Diaspora Missiology and Mid-Term Missions: An Action Plan

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Vol 1:1 2021

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Introduction

The concept of "mid-term missions," a ministry assignment lasting from a few months to a couple of years, has been around for quite some time, but the demand for such mission opportunities continues. Mission agencies hope that some of the mid-termers they send out will come back as career missionaries. But most of the time this hope is not realized. At the same time, a growing number of unreached people groups can be found in diaspora pockets throughout North America. Many churches have a burden to reach out to the newcomers but often are not well equipped to connect with these diverse people groups.

This paper will present a possible action plan for creating dynamic partnerships between mission agencies and North American churches, using mid-term missions as a platform to effectively reach the unreached who live among us. This paper was originally written and presented in 2014. Some of the material has been updated. In addition, COVID-19 has changed the face of short-term and mid-term missions. The paper needs to be understood in this context. But the underlying premise of mission agencies and churches cooperating in order to employ former mid-term and long-term missionaries as channels to reach diaspora peoples in North America remains valid.

Diaspora: Accessible but Out of Reach

Guilt became my primary emotion whenever I went to my neighborhood coffee shop in metro Detroit and passed through the clusters of men sitting outside smoking cigarettes and sipping espresso. They were there almost every day, shooting the breeze before starting their workday. As I walked past, I couldn't understand a thing they were saying; they were speaking Albanian. As recent immigrants to America from Albania and Kosovo and other Albanian-speaking countries, they had found each other and developed their own ethnic Albanian community.

As a Christian and a missionary, I wanted to connect with these men. The mission agency I served with had a team of evangelists and church planters engaged in Albanian ministry in southern Europe, but here was a cluster of men from that same people group just blocks from our mission headquarters. They were easily within reach of the church and the gospel—at least it seemed like they *should* be. But efforts to make a connection while they were drinking their coffee only resulted in empty stares. Their morning coffee clique was clearly a closed group; outsiders weren't welcome. And so I walked past and felt guilty.

A church just a few blocks away had an ESL program, and other churches in the area had similar outreaches. But these men didn't seem interested in learning more English or developing friendships with Americans. They were accessible—at least physically, if not linguistically or culturally—but they continued to be just as unreached as their relatives in the Balkans. And ten years later, none of them had ever attended the ESL program at the church (L. Speight, email message to author, February 4, 2014).

I didn't realize it at the time, but as I discovered more about diaspora groups, I learned that it is not uncommon for certain groups of immigrants to create their own tightly knit culture within the United States, maintaining their own language and traditions while resisting integration into their new host culture.

What might have happened if someone who had spent a few years overseas learning Albanian language and culture had showed up at my local coffee shop just to "hang out"? Perhaps these men who weren't interested in learning English or American culture would be more responsive to someone who had studied *their* language and culture. Such a person could engage these men on their terms instead of on ours. Isn't that the basis of a sound missiological outreach? When a missionary moves halfway around the world to take the gospel to a particular people group, the first emphasis is on learning the language and the culture. Going to another country expecting its people to be able to speak the missionary's language and relate to the missionary's culture would be an exercise in futility. Why should it be any different when the people group we want to reach is only a few blocks away instead of on another continent?

Diaspora Missions and the Local Church

Payne (2012) points out that for the past several decades many of the world's least-reached peoples have been migrating in ever-increasing numbers to Western nations, including the US and Canada. Out of the estimated 272 million international migrants

worldwide (as of 2019), an estimated 40 to 50 million live in North America. From 2000 to 2010 the increase of migrant populations was expected to be the highest in North America, at 24%. During that same time period the US took in 8 million new immigrants—the most of any host country—for a total migrant population of 43 million people, making up 13.5% of the US population. And in 2005, among countries with a population of at least 20 million, Canada had the second highest proportion of migrants at 19%.

