

MY VISION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS ASSOCIATION

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I. Personal and Historical In early 1975 I began to take courses at the Fuller School of World Missions with Ralph Winter, Peter Wagner, Donald McGavran, Alan Tippett, and Charles Kraft. That immersion in perspectives on the world Christian movement in a twentieth century missionary and academic community which was itself a highly influential movement was to shape my life and thought profoundly from then on. It was there that I became acquainted with other mission leaders such as John Wimber, Ed Dayton, and Paul Hiebert. Never before or since did I experience so many paradigm shifts in such a short period of time. It was a gift from God. From there we went to Kenya, Turkey, and North Cyprus, and eventually came to EMM.

It was Winter, I believe, who helped me begin to think "mission-to-mission" rather than "mission-to-church." I saw how pervasive was the western mission focus on relationships with the *churches* we had planted and how infrequently we saw the emergence of new mission sending groups which then ventured on into pioneer cross-cultural missions of their own.

Later in Kenya (1982) I began to dream and plan with Henry Mulandi, then leader of an indigenous Kenyan youth movement, about cross-cultural mission-sending movements out of Africa. By the end of that year, our Kenyan brothers and sisters were in many ways as significant a sending group for our venture into Turkey as those in North America. The African Christian Church which Mulandi now leads has developed its own mission board with an international and pioneer focus.

II. Early Initiatives at EMM About six months after coming to EMM (December, 1994) I addressed an exploratory memo to the three program directors with a query/proposal for a meeting with our sister conference missions leadership, suggesting Calcutta (Attachment I).

Galen Burkholder and Glen Yoder responded in writing, encouraging us to move ahead. Galen noted, "I like the idea for the sake of EMM - international church relationships! A forum of this kind would be helpful to discuss DM international training options." Glen wrote, "I like your idea of a consultation with mission leaders from other Mennonite Conferences around the world in conjunction with Mennonite World Conference. I believe I would find such a meeting stimulating and enriching. January 1997 seems like a long way off, but will probably be here before we realize, so it makes sense to plan ahead" (Attachment II). David affirmed the concept in one-on-one discussions and told me about the Winnipeg meeting in 1990. From him I understood the Winnipeg meeting to have represented a combined "mission-to-church" and "church-to-church" focus, and I began to take opportunities to explore the mission-to-mission paradigm further, especially with Overseas Department staff (Attachment III).

Since the Winnipeg meeting had involved Lancaster Conference ecclesiastical leadership as well as mission leadership from EMM, in November 1995 in anticipation of the proposed Calcutta meeting I initiated discussion with Ervin Stutzman and Ernest Hess suggesting that we might plan separate mission-to-mission and church-to-church meetings (Attachment IV). The upshot was that we were blessed to proceed with a straightforward mission-to-mission focus. Ernest Hess was later invited to the Krishnagar consultation as Conference General Secretary but was not involved in giving leadership to the meeting since it was not designed as a broader church-to-church gathering.

By December 1995 the stage was being set for what became the Krishnagar Consultation (cf. Attachment V, No. 3), and from that point on the preparations continued as David has described. For Krishnagar, I did not follow through with the earlier interdepartmental query; rather, David and I worked together bilaterally. As I recall our developing conversations for initiatives beyond Krishnagar, David focused particularly on the development of periodic regional consultations with mission leaders while I began to give more attention to a potential global association. As of this writing, both the regional consultations and the global association have begun to take shape.

III. Establishment of the IMA The International Missions Association held its first meeting on January 9, 1997 at the St. Thomas School in Calcutta, minuted only by a Memo of Understanding (Attachment VI). In this meeting we recognized ourselves as "organized Anabaptist international mission efforts representing our respective circles of churches, desiring to pray for each other, learn from each other, and partner as God leads in cross-cultural missions to the unreached peoples of the world."

In the February 19, 1997 minute of the EMM Executive Committee on my report it was noted that "three international Mennonite mission agencies are initial members--PIPKA (Indonesia), MKC (Ethiopia) and EMM, with Amor Viviente (Honduras) being a probable fourth. A second meeting in Central America may be possible this summer. At present this is an EMM-related group but is open to additional members. Executive Committee affirmed the direction envisioned for this Association." (Attachment VII)

In the following meeting of the Executive Committee (March 5, 1997) the IMA was again referenced and affirmed, this time in connection with a report drafted by David on the "Krishnagar--Sanjibani Retreat." (Attachment VIII; note also the Executive Committee affirmation of regional consultations.) Thus within a two-week period the EMM Executive Committee twice affirmed the new association in response to reports from the president's and overseas offices.

