# [American Missions’ Acts 6 Moment](http://ministerdifferent.com/acts-6-support-raising/" \o "Permanent Link to American Missions’ Acts 6 Moment)

*From This entry is part 1 of 4 in the series*[*Funding Multiethnic Mission*](http://ministerdifferent.com/series/multiethnic-funding/)

A system has been setup that is supposed to serve all. Everyone is to be treated equitably as the Church goes about her mission. However, after some time, minorities have started to raise the issue that the system isn’t serving the minority group as equitably as the majority group.

I am talking, of course, about the distribution of food to widows in the Jerusalem church soon after Pentecost.

What is amazing about the early church is not that they had problems, or even that those problems often fell along ethnic lines. That’s as common today as it was then. What is incredible about the story in Acts 6 is that when confronted with the problem the church leadership readily admitted they had one.

There was no intent to deny, no blaming of the Hellenistic widows for their own plight, no sweeping the issue under the rug. The incredible thing about the early church is that they listened to minorities, admitted they had a problem, and asked the minority group to lead them in solving the problem.

**The Western Missionary Enterprise is facing its Acts 6 moment in our generation.**

Agencies, systems, and structures that were designed to function for all are being stressed to the limits by growing ethnic diversity in North America. With the increasingly multicultural world in which we we find ourselves, we can no longer ignore the fact that while our society may be 35% minority, the Church’s missionary thrust from the U.S. is far from that diverse.

Ethnic minorities within U.S. mission agencies have long voiced that the current model of personal support raising doesn’t work as well within their communities. Though I am a member of the majority culture (and don’t presume to speak for ethnic minorities), I have observed that while some ethnic minorities are able to raise their full support goals, many are faced with a difficult choice: leave their ethnic community to raise support among Anglos, or resign from the mission agency and pursue a career outside of full-time ministry.

Their concerns have generally been met with skepticism or disbelief. Instead of trusting these ethnic minorities to understand their reality, Evangelical mission leaders have questioned either the workers’ work ethic, depth of faith in God to provide, or the level of mission zeal of entire communities. Rarely have mission agencies simply acknowledged the equity problem present in the support raising system and begun to seek a solution.

What would it mean for the American missionary enterprise if we learned the lesson of Acts 6? What if when minority groups among us raised complaints about equity we listened instead of blaming the messenger (or the messenger’s community)? What could God do in and through us if we followed the example of the early church?

This is the first post in a series to explore how our current mission funding structures are proving ill suited for a [**New American Reality**](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQnhuj11zgI). We’ll describe the problem, explore why we’ve been reluctant to admit it, show how it limits us from reaching the world for Christ, and suggest bold actions to lead us into the future.

May we be a Church who follows the example of Acts 6: listen to the voices of our minority brothers and sisters, admit the shortcomings of our current system, and appoint them to help lead all of us into a glorious future of joining Christ in His mission. All of us.

image credit: [**Andy**](http://www.flickr.com/photos/atmtx/5149901707/)

# How Support Raising Keeps Parachurch Ministries White

*This entry is part 2 of 5 in the series*[*Funding Multiethnic Mission*](http://ministerdifferent.com/series/multiethnic-funding/)

**“If you see a fish go belly up in a lake, you try to find out what was wrong with the fish. You see a thousand fish go belly up in a lake and you better take a look at the lake.” – Unknown**

The personal support raising model[**1**](http://ministerdifferent.com/support-raising-white/#footnote_0_411) used by parachurch ministries and mission agencies around the world raises more money for ministry than ever before. But, despite this apparent success, the model is deeply flawed. In this post I will share how the personal support raising model is broken: **its structural and cultural flaws produce systemic funding inequities for ethnic minorities that serve to keep parachurch ministries White.**

### Deeply Flawed: Support Raising Isn’t Working for Ethnic Minorities

Ethnic minorities, specifically Latinos and African Americans, have long voiced concern that the personal support raising model used by American parachurch ministries since the 1950′s doesn’t work as well in their communities. While there are obviously many ethnic minority individuals who have been able to raise full support and join staff, I want to take a broader look at the pond. It has been, and continues to be, difficult for many ethnic minority staff members to raise all of their support and join the full-time staff of parachurch ministries.

My first experience with this came in 2008 when I began working with the Latino ministry division of a large parachurch organization. My wife and I soon noticed that none of the full-time Hispanic staff in the ministry were fully funded. They were either getting second jobs or supplementing their support raising deficits through temporary grants from ministry leadership. As an Anglo American who had grown up in the Bible Belt, I had seen individuals struggle with support raising in the past, but this was my first personal experience with an entire group of people struggling to fit in the current model. The more I began to listen to and learn from my ethnic minority brothers and sisters in Christ the more I heard how the current system of support raising wasn’t serving them. It was then I began to realize that there might be systemic issues at play.

### Why Support Raising Doesn’t Work As Well for Ethnic Minorities: Structural And Cultural Barriers[2](http://ministerdifferent.com/support-raising-white/#footnote_1_411)

The personal support raising model is built on the idea that each missionary has a social network they can leverage to pray for them, give financially to fund the ministry, and provide them referrals to expand the network. As opposed to denominations or large non-profits who usually have a centralized funding system or specialized fundraising department, in most Protestant ministries each missionary is responsible to raise the full amount of their funding. The organization provides no other mechanism to provide financially for the staff member. If the potential missionary is unable to raise their full financial support, they cannot join staff with the organization.

