

# On Mission 2020

*Topic Focus: Mobilization*

**Jay Matenga - WEA Missions Commission**

## ***Mission Mobilization Shifts***

Kia ora koutou! Ko au Jay Matenga aho. Well, in my native Maori language, I effectively said well being to you all. I'm Jay Matenga. I am the Director of the Missions and Evangelism Department for the World Evangelical Alliance of which Missio Nexus is a member through our Mission Commission. Well, it's a delight and a privilege to be here to share with you today. For my part in this 2020 On Missions Conference, I'd like to explore the very concept of missions mobilization with you.

When we talk about encouraging more people to engage in the mission of God, we now tend to refer to it as the Ministry of Mobilization. This is something I've been involved in for more than twenty-five years. Yet if we're not careful, mobilization can become overly industrialized as marketing or recruitment, which is functional, and may seem organizationally appropriate. But I'd suggest it lacks biblical support.

In the 1980s, the late Doctor Ralph Winter popularized and professionalized the idea of mobilization via the Perspectives Course. In the current edition of the Perspectives reader, this one here, Doctor Winter's article is called "Join the World Christian Movement." It's still in here and here he introduces mobilizers as those who marshal support for frontline cross-cultural workers. He goes on to argue that churches without a vision for the nations require a heart transplant, and that mobilizers need to train to a surgical degree to bring a new vision and purpose to churches - a new heart, if you will.

Well, to move the masses to missions was Doctor Winter's big idea about mobilization. Well actually, mobilization is an idea. There's nothing in Scripture that speaks of a ministry or gifting for mobilization as such, but there is plenty in Scripture that speaks of being an encourager and a positive influence on others' walk with the Lord, to spur one another on to love and good deeds as it says in Hebrews 10:24.

Well, we commonly understand this to be a discipleship process. Far from the world of marketing and recruitment, the Bible speaks of discipleship and I contend that the idea of mobilization is only biblically defensible if it's part of a normal discipling process. In our book *Mission in Motion*, speaking frankly of mobilization - this one here - Professor Mal Gold, Chair of Sociology at Messiah College and I got together, we report on the findings of a ten-year, global research project into the reasons why people became involved in missions. And here we know that the specific idea of mobilization arose in the wake of the 20th century World Wars. As

leaders such as George Farewell, Lauren Cunningham, Bill Bright, Billy Graham and Ralph Winter borrowed from the realm of military logistics to speak about their missions strategies.

Well, in our book, we define mobilization as the process of assembling and making both personnel and supplies ready for deployment usually for a war. As the word suggests, it implies a making of something mobile - ready to be moved. In a mission since then, it's preparing Christians for deployment into some form of missions involvement. This is the core sense of mobilization that others have built whole ministries around since, following Doctor Winter's version of this idea of mobilization.

Well, preparing Christians for deployment is one thing. Motivating them to actually deploy, it's something completely different. In an era of missions that I believe is now in our rear view, the motivating catch phrase was the "task remaining" as evaluated by a diminishing number of unreached people groups. An urgency was created around that task supported by a certain eschatology concerning Jesus' return rooted in a particular reading of Matthew 24:14 and 28:18 to 20. While that remains a strong rationale in the global missions community, in my experience as a mobilizer, it's no longer an affective motivator towards mission service, at least not in the West. The urgency of an imminent future has been eclipsed by the survival in an uncertain now. In very broad strokes, the late 20th century context, they brought about the idea of missions mobilization, was by and large optimistic, developmental and progressive. We were told by mission speakers that we could go ahead and change the world. Well, at the beginning of this 21st century, at least in the Western Hemisphere, the focus is now on the fact that I need to change me. In one generation, we've actually gone from Michael Jackson's global crisis appeal song, "Man in The Mirror" to Lauren Daigle's back porch anthem "You Say."

Welcome to the age of authenticity. This is a theme coined by Canadian Philosopher Charles Taylor in his book, "A Secular Age." Taylor argues that we have moved from an age of mobilization, that's what he actually calls it, into an age of authenticity. World development has been superseded by self development. Collective concerns have become radically individualized.

Another author, Christian Welzel, discussing the global research underpinning his book "Freedom Rising," he notes that as societies move from industrial to knowledge-based realities, the evidence shows a shift from concerns about external development to internal fulfillment as peoples' prime motivator. With these two very different books overlapped well in the way that they articulate our current and increasingly global reality; self-fulfillment, authenticity, my identity, my group, my personal development and security, these are now prime movers for those you might be seeking to recruit into mission service or local ministry.

Some still argue that the Great Era of missions is one of mobilization on mess. The evidence simply doesn't back this up and I fear we find ourselves banging our heads against the wall if we believe otherwise. Rather than mass mobilization, I believe the next great era of missions we're in now is one of personalization. In our research for Mission in Motion, the one single common denominator we uncovered which consistently gets people engaged in mission service is...

Well, it's in the book available from [missionbooks.org](http://missionbooks.org). OK, I'll spill, it's really a no-brainer. We identified it as a nascent, supernatural sense of core. A nascent supernatural sense of core. That's right, God called them! Ahh!

Sure other factors were involved. But none of these factors were consistent enough to view them as a cause. The missions-active people we interviewed across nine regions of the world, they record an encounter with God, they best described as a calling. The next most common, but by no means consistent affect on mission service that help make sense of the under-defined nature of their calling was a long term personal relationship with someone or a number of people involved in missions. This helped shape their calling.

Well, from all of this and much more, I conclude, that rather than professionalizing mobilization and drawing on formal training, marketing or other mass influencing strategies, we need a better understanding of discipleship, of Christ-followership. To personalize engagement in mission service, we all need to become better disciples of one another. What better way to help God's people find self-fulfillment, than to help them hear and obey the call of God on their lives. How God's mission will be greatly improved if Christ-followers understood who God has created them to be and from that reality, they invested themselves into the world. To be a blessing wherever the Spirit leads them to work in the harvest. We must trust God's Spirit to lead God's people into God's mission. Not our statistics. Not our strategies. The most valuable role effect that we can play is to pray. Pray the Lord of the harvest to catapult out workers and then nurture the call on those He raises up.

Well, in some men, an industrialized sense of mass mobilization in my opinion is not biblically defensible nor a realistic aim anymore. If it ever was. Instead, we as mobilizer disciples multiplied... If we multiplied fully-formed disciples who make fully-formed disciples, we'll be a standard at how quickly the Gospel of the Kingdom will spread throughout the whole world. Not because of a mass mobilization impetus, but because of God's personal call. So I recommend that we mothball mass marketing manipulation. We make it personal and invest in disciple makers.

Hey, thanks for listening and hashtag Stay on Mission for God's glory, if it were always, I'm Jay Matenga.