

Ministry Action Teams

by Kathy Appleton

How It All Started

I came to Texas 31 years ago and quickly learned that football is the favorite pastime and the Dallas Cowboys are kings! I married and taught elementary school for 10 years, then took time off to care for my two young children. I thought I would go back to teaching, but God had a different idea.

I had enjoyed books by Amy Carmichael and Jim Elliot. Their inspiration led me to take a leap of faith (in my case this was a giant dive into the deep end) and sign up for my first mission trip. Going to Russia was life changing for me! Along with my souvenirs, I brought back a deep and passionate desire to see God honored by all the nations. My enthusiasm spilled over on anyone who happened to cross paths with me, and soon after that, the elders at my church, Irving Bible Church (IBC), offered me the brand-new position of director of missions.

A New Name and Team Approach

When I inherited the missions program in the early 90s, it was operating in a very typical manner. Eight people on a committee chaired by one of our elders decided how the missions budget was spent. My first challenge was to fully utilize the people on that committee and add to their number. I capitalized on the city's love for football and changed formats from the rather outdated committee to one that took a team approach. This team was way more important than the Cowboys, and our goal was not about winning the Super Bowl but about bringing worshippers before the throne of Jesus.

Step one was to change the name from the "missions program" to Bridges. Our core group of eight quickly grew to around 25. At IBC's monthly newcomer coffees, more and more people signed up to be involved with the Bridges team. My new challenge became how to organize and effectively communicate with them, and intentionally involve them in opportunities to expand the Kingdom.

We addressed the issue of communication by starting quarterly "huddles." Anyone who had indicated interest in

Bridges was invited. The room was decorated "football style" with snacks that you might find at any football tailgate party. The purpose of the huddle was to familiarize each person with the core values of Bridges, the geographic locations where we served, and how they could find a place of service that utilized their gifts and talents. Reflecting Ralph Winter's admonition, "So much more can be done for the kingdom of God, if we don't care who gets the credit," we emphasized the importance of teamwork.

My purpose was to offer a variety of ways to get everyone in our church involved in God's worldwide plan to bring all people to Him. With over 50 missionaries and partners, there was a lot of work to be done for and with them. There were also other fundamentals to consider such as missionary care, short-term trips, and building mission awareness in the church.

Organizing Action Teams

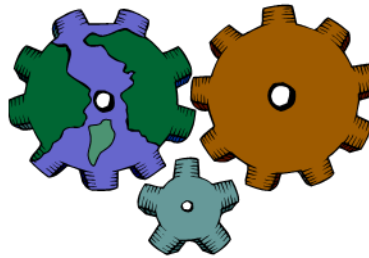
We needed to more efficiently facilitate the tasks. I began to categorize the work and formed groups called Ministry Action Teams, abbreviated to "MATs." Each MAT had a leader and focused on our strategic initiatives:

- equipping national leadership
- reaching the unreached
- helping children at risk

The following descriptions outline the purpose and function of each Ministry Action Team. (More information is on our [Bridges webpages](#).)

Kingdom Business: The Kingdom business team investigates ways to bring glory to God and aid workers in developing countries by sharing their business skills and offering microloans to marginalized families. From teaching seminars on ethics to training people in the area of finances or technology, efforts coordinated by the team are designed to improve the lives of people in economically distressed communities around the world.

Partnerships: Irving Bible Church has joined hands with dynamic leaders and organizations around the globe. We seek to equip national leaders with needed resources and information that will assist them in reaching and teaching



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their own people. This team walks alongside national leaders in ALARM, Inc. (East Africa), LEAD Liberia (West Africa), and Maranatha Church (Romania).

Children at Risk: In a world that ignores the needs of forgotten children, the church is called to be a refuge and help. This team works with agencies dedicated to transforming the lives of children at risk by seeking to meet their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Kutchi Outreach: The Kutchi team researches and strategizes new ways to reach and minister to IBC's adopted unreached people group, the Kutchi of northwest India. This team coordinates IBC's sponsorship of two schools for Dalit children in India, scholarships to train national pastors, and our involvement in the translation of the New Testament into the heart language of the Kutchi.

Field Care: This team coordinates our efforts to help our missionaries feel connected to IBC by doing things like sending them Christmas presents, birthday cards, encouraging emails, sermon recordings, worship music, and IBC's monthly magazine, *Chatter*. Encouragers fit well on this team focused on shortening the distance between missionaries and IBC.

Welcome Team: This team is on hand to assist missionaries when they arrive at IBC by arranging for meals, lodging, and transportation. Great on this team: those with an eye for design to help decorate apartments for missionaries; people with an extra bedroom, a guesthouse, or car to loan; and those who enjoy helping to stock an apartment to smooth a missionary's transition to the US.

Launch: Led by veteran missionaries, this group is designed for those considering a short stint or career in missions. Together they learn how to raise support and what to expect when crossing into an unfamiliar culture. There is networking with other candidates to share ideas and pray.

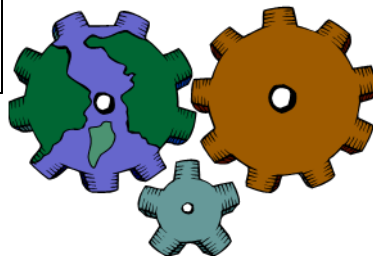
Global Exposure: This team coordinates the ways that people at IBC can learn about God's heart for the world. To make sure that everybody—from the little ones in the nursery to the seasoned saints—are exposed to the message, they plan a variety of classes, conferences, and seminars including Perspectives and Encountering the World of Islam.

Student Mobilization: Because people are more open to the Lord when they are young, this team engages youth in hands-on mission activities. Opportunities like attending a national conference such as Urbana or experiencing the mission field first-hand are designed to nurture the lifelong priority of bringing the light of Christ to a dark world.

