THE LANGUAGE OF MISSION

ESSENTIAL DEFINITIONS

the language of mission

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DEFINI-
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Definitions

MISSIO DEI

or the "Mission of God" is the sending activity of God as revealed in the Bible to establish His kingdom through the redemption of humankind and all of creation.

MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The activity of the Church in the mission of God in the power of the Holy Spirit both locally and globally.

CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS

The specific activity of the Church in the mission of God in the power of the Holy Spirit to send persons called by God to cross cultural and linguistic barriers to make disciples of Jesus by establishing the Church through the communication of the gospel in order to provide access to salvation to every person from every people.

CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARY

A person called by God, empowered by the Spirit, and sent by the Church to cross cultural and linguistic barriers, living incarnationally, to make disciples of Jesus by establishing the Church by communicating the gospel.

MISSIONAL CHURCH

A church that actively and intentionally engages in mission both locally and globally.

the m-words

IF YOU'RE UNSURE ABOUT WHAT A MISSIONARY IS, YOU ARE IN GOOD COMPANY.

The M-Word(s)

What is a "*missionary*"? When you hear the word, do you imagine a European dressed in khakis and walking through the jungle, a Bible in one hand and a machete in the other? Or do you think of two young men in ties knocking on doors and handing out gospel pamphlets. Or maybe you picture a group of suburban teens volunteering at an inner-city soup kitchen.

If you're unsure about what a missionary is, you are in good company. In Christian circles, we use "missionary," and several other "missio-" words in a dizzying variety of ways. Pastors say, "Everyone is a *missionary*." Youth pastors tell students they are *missionaries* to their school. Christian leaders tell us that all Christians are part of the *mission of God*. Our church is very involved in *missions* giving and *missions* trips. We are *missional* now, and we strive to be *mission-minded*.

With these different uses of the same word, people naturally wonder, *How is it possible everyone is a missionary?* Not everyone is a doctor, or pilot — and, in church, not everyone is a pastor.

What do we mean when we say, "Everyone is a missionary"? How can that be? Adding to the confusion, there are times when some people who call themselves missionaries get special attention. Listening to these "missionaries" tell miracles stories of far-off lands can sometimes make us feel like bench-warming Christians while they are the superheroes.

So, if you're confused, you're not alone. What is a "missionary," or "the mission of God" or a "missional church"? How do we figure it out?

Now, while some argue it doesn't really matter how we define "missionary" as long as Christians are sharing the gospel, we think it really does matter. Our understanding of these words affects how we see ourselves and our Christian identity. So, it is incredibly important that we understand these terms, how they are different, and how, together, they give us a clearer understanding of our Christian task.

There are five "M-words" or phrases based on the root *Missio* we regularly hear: Mission of God, the mission of the Church, cross-cultural missions, cross-cultural missionary, and missional churches. Each phrase, while related, tells us something unique about God, His people, and His activity in our world.

EACH M-WORD, WHILE RELATED, TELLS US SOMETHING UNIQUE ABOUT GOD, HIS PEOPLE, AND HIS ACTIVITY IN OUR WORLD.

Getting to the Root of Things

For the past 200 years in the English-speaking world, the word "missionary" was connected to some of our highest ideals of sacrificial service, gospel witnessing, and compassion for the hurting. It was the term assigned to women and men who took the gospel across cultures and around the world. Today, people often use "missionary" as shorthand to connect a work or ministry to the actions and ideals of these faith-heroes. However, as Stephen Neill noted in 1959, "When everything is mission, nothing is mission."

We want to look beyond simple associations. These M-words are rooted in Scripture and Church history. They carry deep theological and practical meaning for Christian life. They each point to the Church's central task and clarify the different roles of each believer in this task. How can we get clarity on these very important terms?

One way is to find where these English terms come from and then track to where these ideas appear in Scripture.

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"MISSION" WAS A THEOLOGICAL TERM THAT DESCRIBED THE FATHER SENDING THE SON AND THE SON SENDING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

You might be surprised to learn that for the first 1,500 years of the Church, the word "mission," and other words based on it, did not refer to people taking Jesus' message to the world. Instead, "mission" was a theological term that described the Father sending the Son and the Son sending the Holy Spirit. Our modern English terms that start with the root *mission*, "mission," "missionary," "missional," all come from this theological term — the Latin word *missio* — when Latin was the language of the Church. *Missio* refers to "sending" or "sent."

