

# Short Term Missions and the Groaning Creation: Expanding Participation in Short Term Missions Through Creation Care

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**All things were created for Him and by Him (Colossians 1:16)**

## Introduction

This, to me, is a shocking picture. It is a picture that spoke to me about how difficult life is for a group of people who live in the Middle East and are victims of bad policy – or more specifically, bad creation care. This is a tragic occurrence for a river that is prominently mentioned in the Bible at least twice – once in Genesis 2:14 at creation and once in Revelation 16:12 where it figures prominently in the final days.

I don't mention this to focus on the condition of the environment or the need for believers to consider how they are caring for God's creation (which by the way I do believe is important) but more to open a discussion around an opportunity to use a re-energized and re-engineered program of short term missions as a way to train people for the task of relieving some of the suffering caused by environmental conditions like water shortages, deforestation and pollution.

And, because I don't believe that endless stories of gloom and doom are going to make you consider some of the points that I want to present here today, I need to say that I would be remiss if I didn't tell you about people and organizations who are beginning to successfully use short-term missions and service to combine their care for God's creation with the call to bring the gospel to the whole world.



***A boy rested on the mud in a dried-up section of the Euphrates River near Jubaish, Iraq, in June. (Moises Saman for The New York Times)***



***The A Rocha Santa Barbara team and some 40 volunteers built 750 square feet of raised garden beds for a community garden with Habitat for Humanity of Southern Santa Barbara County and Grace Lutheran Church.***

These good events and tragedies are happening today -- not only outside the USA but also, albeit on a slightly different scale, in our backyard. They are the things that drive me to focus this paper on two points:

- **First:** short- and long-term projects -- both local and global provide an opportunity to “re-engineer” how we do missions. This re-engineering will be necessary so that we can effectively continue to fulfill the great commission well into the future as new issues, such as the how the condition of the environment effects our well-being, arise.
- **Second:** we have in front of us a huge opportunity to leverage short term missions so that it encompasses more of a lifestyle and a training opportunity – not something that is “explored” for a week or two during the summer.

## Why Creation Care and Missions 2.0?

With these points in mind, let me start with a bit of background about how I arrived on this podium.

My field, my interest and my passion is creation care. It’s where I spend my days as a Program Manager for Care of Creation, Inc.

Yes, I am a recovering fast-life, somewhat driven, money worrying, typical middle-aged, American consumer who spent many years not paying attention to the beauty and majesty of the creation that God put me in and my relationship with that creation.

After a long journey I arrived at a place where I started to focus more on what God wanted and less on what I thought was important -- including some serious re-thinking about the community and the purpose of work -- I came to the field of creation care.

It was here after talking to many Christ followers who deeply love and care for His creation, that I began to see an enormous opportunity that short-term missions offers for helping us realize how to restore our relationship with God’s creation.

As part of that journey, I am blessed to have participated in 13 or so short term mission trips in the US. Some of these have been with small churches and some with larger churches. These trips have been with my wife, with groups from other churches and on a couple of occasions I have had the privilege of working together with my sons and others in their youth group. I am now using some of that experience to support and work with some very dedicated and competent long-term missionaries who are doing environmental work with local farmers just outside of Nairobi Kenya.

As for creation care, I have come to define it as a recognition that part of the reason we were put on this earth is to tend to God’s creation, to respect it, to learn about how it works and to care for it.

In other words, if we believe that God created this world, than I believe that we should be the ones to care for it. As part of Creation Care and as a follower of Christ, I also believe that we are to live a lifestyle that demonstrates this stewardship.

This caring is the “work” that we were given to do in the Garden of Eden, it is work that is honorable, and it is work that brings Glory to our creator.

But, sadly, sometimes things just don’t work out.