While these totals and percentages are staggering, even more staggering is the number of unreached people groups (UPGs) included in these statistics. According to research Payne (2012) cites from the Global Research Department of the International Mission Board, there are 361 UPGs represented in the US, with another 180 groups present in Canada. While not all these UPGs are migrant populations, the numbers of unreached peoples coming to North America from around the world—often from countries that are closed to the open spread of the Gospel—can't be ignored. Payne calls on the North American church to take notice and make the most of this opportunity to engage locally in diaspora missions, while bemoaning the fact that most evangelicals—including churches, denominations, and mission agencies—have been slow to respond.

For mission agencies, the slow response may be rooted in the centuries-old paradigm of missions: Missionaries go from "here" to "there." The culture of traditional missions emphasizes *where* we serve rather than *who* we serve. For the entire history of many mission agencies, their whole strategy has been sending missionaries to a particular location to initiate ministry and plant churches. For those agencies to embrace the call to diaspora missions within their home "sending" country, their whole paradigm needs to change. Instead of thinking in terms of sending missionaries to *Albania*, they need to think in terms of sending missionaries to *Albanians*—wherever they are—even if that means here in North America.

Payne (2012) shares a case study of one such outreach to the Albanian diaspora. After spending five years living in Albania learning the language and culture, a missionary returned to the US to plant three Albanian churches in the greater New York area. While this missionary continues to travel to Albania and Kosovo, his focus is on reaching Albanians rather than Albania. According to various census reports, only about one-third of the world's ethnic Albanians live in Albania (Faith 2017). Certainly if "the majority of Albanians don't live in Albania [then] missionaries must adjust their worldview to reflect contemporary realities" (Payne 2012, 121). And while this change of perspective is slow in coming, there are signs of change. As of summer, 2020, SEND

International had six different diaspora teams in five different cities in the US. The mission agency Pioneers has people working with migrants from Islamic backgrounds at a major US university. Other agencies are also beginning to see this as a new opportunity.

But it isn't just missionaries or mission agencies who will need to embrace this new way of thinking and adjust their worldview. Churches, particularly independent missionary-supporting churches, will also need to make changes. Typically, missionaries who are initially assigned to a stateside role or who return from a foreign location to work in a domestic location have an extremely difficult time maintaining support. Those whose supporting churches funded them at a sufficient level while they were serving out of the country often find their support reduced or eliminated when they move back to serve in North America. If the new reality is that diaspora missions gives us an opportunity to connect with unreached people groups in our own backyard, then church policies regarding financial support for stateside missionaries engaged full-time in reaching these groups need to be redesigned to reflect that reality.

In addition to recognizing the new reality of local diaspora missions, we must also keep in mind the reality that most North American Christians are not equipped for effective cross-cultural engagement. In a presentation on current trends in missions, Camp states that one thing many churches want mission agencies to provide for them is "guidance and assistance in local cross-cultural outreach" (2010, 2).

While churches in North America increasingly recognize the need and opportunity to engage diaspora populations in their communities, often their efforts are limited to offering ESL or citizenship classes.

> When the peoples of the world migrate into our neighborhoods, it's an invitation from God. Some might serve them by helping them get their documentation in order. Others might start an English as a Second Language program. Others can simply provide hospitality (Borthwick 2012, 43).

These churches should be applauded for their heart for ministry and desire to reach those who have never heard the Gospel. Unfortunately, those efforts may not be enough. And in some cases, they might even be detrimental.

What these ministries may inadvertently communicate is "let us help you become like us—learn to talk like us, dress like us, and be good American citizens like us—then

you'll be able to worship our God like us." There is an underlying assumption that these "foreigners" want to assimilate into American life. And with such an assumption there is a danger that

> some Christians in their practice of diaspora missions still manifest the kind of cultural superiority that should be anathema in the body of Christ. They demand assimilation to the host society, prefer the role of benefactor to partner, and have no patience for contextualization (Lorance 2011, 271).

