

The Vision for Birthing a New Category of Ministries called Pre-Candidate Fellowships

By David Sherbrooke

Authors note: This is not a publishable article. Rather it was extracted from an email written to a mission mobilizer who stated: "I'm not sure I see your whole vision at this time." The thoughts herein are quite random as we currently are writing both a booklet on this topic for general Christian audiences as well as a larger book for key visionaries. The book will include the more academic and complex language such as is used in this article. Please excuse the randomness, this was thrown together. Version date: 11/15/07

After 20 years of serving as a student mission mobilizer, I have only seen a tiny handful go to the mission field as long term missionaries. That was the primary motivation to begin to explore a completely new approach to solving the "follow-up" problem as it has been called in some circles. Rather than interviewing mission mobilizers and asking them what they think we need to do to solve the "follow-up" problem, the discovery came instead by listening to the pre-candidates who were in the 90 to 99 percentile, those who likely would never make it to the field.

We discovered from these pre-candidates that what they need is not only to participate in more training programs, read more books, attend more mobilization events, or go on more short-term mission trips, but they also need some type of **ongoing** encouragement over several years. In fact, they need this encouragement in an ongoing continuous way until they join the mission agency. We soon realized that a massive, purposed and most of all **non-stop** ministry effort to help pre-candidates all the way until their hand is in the hand of the sending agency is actually what is needed.

A test group of future missionaries was formed, both to help them and learn from them. The key turning point in the test group was at the end of the first year when our "program" was about to end and the pre-candidates chose to keep meeting monthly, forming what they called the "Future Missionary Club." At the end of the second year, we became convinced that we were on to something "different" (the core difference...that this was an ongoing fellowship and not a start/stop program). We realized that this very well could be the birthing of a new kind, or even a whole new category of ministries. A new sodality (para-church) category to encourage and help the modality (church). (In the forthcoming book I will explain in detail the steps of how this vision was birthed.)

Through that two year process of moving from a program that almost ended to a fellowship that continues to meet today, I was awoken from my mission mobilizers mentality that almost always relies exclusively on programs, seminars, events, training, and even books, all of which have the key common functional identity: they end. We discovered that what was needed was something that did not end.

Essentially by borrowing principles from Dr. Ralph Winter's writings, our "test group" and leaders running the Future Missionary Club discovered that we need a new category of ministries (sodalities) which **exclusively** focuses on helping pre-candidates join mission agencies. Winter's constant call for more mission mobilizers and especially his call for missionaries to start new sodalities (mission sending agencies) while serving on the mission field, both played a key part in facilitating the borrowing of this concept: the significant role sodalities play in impacting modalities, namely, the church.

We recognize that the campus ministry sodalities have had a tremendous impact in motivating and challenging the church (modalities) in the areas of evangelism and discipleship. We also recognize that the mission agency sodalities have been greatly used to stimulate churches to send their members out as missionaries, historically, primarily through these para-church sodalities called mission agencies. We believe that the birthing of pre-candidate fellowship sodalities could stimulate the local church to help so many more of their members join mission agencies and go to the mission field.

Let's be clear about something at this point. There is no question that the church, the local church, has the God given role both biblically and practically to do evangelism, discipleship, the sending of missionaries and the preparation of future missionaries to be sent. We envision that the vast majority of these pre-candidate fellowships should be owned and operated by local churches. In cases where pre-candidates find themselves all alone (with no other pre-candidates at their home church), we will encourage city-wide pre-candidate fellowships. But we believe history shows that sodalities (para-church) play a vital role in reviving and motivating the modalities (church) in carrying out their God given roles.

The call for a new category of sodalities, possibly eventually to be seen as a subset of the category of ministries we now call “mobilization” ministries, is what we are calling “Pre-Candidate Fellowships.” Just as mission agencies do much more than send missionaries, and just as campus ministries do much more than evangelize and disciple college students, pre-candidate fellowships will do much more than help pre-candidates join agencies. But, pre-candidate fellowships will primarily focus on that singular task of helping pre-candidates join mission agencies as their fundamental purpose for existing.

The big picture vision is to see God raise up a new breed of mobilizers who would work as facilitators and consultants starting these “Pre-Candidate Fellowships” in local churches as well as citywide pre-candidate fellowships in cities where not enough pre-candidates are located in any given church. Our vision and prayer is that in the next 5 years or so, God will raise up 3-5 visionary leaders, each who likely will start their own unique form of pre-candidate fellowship ministries with their own unique ministry names, styles, formats and methods, but clearly all under this new category called “Pre-Candidate Fellowships.”