When we “forget” or “fail” to do this honorable task to which we were assigned, two things happen:

- First, because the earth is where we live and because we depend on its resources for our survival and because these resources are not inexhaustible but finite, the quality of our lives suffer.
- The second thing that happens, happens because what we do to God’s creation not only affects us but also affects our neighbors. Our neighbors suffer when we cause water wells to run dry or when our lifestyle and technology habits cause the air in our cities to get polluted. Our neighbor suffers because we exploit resources in other countries so that we can feed our over-consumption based lifestyles.

Please note that I am not here today at this conference to prove to you that there is or is not an “environmental crisis”. It is a tempting challenge given what I am passionate about but, given the focus of this conference I will save that as a subject for another day.

Instead, I will refer you to many, many papers and books, including the Care of Creation seminar “Our Father’s World – Why Christians Should Care About The Environmental Crisis” that discuss how droughts, de-forestation and unsustainable farming practices are effecting many, many of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world.

And I will refer you to the many reports published by the United Nations that identify environmental issues as a major contributor to forced migration of peoples in Africa and other countries.

And finally, for more information, I would suggest a conversation about how drought and erosion is affecting the individual farmer with missionaries who are currently serving in Kenya or a conversation with Haitian missionaries about how the rampant deforestation in that country effects erosion and the ability of the Haitians to live decent lives.

What I can say at this point is that I believe the current degraded (and getting worse) condition of creation stems from a problem of the heart and because of that, the Church is perhaps the only institution in the world that can solve this problem.

That may be an obvious statement since we, the church, are the only institution that works directly on the condition of the heart. In fact, you can say that the Church is the only institution available to the human race that is capable of addressing all of the issues raised by the environmental crisis because:

- We have the message of healing and restoration
- We have the means in both short- and long-term missions
- We have the people both young and old and;
- We have the presence both locally and around the world

What I am here to do is to propose that the current state of His creation is one cause for the suffering of many people and to talk about a way that we could be much better stewards of the gift that God has given us – the gift of his creation -- and at the same time have a profound effect on how missions is taught and experienced.

## Untapped Energy

Now here's why this is important. There is an enormous amount of untapped energy about this subject in the hearts and mind of young people (and some middle age and older people) today. Some of these people are already followers of Christ, and many others who deeply care about this subject are not.

These young people who see the condition of the world, who at least know about global warming, who read about environmental disasters in other parts of the world and who may be Environmental Science majors at colleges and universities across our nation are energized and anxious to do one thing – to care for creation in the context of what they believe and know about God.

All this energy around creation care is a good thing but we must ask ourselves if we are prepared to take advantage of it. We must ask ourselves as current and future leaders of the church is “Are we responding in a way that can tap this energy and is the institution and traditions of missions an ideal opportunity to spread the gospel and relieve some of the suffering that the condition of the environment is causing?”

## A Foundation For Environmental Missions

Missions, indeed, is an appropriate way to tap this energy because that is exactly what missions was designed to do – channel passion for a Godly cause to those who do not know the gospel.

We, in our circles should be reminded that we call it missions for a reason. This may be because the word mission, according to Webster is defined as:

1. A group or committee of persons sent to a foreign country to conduct negotiations, establish relations, provide scientific and technical assistance, or the like.
2. the business with which such a group is charged.

That definition and the goal of today's missions remains as it was when in 1792 William Carey gave his sermon on Isaiah 54:2,3<sup>1</sup>. It was this sermon which persuaded the Baptist Ministers Association at Nottingham to adopt a resolution to “propagate the gospel among the heathen”.

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<sup>1</sup> Isa 54:2-3 (NIV) 2 "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. 3 For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.

Although we might state it a bit differently today than he did in 1792, that goal is still the same -- take the gospel of Christ to those who have not heard it.

Teaching the gospel and demonstrating the Gospel in action have always gone hand-in-hand -- mostly because the gospel itself is undermined if those who teach it don't show that their lives are changed by it. In other words, the great commission (Matthew 28:19) and the great commandments (Luke 10:27) are both required for us to effectively implement God's plans through missions focused activities.

