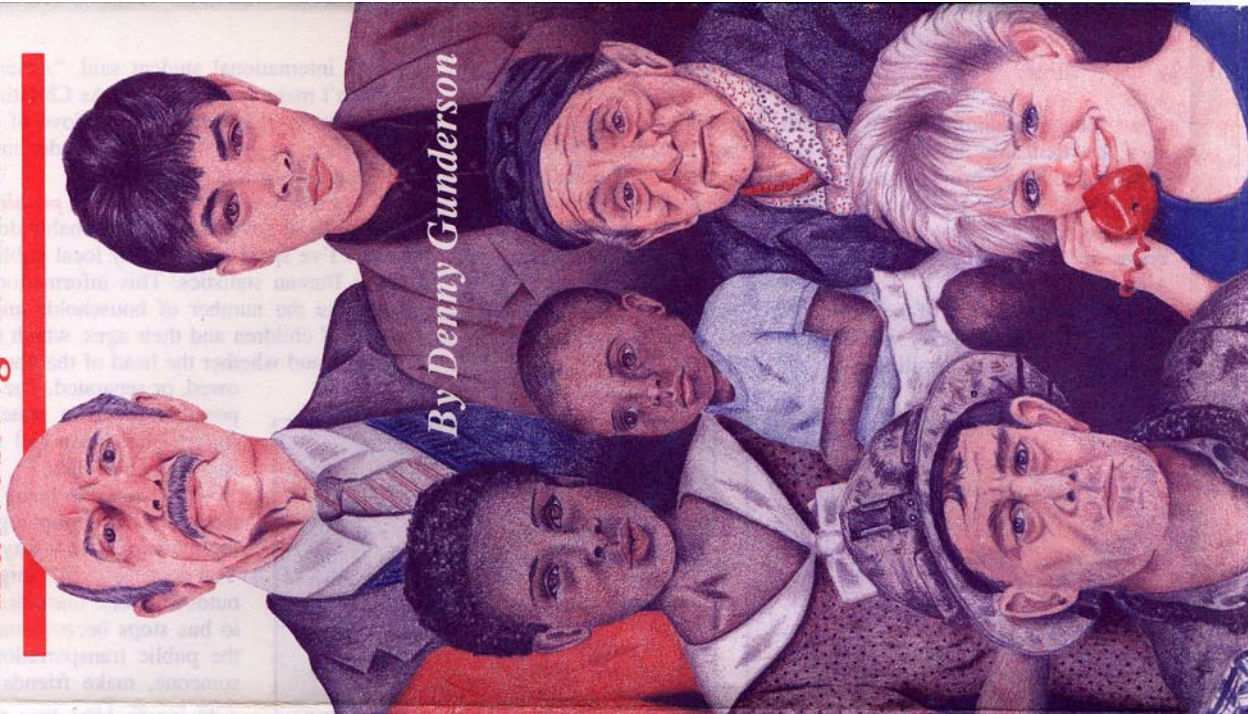


# MISSION: AMERICA

Harvesting At Home!



fore, each part needs the other parts or it won't function correctly. This applies both cross-culturally and cross-racially. I happen to be a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant of Scandinavian descent. That adds up to B-L-A-N-D with a capital B! So, in my life I need some of the charisma of the Blacks, the passion of the Hispanics, the joy and spontaneity of the Pacific Islanders, and the acute business sense of the Asians. If we as individuals need to be enriched by these types of differences, the Body of Christ needs it even more.

We are all surrounded by people, from our own and other cultures, who do not yet know the Good News of Jesus Christ. People we'd normally need to travel thousands of miles to reach may be in our own city. Seek them out. Become aware of their needs. Invite them over for meals. When we do this, they are not the only ones who will be blessed. We will be blessed in return as we gain a bigger vision and break out of our own cultural straightjackets. The mission field isn't only on the other side of the world... it's just around the corner!

## FIND YOUR ASSIGNMENT!

The question is not, "Are you called to be a missionary?" but rather, "What are you waiting for?" The words of Jesus, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few," (Luke 10:2) are just as relevant today as when He first spoke them. The laborers are still too few! The Lord of the Harvest wants to use you in a powerful way to reach into your community with His heart and His saving love.

Every believer is called and anointed to be a part of the Great Commission, wherever he may live. The choice of location is God's responsibility. The choice to obey is ours. What I'm trying to say is that we, the Church, must change our way of thinking about missions.

