

Voices for Mission – Engaging a Globalized World

Objectives: 1) To provide missionaries with the opportunity to reflect on and analyze their mission experience during a period of unprecedented global interchange (1990-2003), a period of time characterized as Globalization; 2) To provide an opportunity to missionaries to give critical feedback as to how mission may best be done in light of our present globalized world.

Two Parts

1. Local person or community's story and reflection and/or
2. Missioners experience and reflection

30 stories received at USCMA.

A mix of international and US mission experiences
21 women (one lay, 20 religious)
9 men (7 religious, 2 diocesan)

Voices of missionaries are also a mix of US, Indian, Nepali, Mexican and others from around the world, primarily members of international congregations.

Threads

During this time period 1990-2003 there have been significant shifts in the values, attitudes and communities where missionaries have been living. Many of these shifts began before this period, but have accelerated due to the impact of economic and technological aspects of globalization.

The local person/community experience

Globalization with its economic, political and social forces has rapidly arrived in areas that before were seen as remote or slower to change. The influences of communication, migration, unjust political structures, media, consumption, homogenization and technology are evidenced in these stories in both positive and negative ways. Although increased opportunities for education, transportation, political organizing, better health care and access to a large variety of goods and services are available in many regions there is still a growing chasm between those that have real access and opportunity and those that do not. These mission voices reflect that globalization has brought increased exploitation of natural resources, peoples and cultures.

Due to these global forces communities are experiencing a weakening of traditional community and family structures, increased health problems, astronomical unemployment, a decline in small scale agriculture, an increase in social problems such as gangs, domestic violence, drugs, prostitution, trafficking of children and women, alcohol abuse, and a denigration of traditional social and sexual mores. These mission voices are also

witnessing a devaluing of traditional culture, music, and dance. There is a tendency toward a global homogenization of culture leading to even more exclusion of the poor. At the same time, availability of films and Internet has expanded the world for many, enabling them to make positive connections.

Dependence on a cash economy in many places results in massive migrations from rural to urban areas causing disruptions in family and community life while also enabling personal growth and opportunities for individuals. There's an increase in individual needs and wants; i.e. consumerism, the creation of an international culture of consumption and imported mass produced goods are displacing local trades and artisans. This growth in individualism and competition strains family relationships. Families trying to stay alive in this fast paced economy are unable to care responsibly for their children. There is a decrease in respect for authority. There is the ever-present temptation to choose to get ahead, regardless of the effects on one's neighbors.

A lack of peace and feelings of impotence cause many to have internal struggles and has resulted in an alarming increase in depression and suicide.

These mission voices share that women have greater access to education, economic independence, and leadership opportunities in their local communities and governments, yet at the same time there is greater exploitation, abuse, and trafficking of women within and across nations.

The impact of other cultures through media, tourism, missionaries, businesses and the Internet has increased global awareness and communications, but has not necessarily increased the quality of relationships across cultures.

In the religious sphere, these mission voices share that people of various faiths find it difficult to stay faithful due to the stresses of this new life, and competition among increasing numbers of denominations or faiths. Where collaboration among faith groups has happened communities have greatly benefited. Youth are less interested in religion and more focused on obtaining a job, getting and spending money. Religious festivals and rituals are less meaningful to the youth and their practices have been threatened or changed by global influences.

New attitudes, knowledge and formation have resulted in greater attention awareness to social and global issues, solidarity groups and movements, but solutions and participation are limited by economic circumstances. Struggling to survive is a priority. Many of the local people interviewed felt that due to globalization they are

losing more than they are gaining especially regarding the ability to determine their own destiny. “We don’t know if we are going to have a better reality.”

However there is some hope in the positive connections and changes due to globalization. A local person shared with a missionary via e-mail, “Overall, however, I think that having been introduced into what we have so far, we can only look forward to many more changes. Many of us would like to explore and improve our situation when we see what is available in other countries. So, we can only go forward and not backward.” She wrote, “I have been personally helped by some changes. I can communicate with you more often now. I have no problem with the changes, rather, I want more.”

