

# On Mission 2020

*Topic Focus: Mobilization*

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Multiethnic, Multicultural Missions Mobilization**

Hi my name is Valerie Althouse. I serve as the New York City Area Director for ISI - International Students Incorporated.

A few years ago, there was a young man that several of us were hanging out with over dinner. We were talking to him about, "Oh, you should join our staff team and we'd love to have you." We went back and forth like this for awhile and when he realized that we were serious, he said, "Oh, you know, I could never be a staff." "Well, why not?" He said. "Oh, I don't, I don't play the guitar." You know there was that awkward pause and then a lot of laughter and then eventually it came out that the only staff members he really knew, played the guitar. So he equated being staffed with ISI with that. And of course, we helped him understand that that was not the case. But it's a funny story. It's a funny memory, but it helped me realize that we're not always aware of the messages that we're sending and the models that we're using, what it communicates to other people. And when they don't see themselves in what we're saying or doing, that it can be hard to realize that it's something that they can do as well.

So I moved here to New York City fourteen years ago from Pennsylvania. And like many of my other colleagues in missions here in New York, we realized that there was a powerful church here in New York City. We work alongside of many of them. There are some excellent examples of churches that are on mission. But there are also several churches that we realized that when they're doing missions, they're doing monocultural missions and not cross-cultural. Now, New York City - some estimate that there are up to four million of our over eight million residents that would fall within an unreached people group background if you include Orthodox Jews.

And so here we are seated in this major urban center with over 99,000 international students as well, poised for incredible impact for the Kingdom of God, but many churches aren't taking that step to cross cultures. So we began to say, how could we do this? How can we mobilize the church to step over that line? And so, I realized I needed to try something, so I'm going to try something in the church that I'm part of. So I am a part of a church in Queens, New York City. Let me give you a little bit of a picture of Queens. Now in New York City in general, 37% of our population is foreign-born. So we're already an international city, but then, when you come to Queens -New York City has about 800 spoken languages- most of those are spoken in Queens. The neighborhood where my church is located 71% of them are foreign born and 52% speak a language other than English at home.

So my church is located in an incredibly diverse area. So, in order to mobilize my wonderful church into cross-cultural work with unreached people groups, I needed to look at some tools - some mobilization material. So I gathered some people into the room to look at this material and I wanted to include a variety of people in leadership and so people that were in the room, let's see, I had two American Filipinos; one African American; one South-East foreign American; Southeast Asian; two White men; one Chinese American woman. And these don't even represent the many international people in our church community. So we reviewed some mobilization media, some mobilization material and after spending a day doing that the questions that were posed to me were these: They said, "Valerie, I don't see non-Western church history. How will that connect with our people?" "Valerie, I see mainly examples being used of Western missionaries. How will that connect with our people?" And finally, they said, "Where are the examples of the Filipinos that are going overseas or the examples of the Africans that are engaged in mission; or Chinese that are engaged?"

And so I realized that when you take a mobilization mindset, you know, that's built from a place where you worked in a mono-cultural setting, particularly in my background -I worked for three years as a mobilizer- and then you transplant it right, and to have incredibly diverse multi-ethnic, multi-cultural context. It simply doesn't translate very easily or smoothly because some of the messages that are being sent are old messages that don't connect with that population. Now it might be easy for you to hear my story about doing this and say, well, there are of course, there's a lot of materials out there that are great for language-specific groups or culture-specific groups. But in my context, we have people from everywhere and people from all different backgrounds in the same congregation. Now, many of you that are in a more monocultural context are going to say, okay, I can see that that's an issue for you, Valerie, in Queens New York City. But how is that an issue for me as a mobilizer, I'm still working in a very mono-cultural context?

So as I began to reflect on this I realized, you know, Queens, is you know, it's the big example, right? But it actually reflects on the changing demographics of our North American context in a much larger way. It's projected by the US Census Bureau that a lot of changes are going to take place in the next 20 to 25 years. The estimate that Caucasians will dip below that 51% majority so will be 47%; It will be 29% Hispanic; 14% African-American, and 9% Asian.

So our community here in North America is rapidly changing. That's not something that's going to slow down. And many of you are aware that with the immigrant population that's entering, current estimates would say that 60% of them are incoming as Christian. Now of course, that doesn't really, you know, there's nuance to that, about where they're at in their faith walk. But there is a changing picture of what's happening within our own country and my question to mobilizers and organizations is this, is our mobilization material and media keeping pace with what's happening not only in the changing demographic of North America, but just in the changing nature of missions at large from everywhere to everywhere? Are we telling those stories? And so my concern is that, if we're not keeping pace with that, if we're telling a single story instead of a multitude of stories so that people can see images of themselves and what's taking place, we're going to miss mobilizing people with incredible cross-cultural abilities and incredible hospitality gifts, an incredible openness to other cultures. Because we're not painting that picture for them and they're not seeing themselves in our material.

As I'm doing mobilization work at my church in Queens, there's a wonderful example of two incredible ladies that happened to be working here and they're from the Philippines. They grabbed hold of this idea of least-reached people groups were invited into our ministry and right away brought a young woman from Saudi Arabia home for Christmas with them and were able to speak to her of Jesus. And that's the kind of mobilization I want to do more of and I want to see more of happening in North America.

We have an opportunity to mobilize the global South. Even here in this context of North America. I want to challenge you as my fellow mobilizers just with a couple of key take-aways from this. Get feedback on your current media. Take a look at it with fresh eyes. Is it accurately representing the world of missions today? Is it accurately bringing into the picture people from my diverse background or people of color? Are you representing those that you want to recruit well? And, are you thinking outside the box of who you've always recruited in the past or you diving into some of these new pools of fresh faces and voices and fresh partners in the work of the Gospel? Consider looking for ways of mutual partnership by mobilizing global South peoples here in our context.

And then finally, I just want to give a shout out. I was just recently connected with a brother named Brian Hebert who has a YouTube channel called Nations Reaching Nations. There's a playlist down there about multi-ethnic missions mobilization. This is what I'm getting at, this is what I'm asking us to be aware of in our North American context for who we're sending, what we're modeling and how we're really calling forth this next generation of laborers, whether they are internationally born, whether they're second generation, or people of color. Let's be sure that we're mobilizing all of the Kingdom of God to engage in all of the work of God and do that together for the sake of the Great Commission and the sake of His name. I'd love to continue this conversation with you. Please shoot me an email. Let me know if you'd like to talk further. Thank you very much.