God, in His role as Strategic Commander, knows the exact geographical locations where He can best use our giftings, experience, and natural abilities. If you've earnestly sought God about where you should be living, and have obeyed Him, you must now realize that the Father has strategically placed you right where you are for the time being. But that doesn't mean you can sit around passively, feeling great about living where God wants you to live. God has placed you in a strategic location so you can play your part in His "399 Army"!

Now you must take the initiative to find the Mission Assignment God has given you in your community – and carry it out!

### Get Six Gift Issues!

"Mission: America" was reprinted from an article in *The Last Days Magazine*, a colorfully illustrated publication filled with challenging articles, ministry opportunities, and more! If you would like to receive a gift of six issues, send your request to: Last Days Ministries, Box 40, Lindale, TX 75771-0040.

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Denny Gunderson is the National Director of Youth With A Mission for the United States. His teaching ministry has taken him across North and South America, as well as to Asia and Europe. Denny is a good friend of ours and we've often gained valuable insights through his godly wisdom. Denny and his wife Dodie live in Seattle, Washington, with their two children, Tanya and Timmy.

### MISSION: AMERICA Audio Teaching by Denny Gunderson

Denny shares his testimony about how the Lord brought him deeper understanding about being a "missionary where you are." He expands on many aspects of this article, and even adds in some new elements. Denny's wisdom and maturity shine in this interesting and informative teaching.

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If you've been unable to travel to other countries and minister to people still unreached by the Gospel, take heart. God has brought the world right to your doorstep! America is full of people from other nations – many of them belonging to unreached people groups. And even more surprisingly, there are thousands of Americans belonging to people groups that are still unreached.

Want to reach the world for Jesus? All you have to do is open your heart – and your eyes. For example, did you know:

- People belonging to over 1,350 different unreached people groups have immigrated to the United States from all over the world! There are people from:
  - 1000 Chinese groups
  - 200 Muslim groups
  - 100 Hindu groups
  - 50-100 Buddhist groups
- Living in the United States there are approximately:
  - 3,000,000 Muslims
  - 200,000 Animists
  - 150,000 Sikhs
  - 100,000 Hindus
  - 100,000 Buddhists
  - 90,000 Confusionists
  - 25,000 Shintoists
- 1.4 million Americans living in the United States belong to the huge unreached people group of Native American Indians. Two tribes in particular, the Hopis and the Zunis with 6,000 each, are considered two of the most unreached tribal groups in the whole world!

## FRIENDSHIP: THE OPEN DOOR

A friend of mine met a Muslim man who owned a small import store in the states. She would drop by this man's shop occasionally to have a neighborly conversation with him. They became friends and she introduced him to many of her friends. They invited him over for dinner, asking him to share about his country and his culture. He enjoyed himself so much that he would often visit, bringing many of his Muslim friends along so they too could get to know some Americans. The relationships developed easily because of the genuine interest and love shown to these people from other countries.

After a few months, this man came over one night, broken and in tears. He'd been observing the freedoms we have in America – especially the religious freedom she and her friends had in Christ. He was in despair because his family had "arranged a marriage" for him – to someone he wasn't in love with. His life was falling apart and in that crisis he turned to the only friend he knew would help him. The door of friendship became the door to salvation for this Muslim man, and he gave his heart to the Lord.

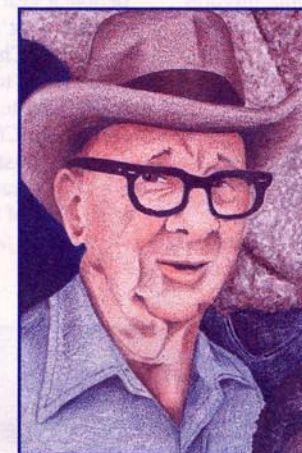
This story had a happy ending. Unfortunately, there are still millions of people who have not yet found freedom and salvation through the love of Jesus. Many of these people are from different nations, yet live right among us. Some of them even come from countries that are officially closed to Christian missionaries. Fortunately, most of us have an opportunity to reach these people right where we are.

This may be a new concept for you. It was for me at first too...

