

POSTINGS

articles for missions mobilizers



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A New Kind of Missionary

Releasing your church's global Influencers

Like many churches, North Park is on the edge of our seats as we witness the rising advance of the global Church.

We sense a new mission season at hand, and it is causing us to rethink our role. While our commitment to sending has grown deeper, we are asking questions about what sending means in this globalized world.

Early on in my tenure as North Park's missions pastor, I noticed that we had a handful of "short termers" who seemed unique in

how they engaged globally. Each was focused on a challenge that had gripped their heart, and they were traveling regularly to be personally involved. Each was eager to talk about their work, but it was less about their own experience and more about the people and the end goal of what they were doing. They were using their vocation—a set of skills developed through their working life in Canada. In each case they traveled alone rather than with a larger team, which seemed to give them a greater sense of

responsibility. This heightened responsibility appeared to produce in them a discipleship that was deeper than what I saw occurring in the lives of other short termers.

Ten years later, we have a growing movement of what we now call “Influencers.” An Influencer is a person who explores and engages in a global challenge in a thoughtful, regular, faithful way. They live and generate their income through their work here in Canada, but they make space for the world in their hearts and schedule. Their example has convinced us to shift away from the general short-term team approach and instead to call individuals to consider what value their life experience gives

equipping nurses in Hanoi’s largest hospital. Because Janet is a nonthreatening outsider who deeply cares for their professional careers, she has become a friend



Janet travels annually to Vietnam, building into the lives of nurses and other medical professionals.

and confidant to many of her Vietnamese colleagues. Her passion for nursing and for their people inspires them to seek

grow both professionally and spiritually. Initially Janet traveled with a team from a Christian agency. After several trips, she asked to go by herself and

focus on one hospital. Her credibility with the Vietnamese overcame the agency’s initial reservations, and they opened a special channel for her. Because we believe it is best for the

church to work alongside the agency, we have forged a bond with Janet’s agency. Church, agency, and Janet meet regularly to hone her strategy and map out goals for each trip.

Janet has grown a team of people at North Park who pray regularly with her and who stay in close contact when she travels. She is a beacon in our church calling others to consider their potential importance to Jesus’ mission.

An Influencer is someone who explores and engages in a global challenge in a thoughtful, regular, faithful way.

them for global service. For some it is their vocation; for others it is their personal or ethnic story.

AN INFLUENCER IN HANOI

Janet’s example caught my attention early on. Janet is a nurse who annually spends four to five weeks in Vietnam,

her out for spiritual input. They are curious about what compels her to come on her own time without remuneration. Each year a growing number of her friends are asking deeper and deeper questions about Jesus. Janet has just completed her tenth annual trip to Vietnam, and it is clear that her influence continues to

A STORY SET IN CAMBODIA

We have a young Cambodian couple who as children were carried through the Killing Fields to a refugee camp in Thailand. Ever since, they have sensed a sacred responsibility for their

story, and they want to serve their people suffering back in Cambodia.

We introduced them to the idea of being Influencers and challenged them to explore how they might live here yet make a difference in Cambodia over an extended period of time. We hope to send them to Cambodia this year to learn and deepen their commitment. We are walking closely with this couple, sensing the importance of their story and wanting to coach them to be a new kind of missionaries.

TRAINING FOR TRADES

Don, another of our Influencers, is highly skilled in general maintenance and electrical systems. All who meet him are quickly inspired by his passion for the marginalized who have no work. He travels once or twice a year to Belize to teach a course on electrical wiring to local pastors and other young men, and he is currently equipping two Belizeans to take his place.

Our church celebrates the

deep impact Don is having as this new kind of missionary. In addition to his influence in Belize, he is inspiring others in our church with trade skills to see possibilities for global service. We can see a movement of people like Don offering their skills among unreached people groups all around the world.

A NEW OPTION

A century ago it took months to reach or even communicate with remote places. So it made sense that the only missionary option was to leave everything behind and move to these places full time. As a church, North Park celebrates those who rose to that challenge; they have left an



Don teaches a two-week electrical course each year, empowering young Belizeans with job skills.

indelible impression on the world and moved the needle forward. In some cases, it still makes sense to pack our bags and move full time to a foreign country.

But today we can reach many

remote places in a day or two, and we can communicate face to face via the Internet, so there are many ways that we can make a lasting difference in the world while still living and working here in Canada.

Developing Influencers requires the church to help individuals think through their stories and their options for engagement. In some cases, people come to us with firm ideas, and in others we shape possibilities together. We may recommend taking time to research opportunities and then a trip to determine fit. This season of exploration allows us to train and grow their cross-cultural capacity as well as test their perseverance for the role of Influencer. We help them set goals and think strategically about their actions. The church offers no financial assistance, although we offer charitable receipting. Currently, we are forming teams of Influencers who coach one another.

We are delighted to discover a deep well of discipleship rising up in these Influencers. Most travel alone, so the compelling mission is on their shoulders. As they embrace their global challenge and learn how to make a difference, the urgency of the mission is driving them to a deeper relationship with God here in Canada.

The traditional North American missionary-sending approach results in too few responding to the discipleship challenge while the vast majority sink back into their couch as donors. Recent declines in Canadian sending affirm my concern.

The Influencer model calls our people to wise engagement in

vibrant disciples here at North Park. We have nine couples/singles actively engaging the world and a lineup of people wanting to learn.

Recently my wife and I returned from a trip overseas as Influencers. A woman came up to me and asked, “Do you feel called to go?”

new movement of Influencers. Imagine how that would impact the world and our church here in Ontario! 📱

At the time this article was published, RB was the director of global outreach at North Park Community Church in London, Ontario, Canada. After 25 years as a business owner, he studied at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies and then for almost 10 years served in the missions leadership role at North Park. Since then, his passion has grown to see godly, gifted entrepreneurs in the Majority World succeed and contribute to the flourishing of their church and community. Today, he and his wife are engaged in a global mentoring ministry that takes them to places like Mongolia and Ethiopia.

The Influencer model calls our people to wise engagement in the world, in situations where nationals are at the forefront and we are in the shadow.

the world in situations where nationals are at the forefront and we are in the shadow. The Influencer model calls people to embrace their vocation and seek to discern its value to the world. The Influencer approach is financially viable and lean, allowing many to engage. Most importantly, the Influencer approach gives people a call to serious discipleship and a deep sense of responsibility for mission. This approach is growing a new generation of

“Absolutely, and we just went!” I answered.

“No...do you feel called to GO?” she insisted.

“Absolutely, and we will go back next year!” I reaffirmed.

She seemed bewildered, and I realized that we must open people’s thinking to nonresidential models of missions in order to mobilize the Christians who are content to be donors when God wants them to be global disciples. Our prayer is that we can grow an entire

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