Such an assumption comes naturally to the American way of thinking. In previous years high school civics classes taught us that American society was a "melting pot" where multiple cultures blended to make something new and unique. For the most part, previous generations of immigrants wanted to quickly integrate with their new culture and be known as "American." In contrast, immigrants today

> are coming in even greater numbers, but they are not becoming *American*. They are maintaining their language, their foods, their culture, their religion; they are not pledging "allegiance to the flag of the United States of America." They are changing the face of America (Pirolo 2013, *x*).

Whether they intend to or not, when American churches take this "assimilation" approach in reaching local diaspora they come perilously close to replicating the errors of the Judaizers within the early church. While there were significant moral and theological issues involved in the Judaizers' dispute with Paul, much of their concern revolved around issues of culture. One of the accusations raised against Paul was that he taught "all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our *customs*" (Acts 21:21 [NIV], emphasis added). When Paul confronted Peter in Antioch he asked why Peter would "force Gentiles to follow Jewish *customs*" (Gal. 2:14, emphasis added). The Hebraic Jewish Christians were saying that to become part of the church, the Gentiles and Hellenistic Jews must first become cultural Jews—eating like them, following their traditions, and so on. In other words, "first become a good Jew; then you can become a Christian."

While offering ESL or citizenship classes can be key elements of diaspora missions, if such methods are the *only* ones churches employ in reaching out to a local diaspora their message may be perceived as saying, "First become a good American; then you can become a Christian." The American church needs to be careful not to communicate to

migrant populations that they must learn *our* language, adopt *our* citizenship, become able to function in *our* culture and worship in *our* churches, before they can become Christians. That approach is akin to that taken by the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, inviting the nations to "come to us"; but the New Testament model enjoins us to go to *them* and meet them within their linguistic and cultural milieu.

But beyond the expectation that immigrants will want to assimilate into the host culture, other factors might motivate the American church to adopt a "come to us" approach when engaging in diaspora missions. An integral part of our American culture is a hunger for efficiency. We are always looking for a faster, cheaper, easier way to accomplish a task. That drive for efficiency can easily influence our diaspora missiology. After all, diaspora missiologists emphasize the concept that the world has "come to us"; we have unreached peoples "on our doorstep"; the nations are now "easily within reach"—terms that Lorance refers to as "the language of convenience" (2011, 277). Some have even argued that, unlike traditional missions, diaspora missions does not require that we learn the language or study the culture of the focus population. One simply needs to "be a friend" to a stranger from another culture to accomplish the missiological task. With this mindset, it's reasonable for a local church to assume that diaspora missions can be a "faster, cheaper, easier" means to reach the world. The time required to learn a *new* language and *new* culture is removed as volunteers teach the *English* language and *American* culture to the newcomers. The costs of sending full-time workers out of the country are eliminated as local volunteers accomplish the task.

> Unfortunately, few have taken the full compass of culture and language seriously enough in the training of their workers or in demonstrating a willingness to allow ethnic churches to develop without cultural and denominational restrictions imposed by the larger organization (Pirolo 2013, 183).

Thus, missionary specialists with appropriate skills, training, and spiritual gifting are replaced with untrained volunteers who may have plenty of passion and drive but may not be prepared for all that is involved in doing cross-cultural evangelism and church planting.

Perhaps the most disconcerting element of this approach is that it is sometimes encouraged by missiologists—people who should understand the need for contextualization of the Gospel message when approaching a new culture. Howell claims that "the goal of missiology should always be to empower the local church to

engage in mission, rather than train specialists or professionals for the task" (2011, 83) and that applying culturally appropriate missional strategies will distance the local church from diaspora ministry. Howell argues that in place of professionals applying contextualization strategies, a better method of diaspora missions is for local believers to engage in "radical hospitality, compassion, and justice" (79). At the same time, he affirms that "efforts to reach new immigrant populations in North America can certainly benefit from concepts of culture and contextualization" (83) as long as the effects of being surrounded by the pressures of a new culture are kept in mind.