## BEING A MISSIONARY WHERE YOU ARE

I was recently speaking at a missions conference where the theme centered on "being a missionary where you are." During this conference, a number of people spoke out and said they were struggling with the idea that you could be a missionary without leaving America. The thing that made them struggle was that they actually had a "missionary stereotype" in their minds that was putting a limit on the scope of their vision. They believed, like so many of us do, that missionaries are "an elite group of specialists called to exotic overseas locations."

Actually, I too have struggled with the idea of "being a missionary where you are," but for a different reason. I've often heard local church leaders tell their congregations that there was no reason to go into foreign



*"Every believer has a part in the Great Commission, wherever he lives. The choice of location is God's responsibility. The choice to obey is ours."*

missions because, "After all... there are plenty of spiritual needs in our hometown." While I've agreed that needs are everywhere, I've felt that statements like that are really just spiritualized rationalizations for keeping people at home... and church membership rolls intact!

Although I've never commented at such times, my mind has silently shouted, "You're right! There are needs in your hometown. SO WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO START MEETING THEM?!"

## EASIER SAID THAN DONE

I must confess, however, that I haven't always lived out the answer to my own question. In other words, being a missionary at home is easier said than done.

Fifteen years ago my family and I were missionaries with Youth With A Mission in the nation of Morocco. We were content and fulfilled in our service and we were seeing many people come to Christ. So it was a real shock when we began to sense God speaking to us that we were to return to our homeland – America. In fact, I felt embarrassed. Not only was the United States thoroughly evangelized – or so I thought – but the only missionaries I knew about in the United States were the so-called "home missionaries."

Even the very name "home missionary" sounded strange to me. It brought to mind an image of penniless, unnoticed drop-outs who couldn't make it on the foreign mission field. My mind-set was reinforced by one missionary I knew who was sent out by his denomination. He told me his mission board required him to raise \$60,000 a year in support to live as a missionary in a Third World country. Yet, within that same denomination many "home missionaries" were unable to raise that much support in over 20 years of ministry. Now, I would be joining their unglamorous ranks!

As a result of my stereotype, I made sure that when we *did* return home, my Christian friends realized I was only going to live in America to help train and mobilize other young missionaries. There's a wonderful missions saying – that I still agree with – which says, "All Christians are either called to go or to send." I took that saying and committed myself to fulfill what I felt was the lesser of the two categories – a sender.

I was afraid of what people would think about me – and my fear of man compelled me to come up with what I felt was a legitimate reason for belonging to a missions organization while living in America.

## NO APOLOGIES NEEDED!

Of course, I realize how very narrow my thinking was 15 years ago. There's never a need to apologize for God's call on our lives.

Please understand me. I don't want to minimize the absolute necessity for Christians to go into foreign missions. However, it is a known fact that some foreign missionaries are not really doing the work of reaching the lost – while a Christian factory worker in Des Moines may be consistently leading fellow workers and people in his community to Christ.

I would like to pose the question, "Who is really the missionary?" And is location the only basis for defining mission involvement? Geographical location may or may not define missionary activity. A better barometer is the heart, the actions, and the obedience of each believer.

Several years ago I read a statistic that really grieved me. It stated that if an appeal to serve the Lord by going into foreign missions was given to an evangelical church of 400 people the result would be: 40 would indicate a willingness to pray about it, 12 would actually follow through in prayer, four would actively prepare, two would actually go, and only one would remain for more than one term!

It's hard for me to believe that it could really be God's will for only one out of every 400 believers to serve Him on the foreign mission field!

However, I've come to the conclusion that rather than bemoan this sad fact, we should try to motivate the 399 who are left to become missionaries – right where they live! This is the huge – and almost totally untapped – “399 Army”!

### THE “399 ARMY”

So where do we start? Right where we are! I'd like to suggest five steps to help launch you into the exciting world of missions at home...

#### 1. Liberate yourself from a Mono-Cultural straightjacket.

We do need to be grateful for the culture God has placed us in, but it's essential for us to see the diversity of cultures within our own nations. Most Western countries are Multi-Cultural – or made up of many cultures. America has been called a melting pot, but actually we're really more like a “stew pot” – with each ethnic group keeping its own unique identity as we're all mixed together! This could also be said about most other Western nations.

In working with many Cambodian refugees where I live, I've found these wonderful people are especially open to the Gospel within their first two years of arrival. In fact, they are more open to the Gospel when they come to *our* shores than when we go to theirs!

