

MOVER MISSIONS

What is MOVER missions and why should it matter to us?

By Revd Manik Corea, National Director, SCGM

Think Mission. Do Missions.

MM¹ is not your typical cross-cultural missionary. After a successful career as an engineer working in Singapore and other countries, he took early retirement and has been serving as a non-residential missionary in his senior years. Over the last 7 years, he has been making occasional, short-term trips each year to a state-less people group he met in the Mekong region. Learning about their struggles in earning a living from dwindling fish-stocks, MM used his engineering and business background to train and successfully help them implement hydro-farming techniques. He has even engaged with volunteer believers from the neighbouring nation that they come from, to help in ministry amongst these people. God has been at work amongst them since.

MM sees the need for integral or holistic mission and has simply responded to God's call to get involved with this particular people group. He is not an official missionary of any church or mission agency. He sees himself as just doing his part in God's greater mission.

But he is typical of an alternative missionary workforce that God has been using to great effect in recent years, in many parts of the world where traditional mission methods or missionaries might struggle or not be welcome or allowed.

In fact, the last two National Missions Studies (NMS 2019 and 2024) conducted by SCGM have shown that an increasing number of official missionaries sent by our churches are undertaking what we term as non-traditional missions.²



¹ Name protected because of sensitive nature of work

² Both reports can be downloaded from <https://www.scgm.org.sg/nms/>

As seen in the above chart, from the 98 churches surveyed in the 2024 NMS, almost a third of the official mission workforce sent out from the churches are engaged in such “non-traditional” missions. The number is much greater when we factor in many people who are involved under the radar or are not officially sent out or supported by their churches. Anecdotally, we have heard from many young people who are not as open to career missionary pathways in the traditional sense, but prefer these non-traditional and more novel ways of being involved missionally.

Non-traditional missions - what’s in a word?

“That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” wrote Shakespeare.³ However, descriptive or classifying terms should at the least be clear and clarifying. Let’s consider the confusing nature of the term “non-traditional missions”.

SCGM takes the term “traditional missions” as referring typically and broadly to mission workers spending two years or more spent serving cross-culturally doing church-based, church-planting, community development or evangelistic work, and sent out by a mission agency or a church.

On the other hand, the word “non-traditional” missions is a catch-all phrase essentially for any work involving cross-cultural mission work or periodic engagements that are different from those serving in traditional missionary postings. There are manifold and wildly varied types of mission work so described.

Non-Traditional Missions =

Tentmaking, Bi-Vocational Missions, Business-As-Missions (BAM), Non-Residential Missions, Diaspora Missions, Theological educators, Mission Trainers and Digital Missionaries.

Nor is it ever good practice to define something by what it is not, as it lacks specificity and clarity. Imagine if we classified motorcycles as “non-cars”, or butterflies as “flight-capable caterpillars”! The point is that motorcycles and butterflies are new things in their own right – with their own special structure, function and characteristics.

In the light of this, we at SCGM have come up with a new word we hope to describe “non-traditional missions” – an acronym that we have coined called **MOVER**. We would like to unpack the concept more fully in this paper.

In doing so, we re-imagine missions today as an opportunity to engage a wider group of people than traditionally conceived of in missions. At the same time, we recognize that the concepts engendered in our descriptions of the word “MOVER” are not new – as many of these expressions of missions (like Tent-making and BAM) have been in vogue and in practice, certainly in the modern missionary movements of our day.

³ From William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*, spoken by Juliet in Act 2, Scene 2 - the balcony scene.



What is MOVER missions?

SCGM defines MOVER missions as an acronym containing five words:

Multi-modal – Occasional – Vocational – Entrepreneurial – Resourceful

Accordingly, the terms are defined as follows:

Multi-modal – This is missions that occurs today in poly-contextual modes and fashions, some of which may be even non-geographical or involve different modes and contexts that interact contemporaneously. For example, engaging digital worlds and interactive virtual spaces, or engaging with diasporic communities in our neighbourhoods.