Many mission leaders view this as an equitable, just system and have been hesitant to making changes. Often their rationale sounds something like, “Everyone needs to start from the same place, to raise their own support. It wouldn’t be fair to give some an advantage.” But there’s a major flaw in that logic: we don’t all start from the same place.

Ethnic minorities start from a place that presents two barriers that often prove insurmountable in their fundraising efforts that White ministers (as a group) don’t face: structural disadvantages and cultural barriers.

**Structural Disadvantages to Support Raising**  
African American and Latino ministers face significant structural barriers that prevent them from raising full support. The Personal Support Raising model is predicated on your social network connecting you with people who have disposable income they can give on a regular basis. By assuming all staff start from the same place in their support raising, the model fails to take into account the disparity of wealth in this country.

The Pew Research Center published a study in 2011 entitled, [**Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs Between White, Blacks, Hispanics**](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26/wealth-gaps-rise-to-record-highs-between-whites-blacks-hispanics/). The report analyzed data from the U.S. government and found that **“the median wealth of white households is 20 times that of black households and 18 times that of Hispanic households**…the typical black household had just $5,677 in wealth (assets minus debts) in 2009; the typical Hispanic household had $6,325 in wealth; and the typical white household had $113,149.”

While there are obviously many individual exceptions to the report, this means that when an African-American or Latino minister enters the average home of someone in their community to raise support, the person they meet with will likely have 20 times less wealth than the average person a White minister meets with from their community. So even if the donor from the African-American or Latino church has a heart for missions and is compelled to give financially, they are not starting from the same place as the average White donor.

Staff members from lower income backgrounds (whether white or ethnic minority) face an additional structural barrier in support raising. When a parachurch minister first begins to raise their support they don’t have enough donations coming in for them to receive a paycheck. Until they reach that tipping point they are essentially working without pay. For someone like myself who was fortunate enough to have parents who could provide for me financially for 3 months while I worked without pay, this wasn’t a problem. But for ministers from low socio-economic backgrounds they often don’t have the ability to work for an extended time without a paycheck. This often causes them to get a part-time job to supplement their income (which slows down their support raising progress) or they simply decide not to join staff.

**Cultural Barriers to Support Raising**[**3**](http://ministerdifferent.com/support-raising-white/#footnote_2_411)  
Statistically, Asian Americans are just as likely to raise full support as their White counterparts. While they don’t face the same structural disadvantages as Latinos and African-Americans, they are confronted with cultural barriers. Asian Americans are 2.5 times more likely to report that their families are embarrassed of them because of support raising.[**4**](http://ministerdifferent.com/support-raising-white/#footnote_3_411) Because Asian cultures tend to be more indirect, personal support raising training can offend members of the Asian American community because of it’s white, western way of direct asking. This can be perceived as valuing money over relationship and highlights the white cultural context the model was created and honed in.

Latinos and African American ministers also face cultural barriers in the support raising process. The personal support raising model is largely foreign to their communities, making it harder to convince people to give. A number of other cultural barriers contribute to a startling statistic from one research survey: **71% of Latinos’ and 74% of African Americans’ funding came from individuals outside their racial group**.[**5**](http://ministerdifferent.com/support-raising-white/#footnote_4_411) Because of the structural and cultural barriers, Latinos and African Americans are forced to raise support cross-culturally, further contributing to their difficulty in obtaining full funding. As one Latino staff member as put it when told to join a White church so he could more quickly finish raising support, “We have to leave our community to save our community”.

It is not just ethnic minorities or myself who have noticed these systemic inequities in the personal support raising model. Some of the most popular leaders in Evangelicalism have voiced their concerns.

Listen to Tim Keller:

*…The evangelical world is based on raising your own support… you go out and you raise support from amongst your friends. This, of course, is systemic; it excludes, it marginalizes people who aren’t white. Because what happens is.. white people that don’t think of themselves as very well off can do it, they can raise their own support. And not just black, Hispanic, Asian people.. (and most people think of Asian people as very prosperous).. Asian people have trouble raising support for various cultural reasons, that whole model privileges white people… privilege cultures in which that kind of volunteerism works; it certainly doesn’t privilege Black [or] Hispanic people who don’t have lots of well off friends. And yet the system assumes that everyone who goes out there has equal social power and they don’t. Now I would call that a systemic problem, a big systemic problem…*

*… very often, these organizations, huge parachurch organizations, that you have to raise your support, and you come up in the power structure, having raised your support, then you kind of go on staff, and you move on your way up. Now I know about InterVarsity and plenty of places understand this, and they’re trying to do everything they can to recognize the fact that people don’t start with the same amount of social power. And therefore we can’t, we say it’s a level playing field, we’re meritocratic, we’re individualistic, that is to say, everybody has an equal chance, we’re not giving anybody an extra leg up in any way, and of course what that immediately does is destroy the people who already don’t have a leg up… Maybe somebody is offended by what I just said… The system.. it doesn’t mean, for example, that everybody in a ministry in which everybody has to raise their support is deliberately, intentionally, trying to marginalize people, but, nevertheless, the system is worse than the individuals in the system. And just by being a part of it, you’re participating in this… white people have got to learn how to have those kind of spectacles, is what I was trying to say, they have to be thinking about that… – Tim Keller,*[***Watch the full video***](http://djchuang.com/2012/tim-keller-explains-the-systemic-problem-of-white-privilege/)

