

On Mission 2020

Topic Focus: Mobilization

Steve Leston - To Every Tribe **Church and Agency Partnerships for Stronger Mobilization**

Hi! My name is Steve Leston and I serve as the President and CEO of To Every Tribe, a mission training and sending agency headquartered in Los Fresnos, Texas. I have served in long-term capacities, both the local church pastor and as a missionary. And I have seen the positive impact on mobilization when the church and the agency work together. But I've also seen a negative impact when the church and the mission agency ignore each other and try to go it alone. I believe that when the church and the mission agency work together they can be used by God to send out laborers in a way that helps all of our missionaries endure, be fruitful and be faithful in their work. I want to share with you a few things to start a conversation on how we can grow in mission partnership to open the door to send laborers into the harvest.

To do this, I have two main topics that I want to address with you. I want to unpack first, what I would call the shared values that should govern the partnership. Second, I want to talk about some key first steps that we can take to get started in effective partnership that leads to greater mobilization. It's my intention that this short talk would help foster strategic partnerships between the church and the agency to strengthen the mobilization of people into the mission.

Let's start with the values of Partnership. For any partnership to work, it's important that there are shared values that unites the partnerships. And what I want to offer to you are some four values that I believe will foster a partnership that will strengthen mobilization.

First, there should be a shared definition of what a prepared and qualified missionary looks like. You know it's tempting for churches to send people too soon. Whoever desire to go to the field. I know that pressure myself when I was a local church pastor and it's also a temptation for mission agencies to have a hard time saying "no" to a missionary because most agencies have an economic model that depend upon new missionaries. But both the agency and the church need to learn how to say "no" to people who are not ready.

Second, I think it's important that local churches actually develop relationships with multiple mission agencies to open up the doors for all kinds of people in their church to serve. Different agencies do different things. And to have multiple relationships allows you to have space and places of service for the variety of gifts that are within your church. Now the mission agency does need to be OK with this and not to become jealous. Churches that are partnered with many agencies are churches, who can launch more people into the field.

But it is true that the mission agency needs to value this in churches and see the value in more people being sent.

Third, the agency must recognize the value of the local church. The church is the institution that God uses to disciple people, affirm them in their character, and affirm them in their gift and sends them out to the field. When a church vets a missionary, the agency gets people who have the background and readiness that will serve well on the field.

But fourth, the church must trust the mission agency to be able to handle and deal with the cross-cultural aspects of the mission. The mission agency has the capacity to get people into other nations to help them live, pay their bills, buy their food, carry out the mission and complex context. It's critical that the church values the cross-cultural, sending capacity of the mission agency and leans in on this as they send people. So now those are the key values that a church and a mission agency should share. Now, what I want to do is just draw our attention to some key first-steps to partner together for stronger mobilization.

Now there are four steps that I believe will foster greater partnership between the church and the agency for stronger mobilization. First, and this one is critical, I believe that the agency should design times for local churches to engage spiritually with the leadership of the agency. I'm not talking about a short-term trip. I'm not referring to projects to come help clean the headquarters. I'm talking about a planned time of prayer, fasting, and relationship building with the leaders of both the mission agency and the church to pray that the Lord would send out laborers, and have time in that prayer to be in the scriptures and to renew our commitment to the mission. You know, Matthew 9:38, Jesus tells us that the ultimate Mobilizer is the Lord moving in the hearts of His people to send them out to the field. Our ultimate response is to pray to the Lord, Who owns the harvest, to send out laborers into His harvest. And as partners, we should beg the Lord together, which is actually what the text tells us to do. That He would move in people's hearts to send out laborers.

A second step that we can take is that I believe it's helpful if the local church would commit to having their short-term trips serve the long-term mission of the agency. What this means is that the local church and the mission agency should design trips that put church members in productive projects that serve the long-term goal and objective of the missionaries on the field. Now this does take time. And the mission agency and the local church will need to work this out, so that it's productive. But when short-term trips are done well, this often becomes the way that God pulls people into the mission in a long-term capacity.

Third, I believe it's important that the church and the mission agency should work together to develop discipleship training materials that are practical and will help prepare people in the church to think and act like a missionary in their daily life. I have personally observed the benefit when both the church and the agency work together for this kind of work. As people are prepared to think and act like missionaries in their ministry skills and their character, in their understanding of scripture, they become prepared and ready for the mission.

Fourth, missionaries are wonderful tools in the hands of God to help mobilize the body of Christ to be sent to the harvest. Both church and agency needs to make sure that we help the missionaries tell their stories. Churches can use the technology that we have today to talk to the missionaries on a Sunday, have them speak to your Sunday school over Skype or FaceTime. And when they return on their furloughs, to actually have them speak in your church. Mission agencies, it is important, critically important that you encourage your missionaries to consider their ministries is bigger than just what they're doing on the field. And to keep their churches and their supporters up-to-date with the work that God is doing believing that God can and will use this to raise up laborers for the harvest.

Now, if we can share in these common values that I mentioned and take these four simple principles, prayer, intentional trips, training materials and helping missionaries tell their stories. If we take these seriously, I believe that we're working together to strengthen the mobilization of people into the mission and working in harmony rather than competition for the sake of the mission.

Thank you so much for taking the time to listen to this video. And let us pray together that the Lord of the harvest would cast out many laborers into His harvest field.