

Breakout Session

Title: How Your Local Church Becomes Global...Literally!

Great Lakes Annual Conference

Global Methodist Church

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Spring Arbor University

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Presenter: Rev. Dr. Scott Field

Revsfield53@gmail.com

Welcome and getting situated

So, let's see who's here this afternoon:

We're at a Free Methodist University and I know we have a lot of former United Methodists and maybe some Evangelical United Brethren here.

How many of us are Global Methodists?

Well, we're all in the right room because that is our focus today: being Global Methodists. There's been a lot of attention given to Methodist as part of our denominational name: on doctrine, Scriptural authority, and on holiness as the signature emphasis of the Methodist movement across time.

I want to pick up another piece of our identity: GLOBAL.

Global Methodist Church not as part of a denominational name, but as an adjective, a descriptive modifier of the concern we have, the vision we share, and the geographical territory we claim in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Let's go on a bit

How many of us are:

Pastors

Lay members of Annual Conference

Visitors/observers

Disaffiliated congregation

Newly formed congregation

Church board members

Missions committee members

Fantastic!

I presume, because I expect that most all of us are Christ-followers and desire to live under the influence of the Holy Spirit that we also love the Holy Scriptures.

So, I'm going to remind you of a few passages of Scripture that are pertinent to our session this afternoon:

God's Initiative

Genesis 12:1-3

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. ³I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

The Capacity of God's Compassion

1 Timothy 2:4

This (praying for all people) is good and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. ⁵For,

There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. ⁶He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.

Our Partnership with God's Compassion

Matthew 4:18-20

¹⁸One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. ¹⁹Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" ²⁰And they left their nets at once and followed him.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Therefore, go and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Acts 1:8

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The Glorious Unexpected Conclusion

Revelation 7:9

After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands.

We already know all of this, right?

This is the latent DNA in every believer and in every community of believers. We know, by God’s grace, that we are sent together, under the influence of the Holy Spirit for the healing of the world in Jesus’ name: locally, regionally, globally.

It seems, however, that many, maybe most, of our local churches of all stripes and kinds have a hard time getting beyond our own front door.

And we know why, don’t we?

1. The Urgency Affliction: Can’t Do This Unless We Do That First
2. Organizational Inertia: System of Mutual Mistrust / Everyone has a veto
3. Confusing Inputs with Outcomes: “You Didn’t Do the Paperwork!”
4. Recovery from our disaffiliation trauma.

While the Great Lakes GMC Conference is still in the early stages of life, I want to commend to you **Six Specific, Actionable, Available, organic handles to become locally and globally influential in the Jesus Mission.** These are not checkboxes to achieve and then forget, but congregational habits to be cultivated as an ongoing part of the local church culture. So here we go:

1. Cultivating a Priority Passion

What is your desire for your local church right now?

(Place to call our own, a pastor, enough money to pay the bills, some way to attract youth, etc., etc., etc.)

These are, I would suggest, secondary concerns.

Priority passion, the irrepressible desire, is the drive that focuses the attention, motivates the serving, and elicits the generosity of a particular community of believers.

A persistent challenge for congregations is substituting secondary issues for priority passion.

The Parable of the Wild Goose in the Chicken Pen

Danish Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard used a parable of the wild goose in the chicken yard to point out the obvious: a chicken cannot behave like a wild goose. But a wild goose can become acculturated to behave like and think like a chicken. Even when that barnyard wild goose hears the honking of other wild geese flying overhead, it will at best beat its wings and momentarily, instinctively attempt to fly, it will, however, just as quickly return to pecking the ground for seeds and live within the confines of the chicken yard because that is what the goose has become accustomed to. (Available in original form in *Parables of Kierkegaard*, edited by Thomas Oden, Princeton University Press, 1978).

An organizational recommendation:

Cultivate a Great Commission Conscience Among Local Church Leaders

"Great Commission Conscience" Ratio-3:5.

At least three of every five elected officers (a voting majority) should have a "Great Commission conscience."

What is a "Great Commission conscience"?

It is an attitude which permeates the thinking and the decision-making process of a church. It is an attitude which sees people outside of Christ as lost. It is an attitude which causes rejoicing when new people join the church, especially if they are new converts. It is an attitude which prioritizes disciple making. It is an attitude which resonates with the Great Commission, found in its various forms, throughout Scripture. It is an attitude which sees missions as both "over there" and "right here." It is an attitude which motivates both corporate and personal action in prayer, giving, and service for Great Commission results.

How do you determine whether leaders in a congregation have a "Great Commission conscience"? You ask them!

Here are ten simple "Yes/No" questions which will give you a clue. (Seven affirmative answers are an indication of a reasonably strong "Great Commission conscience").