In the meantime, a faxed response from Rene Penalba of Amor Viviente (March 3, 1997) indicated that Amor Viviente was indeed ready to be a part of the new association, thus completing the initial circle. He wrote, "I was very happy to learn of the development of the new International Missions Association... ..It is with great joy that I say Yes, we want to be a part..." (Attachment IX)

The second meeting of the Association held in Tegucigalpa, Honduras on August 26, 27, 1997 is now history, and the third has been projected for July 27, 1998 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

IV. Vision for the IMA The International Missions Association is still in its infancy, less than one year old. Already many streams, both here and elsewhere, are converging to help shape its identity. At EMM in particular we have paused since Honduras to take stock of our posture, both internally and externally, for the future.

As EMM president, what is my vision? In the paragraphs above, I have touched on some of the strands in brief reflection on the path to the present. In those following is a more integrated summary of what I envision.

1. The IMA is a global association formed by Anabaptist cross-cultural mission-sending

agencies or groups which have been birthed by circles of churches growing out of the ministry of, or working in close partnership with, Eastern Mennonite Missions. Though the CIM (Council of International Ministries) has existed for many years as an association of North American Anabaptist mission and service agencies, nothing similar has been established internationally. EMM has participated in the CIM from its inception, and now the fledgling IMA provides a context for similar association on the global level. However, there are important differences. (1) The IMA does not now include North American Anabaptist agencies other than EMM. This underscores the “family” nature of the IMA as representing one stream of international Anabaptist mission-sending initiatives. (2) The IMA makes no attempt to bring together all Anabaptist mission-sending groups outside North America, limiting itself at least for the present to those which have special relationships to EMM. Thus the CIM is inclusive in its arena in a way which the IMA in at least two respects is not.

Although these boundaries could be changed at some future date, we have included the possibility of similar mission groups being added to the current membership only upon “the mutual agreement of all current members.” (cf., Memo of Understanding, # 7) This is to safeguard the association (1) from being swamped in its inception by North American mission groups and (2) from diluting its clear commitment to the core convictions of prayer, dependence on the Spirit, the centrality of the Great Commission in our missions, and taking the good news to those who have not yet heard. That is, the IMA is not designed to be inclusive of all groups which are both Anabaptist and oriented to mission and service. Other such associations could be formed and members of the IMA could participate, but this is more limited in its conception, at least in its formative stages.

2. The IMA is designed to foster “mission-to-mission” relationships. Since mission agencies plant churches, it is natural for them to maintain close, special relationships with the churches which have been planted. EMM has rightly fostered such relationships with churches and conferences around the world which have been planted through our mission efforts. In six decades of mission endeavor, we have seen the emergence of six overseas conferences of 2500 members or more. These are the Tanzania Mennonite Church, the MKC of Ethiopia, the Kenya Mennonite Church, the Kekchi Mennonite Church of Guatemala, the Honduran Mennonite Church, and the Amor Viviente Church of Honduras. With each of these groups we have an apostolic affinity which goes deeper than the usual bonds of fellowship in Christ, an affinity which results from the fact that they were birthed directly through our obedience, prayer, and sacrifice. If EMM has a “sacred trust” in existing relationships with overseas bodies of believers, this is it.

In addition to these six overseas churches, we could perhaps add a seventh. It is probably not too much to say that the Lancaster Mennonite Conference itself is at least 2500 members larger because of the domestic church planting efforts carried on through EMM during the past century. If so, there is a sense in which even that group which spawned EMM has a symbiotic relationship with it, different yet not totally other than that which exists with the six overseas churches mentioned above.

However, our goal in mission goes far beyond the mere planting of new churches and groups of churches. It is to see these groups of churches become reproducing centers of mission themselves. The IMA was conceived to connect these emerging mission groups with others, in a mission-to-mission international synergy which constantly engenders new church planting movements which in turn produce new mission-sending mechanisms.

3. The IMA potentially connects the whole of EMM with the whole of other mission groups. Through the years, EMM has viewed itself as wholistic in evangelistic emphasis, linking deed and word, the cup of cold water with the word fitly spoken. It has also been wholistic in other senses, such as connecting the domestic with the international, the short-term with the long-

term, the young adult with the aged.

Through the IMA we now have the potential to connect with parallel wholisms in other parts of the world. Domestic outreach here can connect with domestic outreach there. Young adult training and mission endeavors here can connect with similar ventures there. Pioneer mission sending here can connect with pioneer mission sending there. Furthermore, each of these can benefit from dynamic interaction with the others, both in our own backyards and around the world.

4. The IMA may become a catalyst for spiritual renewal as well as the multiplication of missionary efforts, both in North America and elsewhere. As North Americans engaged in church planting and missions, we have much to share, much to learn. Intimate fellowship in mission with brothers and sisters in other parts of the world may be used of the Spirit to change us, renew us--quite beyond what we would experience within our own spiritual and strategic synergies.

May it be so.