Missioners offered some of the following insights:

So many communities are in transition and are forgetting their roots – there needs to be an emphasis on preserving traditions and history

Many of the people feel change is essential to their survival

This new knowledge and awareness brings both positive and negative results and people need guidance to avoid negative influences such as consumerism, and individualism.

There continues to be a dehumanization of populations - everything and everyone, is disposable.

The poor are organizing to demand rights and find solutions

The church needs to welcome and respect immigrants and refugees

Despite so many negative effects, people are committed to change

When asked about the impact of changes on their approach to mission these mission voices shared:

- I recognize I am part of a mechanized world
- Traditional style of mission is no longer acceptable
- Advocacy is important
- There is a great need for the conversion of US
- There was a recognition of the need to update their mission theology more often
- Need for a deep and substantive prayer spiritual life
- A spirituality of wholeness that’s relational and global and identified with the poor

When asked if they are at peace with their mission situation

- Most missionaries responded that they are at peace with their specific ministries and as agents of hope and appreciate the improved infrastructures that enable improvements for individuals and communities, but they struggle greatly with the changed values: from community, hospitality, cooperation and respect to consumerism, individualism, competition, selfishness and fundamentalism.
- To be a change agent is hard

- Mission is like a woman in labor – the painful process of which we are a part hopefully yields new life in ourselves and those whom we accompany. We each play a part in the process.

When asked about the Future of mission

- There is an Urgency to mission today – we must be equipped to be engaged NOW.
- We need to educate and train missionaries to cope with changes
- Collaboration among religious groups and civil groups is essential
- Work to empower women
- Presence, personal witness, reconciliation, peacemaking, dialogue and mutuality are key components
- Promote human rights
- Stress Interdependence and solidarity
- Preserve what is good in cultures
- Lobby for just structures at all levels make the links between local and global issues: e.g. connect service agencies in US working with HIV+/AIDS populations with local advocacy groups and partners around the world
- Educate the US church and public about impact of US policies on others in the world
- Promote alternatives to the current type of globalization
- Effective use of media is needed
- Care of the earth
- We need to find a common voice to question the negative aspects of globalization while going forward with the poor.
- We need to work for change, aware that we cannot program its success.

When asked to give Advice to new missionaries these missionaries shared:

- Listen to the people
- Learn the history, politics, language and social analysis before going on mission
- Be agents for peace and justice among various groups
- Live simply
- Advocate for peace in violent situations
- Solidarity with people is essential
- Work in harmony and collaboration
- Offer hope
- Support and welcome immigrants and refugees
- Mission is a slow process of inculturation, solidarity, accompaniment and empowerment. You are a catalyst.
- Develop the professional skills needed to impact local, national, international policies and decisions that affect the poor
- Have patience
- Be alert and open to surprises.

- Have a holistic approach – promote the total development of the person and environment
- You have to believe that we can make a difference. As the African proverb says, “If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito in your sheets.”

Implications for Mission Formation

Transitions

- There are more transitions in mission today – terms of service are typically shorter, there is a challenge of continuity among successive missionaries or within particular ministry settings or projects.
- More local congregations, NGOs or Christian communities are administering programs, parishes, projects, etc. Are missionaries connecting to and collaborating with them sufficiently?
- Missioners from other countries are coming to the U.S. in larger numbers – they are important links to their communities in the home country and to missionaries serving there – to broaden horizons, cultural understanding and educate communities. Is this type of reverse mission happening? Can US missionaries help to facilitate it?
- The new consciousness toward the environment and ecological issues raises new questions about mission formation. How should this awareness and activity/advocacy impact missionary formation?
- What are the implications for short-term mission or immersion experiences? Do we need to change the language we use to describe these experiences in order for mission to be central to them? What are the impacts on the receiving communities? How is the lack of continuity effecting local congregations or communities?