

Summer-Fall, 2006  
PMI Ministry Update  
J. Nelson Jennings, President

"Connecting Churches Internationally"

One of PMI's distinctives is our emphasis on mutuality and interdependence. That is, we approach relationships between U.S. supporters and PMI missionaries (as well as between U.S. supporters and the PMI Board) as a two-way street of service and encouragement, rather than just a one-way flow of finances, short-term mission trips, and training-equipping. On the one hand we recognize that many relationships between U.S. supporters and missionaries (whether American or international-indigenous) already are in fact two-way; you who are supporters will attest to the challenge and encouragement you receive from missionaries for whom you pray and offer contributions. At the same time, we believe that PMI's distinctive in this area lies in how we seek to be *intentional* about facilitating – both in fact and in theory – reciprocity in relationships between supporters and international ministries.

Our vision statement calls this particular aim of PMI that of "connecting churches internationally." Here is how our operations manual spells out this central emphasis:

PMI missionaries are not simply national leaders who get U.S. financial support until they have sufficient indigenous support to wean themselves away from U.S.-based funding. That model is certainly a valid one, but PMI takes a slightly different tack by trying to cultivate two-way relationships between U.S. churches and churches-organizations in other parts of the world. PMI missionaries are the ongoing links in these relationships. The contemporary need for the worldwide Christian Church to be interdependent is worth playing our part to help supporters cultivate meaningful relationships with churches and organizations outside the United States. One of the main reasons PMI missionaries visit supporters in the U.S. is to encourage these very relationships.

In other words, part of the ministry that PMI missionaries have with respect to their U.S. supporters is to help them have cooperative relationships with churches and ministries in other parts of the world. What that looks like will vary from relationship to relationship. Spirit-led creativity on both ends brings to fruition two-way ministries between U.S. churches and churches elsewhere – with PMI missionaries serving as go-betweens.

Looking at this aspect of missions today can be somewhat intimidating, because it might be new to us and there are few self-conscious examples to follow. Nevertheless, there are several compelling reasons for pursuing worldwide Christian mutuality and interdependency:

*Biblically*, Paul the missionary writes to the church in Rome how he expects his upcoming support-raising visit to them – "in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you" (Romans 15:24) – also to be in order "that we may be *mutually* encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (1:12; emphasis mine). He goes on to note the wider spiritual and material unity and mutual obligations that the churches in Macedonia and Achaia share with the Christians in Judea (15:26-27). In II Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul urges the Christians to join others in sharing financially with the poverty-stricken Christian in Judea because "your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness" (8:14). Christians belong to and are obligated to help each other in the ongoing wider ministry of Christ's gospel.

*Theologically*, Paul's and the entire Bible's vision of the international Church – God's "household" and "holy temple," Christ's "body" and "one new man" (Ephesians 2:19-22, 4:12-24) – instructs us to use our gifts and resources "to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (I Peter 2:10). Gifts and resources include money, formal education, and technical know-how; they also include experiences

of poverty and war-caused displacement, overt dealings with spiritual forces, and traditional community life. U.S. Christians have some of these gifts and resources to share with other Christians; other gifts and resources need to flow in the opposite direction. In other words, mutual exchange and interdependency need to flourish to build up the entire worldwide household of faith and body of Christ.

*Historically*, it is no longer tenable (if it ever was) to interpret Jesus' words in Acts 1:8b strictly in a self-centered, prescriptive manner: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The prevailing evangelical response to these words is to see our own ministries extending outward, with ourselves as "Jerusalem," nearby peoples (geographically and culturally) as "Judea and Samaria," then people outside our own country as "the end of the earth." Especially now that the Christian Church stretches around the world, by this scheme there are countless different Jerusalems and equally countless ends of the earth. It is much more effective – not to mention more in line with Jesus' intended meaning – to understand Jesus' words as historically predictive, with the gospel being shared by Christ's witnesses across generational and national boundaries. That frees all of us living and earth's end cooperatively to see the gospel extend its work to new places and people, as well as within mission fields where it has already been having its effect through Christian believers of all sorts of nationalities – including where my church and I live in the U.S.

*Strategically*, it also makes sense mutually to cooperate with each other around the world. All Christians live within particular mission fields. No area of the world is fully redeemed, all areas of the world have unbelieving people, and each branch of the worldwide Christian mustard tree needs ongoing nourishment through attachment to the rest of the tree. PMI missionaries, and the churches-organizations they serve, have insight and experience that can help U.S. supporters more effectively serve the gospel in their U.S. settings. The support – financial, prayerful, personal, and otherwise – that U.S. Christians share with and through PMI missionaries is vital to those international ministries as well.

*Culturally*, effective service mainly is by those who are familiar with their settings of ministry – supported, stimulated, and encouraged by Christians from outside that setting. U.S. suburbanites know best the people and communities among they live, but they desperately need relationships with Christians from elsewhere to help them keep perspective on what is best for lifestyle levels, including homes, cars, clothes, food, vacations, education, and myriad other facets. Mutuality and interdependence come into play here, as they do in all settings where God's people live and serve.

Once again, what reciprocal and interdependent church-to-church relationships look like in the concrete will emerge out of each situation. Neither PMI missionaries nor PMI board members have pat answers to such questions as, "Should our church pay to fly Christians from country X over to minister among us here in the U.S.?" or "How could our church best engage with PMI missionary Z's church through a two-week trip from here to there next summer?" But even though we do not have precise blueprints, we are persuaded biblically, theologically, historically, strategically, culturally, and through our own experiences that mutual and interdependent international relationships are a big part of what we in PMI want to continue to promote and encourage.

May God bless you in all of your various avenues of serving Christ and gospel – including in the mutual and interdependent international relationships you develop through PMI.

Yours in Christ,

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President