**Implicit Acknowledgement of a Broken System**  
Campus Crusade for Christ (now known as Cru) and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, two of the largest American parachurch ministries, both have programs in place that implicitly acknowledge the support raising model doesn’t work as well for ethnic minorities.[**6**](http://ministerdifferent.com/support-raising-white/#footnote_5_411) Cru has the[**Ethnic Minority Assistance Fund**](https://give.cru.org/2270304), whereby staff in the organization voluntarily give towards a central fund that supplements ethnic minorities in their support raising (only 25% of their goals and only for the first two years on staff. After that minorities are expected to raise 100%.). InterVarsity has the “Multiethnic 1%”, whereby 1% of all donations are directed to a central fund that is then dispersed to ethnic minorities based on a variety of factors. While these represent improvements, many would say they fall short of achieving equity because they leave the fundamental model unchanged.[**7**](http://ministerdifferent.com/support-raising-white/#footnote_6_411)

### How Support Raising Keeps Parachurch Ministries White

[**Samuel Perry**](http://www.slperry.com/), a Dallas Theological Seminary graduate and Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at the University of Chicago, published an article in 2011 that changed my perspective forever:**[Diversity, Donations, and Disadvantage: The Implications of Personal Fundraising for Racial Diversity in Evangelical Outreach Ministries](http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%252Fs13644-011-0020-7)**. In the article Perry explained how not only did the current support raising model fail to work as well for ethnic minorities, but it also served to keep the parachurch ministries White.

His survey of 716 staff members from 7 Evangelical Outreach Ministries(EOMs), primarily Protestant parachurch organizations, revealed:

*“…White dominance is reproduced with the funding structure of EOMs through two primary means: (1) the individualistic fundraising model of EOMs naturally advantages whites over economically disadvantaged minorities, thereby reproducing whites’ structural dominance. And (2) the fundraising strategies of EOMs embody white cultural preferences that become normalized, requiring minorities to sacrifice their own preferences and adapt.***The EOM funding structure thus becomes a mechanism for reproducing white dominance and ultimately fortifying racial divisions and perpetuating racial homogeneity within EOMs***.[Emphasis added]“(p. 397)*

Perry found that “for objective fundraising outcomes, the odds of raising one’s full support were 66% lower for African Americans and Latinos relative to whites…[and] the odds that they had to pick up a second job to supplement their income were twice that of white staff.”[**8**](http://ministerdifferent.com/support-raising-white/#footnote_7_411) Simply put, because of the structural and cultural barriers mentioned earlier in this post, it is far less likely that an African-American or Latino staff member will be able to raise their full support.

Over time, this means that there will be fewer ethnic minorities who are able to raise all of their funding. The few who are able are less likely to be able to maintain full funding over a period of years, much less decades. As a result, they are unable to stay in the organization long enough to rise to positions of power to make changes to the system. White cultural values become normalized within the organization and are unchallenged because of the dearth of ethnic minorities present in senior leadership positions. This cycle ensures that no matter their commitment to diversity, parachurch ministries and mission agencies will probably stay White.

Samuel Perry makes it clear, and I want to affirm as well, that this structural inequity built into the personal support raising model is inadvertent. No mission executive desired to create a system where ethnic minorities would be disadvantaged. But it is present nonetheless, therefore the system is not exempt from critique or the need to be changed. Support Raising is an unjust model of ministry funding that keeps our organizations White, despite our best intentions otherwise.

**Answering Objections**  
(Part of the reason this post is so long is that when ethnic minorities have raised these issues in the past, they concerns have often been met with skepticism and been dismissed. Rather than attempt to answer them now and further lengthen this post, I will address them in a future post.)

**“True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.**

### It’s time to change the support raising model

Over time I came to the conclusion that no matter how much I or other majority culture staff members ministered among ethnic minority college students we would never see the ministry become fully multiethnic without changing our funding model. It’s time to change the model.

**Start a Conversation**  
I don’t presume to speak for the thousands of Latino and African American brothers and sisters in Christ who, [**like the Hellenistic Widows in Acts 6**](http://ministerdifferent.com/acts-6-support-raising/), have repeatedly expressed that the structures developed by the Church are not working for their communities. I also have not written this post out of a desire to harm or disparage any Evangelical Outreach Ministry. I have spent my entire ministry career raising support and have seen God use the model to send thousands of ministers around the world.

But I can no longer sit idly by and participate blindly in a system that disadvantages members of the Body of Christ. The system was developed for my context, and it works well for me. But I cannot get Paul’s words out of my mind: “If one part suffers, they all suffer”. The ethnic minority members of our body are suffering, we can’t ignore them anymore.

Equitable ministry structures were a source of pain in the early church and, in different forms, remain so today. My desire is that this series, [**Funding Multiethnic Ministry**](http://ministerdifferent.com/series/multiethnic-funding/), would spark a conversation about inequity present in our funding structures. I pray that we would listen to our ethnic minority members and would seek to be led by them to develop funding models that are more just and equitable.

**How Should We Respond?**  
For many of you, this post will be the first time you are confronted with the reality that support raising is an unjust model that disadvantages ethnic minorities. This new knowledge has the potential to stir a lot of emotions in you and raise many questions. In future posts I will attempt to explore how those of us who are privileged by the current system should respond.

