The end of the 20th century and of the second millennium was filled with cultural, social and political changes that will influence missions into the 21st century. In the 1980’s, the first personal computer was launched by IBM, followed by the creation of the compact disc and the worldwide web. The spaceship Columbia became the first space shuttle to enter Earth’s orbit, AIDS was identified, protests by Chinese students at Tiananmen Square were violently suppressed and President Reagan’s challenge to Gorbachev to “Tear down this wall” became a reality in Berlin. With the 1990’s came the dissolution of the USSR, Operation Desert Storm, and nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. By the close of the decade, the explosive growth in the internet allowed traveling through cyberspace to become an everyday experience. Dramatic changes in the social, technological, political and cultural climate of the world have provided amazing opportunities and unique challenges for the church in the effort to fulfill the Great Commission.

With the millennium drawing to a close, Y2K was the code word for a doomsday scenario and citizens were encouraged to stockpile food and supplies as the media predicted chaos and destruction of an apocalyptic proportion. Numerous Christians placed great significance on the approaching milestone. In the late 1980’s, thousands of Christian leaders and lay people began praying for God’s direction on how to respond to what was viewed as a critical point in world history. “It called us to redeem the time and to seize every opportunity to make disciples of all nations,” wrote Luis Bush. In a look back at the decade leading up to the year 2000, C. Douglas McConnell, International Director of Pioneers stated, “The emphasis on the year 2000 has primarily been a wake up call for mission societies.”

Phil Butler, International Director of Interdev, added that “Concern about the lost has been escalated in the hearts of many who, previously, might have carried on with business as usual.”

At the beginning of the 1990’s, more than 2000 different evangelization plans focusing on the year 2000 were reported by Christian organizations and denominations. In an attempt to help these plans be realized, the AD2000 & Beyond movement was established with the goal of addressing the challenge of uniting churches from the West with churches of the Two-Thirds World countries, building bridges between young and old Christian leaders, encouraging cooperation among both charismatic and traditional Christian movements, and promoting “understanding of God’s call for both evangelism and social responsibility, sacrificial service in the world and preaching the gospel of Christ to the world, of both word and deed, proclamation and presence.”

**AD2000 AND BEYOND**

With the motto, “A church for every people and the gospel for every person by AD2000,” AD2000 & Beyond sought to encourage, motivate and network Christian leaders through focusing on the unreached peoples of the world. In an effort to visualize the
task, concepts such as “unreached peoples,” “10/40 window,” “people groups” and “adopt-a-people” were developed in order to compile statistical data, identify target areas, and motivate Christians as to the urgency of making the gospel accessible to all. Instead of focusing on specific nations, as had been the pattern, the scope was viewed in light of homogeneous groups of individuals, families, and clans that share a common language and sense of ethnic identity.

While some argue that using statistical information and focusing on key dates in order to promote a sense of urgency “depersonalizes” people into targets to be reached, others believe that viewing the unfinished task in this way has led to an emphasis on the God-sized nature of the mission, a recognition that ingenuity and hard work alone are not enough, encourages prayer, and provides a sense of urgency that motivates believers to become involved in evangelization of the world.

In 1987, Dr. Bill Bright, leader of Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC), announced a strategy to aggressively seek partnerships with as many Christian ministries as possible in order to help reach the world for Christ by the end of the millennium. This strategy, New Life 2000, approached the impossible task of world evangelization by dividing the world into 6,000 smaller areas of one million people linked by geography, language and culture known as a Million People Target Area (MPTA). A plan that strove to be both culturally and politically sensitive was developed for each MPTA. Ideally, each MPTA would have access to one JESUS film team and one New Life Training Center equipped to disciple new believers. By 2000, nearly 1,000 partnerships were formed and over six billion presentations of the gospel were made around the world.

The Joshua Project, an outgrowth of the AD2000 and Beyond, has as its mission “to identify and highlight the people groups of the world that have the least exposure to the Gospel and the least Christian presence in their midst” and to share this information in an effort “to encourage pioneer church-planting movements among every ethnic people group.” As of March 2007, 15,899 people groups have been identified on the Joshua Project list. According to their site, 6,417 of these groups or almost 40% of the world’s 6.5 billion people fall into the category of “unreached/least-reached” people groups. By definition, these are “a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group.” This is based on a belief that it takes about 2% of a group to be Christian in order to be influential enough to impact the whole.