Occasional – This is both missions that is short-to-medium term, or those that are more irregular, perhaps involving regular or annual trips i.e. non-residential missions. They may also include temporal projects and quick and just-in-time response work – for example, crisis relief or Scripture translation within a specified time.

Vocational – This is missions that involves bi-vocational and tent-making mission workers, and those involve specialised skills involving for example agricultural, engineering, medical and educational professionals.

Entrepreneurial – This is missions that utilises Business-As-Mission platforms, the creative arts or social enterprise.

Resourceful – This is missions that seeks to invest in and build capacity for all of the above methods of missions. These may include capital investments, skills-development, spiritual, intercultural and theological formation and partnership support, with the goal of sustaining MOVER-type missions.

We depict it this way, with the five constituent words in MOVER and a second-line word as a further complement:



At the heart of this image is the word “sent”. This is entirely deliberate...



We are a SENT people

In proposing the term “MOVER” as a new descriptive, we hope at the same time to present at heart, a call on all God’s people to find their place and to participate in God’s mission to all the world.

The Gospel not only brings us to Jesus as Savior and Lord, but sends us out by His Spirit to show and share the good news of His saving grace and coming Kingdom to all people. Chris Wright argues so: “Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.”⁴

Consequently, the whole world must be viewed as the remit of concern for every true disciple. As the late pastor-theologian John Stott once famously opined, “We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God.”⁵

Now, the definition of what actually constitutes the ‘mission’ of the Church (both global and local) is much debated among church leaders, councils and commissions, theologians, mission practitioners and the like. It can be confusing.⁶ But it is vital that on this, more than any issue for our day, the Church in Singapore and globally, must be clearest on and certainly faithful to.

We at SCGM believe that missions today – in line with the mission of all God’s people in His one universal Church – must find appropriate and culturally-relevant ways to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ heard and seen, seeking by God’s power to invite and disciple the lost to whole-of-life discipleship where Jesus is both Savior and Lord of them, their families and worlds.

Missions towards this end is a multi-faceted endeavor involving both the sending and support of missionaries to the un-reached places of our world, but also calls us to play our part in being sent out as well. In many places in our world, this will also include partnering with local churches where they exist, to seek and enable the flourishing of indigenous mission movements from local churches and their agencies. Ultimately, we must all be MOVERS!

Unfortunately, there is often a tendency in our churches to separate out the mission work of the church at large, from the care and ministry to local believers in the congregation. The latter easily becomes the default mode of church-life in which missions becomes simply one of a number of necessary but optional ministries of the local church. Most churches have a missions committee, church-staff or department, with the unintended consequence that missions (locally or cross-culturally) becomes the responsibility and concern of the chosen

⁴ Chris Wright, *The Mission of God* (IVP Academic, 2006), 23.

⁵ John Stott, “The Living God Is a Missionary God,” quoted in James E. Berney, ed., *You Can Tell the World* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 9.

⁶ We recommend Chris Wright’s *The Mission of God* (IVP Academic, 2006) and its companion follow-up *The Mission of God’s People* (Zondervan, 2010) as two of the most lucid, biblically-faithful go-to treatments on the mission of the Church today.



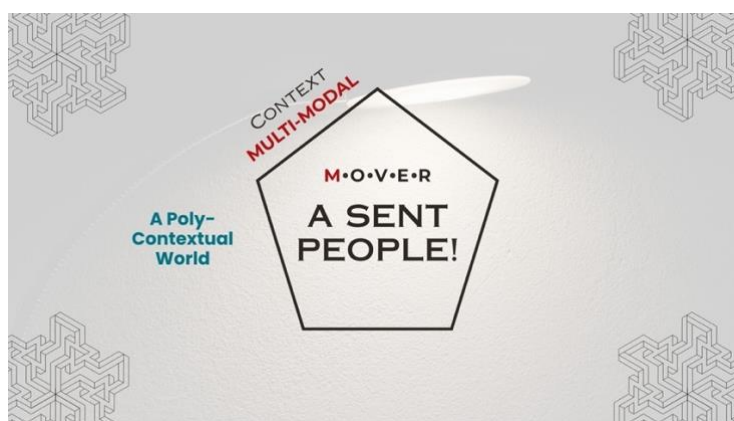
few. For the typical believer in our churches then, missions becomes something happening “out there”. It is not their “calling” or “ministry.”⁷