For some of you, however, this information is not new. You’ve known for a long time that support raising was an inequitable and unjust model. I fall into this group. **My question for us is, “Why haven’t we done more to change the support raising model?”** In future posts I will explore what our unwillingness as an American missionary enterprise to change a system we know is unjust says about us and about the mission we are engaging in.

In coming posts I will also attempt to answer some of the common objections raised when these issues are brought up, explore theological and missiological reasons for equitable funding models, examine the history of support raising, take a closer look at its perceived Biblical Basis, and suggest next steps and possibilities for improving the model of mission funding to be equitable and just. Lord, may you bring equitable funding models quickly.

p.s. – If you are interested in exploring this topic more, I encourage you to read [**“Social Capital, Race, and Personal Fundraising in Evangelical Outreach Ministries”**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jssr.12005/abstract) and[**“Racial Habitus, Moral Conflict, and White Moral Hegemony Within Interracial Evangelical Organizations”**](http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11133-011-9215-z), both by Samuel Perry.

# Support Raising Is Not As Biblically Based As We Think It Is

*This entry is part 3 of 4 in the series*[*Funding Multiethnic Mission*](http://ministerdifferent.com/series/multiethnic-funding/)

We desperately need to fix the reasons why [**support raising keeps parachurch ministries white**](http://ministerdifferent.com/support-raising-white/), but there is a danger of moving too quickly to solutions before we’ve diagnosed the root causes of the problem. Without careful reflection, we face the risk of addressing surface level symptoms without the surgery needed to eradicate the disease. Later in this series I will offer potential solutions to the problems I have raised, but today I want to probe deeper.

I believe part of what inadvertently causes the symptoms of injustice and inequity to persist in our funding models is that support raising is not as biblically based as we think it is. **We often limit our use of Scripture to an apologetic for the current model and we are driven more by a hidden assumption than we realize. Both of these reveal our need for a more robust theology of mission funding.**

The Biblical Basis of Support Raising

I want to be clear, there is a biblical basis for support raising. The Bible teaches in a number of locations that a spiritual worker is worthy of their wages. Priests were compensated for their work (and prohibited from other sources of income). The Apostle Paul lived off of financial support from others when it was available (and made tents when funding ran low). Even Jesus was supported by wealthy women.

Scripture Limited to an Apologetic

I am grateful for the leaders who have gone before me who have articulated to the church the teaching that it is Biblical for ministers to make their living in service of the gospel. When I am on a support appointment and a potential donor questions the legitimacy of being a full-time minister, I know we are on firm ground. My fear, however, is that we have often settled for using the Bible merely as an apologetic to confirm the validity of our current models, rather than as a guide to how our systems ought to be structured.

Instead of stopping at broad principles, many times the training we offer to new support raisers serves as an apologetic for one specific model (to the exclusion of other possibilities). Consider this example from [**a recent popular book on support raising**](http://amzn.to/1eiqzZG):

*The disciples were not taught to raise their funds by going to the local synagogue for a love offering, or hold bake sales at the bazaar, or pass out pledge cards at council meetings. Instead, they were to go to people’s homes and ask them face-to-face to partner with them…I don’t think this method of support raising was just a last minute idea on the part of Jesus. It was a carefully planned-out strategy designed to multiply passion for The Lord and His work in the hearts of key citizens in each city…Apparently, in the mind of God, ‘spiritual work’ is just as valid and deserving of compensation as any form of physical or mental work.*[***1***](http://ministerdifferent.com/not-as-biblically-based/#footnote_0_446)

This statement rightly affirms that a worker is worthy of their wages. But the author doesn’t stop there. His use of Scripture serves as an apologetic for the direct, personal support raising model (seemingly to lessen the effectiveness or validity of other methods). Sometimes we can so closely tie our apologetic to one model we are prevented from seeing other options. These types of statements illustrate how our “Biblical Basis” can actually hinder our imaginations when it comes to support raising.

Naming a Hidden Assumption: The Growth-Priority Mentality

But recognizing how we can be limited by our apologetic is not enough. We also can’t have a conversation about solutions to the current support raising model if we haven’t named the hidden values that drive much of our current thinking. **I believe when it comes to critiquing the current model and exploring possible solutions to inequity and injustice, we are actually driven more by a hidden assumption than by Biblical teaching.**

I believe that our current mindset is overly influenced by what I will call a “Growth-priority” mentality. This is a kind of thinking that mainly evaluates funding models through the lens of growth, sometimes failing to consider other values that might be equally important in the conversation.

Desiring growth is not a bad thing. Jesus told His disciples to ask God for more laborers for the harvest, and yet many of his actions seem unhurried or inefficient towards that end. Many mission leaders question the exalted place this growth-priority assumption has come to occupy in our mindset, both as a Church and as a society. Scott Bessenecker, associate director of missions for InterVarsity, [**describes the problem this way**](http://www.napc.org/download):

*Rather than spinning off smaller things, the Western way is to build monoliths. That’s just part of our mentality. I’d like to challenge our mentality. I think the western for-profit construct celebrates growth over flourishing, for instance. Here’s what Robert Kennedy said about the gross national product when we tried to organize…our main metric of [national] health around this number:*

*Gross national product measures neither the health of our children, the quality of their education, nor the joy of their play. It measures neither the beauty of our poetry nor the strength of our marriages. It pays no heed to the intelligence of our public debate, nor the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our wit, nor our courage, neither our compassion, nor our devotion to country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worth living.*

