

Our Passions

By George Miley

(What follows is the original statement of vision and values of Antioch Network, formulated in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This text is taken from: George Miley, *Loving the Church ... Blessing the Nations* (Waynesboro, Georgia: Gabriel Publishing, 2003), 21, 23-27.)

On March 16, 1987, leaders from seven churches gathered to spend a day together. Our purpose was to explore a vision that was living within us—that each of our churches would focus on how we might start new churches within a strategically selected unreached people group. Throughout the day we shared our individual journeys, prayed for each other, and learned from one another.

We represented a variety of Christian traditions. Some came from denominational churches and others from independent ones. Some were rooted in one theological stream and others in another. But those were not the issues that day. We discovered compelling common ground in worship, prayer, God's heart for all nations, and a whole set of core convictions. What had brought us together was far more powerful than anything that might separate us. When the day was over, we knew we wanted to meet again. We were unaware of it, but Antioch Network had just been born....

We Are Passionate ...

1 – To see the Lamb be worshipped among all peoples. The eighteenth century Moravians, originally a Christian community (church) of around six hundred adults in Central Europe, matured into the most significant Protestant missionary movement of their time. They were propelled forward by the conviction that “the Lamb must receive the reward of His suffering.” Jesus is worthy of nothing less than to be proclaimed, loved, worshipped and obeyed in every cultural context. The final destination of all human history: “All nations will come and worship before you...” (Rev. 15:4).

2 – To see the local church be held in high regard. Scripture describes the Church as “the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1:23), and says “through the Church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known” (Eph. 3:10). This is exalted language. Christ endows churches with awesome capacity waiting to be developed and released. Soon after the resurrection, churches became bases from which church planting teams were sent out among unevangelized cultures (the Gentiles). Kingdom blessings are delivered through spiritually vibrant, culturally relevant churches that are being reproduced throughout society.

3 – To see every believer be esteemed as a gifted minister. Christ through the Holy Spirit has generously distributed a dazzling variety of spiritual gifts among God's people (Eph. 4:7-8, I Cor. 12:7-11). And with good reason! Establishing God's kingdom among every people on earth is a complex process. It calls forth the spiritual gifts, natural abilities, vocational expertise, and life experiences of every believer. The task is too multi-faceted to be viewed as the exclusive domain of a group of religious

professionals, though they are certainly included. They are part of the body too! Every believer is invited to join with the Father in fulfilling his mission on earth and is graced with the capacity to play a significant and deeply fulfilling role.

4 – To see mission rooted in community. Community is the environment of extended family. It is committed relationships developed over time in the midst of real life, providing nurture, support, accountability, and staying power for the long haul. Most believers will not leave home and move somewhere else to participate in a mission. It is not the Father's calling for them to do so. If their unique contribution to God's global purpose is to be made, it will take place right where they are, in the context of the Christian community of which they are a part—their church. "Church" is not a series of religious meetings. It is a way of life.

5 – To commit to the pastoral care of those we send. One fundamental image God uses to identify Himself in Scripture is that of a father. His mission on earth can be described as God forming a family for himself from among all peoples. It is unthinkable that He would authorize approaches to world evangelization that are cavalier about the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of those He sends. God's purposes are most effectively carried out by people who do so out of a fullness rooted deeply in the resources of Christ and overflowing with worship, thanksgiving, and joy. Mature churches are rich with those competent to care pastorally.

6 – To view godly character as primary. We live in a compulsive age that tries to hammer us into its image. Voices all around tell us that we should be busy and rushed. We are tempted to elevate ability and take action based on it alone. God is slower. His goal is Christ-likeness in the inner person. Accomplishments, even those done in Jesus' name, that do not come forth from the wellspring of Godly character will ultimately implode. Man is looking for better methods. God is looking for purer people. The greatest need in mission is not more activity (although more activity is certainly called for), but more men and women of godly character.

7 – To keep prayer central in all we do. A twenty-four-hour prayer chain that endured one hundred years fueled the Moravian missionary advance. Unreached nations are walled off from the kingdom of God by powerful spiritual forces hostile to Christ and His Church. Only the gracious working of God can tear these walls down, and he has chosen to do this work in response to the faithful, faith-filled prayers of His people. As we mature beyond our illusions of what our means can accomplish and grow in our passion to see the hand of God revealed, our joy in and capacity for prayer will deepen appreciably.

8 – To see churches cultivate God-honoring relationships beyond themselves. Each church carries awesome potential, but if any church begins to think it is self-sufficient and doesn't need the rest of the body, that potential is dampened. Jesus' endowment of gracious strengths does not erase areas of need. As relationships of love and trust are cultivated among the wider body of Christ, strengths can be extended and help received. Churches benefit considerably through ongoing interaction with other churches, mission organizations, and mature leaders who have been entrusted by God with a wider ministry among His people.

9 – To see the body of Christ be united. Jesus is doing new and beautiful things in uniting his people. Churches are finding one another: denominational churches, independent churches, charismatic churches, non-charismatic churches, etc. We are discovering that the things we share—worship, prayer, love for our neighbor, a passion for God’s glory among the nations, and, above all else, Christ—far surpass anything that might differentiate us. Churches and mission organizations are learning to honor one another. Racial and cultural barriers are crumbling. We are not talking about organizational sameness, but spiritual unity created by Jesus’ residence among us. “Is Christ divided” (I Cor. 1:13)? Of course not! Antioch Network is intentionally committed to the Scriptural injunction to “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

A note concerning mission organizations: In our passion to champion a high view of the local church, we must be careful to affirm and honor the God-designed role of mission organizations. (You could also use terms such as parachurch organizations, sodalities, apostolic teams, etc.) Throughout the history of the Church in mission their contribution has been biblical, unmistakable, and profoundly significant. The vision of Antioch Network was born in a mission organization, and owes its foundations to perspectives gained there. We honor the ministries of our brothers and sisters who are called by Jesus to serve him in mission organizations. Churches need mission organizations. Mission organizations need churches. We all need one another!

10 – To see mission initiatives be strategically focused. Our God-designed finiteness limits what any one of us can effectively undertake. Therefore, our mission initiatives need to be strategic in order to bring maximum glory to Christ. Traditionally many churches have developed mission commitments without strategic integration. Predominately churches have left the formation of strategy to agencies and have just sent people apart from understanding the strategic needs and opportunities in the world. Responding to opportunities as they come up might seem right at first, but the end result will be a shotgun-like effect to which our people will be less and less able to meaningfully engage. The central questions become: “What does it mean to complete God’s purpose among all nations?” “What strategic opportunities remain?” “In which one(s) is God calling our church to be His channel of blessing?” That is where we focus.

These are our passions. Pastors, business people, church planters, laborers, engineers, students, mothers, administrators, and artists, let’s join together in living them out!