Yet, all of God's church is called into all of God's mission. As the slogan of the Lausanne Movement promulgates, the whole church must take the whole Gospel to the whole World. Or as theologian Dallas Willard once said, “The Great Commission is still the mission statement of the Church.”⁸ It is the Mission of God that we are ALL called to participate in and which cannot be delegated out to a few.

MOVER missions seeks therefore to help release more Christians into participation in the call of God, beginning where we are and to the ends of the earth as God sends, utilizing our vocations, time and efforts and responding with our all.

Let us now unpack each aspect of the MOVER mission paradigm....

Multi-Modal – A world with context



“Mission is from everywhere to everywhere, and from everyone to everywhere—so it must be polyvocal, polycentric, and intercultural.”

Graham Joseph Hill
(<https://grahamjosephhill.com/christian-mission/>)

There are no worlds without culture or context. We all exist in relationship to other entities (whether persons, things or environments).

Indeed, we live in an increasingly unpredictable, globalized world where we interact with many contexts and possibilities. American author and futurologist Jamais Cascio developed an acronym BANI to describe our contemporaneous experience in the world today: “Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, and Incomprehensible”.⁹

⁷ SCGM is not under-playing or criticizing the need either for the specialized and dedicated ministries and calling of missionaries cross-culturally overseas, or the need to mobilize missionaries for the least-reached parts of the world. Indeed, we partner with mission agencies and networks like Antioch 21 in Singapore to see this number grow. But the concern is that it is easy to delegate our collective responsibility to missions to someone else, as though it were not the concern of the whole church and each member. MOVER missions challenges this notion explicitly.

⁸ <https://renovare.org/articles/interview-dallas-willard-renovation-of-the-heart>

⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeroenkraaijenbrink/2022/06/22/what-bani-really-means-and-how-it-corrects-your-world-view/> See also <https://digitalleadership.com/blog/bani-world/> for a good explication of the terms in this neologism.



The world we live in seems:

Brittle – likely to break;

Anxious – referring to a general response to the unpredictable nature of events in our world;

Nonlinear – we live in environments and interact with systems that are interconnected and complex in which cause-and-effect are not straightforward;

Incomprehensible – the world for many people is increasingly difficult to comprehend and understand, let alone make sense of.

The world we are sent on mission into is certainly a changing, unpredictable and vulnerable world that nevertheless, presents us with many new and exciting possibilities and potentialities.

The accompanying second word “Context” (in the figure above) expresses the importance of taking where we are into consideration – the milieu in which missions must take place which are the personal, social and environmental spaces people interact with and inhabit in their daily lives. People today live and interact within multiple contexts.

Generative AI and the encroachment of digital technologies in the everyday; unpredictable geo-political, economic and environmental changes; crime, corruption, persecution and oppression; perceived and growing generational differences, all coupled with the stress, distraction and anxiety of hectic lives lived in the glow of ubiquitous technologies conflate and cohere together to make for a much more complex world than ever before.

There is an increasing erosion of geographical space and perception – social media and people movements have brought the “ends of the earth” closer – they are present in our schools, workplaces and digital feeds. Cultures are no longer monolithic or self-contained. People today function and traverse across hybrid identities and contexts. For example, children in a globalized world may be from second- or third-generation immigrant families. Many will have travelled, even lived abroad or been exposed to music, film, trends and fashion from far off places. They are likely also to be digital natives, sometimes conversant in two or more languages, able to function in a multiverse of personas.

Missions therefore needs to be able to address the complexity and hybridity of our world. Consequently, no one model of missions, no matter how dynamic or entrenched, can do the job. Churches on mission need to be ready to relate to, adopt and adapt across multiple communities and worlds – meeting people where they are and dealing with the different contextual realities.

