

GIVING ALL THAT MONEY TO MISSIONS: HAS IT MADE ANY DIFFERENCE?

C. Philip Slate

Germantown, Tennessee

Several years ago, I heard of a congregation here in the USA that withdrew a missionary couple they had been supporting somewhere in Asia, feeling that they were making too little progress. Once back in the USA, the couple counted the number of conversions their supporting church had realized from their efforts during the past year. The couple discovered that the two of them had taught and brought to baptism more people than the entire supporting church had realized in the same period! The supporting church evidently had decided that all their prayers and financial support of the couple outside of the USA had not made much difference.

Despite our society's many virtues, it has a streak of impatience in it. You know the quip, "Lord, please give me patience, and I prefer to have it right now!" Jesus taught that kingdom growth often comes slowly (Matt. 13:31-33). A big question is, "How do we count or tabulate progress in the gospel?" We can count bodies, budgets, and buildings; but who can measure humility, thanksgiving, love, and devotion? Of course, externals are one way of detecting progress, and Luke used "body counts" to indicate initial kingdom growth (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 11:21, 24; etc.). So, using certain visible indicators, we might ask whether worldwide efforts by churches of Christ have made any difference?

Distribution: A few years ago, Dr. Flavil Yeakley showed that "for their size the churches of Christ are the most widely distributed religious body in the USA." Many churches were started in homes and grew, some to large congregations. A couple or three decades ago some of the staff at what is now Heritage Christian University compared notes and concluded that churches of Christ as we know them were in every nation save two. In some cases, we are barely there, and in other cases work must be unadvertised because of persecution.

In several countries, churches have directories of congregations. On the Internet pull up "Internet Ministries Churches Christ" and click on 'directories'. The worldwide directory lists most of the countries where there are congregations.

Our knowledge about numbers, however, is limited for three reasons: in many cases no one has bothered to count them! It isn't an easy task. Second, we have learned through the years that churches of Christ have come into existence through their study of Scripture (Nigeria in the 1950s, Spain and Ethiopia in the 1960s, and others) rather than from missionary work. Third, in

some cases persecution requires a low profile. God alone knows the whole story. Prayer, encouragement, and financial help, however, have made some known differences in the world.

A Few Known Facts: Currently, according to long-term, informed workers in India, there are in that country alone likely as many as two million members of churches of Christ as we know them. African Christian Schools Foundation announced that there are as many churches in Nigeria as in the USA. In Malawi it is estimated that no person in the country is more than ten miles from a congregation, and the initial churches were a product of work by a brother from South Africa. Hundreds of churches are scattered throughout the Philippines. From the best figures we have it appears that between 65% and 75% of all known members of churches of Christ exist outside of North America, and that the average member (if there is such a thing!) is a person of color. Of course, more than 75% of churches of Christ should be outside of the USA since we have only 4.25% of the world's population!

Most of the churches in India and many African and Latin American countries were started by national, not foreign workers. True, missionaries initially taught many individuals and groups in training schools that they themselves were permitted and obligated to reach out to others. It is known that our brothers and sisters have gone to other countries from Canada, the British Isles, Germany, South Korea, and several African countries, and others to evangelize. Both the Sunset Institute of Biblical Studies and World Bible School have published little booklets on "How to Start a Church in Your Own Home." Initially meeting in homes is precisely the way many of our congregations in the USA began. African Christians tell us, "We can evangelize Africa, but we need your help in education and occasionally financing projects." Yes, our money and prayers for global evangelizing have made a difference!

Churches of Christ existed in North Korea prior to the Korean War. During the war, however, some of those leaders fled to the south and began work. Teachers from the USA went to South Korea after the war, and today there are over 100 churches, a university, and a training school operated by our brothers and sisters. Korean Christians have gone to other countries to work. God alone knows how many little groups meet in homes in Mainland China today. Some churches started in Japan by J. M. McCaleb and others in the 1890s and early 1900s still exist. Japan is not hostile to Christians today, but converts come slowly there.

The work of "Continent of Great Cities", sponsored by a congregation in Amarillo, TX, specialized in planting churches in major cities in Latin America.