*Perpetual growth becomes this construct that comes to us from this worldview. There are things that grow perpetually. Cancer grows perpetually. We need to think differently about how we measure success.*

**More Money, More Ministry: The History of the Growth-Priority Mindset**  
It is important for us to realize that modern Protestant mission has not always been quite so motivated by the Growth-priority mentality as we are today. A fundamental shift occurred in Evangelicalism around the time our current support raising models were developed. In his essay, [**“More Money, More Ministry: The Financing of American Evangelicalism Since 1945″**](http://amzn.to/1bKMfhu), Michael Hamilton shares the following:

*It must be remembered that Evangelicals [like George Mueller and Hudson Taylor] first adopted faith principles as a way to demonstrate God’s presence and power, not because faith principles were an especially efficient way to raise money. Since World War II, evangelical entrepreneurs have shown less interest in proving God’s existence through their fundraising strategies than in growing their ministries. Increasingly, ministry leaders came to feel handcuffed by faith principles, which seemed to place arbitrary limits on the amount of money they could raise.***The mindset now locked into place in the parachurch world is the assumption that “more net income translate[s] directly into more ministry.***[emphasis added]*[***2***](http://ministerdifferent.com/not-as-biblically-based/#footnote_1_446)

This shift in philosophy contributed to the creation of the personal support raising model which has dramatically increased the number of missionaries sent to the world. In a desire to see our ministries grow larger so more people could be reached, we elevated growth to a preeminent place in our thinking. In so doing, I submit that we’ve unintentionally valued growth above equity and justice. In an effort to improve models that weren’t working as well as we wanted at the time, we failed to ground solutions in a whole Bible basis for funding mission. There is a danger we can repeat the process again.

If we’re not careful we can let the tail wag the dog. If our main criteria in solutions to current models is what will result in the most donations (or what donors will give to, or what causes the most growth in our ministries), we will miss the opportunity to develop a whole Bible basis for mission funding that is rooted in more than mainly our growth-priority assumption. We could aleviate the inequity issues currently plaguing us but completely miss the hidden disease: our models aren’t as Biblically based as we think they are.

A Robust Theology of Mission Funding

One of the hallmarks of Evangelicalism is our love for God’s word. But somehow, when it comes to issues of ministry funding, we’ve gotten slightly off track and allowed the hidden assumption of growth-priority to dominate our thinking. What if we could reconnect our passion for Scripture and our strategies for support raising? Might we see a new season of flourishing?

We need a more robust theology of mission funding. A theology that is able to hold equity, community, and interdependence in concert with our desire to grow the number of missionaries we send to a dying world. Could we return to the Scriptures we love with a new question and see what God reveals? How might some of the following principles inform our theology:

**Equity**  
Are our funding models as Biblically based as we think they are when they are rife with inequity? It is time we affirm that **for mission to be truly Christian it must be funded equitably**. Jesus has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between us. Our funding models should do no less. If Marshall McLuhan is right and ‘the medium is the message’, then the structures we use to spread the gospel are saying something about the gospel. Are we really okay with a gospel propagated by funding models that include inequity? The way we go about sharing the message must live out the values of that message.

**Trinitarian**  
How should our understanding of the nature of God shape our funding models? Justo Gonzalez states, “If the Trinity is the doctrine of a God whose very life is a life of sharing, its clear consequence is that those who claim belief in such a God must live a similar life.”[**3**](http://ministerdifferent.com/not-as-biblically-based/#footnote_2_446) We need to ask ourselves, is the “every staff for themselves” paradigm of personal support raising really compatible with the shared relationships we see modeled in the Godhead or even Paul’s description of the Church as interdependent members of Christ’s body?

I don’t think this means we have to all utilize a common purse, though that is a Biblically based option. There is much space in the continuum of possible solutions between the current “every staff for themselves” and living with a common purse as in Acts 2.

**Other Values to Influence our Theology**  
A more robust theology of mission funding would replace our growth-priority mindset with other values we see in Scripture. What do principles like loving our neighbor as ourself, pursuing flourishing not just growth, the priesthood of each believer, and the creativity of our God have to teach us about how mission ought to be funded? I don’t presume to have all the answers, but I believe a renewed commitment to our Evangelical roots of grounding ourselves in Scripture could pay huge dividends as we seek solutions to the problems in our current funding models.

A Small Example of How We Sought Solutions

For the past five years my wife and I served as the main leaders for the global missions department of the Latino college ministry with which we previously served. As a Latina, [**my wife**](http://yosoykristy.com/)felt a unique connection with Arab college students we had ministered among overseas in the past. As we researched her experiences more, we became convinced of what missiologists have been saying for years, [**there are amazing cultural connections between Arabs and Latinos**](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCbMXlqqIyo). God grew in us a passion to see Latino college students involved in world missions among unreached peoples.

However, we quickly faced a problem. In our organization Hispanic and Latino college students had faced difficulty in raising their support for short-term mission trips. In fact, in the previous year before we joined, regional leadership in the ministry had to supply $10,000 at the last minute so the six Latino students on a multiethnic team could go on their trip. The ministry was committed to seeing Hispanic students on mission, but I wonder if they had lost hope that it was possible in a sustainable way.

We were convinced that God wanted to use U.S. Latinos and Hispanics in mission. We believed the [**theme of COMIBAM 1987**](http://comibam.org/) that there was inherent dignity in being participants in mission, not merely recipients. And while we didn’t have solutions for the problem of short-term mission funding, we were compelled by a more robust theology to keep trying until we found them.