Looking deeper at the history of early missionaries, Dr. George Cary, in a forward to a work about the history of the Baptist Missionary Society talked about how missions has expanded because "loving your neighbor" has played such a critical role in carrying out the great commission.

Dr. Cary wrote "Particularly striking is the way in which early missionaries, though faithful to their preliminary task of saving souls, soon found themselves having to address issues of social injustice, as, for example, in the slave plantations of the West Indies. ***Commitment to making Christ known is inseparable from a commitment to remove injustice and oppression; though the latter must never replace the former.***"<sup>i2</sup>

Modern missions organizations have built upon the commitment of making Christ known as they have worked to reduce injustice and oppression.

In comparing various types and modern missions organizations Kane, in his survey of Christian Missions says "though their organizational structure and patterns of support were quite different, these three kinds of missions (interdenominational, denominational missions, faith missions) had much in common as far as their methods of work were concerned. All three engaged extensively in evangelistic, medical and educational work. In this way, their well-balanced programs tried to meet the needs of the whole man—mind, body and soul. "

A fourth kind of mission later emerged – the specialized mission. These missions usually ministered to a certain class of people or they engaged in some particular kind of work – development of literacy, distribution of literature, radio broadcasting, aviation, social service, relief work etc. Some of these were sending missions, others were simply supporting agencies. "

It is to the category of specialized missions that we are now challenged to add environmental missions – the work of dealing with injustice, oppression and the needs of the whole man by helping the believer and the unbelievers restore their original relationship to the earth that God created.

## **Missions Is All About Restoring Relationships**

Why do we, as followers of Jesus Christ, "do missions" – specialized or otherwise?

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<sup>2</sup> The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-2992. Brian Stanley. From the foreword by the Most Reverend and Right Honourable Dr. George Carey. Archbishop of Canterbury. P xi –xii BV 2520 S67 1992

First, some fine print. Let me say right at the outset that I am not a theologian. That, in itself is scary given that most of you are. I know that I may be slightly outgunned here but I'm willing to jump right in based on what I was taught by some others who are definitely theologians.

First the "why". Almost every member of a church when asked that question will answer by quoting the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew where we, as believers were given the command to go and **make disciples** of all nations.

OK, now for the how. How do we go and make disciples? We do it by delivering the gospel – the good news – about restoring broken relationships.

And most of us know what those relationships are. They are the ones that are described in the second chapter of Genesis at that incident called "the fall".

When we decided to go our own way, the relationships that were broken were:

- Our relationship to God – that's when we ran and hid
- Our relationship to each other – that's the famous "It wasn't me, she made me do it" speech by Adam
- Our relationship to ourself – all of a sudden we were ashamed of our nakedness
- And, let us not overlook the other very important relationship that was broken – our relationship to creation. This is the relationship that was broken when we were kicked out of the garden, the ground was cursed and we could eat of it only through painful toil.

We've been talking about how to restore the first three relationships for a long time. It's the last relationship -- that relationship we have with God's creation -- that has not been given much pulpit or mission time over the history of the church.

There are probably many reasons for that; more certainly than I have time to go into here.