The employment of a contextualization strategy in diaspora missions will certainly necessitate the involvement of specialists and/or professionals. But Howell's concept that local church engagement in missions, rather than the equipping and training of specialists, should always be the goal of missiology is debatable. Howell defends his reasoning in part by pointing out that contextualization strategies will become "rapidly obsolete" (2011, 84) as subsequent generations assimilate into the host language and culture. There may be some validity to that argument, but it is too limited and overlooks important additional facts. As Pirolo states,

> the "melting-pot" effect of past generations is not true today. Some immigrants, even those who have been here for two or three generations, are maintaining their cultural distinctives. So, with all their unique characteristics, they are here, living among us (2013, 199).

Many of today's immigrants to America eschew the idea of becoming Americans, or even mixing with other immigrants with similar linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.

> Fearful, not only of whatever defines "America," but fearful of other ethnic groups, the internationals who live among us are isolating themselves in ethnic communities. Their community becomes a place where they can enjoy the familiar and be protected from those "others"—a place where they are "at home" (Pirolo 2013, 171).

In addition, Howell's (2011) assertion seems to imply that immigrants from any one people group come to their new home all at the same time, so that when that initial generation is gone, so is the need for contextualization. But as Payne's (2012) statistical analysis makes clear, new waves of immigrants are coming to the US and Canada every year. Rather than disappearing, the need for contextualization is renewed with each new wave, and, at least for some groups, may continue for multiple generations into the future.

Payne (2012) seems to argue in favor of contextualization by reminding churches that existing methods of evangelism, discipleship, and leadership training may not communicate well when connecting with people from a different cultural background. He challenges his readers to understand that "our cultural preferences for functioning as a church are not necessarily biblical requirements" (135). While never actually using the term *contextualization*, he certainly seems to build a case for needing a contextualized approach when engaging in diaspora missions.

But Howell's concern regarding local church engagement in contextualized diaspora missions is legitimate. Lorance acknowledges that

> the pursuit of contextualization is simply too difficult for most North American Christians. It is too difficult to develop cross-cultural competencies and learn a new language, to engage in respectful interreligious dialogue, and to seek to deeply understand one's neighbor from another nation in order to better communicate the love of Christ in a way he or she can understand (2011, 281).

So, if offering ESL and citizenship classes is too limited and potentially smacks of ethnocentrism, but engaging in contextualized diaspora missions is beyond the capacity of the typical North American church, what options are left? If churches truly are looking for "guidance and assistance in local cross-cultural outreach" (Camp 2010, 2), is there some way that mission agencies can help?

Mid-Term Missions and the Mission Agency

A time-length element is necessarily a component of any detailed examination of mission opportunities today. In addition to traditional career or long-term missions, in the late 1990s and early 2000s there was an explosion in opportunities for short-term missions. The definition of "short-term" varies widely. Priest, Priest, Rasmussen, and Brown use the parameters of two weeks to one year (2006, 431). Dross, who coined the term "Very Short Term Missions (VSTM)" for the approximately two-thirds of short-term mission trips that last less than two weeks, "favors STM of 3 to 12 months" (2009, 1). And Peterson, Aeschliman, and Sneed (2003, 69) break the short-term mission time variable into four subcategories—days ("mini short-term"); weeks ("standard short-term"); months ("seasonal short-term"); and years, up to four years ("extended short-term").

While definitions of what constitutes the time length of a short-term mission vary, most define it in terms of less than a year. What Peterson et al. (2003) call the "extended short-term" is actually a third time-length category for missions that doesn't match the concept of either short-term or long-term.

Many refer to this third time-length category as the "mid-term mission." Like short-term missions, the meaning of "mid-term" varies considerably depending on who is using the word. There doesn't seem to be an accepted standard for defining lengths of mission engagement, and a survey of various church and agency websites reveals a wide disparity in the use of terms. Mid-term can be defined as lasting as little as a couple of months, or as much as two or three years.