For example, maybe a few years from now we will see a “MissionariesRus.com” or “WannaBeMissionaries.org” and even another FMF: “Future Missionary Fellowships.” The similarity here to the common yet unique characteristics of Campus Crusade for Christ, Navigators and InterVarsity is that these three campus ministries all are functionally the same (evangelism and discipleship), but in form and style, quite different. Each has its own unique way of doing things, largely shaped by the visionary founders and leaders and the way the leaders did things in the birthing years. But all three are under the category of sodalities we call “campus ministries.” The common denominator in this new category we are proposing will be that these new pre-candidate fellowship ministries all will run ongoing fellowship groups made up of future missionaries who can join these fellowships at any time and leave when they join a mission agency.

It is crucial here to point out that we are fairly certain that these new ministries will most likely not be started by current professional mission mobilizers. Part of the reason we believe this is that one of the biggest barriers in the current mobilization scene from the West is that we tend to only look at program or event type solutions to solve any or all ministry and mobilization needs or problems. Bear in mind, we most definitely encourage all mission mobilizers to continue their excellent ministries. In fact, we encourage and challenge all mission mobilizers to actually turn up the dial and fan the flame on all of the programs and events which they

currently operate. Millions in the church world wide are still asleep in the pew when it comes to missions.

But unless a few **new** mobilizers are raised up (who perhaps are not locked into the “program or event solves all needs” type thinking), then the new pre-candidate fellowship movement we propose will likely not get off the ground. After 20 years of working as a student mission mobilizer I personally had a rather rude awakening when I discovered that the events and programs which I was promoting and running were in part, by their very nature as events and programs, perhaps a major barrier for solving the “follow-up” problem. That barrier I discovered was the highly westernized approach of solving problems or meeting ministry needs almost exclusively through events and programs.

The birthing of this new category, we call “Pre-Candidate Fellowships,” in no way should take away from the excellent mobilization ministry already occurring via Urbana, the Travel Team, SVM2, Right Now, Passion Conferences, the ubiquitous Short Term Missions movement, INSIGHT, WCF, Perspectives, all the masters in missions programs, and so many other missions training programs, books, and events which pre-candidates are ministered, trained and prepared through. Members of Pre-Candidate Fellowship groups would still actively (and likely more fully) participate in all of these kinds of excellent mobilization and training ministries which already exist today.

The key connection between all of these excellent current mobilization and mission training efforts and the specifically focused effort of the proposed “Pre-Candidate Fellowships” is that PCF’s will help move future missionaries from one event or training program to the next without allowing them to fall through the cracks. If only 1 person out of every 100 who want to be missionaries eventually joins a mission agency, we must assume that almost all potential future missionaries are currently falling out in-between the various mobilization and training events and programs currently offered.

Recognizing this current state of reality, and that is, that almost all (90 to 99 percent) pre-candidates currently fall through the cracks between one event or program and the next is the core reality we must face. Essentially, what this means is that all of us who serve as professional neutral (not working for a missionary sending agency) mission mobilizers regularly minister to and rub shoulders with pre-candidates, almost all of whom will never end up on the mission field (99 of 100 is for sure almost all!). If these statistics truly reflect the current reality, then it is a rare exception if we (professional neutral mission mobilizers) are so

privileged to actually minister to someone who ends up on the mission field.

And for the professional mission agency mobilizers (recruiters), who primarily minister to that 1 percent who likely will get to the field, they long to help the other 99 percent of pre-candidates and encourage them to join their agency (as God leads of course). Most professional mission agency recruiters and mobilizers are aware that there are thousands of potential future missionaries (we call pre-candidates) whom they have limited or no access to. The creation of this new category would give mission agency recruiters incredible direct access to those most likely to join their agency (or any agency) and go to the mission field.

Instead of falling through the cracks, if these potential future missionaries became members of their home church based Pre-Candidate Fellowship group (or local citywide PCF group), the fellowship and encouragement from the group would serve as the motivational “glue.” The sharing, accountability and encouragement from the group would help pre-candidates to “glue” all the pieces of their learning experiences, from the various events and programs the pre-candidate attends, into one ongoing journey all the way to the door of the agency. Membership and involvement in a pre-candidate fellowship would serve as the rails to keep the candidate on track all the way to the agency and then to the field.