The strategy in our previous organization to fund short term mission trips was to have students send out letters to people they knew asking them to give financially and then followup for a decision. For majority culture students like myself, you could typically train them in the process in February and then rarely talk to the student again before May and they would have raised the money for the trip.

For the Latino college students we served, this model simply wasn’t working as well. On average, we saw 1 out of 10 of our mission trip participants be fully funded through the letter writing strategy. Some would raise 75% of their goals through letters, many others only 50% or 10%.

We began to ask students for ideas on ways their communities had raised money in the past that were congruent with a broader Biblical basis of support raising. After sending out and following up their letters, students did [**bucket brigades**](http://vimeo.com/18270605) (three students together raised more than $5,000 in loose change through this strategy) or planned [**barbecue plate sales**](http://vimeo.com/18399815). We also had a foundation give to students who still came up short. Through a combination of these strategies and personalized coaching from staff members, our trip in 2008 was the first all-Latino trip that we knew of in our organization’s history to be fully funded. We also saw every trip be fully funded for the next five years. **Last summer, 33 Hispanic and Latino college students raised a combined total of over $100,000 to minister around the world, including among the unreached.**

By expanding beyond the letter writing strategy, they helped engage more people in the process of mobilizing them to the world. Family members who couldn’t afford significant financial gifts offered to cook the food for the barbecue plate sales. Friends from church stood in the heat at major intersections to help receive community micro donations. When students met their funding goals they voluntarily kept raising to make up for shortfalls for their teammates. They were examples of Trinitarian sharing in community. They taught us a robust theology of mission funding, and they weren’t okay with the status quo. God was changing them, and they wanted to share that with the world.

The students solved the problem, not us. Our theology of mission funding allowed us the intellectual flexibility to empower our students to be creative agents of change. Not only did they raise the necessary funds to go on the trips, but they also helped shape a more robust theology of mission funding in the process.

This is just a small example of how a broader Biblically based support raising model can provide solutions. It doesn’t solve all of the issues raised in the previous post, but it’s a start. It’s an imagining of what could happen when we use the Bible as a compass and the Holy Spirit as our guide to create new funding models. It is an example of flourishing…and an example of numerical growth. More Latino college students are going around the world to help fulfill the Great Commission than ever before. Ironically, though, it wasn’t a growth-priority mindset that fueled our increased sending numbers, but rather a robust theology of mission funding.

Conclusion

Our fears will tell us that challenging the growth-priority assumption will lead to less ministry. In our limited experience, my wife and I have seen the exact opposite happen. Embracing a fuller Biblical basis for support raising compelled us to think outside the box and to listen to the expertise of those we were serving. It resulted in more Latino college students sent on mission by our organization than ever before. May we be a people led not by fears or unnamed assumptions, but by radical faith in our God and the message He has for the world. We could see a flourishing of mission like never before.

# Unsent Peoples: How Fixing Support Raising Could Help Fulfill the Great Commission

*This entry is part 4 of 4 in the series*[***Funding Multiethnic Mission***](http://ministerdifferent.com/series/multiethnic-funding/)

It has been encouraging to hear conversations taking place about solving [**how support raising is keeping parachurch ministries white**](http://ministerdifferent.com/support-raising-white/). Ethnic minorities have raised issues with our current funding models for decades. My hope is that we will listen to and be led by them to remedy our structures and enter a new season of flourishing in mission. **There are compelling missiological and Biblical reasons to believe that solving the current issues with our support raising model could propel us to fulfill the Great Commission in our generation.**

Minorities Reaching Minorities: A Story

Three summers ago my wife and I helped lead a team of U.S. Latino college students on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic. Our family spent a month with the students sharing the gospel on university campuses in the capital city. God used this trip to give me a small glimpse of how He was working in the world, and I’ll never forget it.

I didn’t notice at first, but my wife, a Latina herself, pointed out that a unique aspect of our team was that while the U.S. Hispanic students shared the gospel with anyone they interacted with, they were particularly drawn to the undocumented Haitians they met on campus or working in our hotel. God had placed a special burden for these people on their hearts.

Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the island of Hispañola, and over the years many Haitians had come without immigration papers to the more economically developed side of the island. As my wife and I reflected on our team and their special care for Haitian immigrants, it occurred to us that God had used our teammates’ experience of growing up as ethnic minorities in the U.S. to give them a heart for Haitians (ethnic minorities in the D.R.).

A few of the students, though definitely not all, had once been undocumented in the United States. Others had family who had immigrated legally within the past few generations so they were intimately connected to the minority story. These ethnic minorities from the U.S. could see and relate to ethnic minorities in the Dominican Republic in ways I, as a member of the majority culture in my home country, didn’t naturally do.

God was doing a beautiful thing through our U.S. Latino students, and it started me wondering how He might use ethnic minorities in missions all around the world. With globalization and migration spreading like never before, the possibility exists for more ethnic minorities to be created than ever. While God will certainly use both majority and minority culture missionaries, could He be raising up ethnic minorities for such a globalized world as this? Could God use minorities to reach minorities around the world in unique ways?

Missiological Reasons

In 1974 Ralph Winter presented a talk at the Lausanne Conference that forever changed the shape of missions. The idea of *Unreached Peoples* “shifted global mission strategy from a focus on political boundaries to a focus on distinct people groups.”[**1**](http://ministerdifferent.com/unsent-peoples/#footnote_0_463) As a result of his presentation and subsequent advocacy, entire mission agencies reoriented their strategies and*unreached people groups* entered the lexicon of Evangelicalism.