While there is no consensus regarding the length of a mid-term mission commitment, and the lines between short-term, mid-term, and long-term continue to become more blurred, there appears to be a category of missions that is longer than short-term and shorter than long-term. For purposes of clarification in this paper, mid-term missions will refer to a trip that is at least six months but less than three years in length, thereby embracing most of the parameters employed by churches and agencies today.

The development of mission agencies that specialize in mid-term missions, along with the growing number of large churches and long-term-focused mission agencies that offer mid-term-length trips, points to the growth of interest in this kind of mission engagement. Paul Van Der Werf, director of GoCorps, sees evidence that recent college graduates are looking for service opportunities of about two years' duration. He believes that young evangelicals—and the churches that attract them—want to make a significant investment in ministry while avoiding a long-term commitment to career missions (2014).

Research within long-term-focused mission agencies shows the same trend regarding interest in mid-term missions, and many of them now offer a mid-term option. This trend, combined with GoCorps' experience, may indicate that mid-term has become a popular length for a mission assignment. Both agencies and churches should take this trend seriously and learn how to leverage it strategically in order to reach the unreached.

Career-focused mission agencies typically invest in mid-term missions for two primary reasons, and their mid-term programs function with one or both of these agenda items as the goal. The first reason is for their mid-term missionaries to help

accomplish a specific task or project within a limited time period while serving cross-culturally. Van Der Werf (2020) does the best job of addressing that expectation with transparency in an entry on the GoCorps website stating that the organization seeks to mobilize "recent college graduates to serve globally for two years using their passions and degrees [to assist] with strategic long-term projects."

The second reason is actually more of a hope. The mission agency is hoping and literally praying that the mid-term missionary will catch a vision for the ministry and the needs on their field of service and will want to return as a long-term missionary. Mission agencies have many long-term needs that are going unfilled. Even though the initial return on the investment often doesn't justify the time and money spent to prepare, send, and host the mid-term missionary, sending offices are willing to take the risk in an effort to fill some of those long-term needs. And if that doesn't happen, the agency's hope extends to the possibility that the mid-term missionary will return home to become a prayer supporter, financial supporter, and/or an advocate for the cause of world missions.

Some mission agencies and churches *require* a willingness or desire to become more involved in missions from candidates who apply to serve as short- or mid-term missionaries. Bethlehem Baptist Church (2020) specifies that in most cases those who are sent out on trips sponsored by the church

- Have an interest in serving in vocational ministry and seek firsthand exposure to missions to help determine a calling into full-time Christian service.
- Aim to serve in a cross-cultural setting.
- Consider the trip as a vital step of preparation for a missionary career abroad or for a better-equipped life at home as a follower of Christ.

The hope, then, is that the mid-term missionary either will facilitate a particular task that the long-term team is addressing or will become engaged in world missions in a new way or to an increased degree. While exact statistics on how many mid-termers eventually return to the field as career missionaries are difficult to obtain, anecdotal evidence indicates that most mid-termers return to live in North America and follow their planned career path. Apparently, this goal for mid-term missions is seldom achieved.

It is even more difficult to measure how many actually return to engage in "life at home as a follower of Christ" (Bethlehem Baptist Church 2020). In at least one measurable way, however, there is evidence that this hope is being fulfilled. Savannah Kimberlin, Director of Published Research for the Barna Group, reports that individuals who have been on a mission trip give four times as much to missions as those who haven't. And, depending on their age, those who have been on a mission trip see themselves as between 11% and 15% more likely to give to missions in their future (September 11, 2020, email message to author). It would seem prudent to build on this interest in short- or mid-term missions, and to maximize on the measurable impact it can have on the goer's life.

What if churches and mission agencies formally embraced a third potential purpose for their mid-term missions programs—one that recognized that many, if not most, mid-termers will return to live in North America, where they could conceivably continue to use the language, culture, and ministry skills they developed overseas even as they move along their anticipated career path? What if church–agency partnerships determined to use mid-term missions strategically as a training ground to equip kingdom workers to engage in diaspora missions back home?