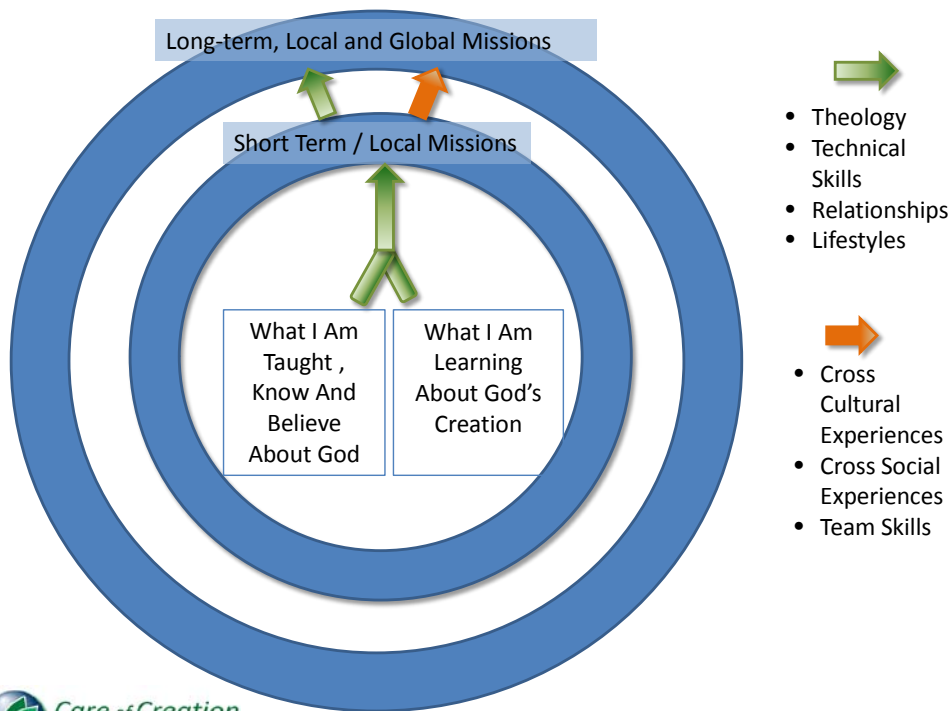
However, one reason we may have not concentrated on this aspect of the fall is that until very recently, we didn't see a whole lot of evidence that this relationship was broken. That, I believe is due to the grace and blessings and abundance that God gave us when he made creation. In fact, He gave us so much that it is only during the past 100 or so years that our broken relationship with the earth has been catching up to us and we are starting to see evidence, both here in the USA and overseas that something is wrong.

## **Missions as More Than A Part Time Occupation**

So what do we do and how do we use the institution of missions, both short-term and long-term to address this problem and tap a huge source of energy and passion and people who are seeking to add creation care as a way to deliver the gospel to those who don't know Christ.

Critical to this plan is that we consider missions much more than a part-time occupation. What I believe we need – especially in light of the large amount of work that we have ahead of us – is that that we start

by considering “short-term” missions as a program that is surrounded by and cooperating with an outer circle of long-term missions.



This, then gives short term missions two very clear purposes:

- To leverage passion and energy and knowledge in order to care for and serve our local neighbors in the areas where they live and where they work.
- To provide a training ground that enables those who are called to choose long-term missions as a career.

We use this new model -- which I call Missions 2.0 -- and focus it on a common critical problem that affects both our local neighbors as well as our remote neighbors – that problem being the current condition of God’s creation.

To unpack this a bit, let me proceed to talk about the following as they relate to building Missions 2.0:

- A strategy
- Preparation
- Focus
- Project Requirements
- Issues that can be addressed
- Constraints
- and project suggestions that illustrate how this might come together.

## Strategy

Let's first address the strategy. By a strategy for Missions 2.0, I am referring to the overall method and direction that is followed to accomplish our goal of re-engineering.



To launch Missions 2.0, I would first adopt an overall strategy that at first glance seems simple -- a strategy of "Good Works" that creates "Good Will" which then leads to an opportunity to share "Good News".<sup>3</sup>

With this strategy, what we do for our neighbors (Good Works) naturally leads to an opportunity that is the key focus of missions – sharing the Good News. It assumes that you have to earn your way to a point where people will listen and accept what you have to say and

that you earn that right by living and demonstrating the lifestyle you are trying to communicate.