Today one can visit sites like [**JoshuaProject.net**](http://joshuaproject.net/) and get up-to-date statistics on how many unreached peoples remain in the world. As of the writing of this blog post, the number stands at 6,898.[**2**](http://ministerdifferent.com/unsent-peoples/#footnote_1_463)

As a result of our ministry to U.S. Latino college students and the trip to the Dominican Republic mentioned above, I began to wonder, “How many of the world’s people groups are minorities in their countries? How many unreached people groups are ethnic minorities?”

**How Many Unreached Peoples Are Ethnic Minorities?**  
While I am not trained as a sociologist or missiologist, I visited the [**Joshua Project website**](http://joshuaproject.net/)and downloaded the most recent data set on the status of unreached peoples around the world.[**3**](http://ministerdifferent.com/unsent-peoples/#footnote_2_463) I began to examine the data and see if I could find big picture answers, though not scientific, to my questions. My goal was to get a pulse on global trends.

The following table is a summary of what I discovered:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Total** | **Population** | **% of World Population** | **% Unreached** |
| People Group Population > 40% | 181 | 2,794,866,970 | 39.58% | 22.65% |
| People Group Population > 30% | 25 | 160,982,700 | 2.28% | 24.00% |
| People Group Population > 20% | 64 | 265,774,390 | 3.76% | 28.13% |
| People Group Population > 10% | 130 | 487,778,090 | 6.91% | 33.85% |
| People Group Population > 2% | 859 | 1,518,931,620 | 21.51% | 28.87% |
| People Group Population < 2% | 4,262 | 1,453,566,920 | 20.59% | 32.50% |
| People Group Population < 0.1% | 10,804 | 378,781,140 | 5.36% | 48.57% |

There are currently 181 people groups whose size represents more than 40% of their country’s population.[**4**](http://ministerdifferent.com/unsent-peoples/#footnote_3_463) The number of individuals in these people groups is over 2.7 billion people.

While this represents almost 40% of the world’s population, in terms of people groups it is only 181 of a total 16,325 people groups around the world. It comes as no surprise then that 99.1% of the people groups in the world are ethnic minorities. It should also come as no surprise then that **99.5% of the unreached people groups in the world are ethnic minorities in their countries.**

Since this statistic is rather obvious once you start to think about it, I broke down the data further by examining how we were doing at reaching groups who were only 30%, 20%, 10%, etc. of their population. The table above shows the results.

With one exception, the odds that a people group will be unreached grows as the percentage of their population with their country shrinks. Simply put, **the larger a people group is in their country, the more likely they will have been reached with the gospel**.

If this is how many minorities and minority people groups there are in the world, the next question I began to explore was, “How many missionaries from the U.S. are ethnic minorities?”.

**How Many Missionaries from the U.S. Are Ethnic Minorities?**  
It has proved more difficult than I originally thought to research how many ethnic minorities are serving with U.S. mission agencies. While a few organizations publish this data [**on their websites**](http://intervarsity.org/about/our/vital-statistics) or [**through press releases**](http://imb.org/main/news/details.asp?StoryID=12199&LanguageID=1709#.Ux_8DXi9LCQ), the vast majority do not make it publicly available.

I called a number of mission agencies and was unable to obtain any further data. Many organizations simply do not track the ethnicity of their participants, while others have interpreted U.S. Labor Law as preventing them from legally doing so.

I was unable to find statistics on U.S. Latino and Asian Americans serving in missions, but there have been some research studies done to determine the number of African American missionaries serving cross-culturally for at least one year. Jim Sutherland, in his [**1998 doctoral dissertation**](http://www.rmni.org/african-american-missions/dissertation-why-so-few-afam-missionaries.html), surveyed the missions community and estimated that the number of African Americans who had served in Africa (the most likely location for them to have gone) was only 0.2% of the total missionary population there.

While we are limited mainly to anecdotal evidence to answer this question, I don’t think anyone would argue that American missions is as diverse as we would like it to be. No doubt our support raising structures play a critical role in shaping our current reality.

**Minorities Reaching Minorities**  
We’ve made significant progress in realizing the role that the Majority World church will play in missions. Nations like Brazil, Korea, and China are rapidly sending missionaries to the world.

While this is to be celebrated, let’s not stop there, with potentially only the majority culture of each country playing a substantial role. Majority culture ministers have a part to play in reaching minorities around the world, but shouldn’t also minorities have their place?

The world needs to see a multiethnic mission force. Countries like Germany, Australia, France, and Russia (to name but a few) are struggling with how to respond to growing diversity within their borders. If we were to make the necessary changes to see more minorities go on mission, how might that further bolster the message of good news we have to share with the world?

Unsent Peoples

*“What gets measured gets managed.” – Peter Drucker*

I believe it is time for a new term, not to replace but to complement the idea of unreached peoples. It is an idea that if taken hold of could drastically shape mission strategy going forward. I believe that we need to focus on one metric in addition to the number of unreached peoples remaining: Unsent Peoples.

**What is an Unsent People?**  
An Unsent People Group is any people group that is not being mobilized and empowered to help fulfill the Great Commission. This would include any unreached people groups, along with ethnic minorities who have been reached with the gospel but are not participating in missions in sufficient numbers.