The reason we do not see the terms "mission" and "missionary" in our English Bibles is because the Early Church used Greek, not Latin, to write the New Testament. The Greek verb for "send" is *apostello*, and this is why we see the term "apostle," and not "missionary," in our English Bibles. Apostles are "sent ones." We read in the Bible and the history of the Early Church that apostles took the message of Jesus across geographic and cultural boundaries.

The place to start thinking about all the "mission" words in the Bible is to look at the idea of *sending* in Scripture. It turns out that the Bible is full of stories of God sending people. It has a lot to say about God's "mission" that involves all of God's family, not just a few special people. Let's start by looking at some of these biblical "sendings" and relate them back to our *missio*-based terms.

THE PLACE TO START THINKING ABOUT ALL THE "MISSION" WORDS IN THE BIBLE IS TO LOOK AT THE IDEA OF SENDING IN SCRIPTURE.

The Mission of God

In the Bible, the *first sending* starts with God; sending is a part of who He is and what He does in the world He created. From the beginning, God had a plan to save people out of their lostness and brokenness. The Bible tells us God took action to save His creation by sending His people and His own self: God the Father sent Jesus Christ, His Son, to save the world (John 3:16).

SENDING IS A PART OF WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE DOES IN THE WORLD HE CREATED.

Sometimes people translate the Latin term, *Missio Dei*, into English as the "mission of God." This term describes the motivation and direction of God's redeeming action — centered around the person of Christ as Savior and King.

The sacrificial love of the Triune God is endless, infinite, and amazing. But another stunning reality we see in the Bible is that God also sends His people into the world to carry out His plans. We might call this the *second sending*. Jesus explained this process and what this means for believers when He said to His disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (John 20:21, NLT).

Just as God sent himself into the world, the Son now sends His people. Jesus also sent the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33) who empowers God's people — the Church — to bear witness to himself (Acts 13:2). All believers are called to take part in *God's mission* by representing Him to the world.

MISSIO DEI

or the *"Mission of God"* is the sending activity of God as revealed in the Bible to establish His kingdom through the redemption of humankind and all of creation.

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Church

The Mission of the Church

Our next M-word, "the mission of the church," describes the way the Holy Spirit empowers God's people to join God's mission through the everyday work of the church, both locally and globally. Sometimes you will see it as "the mission of the Church," or the singular "mission," or the plural "missions." A biblical example of this is the Antioch church in Acts 13-14, which sent Paul and Barnabas out to share the gospel. As God's Church, we are all sent, and we send our sons and daughters to the world.

Tim Dearborn expresses the church's relationship to God's mission this way: "It is not the Church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a Church in the world."

The mission of God's people includes everything the Spirit leads us, the Church, to do to accomplish God's plans.

This wide-angled view on *everything* God's Spirit leads us to do *locally* and *globally* reveals two truths about "mission."

"IT IS NOT THE CHURCH OF GOD THAT HAS A MISSION IN THE WORLD, BUT THE GOD OF MISSION WHO HAS A CHURCH IN THE WORLD."

– Tim Dearborn

First, God loves the world and wants to save all people from every tribe and tongue of our vast and diverse world (Revelation 5:9; 7:9). He does not want "anyone to perish" (2 Peter 3:9, NIV). Because of this, God's desire to reach the *whole* world unites the *whole* Church. We are sent as one body to declare God's glory and all Jesus has done for us.

Second, the Holy Spirit uses every person with every kind of talent, gifting, and calling. There is no A and B team in God's kingdom. Everyone is "sent" into the world, even if each sending looks different. The Holy Spirit isn't limited by our expectations. He is infinitely creative and will equip every believer to fill a specific role in God's redemption plan.

MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The activity of the Church in the mission of God in the power of the Holy Spirit both locally and globally.

Cross-Cultural Missions

As God's people, we are united by His call to declare Jesus' salvation to the whole world. This is a beautiful image. In practice, however, this is where things can get confusing.

God's mission is worldwide, so the Church must do two kinds of work. On one hand, we must share the gospel and plant the church in our own societies. We are "sent" to those closest to us — our neighbors, friends, and relatives — with the good news.

On the other hand, the gospel must also reach all peoples in places and cultures beyond our own home and birth culture. When Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would empower believers for witness (Acts 1:8), the movement from "Jerusalem" to "the ends of the earth" is not simply geographic. It is cross-cultural as well.