A Strategic Plan: A Long-Term Purpose for Mid-Term Missions

Most evangelical mission agencies, whether denominational or interdenominational, recognize that their role is to facilitate the church in fulfilling her calling to take the gospel to all peoples. One way sending entities could help the church in North America would be to provide direct assistance in reaching out to various diaspora groups.

We've already seen that this outreach has been identified as a felt need for at least some churches. We've explored the limitations and difficulties a local church faces when trying to accomplish this outreach on its own. We've highlighted the ongoing and growing need for contextualized ministry with the groups of internationals moving into our cities and communities. Who better to facilitate such an outreach than mission agencies that have significant experience engaging in cross-cultural ministry and that are equipped to train cross-cultural workers, utilizing a mid-term mission immersion experience in that culture's homeland?

Payne's (2012) case study of the missionary who lived in Albania and then returned to plant Albanian churches in New York serves as a perfect example. Others have engaged in similar ministries. Often these are missionaries who went out as long-term

career workers, planning to stay in their overseas assignment, but who were forced to return home earlier than anticipated for family, health, or other pressing reasons. Once they return to their home country, they begin an outreach to the diaspora of a people group identical to or similar to the group they ministered to overseas. They have learned the language, they have wrestled with the issues of culture, they have been engaged in evangelizing adherents to the host culture's religion, and they can utilize that expertise in reaching people from that background who are now part of the diaspora.

There are numerous anecdotal stories about this kind of ministry, but typically these opportunities develop unexpectedly. Returning to America to launch diaspora missions is not the long-range plan. The background of most missionary teams engaged in diaspora ministry in the US seems to reflect this unintended shift in ministry. There's no doubt that this provides an excellent opportunity for cross-cultural workers to utilize their years of experience; agencies and churches should be encouraging this ministry venue. However, the missing element is *intentionality*. "Without intentionality, rarely does anything get accomplished . . . Without an intentional plan to reach the strangers next door, it is unlikely that they will be reached in your community" (Payne 2012, 127).

Along with that intentionality there needs to be a sense of urgency. Payne points out that immigrant populations have been growing in North America for the past thirty to forty years, yet only now are "people, churches, networks, denominations, societies, and mission agencies . . . starting to act on the need" (17). Pirolo joins Payne in emphasizing the importance of timing and encourages North American evangelicals to start "taking deliberate steps *now* to bridge the cultural distinctives of the internationals who live among us, to present a Savior *in a context relevant to them*" (2013, 5, emphasis added).

But for that kind of intentionality and urgency to be realized, traditional missiological approaches need to be reexamined. Wan states that "the reality of demographic trends of diaspora of the 21st century requires a different missiological paradigm from which new mission strategies and action plans can be developed" (2011, 4).

As churches and mission agencies separately explore the parameters of this new mission paradigm, perhaps the cause of diaspora missions will be better served if churches and agencies partner together. Neither is equipped to do the job alone.

> The reality is that if people in diaspora are going to be reached, it will require a synergistic relationship between local church and mission structures. We will need to bring to bear the extensive experiences and vast resources of these structures together with the local context and human contact of the local church (Mitchell 2011, 286).

One potential new strategy or action plan involves using the existing interest in mid-term missions as a springboard for diaspora ministry, applying an intentionality that goes beyond current goals for mid-term missions and embraces the goal of church planting among the diaspora in North America. Agencies and churches could together identify and adopt an unreached ethnic community within the reach of the church and develop a strategy for ministering to that diaspora. Mid-term missions could be part of that strategy, sending workers overseas to gain the language and cultural proficiencies necessary to launch a contextualized outreach to the adopted people group upon their return to America. This would give a new long-term purpose for mid-term missions and would present an opportunity for churches and agencies to work together to reach ethnic communities and engage in contextualized church planting among diaspora.

