
- ³⁴ C. Rene' Padilla, "The Fullness of Mission" in *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985), 133.
- ³⁵ Padilla, "The Fullness of Mission," 136.
- ³⁶ Craig L. Nesson, *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 144-145.
- ³⁷ Elmer L. Towns, Foreword to Tommy Tenney, *God's Dream Team: A Call to Unity* (Ventura, California: Regal, 1999), 15.
- ³⁸ C. Rene' Padilla, "The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle" in *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985), 142.
- ³⁹ John H. Armstrong, *Your Church is Too Small: Why Unity in Christ's Mission is Vital to the Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 63.
- ⁴⁰ Armstrong, 18.
- ⁴¹ Tommy Tenney, *God's Dream Team: A Call to Unity* (Ventura, California: Regal, 1999), 65.
- ⁴² Padilla, "The Unity of the Church," 143 (Padilla citing Eph 1:3-14; 2: 11-22).
- ⁴³ Nesson, 2-3.

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- ⁴⁴ Padilla, "The Unity of the Church," 144-146. [The kerygma of the church, Eph 2:8-9; 1 Pet 2:9; Col 3:11; Eph 1:10]
- ⁴⁵ Nesson, 141. John 17:20-21: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one."
- ⁴⁶ Tenney 30, 39-41.
- ⁴⁷ Marshall, I. Howard. "Who Were the Evangelists?" in Jostein Adna and Hans Kvalbein, ed. *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 259.
- ⁴⁸ W.E. Vine, *The Collected Writings of W.E. Vine* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996)--Chapter 17, Part III of online resource, Libronix, accessed January 12, 2012.
- ⁴⁹ Chad Owen Brand, "Toward a Theology of Cooperation" in R. Stanton Norman, ed., *The Mission of Today's Church: Baptist Leaders Look at Modern Faith Issues* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 166.
- ⁵⁰ Brand, 167.
- ⁵¹ Brand, 169-172.
- ⁵² Donna A. Baptiste, "A Mosaic Mended: Bridge Senegal '09," in *Alliance Life*, February 2010 (on line); e-mail responses from C&MA dated February 25, 2011, February 26, 2011, February 28, 2011, and March 1, 2011 to Information Request questions (see Appendix).
- ⁵³ E-mail response from CRWM dated February 25, 2011 in response to Information Request (See Appendix).
- ⁵⁴ "Reconciliation and Global Missions" from *Reconciliation Report* of Reconciliation Ministries Network, January/February 2008, issue 50—obtained from CRWM electronically.
- ⁵⁵ Diamond Hill Historical Society, Vol 33, No. 2, February 2011, *Diamond Hill News*, page 3.
- ⁵⁶ Darrell Laurant, "Diamond Hill Baptist joins National Historic Register" in *The New and Advance, News Local*, March 9, 2011.
- ⁵⁷ Lynchburg Community Action Group website (www.lyncag.org) and summary of interviews with Dee Fowler, board member of Lynchburg Community Action Group, March 19, 2012.
- ⁵⁸ The author was privileged to participate in the formation and early work of this organization while deployed in Iraq in 2007. The author's first-hand experience with this organization is the source of information regarding the Law and Order Task Force and the work performed.
- ⁵⁹ Don Eenigenburg, "Resource Center Proposal Q & A," unpublished white paper, August 18, 2011.
- ⁶⁰ Winter, 556, 559, 562.
- ⁶¹ Eenigenburg, 1.
- ⁶² Mark Russell, "Christian Mission Today: Are We on a Slippery Slope?: Christian Mission Is Holistic." *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 25:2 (2008), p. 1. (on line)
- ⁶³ Winter, 568-72.
- ⁶⁴ Winter, 693-696.
- ⁶⁵ Moreau, 194-195.
- ⁶⁶ Winter, 677.
- ⁶⁷ Winter, 696.
- ⁶⁸ Eenigenburg, 2-3.
- ⁶⁹ Moreau, 222 and Winter, 532.
- ⁷⁰ Eenigenburg, 3-4.
- ⁷¹ Phone interview with African American missionary who has worked in the field and as a mobilizer for over thirty years. (February 24, 2011)

Appendix

Thirty agencies were contacted for information. Fifteen were contacted via e-mail and were asked to respond to the questions contained in the e-mail (see below). Ten were contacted via e-mail and provided a link to a survey which the same questions, except for question "1" below, that could be answered anonymously. Five organizations were provided questions in the e-mail and provided a link to the survey. I received 11 responses to the questions (others did not have data or chose not to provide it).

Questions:

1. When was your organization started?
2. How many missionaries do you have in the field?
3. How many African American missionaries do you have in the field?
4. How many African Americans did you have in the field in 2000?

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5. Where (country) are African Americans serving?
 6. What do you do to recruit missionaries?
 7. What, in your opinion, are the top three reasons for the low number of African Americans serving in global missions?