## Preparation

Because you want to make sure that people have good reasons to work in short term missions, it is important, as part of the preparation, especially in the case of environmental missions, that the following is considered:

1. First, build a good, solid theological base for what your missions program is doing. In the case of environmental missions, a study of Genesis 1 and 2 and the four relationships (Us to God, Us to others, us to ourselves and us to the earth) that were broken provides this foundation
2. Tap into and leverage people's passions and life experiences and energy. Today's college age, high school age and even younger are aware and enthusiastic about caring for the land and the environment. What they are hungry for is a way to tie together what they know to be the truth about God and their passion to care about His creation.
3. Combine these two items -- good theology and passion -- into Good Works with a specific focus on environmental issues.

## Focus

When looking for a focus that acts as a guide to where our resources and energy can most effectively be spent – one temptation, usually brought on by overwhelming need, might be to cast a wide net and do a

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<sup>3</sup> I would love to claim credit for this strategy, but, alas, I can't. I first heard of this strategy during a presentation by Chris Dolson, Senior Pastor at Blackhawk Church in Madison Wisconsin. This strategy has become the core driver for many local missions and outreach projects that Blackhawk does in the Madison, WI area.

bit of everything. Time and again, experience shows that this strategy may only be mildly effective while a narrow focus on one or two core problems brings a better chance for success.

In looking for a way to define a focus for short-term environmental missions, I have found it useful in my experience to adopt a set of four system conditions at the core of a program called “The Natural Step”<sup>4</sup>.

Briefly, these conditions provide a guide that can be used to focus a corporation, city, organization Church or individual toward what is referred to as a sustainable lifestyle – one, coincidentally, that goes a long way to demonstrate and illustrate care for God’s creation.

In adopting these conditions, they can be re-stated from their “scientific focus” to a “community focus and a “creation care focus”. Doing so produces a set of focus points that are very suitable as a guide for determining short or long-term creation-care missions projects.

Table 1 shows the original four system conditions and the conditions adopted so that they can be used to evaluate and focus short- or long-term creation-care projects

**Table 1 – Conditions Used To Focus Creation Care Projects**

<b>The Four System Conditions as Originally Proposed</b>	<b>The Four System Conditions Reworded as Four Principles of Caring For Creation</b>
In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing:	To help others care for creation as part of spreading the gospel, we should be helping our neighbors
1. Concentrations of substances extracted from the earth’s crust.	1. Eliminate their contribution to the progressive increase of substances extracted from the earth’s crust (e.g. metals and fossil fuels)
2. Concentrations of substances produced by society	2. Eliminate their contribution to the progressive buildup of chemicals and compounds produced by society (e.g. dioxins, PCBs and DDT)

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<sup>4</sup> “The Natural Step For Communities – How Cities and Towns can Change to Sustainable Practices” – Sarah James & Torbjorn Lahti

**Table 1 – Conditions Used To Focus Creation Care Projects (continued)**

<p>3. Degradation by physical means</p>	<p>3. Eliminate the progressive physical degradation and destruction of God’s creation and God’s processes (e.g over harvesting forests or destroying critical wildlife habitat) and;</p>
<p>4. And, in that society, people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.</p>	<p>4. As missionaries of the gospel, we should be working to eliminate contributions to conditions that undermine peoples capacity to meet their basic needs (e.g their ability to grow food, have housing and have safe working conditions).</p>

I think we all realize that identifying the core problems preventing someone from completely achieving even one of these items is a huge task. From anyone and any group, moving from current lifestyles that have been built up by history, tradition and practice to a lifestyle that includes creation care comes in progressive steps and is not unlike the heart change and maturing that one goes through as we grow in our relationship with God. (Mal 3:2-3)<sup>5</sup>

Shouldn’t we however, as leaders in the church, make an attempt to educate those who may someday dedicate themselves to missions by helping them better understand creation and the God created systems that we live in – systems that have an effect on everything we do. This is especially important as it applies to missions because more and more, the creation conditions such as drought, pollution and poor farmland are becoming a factor that affects the ability of more and more people to meet God, enjoy his blessings and live the life He intended us to live.