This strategy will require a paradigm shift in how traditional mission agencies define "the field." As discussed above, terminology will need to be changed from references to ministry in certain *locations* to ministry among certain *peoples*. It will also require a paradigm shift in how churches allocate their financial resources for cross-cultural ministry. The question of the missionary's location will need to be replaced with consideration of the people group being reached, regardless of the location. It will require finding new ways of "networking the expertise of organizations and churches skilled in contextual (1) church planting, (2) discipleship, and (3) leadership development" (Yang 2013, 48).

But embracing such a paradigm shift does not mean abandoning the existing paradigm. Neither strategic use of overseas mid-term mission experience as a venue for diaspora missions back home, nor any other creative approach to engaging with diaspora, should be seen as a change that eliminates or minimizes the need to send long-term missionaries to the unreached peoples of the world (Payne 2012, 18). It simply recognizes that with changing demographics come needed changes and new approaches in how to deal with mission realities and mission strategies. "Diaspora missiology is a complement to, not a substitute for, the traditional approach of sending missionaries to other lands. It is an approach to thinking about the missionary work of the church from an integrated perspective" (Payne 2012, 151).

An Action Plan

So how would this plan actually work? Borrowing from the recognized structure of short-term missions, a plan might unfold through three phases—pre-field, on-field, and post-field—and incorporate the three entities involved—senders, goer-guests, and host-receivers. An excellent tool to facilitate working through each phase of this action plan is the MISTM grid. That can be found in the book *Maximum Impact Short-term Mission*, by Peterson, Aeschliman, and Sneed (2003).

Pre-Field Phase

Step 1: A community of an unengaged, unreached diaspora group is identified as living in a certain area.

A variety of informal approaches can be applied to identify what people groups are present in a selected area and where they are most prevalent. A survey of ethnic restaurants, grocery stores, and/or social clubs or religious centers will provide some clues. Contacting the local schools or district office to find out what languages are represented in the public school system can help identify which internationals are present and what areas they are clustered in. Researching US Census data is also a viable method.

A promising option for identifying which people groups are in a given area is the People Groups Initiative (2020), a joint project of the International Mission Board and North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Working together and drawing on the network of Southern Baptist churches and other contributors, they continually compile population information on a website called PeopleGroups.Info, specifically designed to assist the church in North America to identify and engage local diaspora people groups.

Step 1 can be initiated either by the local Christian community (a specific local church or a network of churches), or by a mission agency. Part of Step 1 is determining that either no one is currently working within a given diaspora, or that attempts to engage the community through ESL, hospitality, and other traditional means have proven only minimally successful in developing significant evangelistic relationships.

Step 2: Once a diaspora focus group has been selected, potential partners are identified and partnerships launched.

If the local Christian community initiates the process, then a partner mission agency or agencies will need to be identified; if the mission agency initiates the process, a local

church or churches will need to be contacted. Once the church–agency connection is in place, the new partnership begins to develop plans to launch a diaspora ministry while ensuring a healthy relationship between all parties involved. Procedures such as how the potential cross-cultural workers are selected, approved, and trained will need to be clarified. Target dates and schedules can be developed. Financial agreements will need to be clearly defined. Many logistical details will need to be dealt with at this stage, similar to those involved with sending short-term teams or other mid-termers; the church–agency partnership's past experience in that area can inform this part of the process.

Step 3: The plans and agreements developed in Step 2 are put in motion.

Potential candidates are identified, approved, and trained. The appointees launch into support discovery to develop and retain sufficient financial resources. Prayer partners are identified and prayer networks developed—both for the cross-cultural workers and for the diaspora people the church desires to reach. The long-term missionaries, national hosts, or other on-field support networks are brought into the process and prepared for the arrival of the mid-termers. The logistics are navigated and the mid-term missionaries are commissioned and sent out.

On-Field Phase

Step 1: The mid-termers learn how to work with the diaspora focus group.