1. I see the primary purpose of our church as responding to the Great Commission. **Yes/No**
2. I have participated in an outreach training event in the last year. **Yes/No**
3. I have invited an unchurched friend or relative to a church event in the past six months. **Yes/No**
4. I would support a motion to designate at least 10 percent of our church budget to outreach events/training/activities. **Yes/No**
5. I would prefer the pastor call on non- members more often than members. **Yes/No**
6. I would be willing to take a new member or visitor home for dinner once every six months. **Yes/No**
7. I have intentionally introduced myself to a new member or visitor in the past month. **Yes/No**
8. I have talked with an unchurched person about my faith in the past three months. **Yes/No**
9. I have prayed for a specific unchurched person in the past month. **Yes/No**
10. I would be willing to be a pioneer in a new group or new church fellowship to help reach people. **Yes/No**

A *congregational* ratio for a "Great Commission conscience" should also be determined, and should be at least 1:5; which means at least one of every five members in a congregation must also have such an attitude. This 20 percent minimum reflects the research of social scientists studying innovation and diffusion, who have found that this is the critical number of members in any group which must endorse a new idea before the majority will accept it. The more members in a church with a "Great Commission conscience," the more likely that church will be open and receptive. Twenty percent of the membership can make a difference, but 100 percent is the ideal!

(Win Arn, "How to Use Ratios to Effect Church Growth", Chapter 8 in *Church Growth: State of the Art*, edited by C. Peter Wagner, Donald McGavran, and Win Arn. Tyndale Publishers, 1986)

2. Initiating influence

It only takes a spark, not a congregational vote, to ignite a priority passion. So, who or what will initiate the influence, the irritating rock in the shoe of the pastor, congregational leaders, and worship attenders that the Great Commission **IS** the priority mission of every local church everywhere? How can we leverage the priority mission into an abiding congregational passion?

Maybe it is or will be you and two or three others. Declare yourselves the Missions Planning Team. Offer to help the pastor prioritize the Jesus Mission. Use Acts 1:8 as your template for the church budget: Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth / local, regional, international.

The persistent drumbeat at this point is simply raising the opportunity of the local community of believers to personally, authentically, really carry forward the Jesus Mission. Jesus didn't die, Jesus was not raised from the dead, Jesus did not send the Holy Spirit so we could have ham and bean dinners and a congregational garage sale. This is about life and death, heaven and hell, life full and abundant or life just climbing ladders and chasing dollars. Why *wouldn't* we want to be personally and directly involved in what God is doing in our congregation, our community, and our world?

So...let's be like the Holy Spirit! Sneak up on unsuspecting people in your congregation.

- a) Put a piece in the church newsletter or bulletin or prayer concerns.
- b) Have a local mission leader come to preach. (Make sure they can preach, not just give an annual report on their activities). And be ready to step up at the end of the sermon to say something like: "We think this group would be a great partner for us to help meet the needs of those in the community, so we're planning to provide some of us to serve on a regular basis."
- c) Have 2-3 people go on an in-person mission trip internationally.
- c) invite an international mission leader to hang out with your church for several days: (mid-week dinner and presentation, men's and or women's Bible study, youth group, preach on Sunday).
- d) form a Missions Planning Team
- e) visit another church that has an awesome ministry of local and global missions.

3. Prayer Partners

Up to this point, you are simply gathering the kindling. If we haven't started already, then begin intentionally asking the Holy Spirit to bring the fire. If there is a prayer group or network in your congregation already, include prayers for a country or mission partner, or local ministry. Lift up the needs they serve, the leaders involved, and the impact they have. Include this in the congregational prayer list.

An outstanding, irreplaceable resource, is the www.operationworld.org website. They have free downloadable information slides that can be used in worship each week as a prayer focus. This is really a treasure trove of motivating information.

4. Direct Connections

Up to this point I've been talking about preparing the soil, getting things ready, gaining the attention of others. Here is where we go from the hypothetical to the imminently practical: direct missional connections locally, regionally, and globally. Acts 1:8, remember?

I want to be careful here about the *modus operandi* of a previous denominational home for many of us, but in so many ways we were enculturated into being benchwarmers, pew-sitters, committee members. There were precious few direct and personal opportunities for missional partnerships. We were expected to pay our apportionments and the experts would take care of the mission.

Glory to God! That is all changed now.

If we're going to be global methodists, then we will need to take the initiative to establish and the responsibility to cultivate direct, personal, authentic, two-way relationships with mission partners. Our hearts and prayers and impact will be tied together.

You may have direct connections already, but here are a few recommendations in considering potential mission partners.

1. Is sharing the gospel of the Lord Jesus a fundamental concern of this potential ministry partner? There are a multitude of not-for-profit organizations that do amazingly important and good things, but the one unique responsibility of the community of believers is introducing others to the gospel of Christ. In all of our partnerships we want to make sure that that the gospel is intentionally communicated.
2. Is this a strategic partnership for reaching the unreached people of the world?
3. Can we have a genuine bi-lateral, personal, relational investment with this potential partner?