Looking at the unreached people groups, the Joshua Project identifies 56.7% of these individuals, or 2.24 billion, as living in the 10/40 Window, that area of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude where the majority of the world’s least-evangelized poor are found. Specific details about these unreached people groups are listed as follows:

- The largest least-reached group is the Japanese, with over 120,000,000 individuals.
- 3,276 groups are primarily Muslim, totaling nearly 1,300,000,000 individuals.
- 2,426 groups are primarily Hindu, totaling about 900,000,000 individuals.
- 555 groups are primarily Buddhist, totaling nearly 375,000,000 individuals.
- The Mandarin Chinese is the largest people group, being in 98 countries with a total of about 793,000,000 individuals, and with 783,000,000 of those in China.

ADOPT-A-PEOPLE

In the early 1980’s, mission agencies began to talk in terms of people group adoptions. The Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse (now known as the Global Adopt-A-People Network), was born in 1989 with a vision to enable the church to identify remaining gaps in the completion of the Great Commission. Unreached people groups are matched with local churches for the purpose of “adoption” and church planting. Participating churches make a commitment to do all they can to reached their adopted people group through working in partnership with the mission agency of their choice, by informing their congregation about the people group, devoting themselves to prayer for the group, and helping the effort to evangelize and minister to the adopted people through sending resources, money, supplies, and/or people when possible.

NON-WESTERN MISSIONARIES

Current trends of an emerging, large-scale non-Western missionary force are described by Butler...
as “the return on 200 years of investment by the modern missionary movement.” “Until recently,” writes Brazilian Antonia Leonora van der Meer, “Africa, Asia and Latin America were considered mission fields—dark continents dominated by heathenism and evil practices.” In 1905, it was believed that 95% of Christians resided in the Western world, whereas today it is thought that over 70% of believers live in Africa, Latin America and Asia. This “massive southward shift of the center of gravity of the Christian world,” as described by Scottish missiologist Andrew Walls, has contributed to a truly global effort of spreading the gospel from every nation to every nation.

Countries that traditionally were mission fields are now becoming missionary supporters and senders, joining together for a common goal. The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) Mission Commission is a worldwide network of mission and church leaders representing evangelism movements in more than 70 countries. The stated purpose of the Mission Commission is “to inspire, advocate and strengthen God’s mission agenda among the global Christian community... [To] serve, catalyze and facilitate global missional affinity clusters for greater effectiveness, developing strategic relationships and resources.” Recognizing the increasing cooperative nature among the church worldwide, the mission speaks of connecting people from the North and the South, “the Old Sending Countries and the New Sending Countries.”

The Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) determined in 1993 to reach all of Africa through planting churches and establishing Evangelical networks in all of their 56 nations by the year 2000. By October 1999, 44 of the 56 nations had Christians mobilized to reach the unreached people groups within their boundaries. Despite persecution from within its own borders from Muslims, the Nigerian church is known for its passion and zeal for evangelism. In 2005, the Nigerian Evangelical Missions Association unfolded its plan to mobilize fifty thousand Nigerians over the next fifteen years through its project Vision 50:15, seeking to take the gospel through North African Islamic nations back to Jerusalem.

At the first COMIBAM conference (International Congress for the Evangelization of the Latin World) in 1987, it was estimated that there were about 1,600 cross-cultural missionaries from Latin America. More than 4,000 missionaries were reported to be involved in global missions by 1997. As of 2006, more than 8,500 cross-cultural missionaries are said to be laboring for the gospel from among the various evangelical denominations, churches, and mission agencies spread throughout all of Latin America, Spain & Portugal. COMIBAM’s global mission is reflected in its desire to be transformed “from a missionary field to a missionary force” as it promotes “cooperation, networking and partnership between all those involved in missions in Latin America, Hispanic North America and the Iberian Peninsula.” Chinese house churches are deeply committed to the Great Commission through their vision to take the gospel “Back to Jerusalem.” In their desire to bring the gospel full circle, that is the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the West, from the West to China, and now back towards Jerusalem, Chinese believers are carrying out a plan that originated in the 1920’s, hoping to send 100,000 missionaries to 51 countries. As their site indicates, “this vision is no small task, for within those nations lay the three largest spiritual strongholds in the world today that have yet to be conquered by the Gospel: the giants of Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism.” While the details of their ministry must often be hidden because of security reasons, one report describes how “many Back to Jerusalem missionaries are beginning to see God move through them and fruit is being produced for the kingdom of God. The workers have overcome many obstacles, and are learning to be excellent witnesses in the cultures and languages they have been sent to.”

