

Voices: Co-laboring together to reach the world

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And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15 ESV).

God has extended a beautiful invitation to humanity to join him in his work, but while his heart is for his people to experience the joy of sharing his goodness, this task often can feel daunting.

With so many language groups spread across the globe, how are we to take the gospel message to all of creation? Is this mission even attainable?

A unified purpose

To help answer these questions, let's observe a desire God has for his followers. Jesus prays that his disciples may be of one heart and one mind (John 17:21). The byproduct of the unity of believers and of the love they have for one another will be that the world will witness the reason for their union. The world will see Christ in us.

The concept of being of one accord is also found in the Old Testament in Zephaniah 3:9—"For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord."

The New International Version translates this portion of Scripture as being "shoulder to shoulder." This expression is a metaphor derived from livestock laboring together under a single yoke over their shoulders as they plow a field. There is beauty in the burden both animals share as they

ready a pasture to bring forth life.

As we look to the mission of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, we must identify ourselves not as individuals seeking to labor in isolation but rather as part of a greater body of believers who co-labor together with one mission.

With so many in need of Christ, we have to discover more pathways for the church—the body of believers—to collaborate and work in unanimous participation in this commissioning.

A diverse make-up

One of the advantages the church has is its composition. With Christ as the center, the make-up of the church transcends language barriers, cultural norms and ethnic distinctions.

When we are found in him, he makes us able to set aside our differences and preferences to serve one another as well as those in the world. As 2 Corinthians 5 declares, the love of Christ will compel us and will transform us into his ambassadors, imploring those who are lost to be reconciled to God through Jesus.

Texas Baptists operate under the conviction we are better and more effective when we serve together. We have identified that those with whom we cooperate will not always share our cultural idiosyncrasies and may not always reside in Texas. We recognize we don't have to fulfill this commission alone when the Lord has granted us numerous brothers and sisters with the same heart in countries all over the world.

Working together

The Missionary Adoption Program was created through a partnership between Texas Baptists and the Brazilian Baptist Convention with this in mind. The goal of MAP is to partner Texas Baptist churches with churches in different countries around the world to support local missionaries jointly and equally.

Since then, the program has expanded to Peru, Sierra Leone, India, Myanmar, Mexico, Canada, Spain, Portugal and even domestically in the United States in the Pacific Northwest and New York. These missionaries are native to the regions where they minister. Therefore, they not only comprehend the language but also have the ability to contextualize their presentation of the gospel. Due to their accessibility to the country in which they reside, they are able to take the gospel to areas we could have never imagined.

By partnering with other Baptist conventions in different parts of the world, we are able to collaborate with local churches, not simply monetarily, but also ensuring MAP missionaries are going through proper leadership development and are given training in evangelism, discipleship and church planting.

By God's grace and through the conviction he has placed in the hearts of generous and committed churches, Texas Baptist churches currently support 86 missionaries around the world. While we still believe adamantly in going to the nations, we also recognize we are blessed with co-laborers with a reach far greater than that of any individual.

Can we take the gospel message to the ends of the earth? The way we begin to answer this is through the lens of cooperation and in seeing believers in other countries around the world as part of the same body who are just as motivated to experience the joy of living out this mission.

To learn more about MAP, visit txb.org/map.

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