While on-field, the mid-termers engage in language and culture acquisition, learn how to best approach ministry within the diaspora focus group, and provide much-needed encouragement and assistance to the long-term missionaries, national church, and/or national community. They may engage in accomplishing a specific task that their training or educational background equips them for, or they may engage in a variety of ministries that help develop the skills they will need back in North America.

Step 2: The home-based congregation learns how to work with the diaspora focus group.

While the mid-termers are serving on-field, the church–agency partnership in North America will need to educate and train the home-based congregation(s) regarding cross-cultural ministry in general and the diaspora focus group in particular. Short-term teams from the church(es) can be assembled and sent to work alongside the mid-termers and their on-field partners. This gives the sending church firsthand opportunity to learn about the culture they will be engaging back home.

Step 3: The mid-termers return to North America.

After spending the specified amount of time living overseas in the new culture, the mid-termers return home to spend the next two to three years (or longer) engaging in contextualized outreach with the diaspora focus group.

Post-Field Phase

Step 1: The mid-termers begin to develop contacts within the diaspora focus group.

Using the language, culture, and ministry skills they gained while living in the focus group's home culture, the now experienced cross-cultural workers begin making friends and making themselves known within the North America–based diaspora community. Perhaps they even find housing within the diaspora community. Depending on funding levels and career path goals, some mid-termers may engage in ministry full-time; others may divide their time between work and ministry as they begin to also enter their selected vocation.

Step 2: The home-based congregation engages with the diaspora focus group.

The local Christian community begins to work alongside the mid-termers, engaging in culturally appropriate ministry outreaches with the experienced mid-termers giving direction and leadership.

Step 3: A contextualized, indigenous church is planted within the diaspora focus group.

Reflecting again on the coffee shop in the suburbs of Detroit, perhaps one day a mid-termer who has spent time in southern Europe living with and ministering to Albanians goes for a cup of coffee. He sees the Albanian workmen sitting outside drinking espresso and smoking. The mid-termer takes his coffee to a nearby table. He greets them in appropriate Albanian style. Then he laughs as he overhears one of their jokes. Before long they are asking him how he learned Albanian, where he lived during his time in Albanian-speaking Europe, and maybe—just maybe—he makes some friends.

Building on these kinds of contacts, the local Christian community, the mission agency, and the mid-termers have *intentionally* taken a huge step toward an effective evangelistic outreach to a previously isolated diaspora community, developing relationships and sharing the Gospel in word and deed. Eventually, God willing, individuals and family groups within the diaspora focus group begin to come to Christ. As time goes on, these new believers begin to meet together to study God's word and to

create a local fellowship that reflects both their home culture and the culture of their new spiritual citizenship.

Conclusion

Intentionally utilizing mid-term missions as a component in diaspora missions is only one suggestion for how Wan's call for "a different missiological paradigm" (2011, 4) might be realized. Churches and agencies together have the opportunity to creatively explore innovative, intentional strategies and action plans to make disciples and plant churches among diaspora people in their communities.

Borthwick, citing Taylor, refers to the "tsunami of peoples coming to the United States" (2012, 29). We can easily see the vastness of this wave when we look at the statistics. We can observe the effect this great wave of new peoples is having on our economy, culture, politics, and language, and we have a choice. We can ignore the wave, or we can learn how to surf. We can let the wave overwhelm us, or we can capture its energy and ride it into a new century of missions and church planting. We can choose to make the best of this unique opportunity. And we can consider the viability of using mid-term missions as a strategic training venue for equipping home-based missionaries prepared to plant contextualized churches among diaspora. This paper presents one possible way to surf. Churches and agencies should be encouraged to work together to find more.

> For this reason, partnership is of utmost importance. A single denomination, a local church, or an individual must not pretend that it, he, or she can reach a city alone. It takes an organized groups [*sic*] of people, churches, and Christian organizations…to reach out to the…ethnic groups present there, to strategize and to carry out all the practical aspects that entail proclaiming the Good News, planting churches, and discipling new believers (Bongoyok 2011, 206).

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