I will leave the exact determination to missions experts of what percentage mobilized a people group needs to be before we designate them as “sent”. That is beyond my expertise. But suffice to say I think we should be striving to see the demographics of a nation’s missionary force be similar to or equal to its overall population demographics. The United States population is currently 63.7% White,**[5](http://ministerdifferent.com/unsent-peoples/" \l "footnote_4_463" \o "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_United_States)** but some of the missions researchers I talked with guessed that our missionary force is closer to 90% majority culture.

I mentioned above that currently there is no way of knowing which people groups in the U.S. would qualify as *Unsent Peoples*. Anecdotally we might be able to conclude that both African Americans and U.S. Latinos would qualify, but there is no way to be sure. Certainly there are more Unsent Peoples than we would want there to be.

I hope this post will spur a discussion in missions circles about the idea of Unsent Peoples and whether it is worth tracking in our global statistics. Could this be something we record at[**JoshuaProject.net**](http://joshuaproject.net/)? I believe it is a needed complement to the idea of Unreached Peoples and could help us take a giant step forward towards the completion of the Great Commission in our generation.

**Support Raising and Unsent Peoples**  
It is my belief that part of what contributes to the number of Unsent Peoples in the United States is the personal support raising paradigm that has been the dominant model of mission funding for the past 60 years. There are other dynamics that contribute to the problem as well, as evidenced by the fact that [**some non-support raising agencies have yet to develop a diverse mission force**](http://imb.org/main/news/details.asp?StoryID=12199&LanguageID=1709#.Ux_8DXi9LCQ). These issues must also be addressed.

But, if you permit me to dream for a moment, what could God do if together we were able to develop more equitable funding models? What if we invited ethnic minorities to lead us to new structures that decreased the number of Unsent Peoples? Could this be another needed paradigm shift in modern protestant missions?

Biblical Precedent: The Early Church

I believe there is powerful Biblical precedent to the idea that increasing the number of ethnic minorities participating in mission could represent a new season of growth for the church. We need only look in the book of Acts.

Solving the issues of inequity in the early church (distribution of food to Hellenistic widows) propelled ethnic minorities to positions of leadership and the church to expansion unlike it had ever seen before. This is the original story of an Unsent People becoming sent.

Peter and the other ethnically Jewish apostles played a key role in the early church. But, beginning with the conflict in Acts 6, ethnic minority Jews (ethnically Jewish raised in Greek culture, often outside of Israel) played an increasingly important role. In fact, they dominate much of the narrative of the rest of the book of Acts.

Characters like Barnabas (Levite from Cyprus), the original seven deacons (all have Greek names), Stephen (the first martyr), and Paul (Jew raised in Tarsus, Asia Minor) propelled the church to minister among the Gentiles in ways the first apostles simply weren’t doing.

Consider the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. Peter needed a vision from God before he would share the gospel with a Gentile, and even then he did so reluctantly. Contrast this with just one chapter later in Acts 11 where Jews flee persecution and end up in Antioch. They only shared the gospel with Jews until men from Cyprus and Cyrene (modern day Libya) came and shared with Gentiles.

It was here in Antioch, where bicultural Jews dared to share with Gentiles, that the followers of Jesus first became known as Christians. To be Christian encompassed sharing the gospel across cultural lines, and it was these ethnic minorities who led the way. Peter needed a vision from God. Biculturals simply did what they had been doing their entire lives, they bridged cultural barriers.

At a time when the world was globalizing like never before, the Spirit called biculturals to lead the church into a new era. I believe he is doing it again in our day. Bicultural ethnic minorities can serve as Bridge Peoples to take the Gospel into new contexts. Others are also seeing the missiological potential of mobilizing ethnic minorities like never before:

**The Potential of Minorities on Mission**  
\* [**Bridge Peoples: The Role of Biculturals in World Evangelization**](http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles.php/1275/05-2010?pg=all)  
\* [**Asian Americans uniquely shaped for the mission of God**](http://youtu.be/RJvat--rvUM)  
\* [**Native Americans may be key to reaching the nations**](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/march/native-americans-foreign-missions.html)  
\* [**Mobilizing U.S. Latinos in Mission: COMHINA**](http://www.comhina.org/sitio/2012/index.php/resources/multimedia-en/videos-en)  
\* [**God has called African Americans to a unique role in missions**](http://www.afammissionmanifesto.org/)  
\* Even secular professors are recognizing the crucial role ethnic minorities will play in the next century: **[Biculturals are the MVPs of 21st Century](http://www.fastcodesign.com/1663081/the-21st-century-mvp-bridge-personalities-who-happily-span-cultures)**

Conclusion

Could the Spirit be setting aside a new generation of bicultural, ethnic minority ministers for His work? Our place as a multiethnic church is, together in all of our diversity, to create structures that facilitate the sending of a fresh wave of bicultural Bridge People to pave the way for a new flourishing in the Great Commission.

Maybe this generation will be the one who finally sees the fulfillment of the Great Commission in our generation, because we were able to focus passionately on reducing the number of Unreached and Unsent peoples simultaneously. Would you join with me in this call to be led by ethnic minorities to fix our current mission funding structures? Could we as a Church begin to think outside the box together to mobilize missionaries from majority and minority ethnic groups? Could we affirm the unique role ethnic minorities can play as Bridge Peoples and develop the structures to help them accomplish it?

The fulfillment of the Great Commission may depend on it.