Prayer Ministry: The prayer team plans event such as "Praying through the Window" and coordinates the Sundays when we focus prayer on the persecuted church and chil-

dren at risk. Their goal is to stimulate more prayer support all across our church.

Short-Term Trips: This group coordinates IBC's efforts to train short termers so they are well prepared to serve our overseas partners and share our encouragement and resources. They see people off with goody bags at the airport and greet them upon return. They help plan and set up "Impact Sundays" when we share with the congregation what happened.



The entire Bridges team meets every eight weeks right after church for communication, prayer, and fellowship.

International Student Outreach: This team is passionate to change the statistic that less than 10% of international students are invited into an American home during their stay in the USA. Their efforts are concentrated on helping IBCers develop friendships with international students from the University of Dallas and North Lake College.

Refugee Ministry: Many African refugees are making a new home in the Dallas area, and this team guides IBC's efforts to help. This ministry includes collecting supplies to help new immi-

grants stock their homes, providing presents for the children at Christmas, arranging transportation for them to doctor appointments, and teaching literacy classes. The team offers training to help volunteers welcome and initiate friendships with these newcomers.

Water is Basic: Decades of war, poor land management, and drought have left 70% of the population of Southern Sudan with no access to safe water. This team coordinates our efforts to help provide drilling equipment and training.

Team Meetings

These 14 ministry action teams comprise the Bridges team. The entire Bridges team (approximately 120 people) meets together every eight weeks right after church (12:30 p.m.) which seems to be the most convenient time. Lunch is catered. Attendees are requested to RSVP to let us know they are coming. The purpose of these meetings is:

- communication
- prayer
- fellowship

The names of those attending are put into a basket and three names are drawn at the beginning of our time together. Those whose names are drawn receive a gift—usually a relevant missions book or something from another country. The group engages with visiting missionaries, or a speaker comes to share about global topics. Hearing about all God is doing around the world is so encouraging, and all missionaries and speakers are prayed over by the group before the meeting is finished.

After the Bridges meeting, the MAT leaders and I meet for an hour. Each leader gives an update on his/her particular ministry, and then we discuss a pre-assigned chapter of a book we are reading through together.

Both the large group meeting and the MAT leaders sessions have taken on the element of a “small group.” If people in the Bridges team are sick or had an accident, others in the team minister to them. We celebrate together. We love each other as well as love the world.

The Bridges team intentionally ministers to our missionaries and partners in a servant-hearted way. We follow the lead of our missionaries and try to help them in any way we can (i.e. short-term trips, missionary care, etc.). Decisions are made primarily by each MAT leader along with his/her team and then sent to the Bridges staff for approval. We operate with a yearly budget, and each MAT team is notified in December of their funding for the next year.

Leadership

Many of our MAT leaders have served for several years or more. There is no set policy as to how long a person serves. Some teams need leaders who are committed for a longer duration. Over time, they grow relationally, and their knowledge and understanding increase.

Some leaders serve a year or two and discover that their passion lies in another part of the mission world. For example, they may start working with children at risk and eventually move to a specific arena, such as human trafficking. I am thrilled when MAT leaders become so engaged in the area they serve that they decide to work long term overseas in that particular area. It means losing a leader in the church, but we gain a laborer in the field.

The Challenge of Shifting Approach

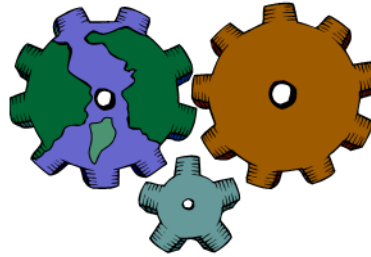
I don't want to leave the impression that moving from a traditional missions committee to a “team” model of leadership was easy. The move was initiated with a great deal of prayer. I was blessed with a missions committee that was a praying committee. They were also open to new ideas.

I once heard someone say that no big change in missions happens overnight. He compared big change to turning the Queen Mary—a task that requires at least 25 miles. I had to learn patience. It took a combination of prayer, openness, and patience to bring about the changes that led to our team style leadership. It also took a group of people whose only concern was the expansion of the Kingdom instead of holding onto personal territory.

Motivated by Global Realities

Our team also was well resourced and very aware of cultural crises. In light of such information, we knew it was necessary to lay aside differences and concentrate on what united us. Statistics like the following grabbed our attention and made us serious in our commitment to work together:

- Two million pastors in spiritually impoverished areas desperately need training and resources.
- 95% of the least-reached nations lie in a concentrated area that stretches across North Africa, the Middle East, India, and Asia.
- Ten million children are AIDS orphans, and in the minute you've spent reading this, 28 more street children have died.



The MATs teams can't consider walking alone. We absolutely must walk in dependence on Jesus Christ.

Those statistics could have been digested with resignation, but they compelled us to connect with each other and leaders around the globe. The MAT teams can't even consider walking alone. We absolutely must walk in dependence on Jesus Christ. It is His work and He will see that we accomplish all He has designed us to do.

Football season is here again and the Cowboys are playing in a new stadium this year. This season consider a team style approach to missions. An individual has never won a Super Bowl—it takes a team. People working together

for God's glory and renown will make extraordinary changes.



Kathy Appleton directed Bridges International Outreach at Irving (TX) Bible Church for 14 years. Currently, she is working on her MACC at Dallas Theological Seminary and taking time off to spend with her youngest daughter who has a variety of special needs. Kathy is available to consult with churches and can be reached at kpappleton@verizon.net.

Interchange Postings

Catalyst's *Postings* e-newsletter is a monthly publication designed for mission agency personnel and local church leaders involved in collaborative global efforts. The practical articles highlight what churches and agencies are doing to mobilize believers, especially those of younger generations, to expand the Kingdom.

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