### **Requirements For A Creation Care Missions 2.0 Project**

So, with a clear overall strategy and focus that allows us to plan and choose Missions 2.0 projects, we can go on with our re-engineering and propose six requirements that a specific Missions 2.0 project should meet:

1. A “Missions 2.0” creation care project could be done by a local church regardless of the size of the congregation or availability of financial resources. The goal is to enable everyone to participate in the great commission.

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<sup>5</sup> Mal 3:2-3 (NIV) - <sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. <sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness,

2. As many of the available resources as possible should be focused on directly addressing one of the four principles previously mentioned. This requirement helps to ensure that as little resources as possible are used in getting to and from the place where you are working to solve the problem.
3. Projects that are undertaken should be available to family groups – not just to a part of the family. Parents should have the opportunity to participate side-by-side with all their children regardless of their age. This requirement goes a long way in providing role-model examples of serving and participation.
4. Projects can be short term or long term. Short term projects address immediate needs of the community and long term projects provide consistency and connection for a long period. This way, a missions project could be started by a junior high group, continued on through to a senior high and college group and also involve adult groups. Projects like this become an integral part of congregation life, history and “tribal lore”.
5. The principles and skills learned on a local mission project should be transferrable to global, longer-term missions. This allows a local team to be trained and built over a period of time with a longer term goal of the group or individuals participating in global, long-term missions.
6. Because most short-term projects have limited face-to-face connection, the skills and principles used in the project should easily be transferrable to the people they are benefiting and the skills required for the project must be able to be put into practice by local people in their local conditions using local resources. In other words, follow the old adage that says “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

### **Issues That Need To Be Addressed**

With a strategy and criteria for identifying possible projects, specific types of creation care projects in US and around the world can be identified.

It will help at this time to identify types of environmental issues that are being faced here and around the world. Each of these areas has a direct effect on quality of life and how God’s creation is treated.

The four areas and the effect they have on quality of life are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 – General classification of environmental Issues and the effect they have of the quality of life

<b>This Creation Condition ...</b>	<b>Has This Effect</b>
<b>Water shortages and water quality</b>	Degraded land productivity and poor health
<b>Land condition and land use.</b>	<p>The better and healthier that land is, the better food it produces and the more food it produces.</p> <p>Poor land condition is often caused by erosion due to deforestation or pollution. Both of these contribute to a degraded ecosystem in which we all depend. Improving land use makes for better communities and “shalom” – good relations among neighbors</p>
<b>Pollution due to poor disposal policies.</b>	We run into this problem when we don’t consider the consequences that our actions have on our neighbors. It’s hard to live like we are “loving our neighbor” if we are also polluting their water and their land.
<b>Over consumption.</b>	Although consumption is a necessity to live, over consumption affects the available resources by taking more than what we need and leaving others with less than they need.

Another classification that is useful for identifying and prioritizing environmental missions tasks was proposed in an article entitled “Missiology in Environmental Context: Tasks for and Ecology of Mission”.

In this article, Willis Jenkins outlines some driving issues of environmental missions activities. This list forms another excellent starting point to first understand the environmental issues affecting quality of life and then begin to identify specific mission goals and activities that put God’s enduring love into practice.

These issues that Jenkins identified are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 - Creation care issues driving environmental missions activities (Jenkins)

<b>Public health risks</b>	caused by the regional and sometimes global spread of pollutants. These pollutants are often caused by destructive or uncaring manufacturing practices or by improper disposal of waste products.
<b>Issues related to land tenure.</b>	Land taking or land re-distribution often forces populations to live on lands that are most at risk of degradation or damage from natural disasters. Often, land tenure issues force people to live on land that is outside their traditional sense of “place”.
<b>Restricted access to natural resources</b>	such as wood and water
<b>Reduced biodiversity</b>	caused by environmental change or destruction. This is especially an issue where indigenous populations have, over their lifetimes, developed ways to live sustainably with their environment.
<b>Adverse impact of climate change</b>	which affects the ability of populations to grow food or live on lands.
<b>Ecological degradation</b>	that in turn contributes to the creation of <b>environmental refugees</b> . When the land is no longer able to support the food and shelter needs of individuals, large numbers of people find it necessary to relocate in order to survive.