The growth of participation in global evangelization by the two-thirds world church (Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania peoples who inhabit approximately two-thirds of the world’s land mass and an even greater percentage of the world’s population), does not mean that the task has ended for the Western church. With billions still to be reached and the world population rising, the total force necessary for the task cannot be supplied without the effort of believers from all nations. Missionary leader Clyde Taylor says, “We would caution western missions not to excuse themselves from responsibilities in the third world... All of us have the responsibility of encouraging, praying for, and helping each other in every way possible. The Great Commission is still valid and impinges on the church in every land.”
The 21st century is viewed as one of “unparalleled magnitude and opportunity for the borderless church of Christ.” The question for the Western church has been not “if” we will continue to participate in the Great Commission but “how” is God calling us to do so. Evangelical leaders, meeting across the globe through various congresses such as COMIBAM in 1987 and Lausanne II in Manila in 1989 in the last quarter of the 20th century, agreed that a new commitment to networking and partnering across denominational and organizational lines was necessary to fulfill the task of making the gospel accessible to peoples. The Lausanne covenant also affirmed a growing conviction for the need of missions to return to being holistic—retaining an emphasis on proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ while relating the mission to every human need through compassionate service. In response to challenges of the past thirty years, including the AIDS epidemic, natural disasters, sex trafficking, social and political turmoil, and religious persecution, the evangelical church has sought God’s direction on how to integrate passionate evangelism with compassionate service. For about 150 years, most Christian missions focused on either performing good deeds or proclaiming the good news. As the 20th century ended and the 21st century began, the goal of obedience to the Great Commission was marked by both a spirit of cooperation among believers of all nations and a desire to form partnerships among mission organizations and agencies to demonstrate the love of Christ to the world. Changes in the political context of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe opened the door to unprecedented opportunities for evangelism ministries and relief organizations to engage in global cooperation.

In 1989, following more than forty years of prayer for the Soviet Union, Dr. Bill Bright set foot on Russian soil. On the final day of his visit, he was invited to return to give an Easter message at the Palace of Congresses in the Kremlin the following year. Broadcast on the state television network, 150 million viewers were presented with the good news of a risen Lord.

When Paul Eshelman, director of the Jesus film project met with the Communist Party Deputy Minister of Education in 1989 he offered a free JESUS video to every of the 65,000 schools in the Soviet Union. Recognizing the need for moral education in his country, the Minister agreed and suggested that teachers be trained to use the material. This led to the formation of CoMission, a coalition of 85 organizations that sent 30,000 short-term missionaries to the former Soviet Empire over a five-year period. The movie was provided along with a curriculum teaching how Jesus could transform society (essentially a follow-up course for children who would become Christians through the film). During that time, 42,000 teachers in 116 cities were trained, resulting in 10 million children hearing the gospel.

The collapse of the Soviet Union provided incredible opportunities for the body of Christ to provide both physical and spiritual help in the wake of economic upheaval and decades of communist rule. A visit to a children’s hospital in Moscow, witnessing the deprivation experienced by children in Russia, led CCC leader Josh McDowell to form Operation Carelift. Through Carelift, partnering churches and organizations donated humanitarian aid which was organized and delivered by volunteers to Russia and the surrounding republics of the former Soviet Union. Since 1991, more than 9,500 volunteers have helped to deliver $44 million worth of aid to places like orphanages and hospitals in fifteen countries.

OPEN DOORS OF COMPASSION

Operation Carelift has now expanded its mission and become the Global Aid Network (GAIN), a multi-national network of ministries, demonstrating the love of God in service to hurting and needy people around the world through relief and development projects. GAIN is now overseeing projects in over 60 countries having distributed more than $60 million worth of aid and involved more than 10,000 short-term mission volunteers. Noah’s Ark Children’s Home in Uganda is run by a Dutch missionary couple. HIV/AIDS, poverty and civil war have resulted in 1.8 million orphans in Uganda, equal to the size of the population of the state of Nebraska. GAIN has helped the home care and provide for the 68 children who live there by sending money, goods, and volunteers. One visit to the home allowed volunteers to reach out to three community schools near the home by presenting them with Bible curriculum and AIDS awareness and sexual abstinence information.