One year we decided to have a special Thanksgiving dinner and invite all the Cambodians we could fit into a room. That night we let them share their stories of how they got to America. For many, it was the first time they'd talked about it and there were many, many tears. Although most of them did not know the Lord, we had a time of prayer with them and asked God to heal them. Many were saved and we started a Cambodian church from that one dinner party. Later many told us that the thing that touched their hearts the most was the way the Christians were willing to meet their needs in practical ways.

One particular Cambodian family my wife, Dodie, and I helped had escaped by walking through the forest eating the bark off the trees to survive. Their young daughter Pon had spent time in a Communist work camp where she worked from 4:00 a.m. to midnight seven days a week. When they finally arrived in Tacoma they were disoriented and in total culture shock. We helped them in practical ways by showing them how to use the phone, put food in the refrigerator, and sheets on the bed. They couldn't read, so we helped them with their paperwork and with figuring out their utility bills. We gave them rides to the doctor and helped them get settled. Pon received the Lord right away and became a key leader in the Cambodian church we had started. She was the translator for the whole youth group!

There are large concentrations of Cambodians in California, Texas, and Washington. Perhaps God would have you reach out in a similar way. It was one of our most rewarding Christian experiences. The need is still great – and it takes so little to meet it.

Refugees – Cambodian and otherwise – are still trickling in and the greatest need is friendship evangelism. They need someone to walk them through the daily tasks of life. The Mormons realize this and even now go systematically door to door in the housing projects – bringing the refugees clothing, inviting them to church, and being their friends. That's one reason why, in many instances, the Mormons are more effective in winning recent immigrants than the Christians!

### CULTURAL BONDAGE

Since I live here, let me use the United States as an example. According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, people are immigrating to America at the rate of 500,000 a year. Most of them are coming from Third World countries – the very *same* countries we

labor to take the Gospel into! It's also estimated that another 600,000 people a year enter America illegally and take up residence without getting caught. That's a total of over one million people a year!

Often, Christians are afraid of people who are different. The fear which confines us to our own culture is a sin. This fear of differences will eventually lead to hatred if it's not dealt with properly – and hatred produces racism. As Christians we are called by God to build bridges of love. Therefore, we must repent of our fear, or hatred, of other cultures. Only then can we, the Church, really *be* the Church – and warmly embrace people regardless of their race or any cultural trappings they may bring with them.

#### 2. Look for the ripe, unreached souls living within your own areas of influence.



Urban Mission spokesman Ray Bakke, in his excellent book *The Urban Christian*, says there are four primary Spheres of Influence in which we all move:

**Family Sphere:** Our immediate family members – whether they live near us or far away.

**Geographical Sphere:** Our neighbors who live close by.

**Vocational Sphere:** The people we work with.

**Recreational Sphere:** The people we hang out with.

It's a commonly known fact that most people come to the Lord within the context of these four spheres – while less than 1% of all conversions worldwide take place in mass crusades! In other words, YOU, whatever your vocation, have the potential to be a more effective missionary than the overseas missionary simply by becoming an evangelist within your own natural spheres of influence!

### COLLEGE MISSIONS

Our college campuses are filled with international students who are hungry for friendship and a sense of belonging. They come to America expecting it to be a Christian nation and they're often quite open to learning about Christianity. However, a 1976 study said, “Foreign students felt unwelcome, lonely, and isolated.”

- There are over 344,000 international students currently studying in America.
- One quarter to one half of the world's top positions in politics, business, education, and the military will be filled in the next 25 years by foreign students attending universities in the United States.

### UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS IN AMERICA AND CANADA

Unreached People Groups are people who do not have access to a culturally relevant Christian church in their own language – and where the community of believing Christians is too small in numbers or resources for them to evangelize their own people without outside (cross-cultural) assistance.

Although many unreached groups live in major cities, they have not been penetrated with the Gospel. This is *not* a complete list.

- AMERICA**
- 2,700,000 Vietnamese Refugees. Buddhist. 7% Christian. 1,300 Vietnamese fishermen in Biloxi, Miss.
  - 1,400,000 Native American Indians. 201,000 in California. 169,000 in Oklahoma. 153,000 in Arizona. 105,000 in New Mexico.
  - 125,000 Cubans. 2% Christians. 90,000 in Miami, Florida.
  - 40,000 Haitian Refugees. Folk Religions.
  - 35,000 Hmong Refugees. Buddhist. Less than 1% Christian. 11,000 in Minneapolis-St. Paul.
  - 5,000 K'anjobals in Los Angeles.
  - 4,000 Bengalis in Los Angeles. Muslim. Less than 1% Christian.