Both of these groupings are well suited to serve as a guide that is used to determine the type and scope of the projects that can be addressed by Missions 2.0. Why? Because some of the solutions to these issues are solutions that can be addressed by short-term, local missions and many of the solutions, although not easy, have the following characteristics

- We don’t have to look very far from where we sit to see how these types of problems are affecting us and our immediate neighbors. In every community around the world – including the one in which your church is located – problems like pollution, degraded land and poor land use exist, they are affecting the quality of life and they need to be solved.

- Addressing many of these problems can be done with the skills that people in your congregation currently have. To improve the condition of a local park by planting trees or to clean up a watershed or plant a community garden for those who live in apartments does not require you to have an MD, be a pilot or know how to operate heavy machinery. All it requires is the capability to do some physical labor, and the capability to change a lifestyle and demonstrate to others how to do the same thing.
- Many of these problems affect those who have limited income, are not believers or may not be members of a church community. Solving these problems are ideal ways to create “Good Will” which leads to “Good News”.
- All age groups can participate in some way with providing solutions to these problems. Elementary, junior high, high school and adults all have skills and knowledge necessary to address some of these problems.
- What you learn in projects such as these done in your own communities can be taken to other parts of the world. You are building and preserving knowledge that can be re-used. If you decide to expand your short-term, local missions into longer-term, global missions, what you learn solving these types of problems will be re-used.

## Some Constraints

To identify Mission 2.0 projects that can be effectively addressed by the local church and encourage the widest participation possible, we need to put the following constraints on the solutions:

- Solutions should not require a large amount of technical skill for those who are the project workers. Lower requirements for technical skill enables wider participation. I should not have to be a medical professional, a trained translator or a pilot to participate in a short term environmental project. Granted, every project needs some specialized skills to succeed but overall goal should be to encourage and enable as many people as possible to participate.
- To address these issues should not require large amount of funds to start them up. To encourage wider participation and encourage a “missions mentality”, local projects to teach and encourage and familiarize people with the concept of serving may be preferred over projects in areas that require large expenses and time for travel.

Both of these constraints are actually enablers for Missions 2.0.

If our goal is to weave missions into the life of junior high and senior high youth groups as well as adults (both young and old) and families, with the purpose of encouraging missions as a lifelong habit, we need to be able to at least start people out in missions projects that can be completed in a safe, familiar environment at a minimal cost.

Consider cost for a moment. In most “Mission 1.0” trips, travel from here to there is a major expense and drain on energy. As some of you well know, it is very easy to spend more dollar resources just getting a group from here to there than in all the other resources spent on the actual project. Most of the time, these dollars could be better spent on solving the problem – not burning time and fuel.<sup>6</sup>

As anyone will tell you, travel is expensive, safety is sometimes an issue and being able to pass on knowledge and have a long term relationship with people or a project is a benefit. These issues can only be mitigated if you consider missions in your own backyard – missions where the maximum amount of resources are directed as solving the problem at hand.

If you are a large, middle or upper-class congregation, a one-week mission trip somewhere overseas might be possible and profitable. But if you are a smaller congregation without the resources for travel and with a strong desire to build community relations then perhaps Missions 2.0 makes more sense for you.

Why? Because considering more local, short-term missions, the cost for travel becomes almost negligible, safety due to political unrest is not an issue, the work done during a missions project is not “left behind” but is available for further teaching, lasting relationships that can be nurtured and grown are built and knowledge that can be passed on to other groups is developed.<sup>7</sup>

## Ideas to Put Missions 2.0 Into Practice

I would like to move toward conclusion of this talk by presenting a few general ideas for short-term, local project ideas for you to consider. They are intended to “stir your pot” with ideas that you can use as you move your short-term missions programs from Missions 1.0 to Missions 2.0.