World crises, disasters, famines, economic and
political refugee displacement, and disease pose incredible challenges for the global community, but they also provide unique opportunities for the body of Christ to continue in the mandate to make disciples through the works and words of the gospel. In regions known for its hostility to the church, Christian relief work is building bridges with Muslims. The 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake spawned a tsunami that left almost 230,000 people dead or missing. The world responded with great amounts of aid and assistance. Local Christians and churches were on the front lines, passing out food, water, blankets and shelter and helping those devastated by the disaster through the love and compassion of Christ. Two young men from one of the areas destroyed by the tsunami traveled to the capital city where they were exposed to the gospel through the JESUS film. Deeply moved by the movie, they convinced their coastal village chief, an Islamic leader in the community, to let others see it. About 300 people viewed the film in their heart language, and though the initial response to the gospel was very small, through the working of the Holy Spirit the village chief invited Jesus into his life. A church was established and grew. Months later, a Baptist follow-up team traveled to the village and reported baptizing over 300 believers in one day!

Since its release in 1979, the JESUS film, a two-hour docudrama about the life of Christ, based on the Gospel of Luke, has been viewed in every country of the world. As of March 2007, the film (including “audio only” and children’s versions) has been translated into 1,001 languages. Through the cooperation of more than 1,500 Christian agencies, there have been more than six billion viewings worldwide and more than 200 million people have indicated that they have made a decision to accept Jesus Christ as their savior as a result.

According to the 2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, an estimated 38.6 million people worldwide were living with the HIV in 2005. In countries such as Kenya, India and Haiti, there have been recent notable declines in HIV prevalence, believed to be due to significant behavioral change and prevention efforts. CrossRoads is a character-based strategy dedicated to help communities worldwide discover the hope, life and truth of Jesus Christ in the midst of devastating societal needs (such as HIV/AIDS, promiscuity, and violence). Since 1995, CrossRoads has been implemented in more than 40 countries, training educators and helping youth develop godly character and understand how to have a relationship with Christ.

GLOBALIZATION
It is written of the men of Issachar who supported David against Saul that they were men who “understood the times” (1 Chronicles 12:32). The dramatic events and advances of the latter part of the 20th century have contributed to what is called “globalization”—“a seemingly borderless world across which people, information, and ideas flow freely,” creating both roadblocks and bridges for the communication of the gospel in the world. Many had hopes that because of technological, social and political changes that all peoples of the world would have access to the gospel by the year 2000. By the late 1990’s, however, there began a shift from viewing the year 2000 as a deadline to “finish the task” of world evangelism to viewing 2000 as a catalyst for a new surge of outreach. An understanding of the times we live in will be essential if the worldwide church is to continue the advance of the gospel to unreached people and places.

What will it take to finish the task of global evangelization? What significant advancements have been made? What are the challenges and obstacles to the task of making the gospel accessible to every people group?

Almost any point on planet Earth can be reached within 24 hours. Christians reside on every continent in the world including Antarctica. Nearly all of the world’s 220+ countries have an existing church, though some are forced to worship underground. The Joshua Project cites that 90% of the world’s people, if they have an internet cafe and the funds, can hear the gospel in a language they understand. Mission work in the 21st century is becoming more interconnected through networks and partnerships recognizing the need to be involved in not only good deeds or good news but in both.

BIBLE TRANSLATION
Translation of the scripture has been progressing faster than ever. More than 2,200 of the world’s 6,900 spoken languages have at least some of the Bible in their native language. Around 1,900 translation programs are currently in progress. Central Africa, the region from northern India to southern China, and the bands of islands in Asia...
from Sumatra to Papua New Guinea comprise the majority of the remaining three thousand languages still in need of the Word written in their native tongue. Vision 2025, a plan formed by Wycliffe Bible Translators, “calls for the start of Bible translation projects for every language community that needs one by the year 2025.”

Innovative strategies are being utilized to provide Bible passages and theological and discipleship training to the nearly three billion people—half the world’s population—who are functionally illiterate. Living in closed nations, in rugged surroundings, or in poverty, the only way to communicate for most of these people is through the spoken word. Emphasis on oral learning preferences, “orality,” has been considered by some as “the next wave of missions advance.”

In 2001, a group of Christian communication specialists with a commitment that all people groups be able to hear and understand the Word of God and other life-giving messages in their own language, founded MegaVoice. Using the latest digital technology, they developed a compact and discreet player that fits in the palm of the hand, operates on its own internal power supply and holding up to 160 hours of information from short and direct blurbs.