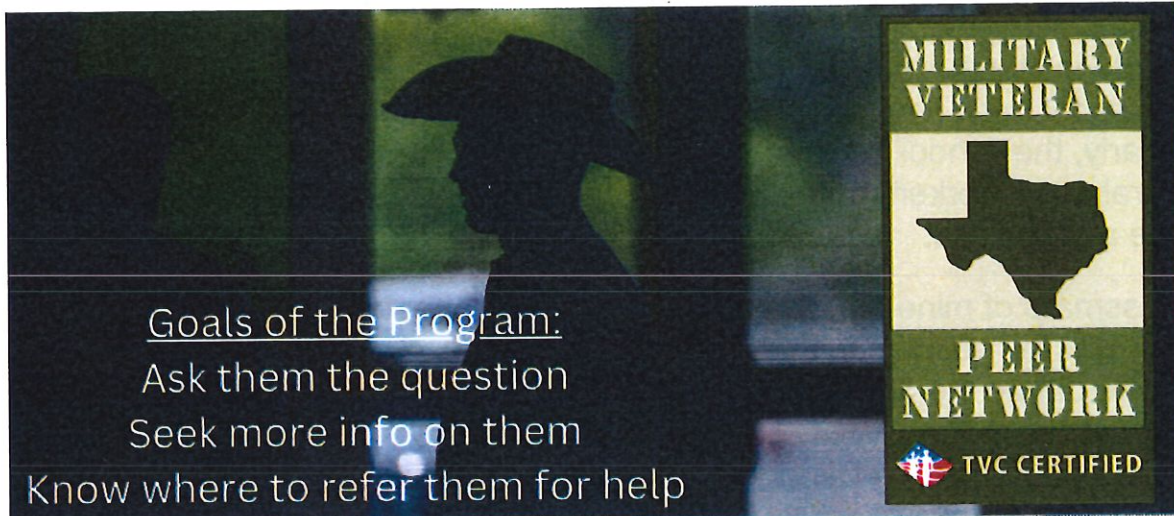
Some of those congregations have planted ten or more congregations. Indeed, it is likely that most churches in Latin America were planted by nationals who had been taught to reach out to others just as someone reached out to them—as in Brazil where over 300 churches are known. Baxter Institute in Honduras has for many years turned out a steady supply of trained workers for Latin America, most of whom are bi-vocational or “tentmakers”. Similarly, the school in Quito Ecuador School of Biblical Studies turns out several good workers annually. Yes, the money given to those works has made a difference.

A classmate of mine at Lipscomb in the 1950s, Stephen “Epi” Bilak, had broadcast the gospel by radio from Switzerland and sent literature into the Ukraine during the Soviet era. After the Berlin wall came down, many workers went into the former Soviet Union, including the Ukraine, to evangelize. Before Putin invaded eastern Ukraine in 2014, there were about 150 congregations in that country with as many as 5,000 members. Dollars, prayers, and hard work made a difference!

These few cases are mere visible tips of icebergs. Entire books can be written about our Indian and migrating Ghanaian brothers and sisters. Long articles can be written about the efforts of our brothers and sisters in the UK, Latin America and South Korea. God alone knows the whole story.

God deserves our best! The concept of teaching the ideals portrayed in the New Testament documents remains valid. The need remains for people to be taught about Jesus Christ our Lord, and that they can be Jesus-followers without wearing divisive names or insisting on human opinions or doctrines as divisive elements. Be thankful for those who went on their own or were sent out in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see Slate, Lest We Forget: Minibiographies of Missionaries from a Bygone Generation. [Winona, MS: J. C. Choate Publications, 2010]). What these and more recent workers have done made a difference, and we can know only a part of the results! God be praised.

C. Philip Slate
cpsmissions@gmail.com



Goals of the Program:
Ask them the question
Seek more info on them
Know where to refer them for help

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION AND
THE MILITARY VETERAN PEER NETWORK

SUICIDE PREVENTION TRAINING:

ASK About Suicide to Save a Life

WHEN: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2022, 9:30 AM TO 1:00 PM

**WHERE: GRAYSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE
ANNEX ASSEMBLY ROOM, 100 W. HOUSTON ST., A-2,
SHERMAN, TX**

**WHO: OPEN TO ANYONE, 18 YEARS OLD OR OLDER
(Veterans, producers, student leaders, teachers, 4-H
leaders, non-profit leaders)**

Register at: www.grayson.agrilife.org. This program is free to the public.
Questions? Call Chad at (903) 813-4202 or email at chad.cummings@ag.tamu.edu

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.