4. Does our partnership make a difference for them and for us?

Where might you make some connections to consider?

1. The mission displays here at the Annual Conference. I do not personally know all of them, but I would suggest Global Hope Partners (focused in South Asia, particularly India) and Joy in the Harvest (focused in Tanzania and Zanzibar). Both are part of the Great Lakes Conference.

2. https://globalmethodist.world/approved_mission_partners

Check in with other churches in your community/region – or focus on priorities discerned by your Missions Planning Team

5. Generous Investment

Money is often a high hurdle for churches. It's frequently a place of anxiety. *So, I'd suggest disconnecting your mission partner financial investments from the regular operating budget of the local church.*

How come?

Three reasons come to mind immediately:

First, putting "mission partnerships" as a line item in the church budget makes it a program of the church, along with buying Sunday School curriculum and paying for the church utilities. "Missions is not a program of the church; the church is a program of God's Mission." Including a line item in a church budget means going through the competitive compromises of which program gets how much of the estimated income of the church. This relegates the local, regional, and global influence of your faith community to a program rather than a priority passion.

Second, the *Unstuck Group*, in their research on local churches, found that 52% of local church budgets go into staffing expenditures and another 17% go into buildings and facilities. That comes up to just about 70% of the budget without getting into the programming areas like supporting worship, youth, children, and outreach. So you can see that there is little room in a standard operating budget for robust local, regional, and global investment of time, money, and prayerful participation.

Third, related to the second, is that keeping the financial support of mission partnerships tied to the local church operating budget limits what you can do. As the Holy Spirit ignites the priority passion of reaching and serving others in the name of Jesus, people will want to do something major, significant, and high impact. Unbuckle it from the local church budget. Have a separate budget exclusively for the focus of the Mission Planning Team.

Here are some ways to begin separating mission partnerships from “just another line item in the church budget”. These all help build momentum and spread the virus of your priority passion.

Regularly volunteering at a local/regional mission partner. Build teams, get t-shirts, invite others to be part of it. Do something accessible, repeatable, and with modest investment.

A couple of examples from my experience:

Hesed House Transitional Living Center for the Homeless – cooking team, overnight team, breakfast team, child/family team on a monthly basis.

Feed My Starving Children: food packing on a monthly. This is a great activity to bring others along. Step it up by hosting a food packing Sunday and invite the community.

Set up volunteers to help with reading and math skills at a local elementary school.

Have a collection day to receive stuff one of your mission partners needs. For example: Help fill a shipping container or host the filling of a shipping container. *Joy in the Harvest* uses this as a way local congregations can partner with them.

Limited fundraising by members on their own turf.

Example: Luke’s Lemonade Stand for Hungry Kids

(Watch out for fundraiser creep: fundraising activities can become goals of their own and overshadow the larger purpose).

Set a major challenge goal for a special offering with 100% to be given away. Maybe at Christmas?

Short-term mission teams with partners: they will become co-conspirators in helping the church generously invest both people, prayer, and financial resources.

Highlight the impact of international investment:

Example: It would cost us > \$1 million to start a new congregation ins suburban Chicago.

We started several churches in India (land, building, clean water well, and health educator) for \$25K each.

Set a basic threshold investment for your mission partners. Be significant investors in a few partnerships rather than negligible investment in many mission partners.

If you want more on how to do this, check in with me later. It has to do with a pattern of praying called Faith-Promise Giving. But that is beyond the scope of this breakout session.

Joyful Celebration

Finally, you don't have to wait until everything is up and running along this track. Plan an annual party, a celebration, to highlight the small wins, incremental steps, and widening vision for your congregation. Maybe take a week, including two Sundays, in prime time of the year (not the summer slow season). Highlight your partner ministries. Celebrate the impact of the partnerships. Welcome leaders from these ministries to participate in worship and other meetings through the week.

Receive commitments to support the mission investment for the coming year.

Give regular reports in the church newsletter or a quarterly update. Have your international partners show up in worship through Zoom or a similar platform to give a live, interactive, personal update.

Ready to Go Global?

A chicken can never be mistaken for a wild goose. But a wild goose can be "domesticated" to act like a barnyard chicken. The sound of honking geese plying over will cause the goose in the chicken yard to briefly, instinctively know there is more than pecking the ground and squawking, something stirring in the breast of the goose at the sound of the honking overhead, but, sadly, as the flock goes by the wild goose returns to pecking the ground in the chicken yard.

So, which will describe your local church: domesticated chicken or wild goose?

The Scriptures are clear about God's the Strategy in Human History.

We are sent together, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, for the healing of the world in Jesus' Name.

DO NOT settle for anything less.