Populations are more fluid than ever before. As of 2006, according to the U. S. Department of State, there are more than three million Muslims, 90% of Turkish origin, living in Germany. The number of foreign students admitted to educational programs in the U. S. has almost doubled in the past two decades. The MacArthur Foundation states that “Immigration into the United States and Western Europe is part of a global system of population movement. Worldwide, some 200 million people are now living outside their country of origin.” These trends create a multitude of opportunities to reach people from many nations and cultures, but also require the development of a multiple of contextualized approaches.

Despite the increasing globalization of the world, many people groups and individuals remain isolated to exposure to the gospel. A paper from the 2004 Lausanne Forum for World Evangelization, focusing on ministry among the unreached people groups, identified several factors hindering witness to these groups. Preference for oral learning, illiteracy and the lack of the scripture in their own language are a few of the obstacles that are being overcome through creative strategies. Other factors that influence making the gospel accessible include the following:

- **Cultural boundaries**: Resistance to outside influences is a major hindrance to evangelization. Time must be devoted to understanding how to “translate” the gospel effectively into the recipient culture. In many Muslim countries, Latin American, African or Asian missionaries are more readily accepted.
- **Governments**: Several governments restrict or forbid the evangelization of their citizens, denying access by foreign missionaries and/or persecuting believers inside the country.
- **Technology limitations**: Not all remote areas can be reached by radio or telecommunications. Not all people have the financial means or resources to be able to access the internet.
- **Geographical barriers**: Difficult living conditions affect the willingness of many Christians to serve in more primitive areas of the world.
- **Religious fundamentalism and terrorism**

Several themes have emerged in writings about the task of fulfilling the Great Commission over the past couple of decades. The overarching theme is the enormous complexity of the goal of world evangelism. Other common themes, certainly not all, that surfaced include the following:

**Cooperation**: The shift from Western churches as the major senders of missionaries to a truly global effort requires developing culturally sensitive partnerships among Christian churches, missionary organizations and humanitarian groups.

**Contextualization**: Knowing about a culture is not enough; we must try to communicate and apply biblical truth in establishing churches, through words and actions in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context.

**Communication**: Recognizing the orality of much of the world must influence our approach to missions. Technology has the potential to impact greater numbers of people than ever before; however, mass media is not the final answer to world evangelism. The personal component of missions and the need for discipleship must not be forgotten.

**Compassion**: Christ’s love must be expressed
through both words and deeds.

**Coaching:** Existing training programs cannot keep up with the rapid growth of new churches. There are a lack of mature Christ-like leaders and a serious need for sound theological development and equipping among growing churches.

**Comprehensiveness:** All Christians will need to be involved, whether in the field of business, science, the arts, medicine or full-time missions. In areas inaccessible to missionaries, Christians should consider traveling and using their profession as an opportunity to demonstrate what it means to live for Christ in these places.

The task of making disciples will never be truly finished until Christ returns. There is optimism that the goal of granting every ethno-linguistic group of people access to the gospel message appears to be within reach. Movements by African, Asian, and Latin American Christians to bring the gospel back to Jerusalem through highly Muslim populated countries are an encouragement for penetration of the historically difficult 10/40 window.

Some caution, however, that while Christianity in many areas of the world is experiencing tremendous growth, some of the regions of the world once considered to be the center of world Christianity, such as Europe, are in need of re-evangelization. Steiger International recognizes that “secularized global youth make up the largest un-reached people group in the world, held together by common values, symbols, and legends... formed by the shallow entertainment industry, pop culture, and economic strategies that prey on a whole generation. This, combined with a break down in family structure and values, sets the stage for anger, despair, hopelessness, and apathy.” Through radical methods, such as the punk band No Longer Music, the story of the fall of man and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ are being proclaimed and tearing down strongholds in places where conventional ministry teams cannot go including Islamic countries, punk and Goth festivals, and Satanist clubs throughout Europe, Asia, and South America.

When President Ronald Reagan made a speech on June 12, 1987 at the Brandenburg Gate of the West Berlin wall in Germany he said: “As I looked out a moment ago from the Reichstag, that embodiment of German unity, I noticed words crudely spray-painted upon the wall, perhaps by a young Berliner: ‘This wall will fall. Beliefs become reality.’ Yes, across Europe, this wall will fall. For it cannot withstand faith; it cannot withstand truth. The wall cannot withstand freedom.” With faith, through prayer and sacrificial service, and empowered by the gospel and the working of the Holy Spirit the “walls” that constrain the church from fulfilling the Great Commission will indeed fall.