

Missionary Insights:
Getting a New View from the Pew
by Michelle Connor

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What is a missionary? I thought I knew. I grew up knowing and loving missionary work. God not only gave me a love for missions, he gave me opportunities to be a missionary.

My first missionary experience, a trip to Taiwan during college, changed my definition of missionary only slightly. I still thought missions only happened overseas and missionaries only served in developing countries like Taiwan. This experience did teach me that ordinary Christians were serving in the mission field, changing my preconceived notion that “only martyrs need apply.”

After college, God led me to serve as a volunteer missionary in Kazakhstan.* In my short year, I was able to lead Bible studies in English, coordinate the translation of youth ministry materials into Russian, and, with the help of a translator, train four congregations and fifteen national church leaders to be youth ministers and start youth ministry programs. Although my experience was great, my perceptions of missionary work still had not changed much.

Ironically, it was after returning to the States, when God had called me to a new mission field, that I began to see and understand missions in a whole new way. Since joining the staff at the Center for U.S. Mission, I have learned the following truths.

1. Every believer is a missionary.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20).

When we live our lives according to the Great Commission, we realize we already are missionaries. I realized I am a missionary for life no matter what my full-time job is. I also realized God does not require our life to be perfect to serve him. He loves to use those that have been broken and burned out (“ragamuffins,” as author Brennan Manning calls them) to proclaim His message of hope and healing.

2. The Mission Field is everywhere

“He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” (Luke 10:2)

The mission field is everywhere. You don't have to leave your city to do mission work. So much work remains to be done right here in the United States. With statistics like that of 411 Americans converting to Islam and 872 Americans becoming Mormon or even eight Christian churches closing everyday it's hard not to see that our own communities, United States or otherwise, have a great mission field opportunity.

3. Share the Gospel message in the language of the listener.

I recently saw the movie *The End of the Spear* (<http://www.endofthespear.com>). The film tells the true story of how a group of American missionaries brought the Gospel message to a native tribe, Waodoni, in Ecuador. In one of my favorite scenes, a Waodoni man, who has recently become a believer, shares Jesus with another Waodoni. He not only spoke in their native tongue, but the message was simple and relevant to their culture. The message was not encrypted nor was it soaked in theological jargon.

In the United States we are faced with similar obstacles. We need to understand our audience and their diverse backgrounds (i.e. generation, ethnic, religious backgrounds) and clearly communicate this life-saving message in a way that relates to them. The core message always stays the same, but the presentation must always change with the culture of our society and the person we are speaking to.

Missionaries are much needed in the foreign field, but we should not overlook our own communities. Imagine what God might do through us if we all saw ourselves as missionaries in our own backyards. My prayer is that each Christian believer would be open and willing to be used by God to plant the seeds that will multiply His harvest and bring glory to His kingdom.

*For information about Kazakhstan check out: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/kz.html>