The difference between these two kinds of "mission" is obvious to anyone who has tried to talk to someone who speaks a different language. If you have ever visited another country, you may have realized how complicated even basic communication can be. Now imagine sharing the gospel in a meaningful way in another culture. While the gospel

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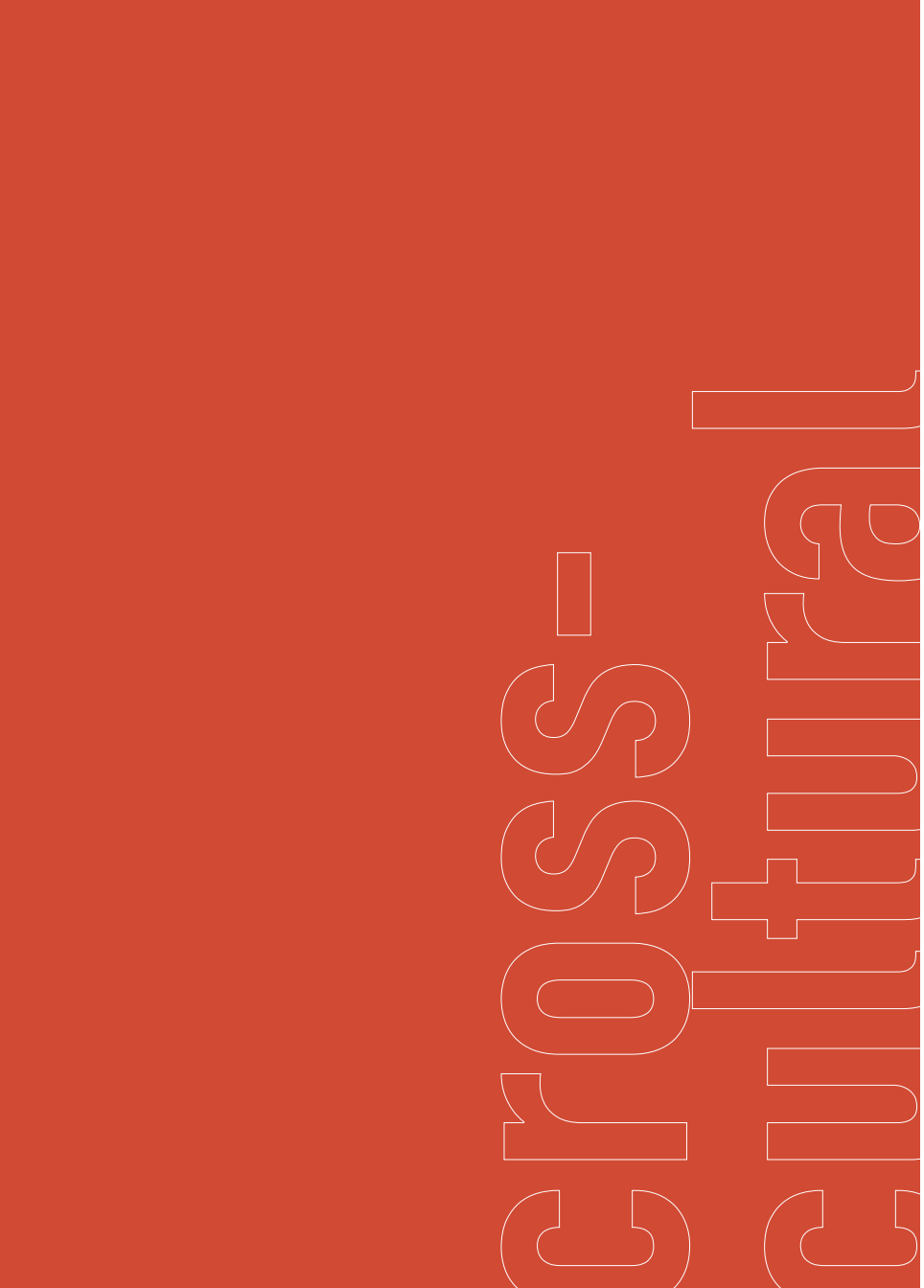


doesn't change, cultural boundaries make sharing it much harder. It requires extra work to make sure Jesus' message is understood and lived out in that cultural setting.

So, when we use the term "missionaries" to describe people doing two very different tasks, things can get messy and confusing. We feel that it's clearer if we describe mission in our own societies and cultures using words like "home" or "domestic" or "monocultural" missions. We want to reserve "cross-cultural missions" to describe sharing the gospel among those who are culturally different from us.

CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS

The specific activity of the Church in the mission of God in the power of the Holy Spirit to send persons called by God to cross cultural and linguistic barriers to make disciples of Jesus by establishing the Church through the communication of the gospel in order to provide access to salvation to every person from every people.

Cross-Cultural Missionaries

Now, you may still be asking, "If everyone is *sent* then aren't we all *missionaries*, sent ones, into our world?" After all, aren't "cross-cultural missions" and "home/monocultural missions" still *mission*? There are two reasons why we want to set this term, "missionary," aside for a specific kind of work.

42% OF THE WORLD HAS LITTLE ACCESS TO THE GOSPEL. NEARLY 34% HAVE NEVER MET A CHRISTIAN.

First, cross-cultural work is just plain hard. Nearly 42% of our world has little access to the gospel; nearly 34% of them have never met a Christian. Additionally, 1.85 billion of those people live in people groups where *less than 1 in 1,000* know Christ. The chance of ever meeting a Christian in their lifetime is extremely slim. To reach this huge segment of the world will require believers to take some dramatic steps. They will have to leave their homes, family, and friends. They will have to spend years learning another language and culture so they can contextualize the gospel. They will face challenges trying to educate and raise their children, and experience continued instability by committing to a mobile life. They will become foreigners in a new, unfamiliar place.

1.85 BILLION PEOPLE LIVE IN GROUPS WHERE LESS THAN 1 IN 1,000 ARE CHRISTIANS.

CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARY

A person called by God, empowered by the Spirit, and sent by the Church to cross cultural and linguistic barriers, living incarnationally, to make disciples of Jesus by establishing the Church by communicating the gospel.

Second, cross-cultural workers commit to live like Jesus by living ***incarnationally*** — that is, they surrender their own rights and culture to live and minister among the people they are sent to reach. They take on a new profession that requires they learn a unique set of skills. A cross-cultural missionary becomes a biblical interpreter and teacher, an anthropologist and a student of language, a ministry strategist, and a skilled church planter. They are lifelong learners who must grow in our seven missionary competencies:

1. Being shaped by spiritual formation.
2. Being guided by a biblical theology of mission.
3. Developing skills for adjusting to missionary life and work.
4. Understanding culture.
5. Engaging the Bible in ministry.
6. Doing ministry in context.
7. Mobilizing believing communities for participation in God's mission.

This "sending" across geographic and cultural boundaries is so very different from every other kind of ministry — than living "at home," engaging neighbors and classmates, or serving as a pastor in your own culture and language — that we feel it deserves a specific descriptor. We call this challenging vocation "missionary" and pray that God will call laborers from His church to His harvest fields.

WE CALL THIS CHALLENGING VOCATION "MISSIONARY" AND PRAY THAT GOD WILL CALL LABORERS FROM HIS CHURCH TO HIS HARVEST FIELDS.

