

Too many Christians fail to recognize opportunities

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By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

BROWNWOOD—Christians miss divine appointments because too many churches fail to challenge members to recognize international contacts as missions opportunities, said Mary Carpenter, director of [cross-cultural studies](#) at [Howard Payne University](#).

“Christians are traveling and doing business globally, but too often we, as churches, are not training them to think globally,” she said.

Carpenter recalled a Baptist deacon whose business sent him to South Asia, where he addressed 90 students of the Koran. He failed to seize it as an open door for Christian witness because nobody in his church helped him see it that way, she lamented.

“It’s not just a matter of sending people around the world. Our global members already are there,” said Carpenter, who served several years with her husband, David, as a mission worker in Albania.

“Our churches should train, equip and release members to be on mission as they travel anyway. Churches need to catch up to the place where business

is already.”

If churches want to make a global impact, they should “tap into” the resources they already have, and that involves conducting a self-inventory and exploring identity, she said.

“The first step for a church that wants to develop a global strategy is to ask: ‘Who has God created this church to be?’”

If a congregation already has a history of church planting locally and a passion for starting new work, it makes sense for that church to be involved in a similar mission globally, she noted.

Likewise, Carpenter noted, a church should ask whom God has placed in their spheres of influence and on their hearts.

For instance, if a congregation is filled with second-generation immigrants or refugees, that church might likely have valuable contacts in their homeland and a passion for displaced people, she said.

“Look at the skill sets in a particular church,” Carpenter suggested. Members with expertise in business, agriculture, engineering, medicine or other fields likely would be best equipped for missions activities that enable them to use their abilities.

Carpenter recommended that churches “shop agencies”—compare the various denominational and parachurch missions-sending agencies to see which is the best fit for a specific congregation. “Ask: ‘Who will our church work best with? Which agency will let the church set strategy, while providing the expertise the church needs?’”

At the same time, she suggested churches “think outside the agency box to get the job done.”

As a church develops its strategy and God places a particular people group

on the hearts of church members, they must be humble enough to recognize someone of another race, nationality, language or vocational background might be better equipped. In that case, the church assumes the role of enabler and equipper.

“If I can’t go, who can? The church’s calling may be to help send others who will be the best fit for the job that needs to be done,” Carpenter said.

As an educator, she draws encouragement from the missions commitment she sees in the rising generation and from their desire to develop skills that will serve them wherever they serve God.

“This generation is willing to risk all. Out of their brokenness and dysfunctional families, they see missions as having real possibility for healing,” she observed.

They are preparing for missions service by majoring in fields like business, education or political science that will give them entry into countries that may be closed to traditional missionaries, Carpenter said.

“We are actively recruiting cross-cultural studies minors who major in other disciplines,” she noted.

Pastors and church leaders need to help church members already in the workforce think in similar terms, she added.

“On the back row of many churches are people who know how to navigate the world, but they don’t know how to connect that part of life with their life at church,” she said.

“We need to help people make the connections.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.