Thus, a multi-modal approach allows for integrated focus within a wide variety of approaches. Single-mode missional strategies are no longer enough as we live in a dynamic, interconnected web of physical, intra-cultural, virtual and interactive spaces consisting of our local communities, diasporic peoples and the influence of trans-national global communities within both physical and digital spaces that are often noisy and contested. The person on mission in



such a world must therefore increasingly be agile, adaptable, culturally intelligent and be able to move and be present across these multiple modes and contexts.

Occasional – Flexible timelines and time-tables.



“Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be easily broken.”

Old missionary adage.

Unlike more permanent long-term missionary pathways that may see missions as a focused, prepared-for specialised calling and role that requires commitment over a period of years, the MOVER paradigm recognizes an equally valid and flexible approach that allows for occasional, just-in-time or spontaneous opportunities for missional engagement that may be just as effective in our world today.

Occasional missions includes both short to medium-term missions engagement as well as connections made on-the-job or in the course of our work and meetings, whether one-off or intermittent during tent-making or bi-vocational work. Such opportunities call for readiness, obedience and availability, using methods that are agile and flexible, even opportunistic - with the use of time, space and cultural intelligence. An example would be the fleeting but providential co-journeying that Philip made with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40).

The same flexibility will be needed by those of us who serve in non-residential settings or go on short-term mission trips, or use occasional connections like meeting or giving hospitality to international students, visiting migrant families or conducting online or on-site training and partnership with indigenous believers on a scheduled weekly, monthly or specific basis.

Flexibility describes the overall feel of our engagement, but it is no less intentional, certainly not simply random. This time of occasional missions necessitates a posture of readiness, an ability and willingness to prayerfully seek for and be open to divine appointments that God may bring to us in the course of the occasional visits or work. They may be situational and highly relational, within the natural flow of life, work, play and daily engagement.



Vocational – employing our skill-sets and passions for God’s glory.

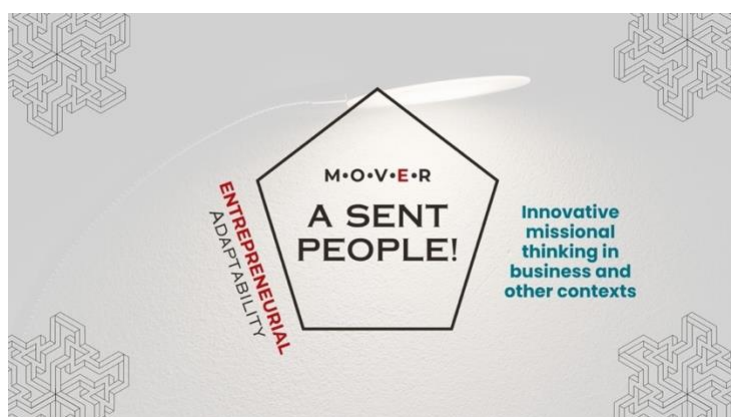


“LK is a tentmaker. She is a doctor in a private hospital in Southeast Asia. For her, being on mission involves being a good doctor and colleague is part of her Christian witness; befriending, sharing faith and life, discipling young believers and accompanying them to local churches.” (From NMS 2024 final report, page 20).

The word “vocation” is a derivative of the Latin word “vocare” that signifies a life-calling.¹⁰ Within a missional framework, the vocational nature of MOVER missions refers to the use of skills and talents either from divinely-bestowed talents, or skills and abilities learnt through work, education or apprenticing, that enables one to use with missional intent to gain access to, assist, inform or transform local and cross-cultural contexts for God’s greater glory.

It opposes the so-called sacred-secular divide, seeing all facets of life, including careers and work life, as arenas for the display and revealing of God’s glory. It sees our interests, hobbies, jobs and careers all as means to live out our calling and purposes as God’s people on mission. In cross-cultural and intra-cultural contexts, we can use our skill and jobs to live out our calling as God’s people on mission wherever he sends us. Missions seen in this light is not just what you do, but who you are and how you can serve God’s greater purposes in the totality of your lived experiences. How can our vocations, qualifications, work experience and interests be applied in missional contexts home and abroad? MOVER missions calls us to use our vocations *and* vacations, our skills and passions with missional intent.