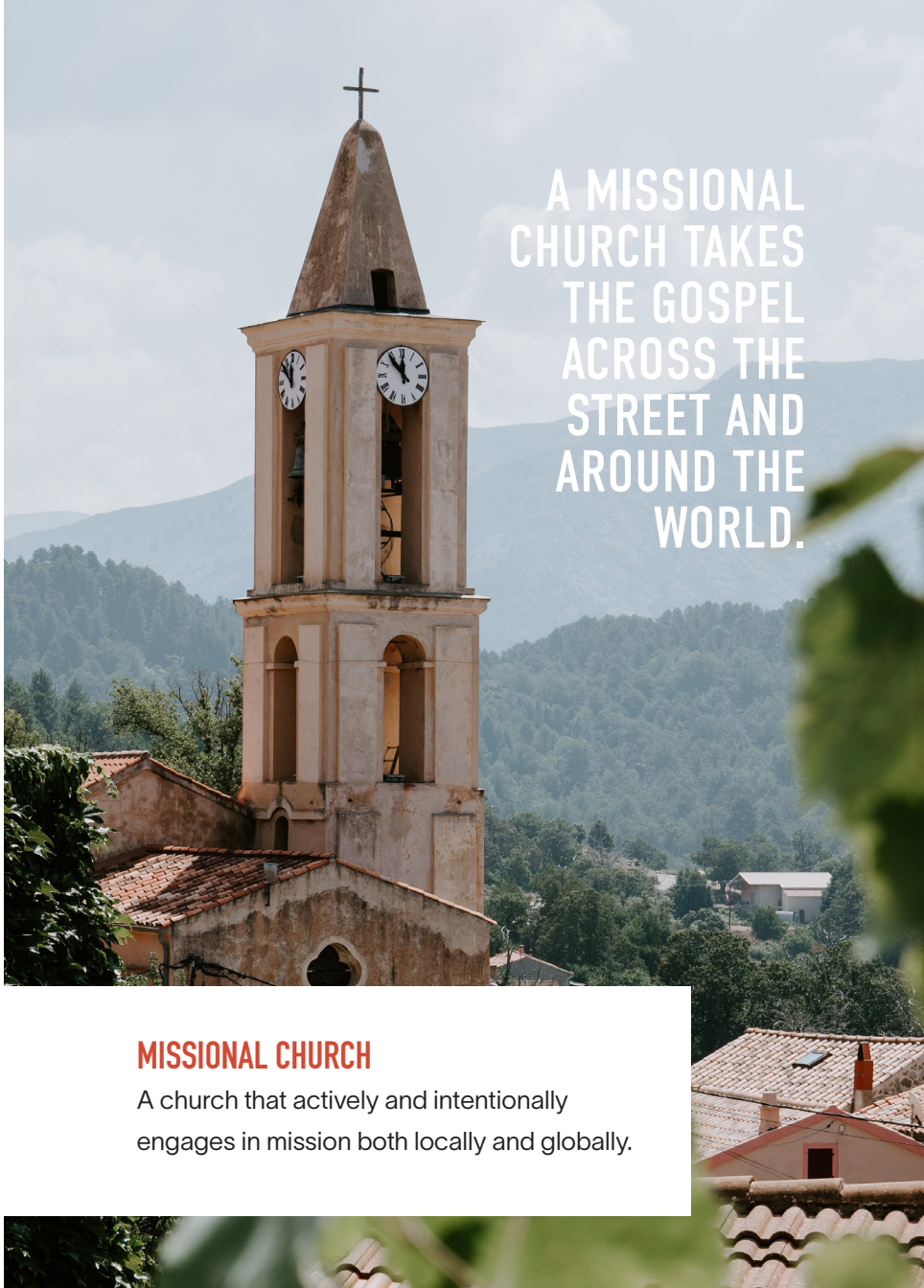
A Missional Church

In recent years, Christians have started using a fifth M-word: "missional." It is typically used in two different ways.

Leslie Newbigin, a cross-cultural missionary to India and scholar of missions, first coined its technical meaning. After serving in India for decades, Newbigin returned to his birth country of England and saw a need for re-evangelization. He used the term "missional" to describe a church taking a missionary stance in its own society: God's people are *sent* to the non-Christians of their society with the gospel. They must actively reach out rather than assuming non-Christians will show up to church services.

Missional has also become a way to describe a church that intentionally engages both kinds of mission. A "missional church" reaches out locally and globally. It sends out missionaries for home and cross-cultural evangelism. It takes the gospel across the street and around the world.

This word reminds us of the unity of God's "sending" His people into the world. The living God works through *all* His people to accomplish His redemptive purpose for *all* that He has made.



MISSIONAL CHURCH

A church that actively and intentionally engages in mission both locally and globally.

Sendings, Senders, and Sent Ones

God's "sendings" are as varied as people are because we are all unique. These five M-words — Mission of God, Mission of the Church, Cross-Cultural Missions, Cross-Cultural Missionary, and Missional Church — remind us that we all play a part in God's redemptive plan. They shape our self-understanding and Christian identity as God's people. They invite us to put our little story into His Big Story!

At home, the M-words challenge local churches to look beyond their four walls and share the gospel with their neighbors. At the same time these key words stir local churches to intentionally share the good news *cross-culturally*. In our world of immigrants and multi-cultural cities, this means reaching out to people who are culturally different from us living right across the street.

Thinking globally, these M-words challenge local churches to consider the whole world. The fact billions of people have little chance of hearing about Jesus should move every congregation to prayer and obedience. God *will* answer those prayers and the Holy Spirit *will* call people from your church to take the gospel to those billions of people without Christ.

THESE FIVE M-WORDS REMIND US WE ALL PLAY A PART IN GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN.