- CANADA**
- 40,000 Koreans. Of Buddhist descent.
  - 29,000 Lebanese Refugees. Muslim. 0% Christian.
  - 20,000 Sikhs. Offshoot of Islam. 0% Christian.
  - 10,000 Moroccan Jews in Quebec. 0% Christian.
  - 7,000 Ugandan Refugees. Muslim. 0% Christian.
  - 3,000 Chinese in Halifax Nova Scotia. Buddhist. 0% Christian.
  - 2,000 Laotians in Edmonton. Buddhist. 0% Christian.

- Forty prime ministers, kings, and presidents once studied in Western universities – and 11 that are now in office studied in American universities!

In the February 16, 1987, issue of Newsweek, Mark Rentz stated, “Some of the bewildered and often unimpressive looking students in our college dorms and classrooms may one day assume national responsibilities in their countries. How we treat them now could have lasting global consequences. Making a foreign friend is easy, but turning a foreigner into an enemy is easier still.”

We did not make a great impression on Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, the former communist leader of Ethiopia. He trained at an Army base in America and was said to have been embittered by the racial discrimination he received while here. After he seized power in Ethiopia, he expelled more than 341 American military men and civilians and signed cooperative accords with the U.S.S.R.

One international student said, “Americans are very friendly, but they don't make good friends.” As Christians we must change this perception as we reach out with the love of Jesus. Who knows, you just might bring an upcoming world leader into a relationship with Jesus. Now that's discipling nations!

#### 3. Study the vital statistics of the people who live in your area.

Your local government has probably done all the necessary research already. I've spent hours in my local public library going through past Census Bureau statistics. This information for your area can tell you things like the number of households and their average income, the number of children and their ages, which language is spoken as a first language, and whether the head of the house is married, divorced, widowed, or separated. The list goes on and on. It's also possible to get a state and county breakdown of church attendance and what type of church, if any, each person attends.

There are also many ways for you to meet people from different ethnic groups. One obvious – and highly enjoyable! – way is to visit ethnic restaurants. You could also visit migrant farm workers or shop at outdoor public markets. One friend suggested going to bus stops because many Third World people use the public transportation systems. When you meet someone, make friends with them, invite them to your home. They may not need you to do anything for them, as much as they need you to do things *with* them as a friend. The opportunities are unlimited depending on how creative you can be in your thinking.

And since America really is a “stew pot,” Americans come in all colors and from many different backgrounds. Depending on *your* ethnic or racial heritage, perhaps the Lord will lead you to seek out others from a similar culture as your own. You may be their very best ambassador for Christ.

The point I'm trying to make is that it's easy to identify and find people of different or similar nationalities who need to be reached with the love of Jesus. All it takes is some research, both at the library and out in your community.

#### 4. Study the spiritual history of your area.

If you live in America, or any other Western nation, the chances are very good that sometime in the past there has been a significant move of God's Spirit in your local area. This is important because I firmly believe that a true understanding of our roots will give us a renewed sense of destiny for the future. Let me give you a personal example. In researching the area where I live, many factors became clear to me. First, the initial white settlers came to the area in response to a request by the resident North American Indians to bring the “white man's Book of Heaven” to their needy tribes. This was, in every sense, a “Macedonian Call.” I also found that currently, several denominations claim to send out more missionaries from *this* area than from any other locale within their respective denominations. In light of this, may I suggest that these two major factors may point to the fact that there is a special “missions destiny” upon the Christians living here. Therefore, it's easy to challenge them to rise up and seize this destiny! An understanding of past *spiritual history* will place your own efforts in perspective. You will see your efforts as being a part of an anointed progression from the past to the present – building momentum and faith for future endeavors. I guarantee you will find a substantial mission link in your roots if you live in a Western nation.

#### 5. Embrace the strengths of cultures different than your own.

The book of Revelation says heaven will be full of people from every tribe, kindred, and tongue. Why wait for heaven before entering the joy of cross-cultural relationships?! We can gain a wealth of knowledge and joy as we build meaningful relationships with people from different cultures, especially as we work side by side with them in our efforts to bring the lost into a relationship with the Lord.

The New Testament is full of references to the Body. Scripture doesn't say the Church is *like* a body – but that we *are* a Body. There-