Entrepreneurial – using adaptive and creative approaches.



“A & BC are business-as-mission entrepreneurs. They run an agricultural-production business in Central-West Asia, buying local produce, processing and distributing them locally and overseas. For them, the work they do and the people they meet is their ministry.” (From NMS 2024 final report, page 20).

Can business, social enterprise, the creative arts and the marketplace become the means by which we gain access and engage with peoples in places that traditional missions cannot

¹⁰ *Vocare* literary means "to call." Its noun form, *vocatio* refers to a meaning "call" or "summons".



reach? We firmly believe so. Entrepreneurs must engender creativity and adaptability. They need to be innovative, pro-active, opportunistic and well-resourced for the sake of the Kingdom. In the business world, entrepreneurs are the risk-takers – engines of change that are willing to experiment in order to forge a pathway where there is no path, or to pioneer into new places and creating new products, tools, processes and services by seeing what others cannot yet see.

In Kingdom terms, creativity is a divine gift that God bestows for His purposes (see Bezalel in Exodus 31:1-5). When applied into missional contexts, such people can find ways to meet needs in the community, experiment with new approaches to influence and facilitate healthy change and vital transformation, or to utilize existing folk beliefs, symbols and art-forms in order to better communicate the Gospel. They are not deterred by challenge and even failure, but seek to learn to engage with unreached people, drawing on financial, relational and spiritual capital to bring transformation.

Resourceful – finding the fuel to generate and support the various MOVER approaches to missions.



“A leader of the future is the one who doesn't need to be seen.”
Jenn Brown

Ultimately, MOVER missions require “fueling” and resourcing that provides capacity and energy to enable multi-modal, occasional, vocational and entrepreneurial missions to thrive. This may be in the form of capital investment – providing seed-funding for start-up initiatives or to aid on-going missional development and focus. Or a focus on training and education to bring about theological education, spiritual formation and inter-cultural competencies. Finally, it may refer to capacity building for raising and mentoring indigenous and next-generation leadership. It is “enabling power”, described by Trevor Fong as “the strategic infusion of spiritual, relational, financial, and knowledge-based capital that empowers” MOVER-mental missions. Potential energy must lead to kinetic impact!¹¹

¹¹ Trevor Fong is the founder of I AM LOGOS and founding member of the Digital Collective, Singapore. The quote is from his description and inspiring notes on the MOVER paradigm.



Conclusion

Every believer is called to truly know Jesus and make him known (John 17:3 and 18). As Jesus was sent by the Father, so He sends us (John 20:21). Therefore, we are a “sent” people called to be MOVERS.

There is space in God’s mission for your gifts and calling. Perhaps He is calling you to renewed vision for short-term missions in intentional partnership with indigenous movements abroad. Perhaps God will open up an overseas posting by your company so that you can serve Him bi-vocationally. Perhaps God will call you to use your job-skills to serve as a tent-maker in a closed country. Maybe He will use call you to use your entrepreneurial skills to start a business that becomes your base of missions in countries where traditional dedicated missionaries simply can’t go. Perhaps your call is to be a digital missionary, intentionally witnessing for Christ in virtual spaces.

Then MOVER missions is for you. It is for your whole church.

MOVER missions is a way we at SCGM would like to articulate an invitation and a call to the larger church in Singapore and abroad, to join in God’s mission into all the world. Here is a call for churches to re-examine their basic understanding of who, what, where and how we engage in God’s mission in the world. Our hope is that it will move us hopefully to re-evaluate our missions policies and long-held perspectives, or at least spur on discussions in that direction.

We will be working to expand our conversations and discussions on this in the coming years.

To be part of the on-going conversation, write to admin@scgm.org.sg.