1. Start a community garden to be better stewards of the land your church owns, to reach neighbors who don't have land resources and to help feed those in your neighborhood who are hungry. Follow this with community classes taught by some of your older members who can teach canning and preservation and nutrition.
2. Work with your local city government to adopt a park or playground or local illegal dump sites and remove any damage that has been done to nature. If you choose to adopt a park, do the work during a time when people use the park. Interact with these people and explain to them

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<sup>6</sup> An excellent discussion on the topic of the cost of short-term missions, is contained in the article “The Cost of Short Term Missions” by JoAnn Van Engen. This article is at <http://www.catapultmagazine.com/global-eyes/article/article/cost-of-short-term-missions>.

<sup>7</sup> In no way am I advocating for a replacement for the work that long-term missionaries are doing. All I am proposing is that we consider a more effective way to spend resources dedicated to missions. In a recent conversation with a husband and wife team who spent many years as medical missionaries in Africa, they related to me that although they appreciated the groups of people coming from the US to help them in their work, sometimes the time and effort required to host these groups was overwhelming. It got to the point that they had to hire a full-time coordinator who did nothing but arrange for visas, manage transportation and locate housing for the groups. I think of the costs involved in bring a group to help and can't help to wonder if it might be better to consider using these resources either fund projects that train and hire local individuals or to better support the long-term missionaries and their infrastructure needs.

who you are and why you are choosing to serve in this way.

3. Work with your local utility company to upgrade, fix and insulate sub-standard housing in your area so that those who live there can reduce what they spend on energy and re-direct it toward food or clothing.
4. Offer to clean up and recycle trash during or after a local community festival.
5. Spend a week or a weekend planting trees in your community or neighborhood. Do this especially in areas where city services may not be effective or where homeowners do not have the resources to do this. Caring for these trees can be an on-going project that follows a youth group from junior to senior-high and on through college.
6. Encourage lifestyle changes toward an attitude of creation-care by having a “no-drive” or “bike to church” day. Have a junior high or senior high “creation care” dinner where everything that is served is locally grown and everything that is used can be recycled. Do the same thing at your next potluck dinner.
7. Start a re-cycling / distribution program that gathers good, usable items such as furniture or clothes and re-distributes them to those in need. Work with the recipients to help them responsibly dispose of their items that are worn out or broken.
8. Organize an e-waste or community recycling day. This is an opportunity for outreach to your community. Invite people to your church to drop off items for recycling.
9. Work in an inner city to clean up an abandoned lot. Work with a local church to plan and implement a better use for the property – tree planting, public park, community food or flower garden.
10. Reach out with creation-care projects to people groups in your locality that have tie-ins to the long-term missionaries that you support. This helps build bridges between your short-term missions and your long-term missions. For example, if you are supporting a long-term missionary in Kenya, consider working with your local Kenyan community.

## Conclusion

If I can do one thing today, I would like to leave you with a few thoughts.

First, the time to do something is now and the opportunity to do something is in front of us. There are an enormous amount of ways for you and your congregations to blend the concept of taking the gospel to your local and global neighbors as part of caring for God’s creation. We have only touched on a few of them here today.

They are opportunities that are waiting to be addressed, there are people – young and old -- with the passion to take them on and they are opportunities that can provide you with a new view of short- and long-term missions. They can involve your entire congregation and they can help to build the attitude that missions is not just something to “do for a week in the summer”.

Instead, missions is and will remain the way that we as believers care for creation and deliver the whole gospel to the whole world now and well into the future as we are faced with new challenges.

That way, when the opportunity exists to deliver the gospel to someone, who, for the moment is not focused on God but is focused on finding water for his family or fresh local food from a food bank, there are legions of people willing to help because

- living missions – every day -- is part of their Christian life and ;
  - because of their experience, they understand that caring for creation and missions can, truly, go hand-in-hand in spreading the Gospel.
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