THEY INVITE US TO PUT OUR LITTLE STORY INTO HIS BIG STORY!

As we prepare for the complex task of cross-cultural missions, we will need sending agencies beyond the local church. Agencies like AGWM serve the church by giving local congregations the tools, expertise, and pathways to send their sons and daughters on mission. They provide training for new cross-cultural workers and help them with the transition to fields geographically far from their home churches. As the local church reaches out to the world, these agencies help steward the human and material resources moving between the sending and the receiving church. Importantly, agencies like AGWM are not separate from the church, but a vital part the church's mission.

AGENCIES LIKE AGWM SERVE THE CHURCH BY GIVING LOCAL CONGREGATIONS THE TOOLS, EXPERTISE, AND PATHWAYS TO SEND THEIR SONS AND DAUGHTERS ON MISSION.

Each of these M-words, with their unique definitions, remind us that God's plan is so much more than what He has done for us as individuals, families, or communities. His sacrificial love embraces your neighborhood, city, society, and the whole world. We need the clear thinking these words bring so we never lose sight of the vision of a church locally and globally taking the good news to "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9, ESV).

HIS SACRIFICIAL LOVE EMBRACES YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, CITY, SOCIETY, AND THE WHOLE WORLD.

Who is AGWM?

Assemblies of God World Missions is the global missions arm of the Assemblies of God USA. Serving in this capacity, we are committed to the call of God to make disciples of all nations. We listen attentively to the voice of the Holy Spirit and strategize accordingly. We seek to honor God's call on the sons and daughters of the church, sending them out to the world in the work of *Establishing the Church among all peoples everywhere.*

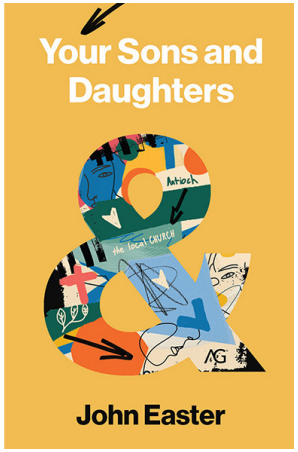
Our missions model, planting and nurturing national churches, is rooted in the example of the New Testament Church. We send AGWM global workers to new harvest fields to learn local languages, contextualize the gospel, and work alongside local, indigenous churches to further His kingdom. We do this in the spirit of the first apostles who Christ sent to make disciples in "all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NIV). These first apostles proclaimed the gospel and formed assemblies of believers wherever they went. These assemblies, in turn, commissioned and sent out missionaries to reach the world (Acts 13:1–3).

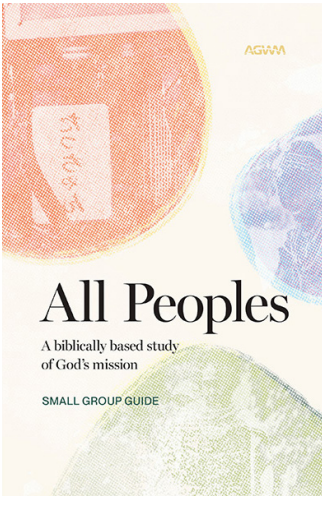
We aspire to follow this New Testament example by commissioning and sending our sons and daughters into the harvest field. As they reproduce believing communities around the world, God increases the harvest. Wherever the Church is planted, He multiplies His disciples, sending them as He has sent us into all the world. By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, we are committed to *establishing the Church.*

World Missions Resources

Assemblies of God World Missions and its missionaries are extensions of our local churches. You have nurtured, discipled, and equipped us for ministry. We are you. Executive Director John Easter urges pastors and churches to build this vital missions mind-set, so that we continue sending workers and establishing the Church among all peoples everywhere. Share this book with others so they hear this important message.

Scan the QR code to purchase your own copy of ***Sons & Daughters***





Leading a small group but don't know where to start? You're in the right place. *All Peoples* is a small group study with lessons that examine God's missional plan for the world. These six lessons are designed to be completed in a small group setting, together, learning more about God's missional plan for the world. Your small group will read Scripture, have lively discussion, hear from missionaries on the field, and discover what God is asking from us.

God created humans with a desire to participate in God's global plan of redemption. As you walk through *All Peoples*, you will not only deepen your understanding of global missions, but you'll explore how God has uniquely poised you to reach *all peoples everywhere*.

Scan the QR code to purchase your own copy of ***All Peoples***