Any of us who work in mobilization must honestly admit that we see large numbers of potential future missionaries who participate in one or even many of our mobilization events, programs, or even completion of graduate degrees, only later to drop out and never make it to the field. All the data shows that not just a few but the **vast majority** of potential future missionaries drop out and never make it to join an agency. Perhaps most mobilizers do not realize or believe this data? More likely most professional mobilizers keep focusing on mobilizing new people rather than the key thing we are suggesting: **A MASSIVE NEW EFFORT TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH THOSE WE HAVE ALREADY MOBILIZED.**

Our test group (the Future Missionary Club) led to several profound discoveries. But the biggest discovery of all was the most simple, something we should have seen all along: future missionaries, while participating in all the excellent preparation and training activities and programs currently available, need some kind of “social dynamic” to motivate them and move them along.

In Western culture we accept the idea that decisions are made independently and that you are pretty much on your own in life, free to do or not to do whatever you

want. Simply because “independence” is our post-modern culture in the West, it in no way means that “independence” is our best social functioning norm (in fact some may argue that independence was the root of the fall in the Garden of Eden). Perhaps the fact that 99 of 100 potential future missionaries decides not to become a missionary should awaken us to see that maybe these pre-candidates need the positive influence of the very “social dynamic” they are starved from due to Western culture.

It is quite surprising that those of us who understand the crucial role “social dynamics” play in numerous missiological concepts which we teach, yet we have missed the application of this same principle to the process of becoming a missionary. The role “social dynamics” plays in the Insider Movement concept, the Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches, and even the Unreached People Group strategy are well understood and taught by many mission mobilizers. Yet we have missed the fact that future missionaries also largely are needing a “social dynamic” (a process of socialization) in order to move them along through the many fine mobilization events and training programs. In fact, pre-candidates need this constant social influence until they become a member of yet another “social dynamic,” the category of fellowships birthed by Carey (mission agencies), in order to then go to the field.

This core principle of “social dynamics” is that people make and maintain important decisions largely based on social factors. This indeed is what Winter was noted for in the Christianity Today cover article two decades ago, as they called him (or he likely called himself) a “social engineer.” Not all have clearly understood that indeed Winter was borrowing from McGavran and Townsend the core “social dynamics” of how people make decisions for Christ then gather into churches, and the social reasons that facilitate and maintain their membership in those fellowships. The birthing of the Unreached People Group strategy and the Frontier Mission Movement was at its core, built on the concept that humans are social and make decisions and take major actions (i.e. becoming a Christian) based primarily on social factors (what I am calling here “social dynamics”).

In the same way we are borrowing both from Winter and McGavran this core “social dynamic” in the call for a new category to be birthed. The power of group “social dynamics” in decision making is well understood by many missionaries, missiologists and mission mobilizers. But we likely better know this concept in Christendom as “fellowships.” We recognize that most potential future missionaries give up their dream to become a missionary because they have no constant “social

dynamic” or social stimulus to keep them going all the way to the agency door.

Westerners struggle often in grasping and understanding that people are moved and motivated primarily by relationships and social factors, not just intellectual knowledge. This fundamental human truth is what I call “sub-cultural,” a fundamental need all humans have regardless of their culture. Not too many centuries ago Westerners were just like the rest of the world, motivated in life primarily by social interaction and relationships (social dynamics). Perhaps inside we westerners still long for relationships and primarily make decisions influenced through the socialization process amongst our peers. The one super Westernized ultra-independent pioneering go-getter that makes it to the field today, out of the ninety-nine who do not, likely exemplifies a more abnormal pattern than a normal one.

McGavran called for the birthing of mission fellowships in every church across the world in order to see the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the social breakthrough in the then 14,000 UPG at the time of his home going. We simply are borrowing from and building on McGavran's call for mission fellowships to be birthed in every local church.

Although we encourage the birthing of church based mission fellowships which are made up of both Senders and Goers as an idea we likely will promote under the larger umbrella of “Pre-Candidate Fellowships,” it is Winter's concept of the ‘second decision’ made by members of sodalities which we are building upon for the exclusivity of those in the Pre-Candidate Fellowship movement to primarily (or even exclusively) be made up of future missionaries. Let me explain why.

Just as the Celtic missionaries sat in the icy stream waters to show their extreme devotion and “commitment” to their membership in the Celtic mission sodality, we are simply suggesting that members of Pre-Candidate Fellowships exclusively be made up of future missionaries (Goers). In a sense, this is parallel to the “second decision” made by all members of the other major sodality category (which the Pre-Candidate Fellowship movement will primarily serve to supply): mission sending agencies. Members of mission agencies all made this second decision (beyond their membership in the body of Christ as the first decision) to join the missionary fellowship (the mission agency) and serve as a missionary.

We are paralleling this simple concept of equality in membership based on similar role in that all PCF members are Goers (not Goers and Senders). We see the power of the solidarity in the common commitment of

the group as a band of equally focused people. Everyone in the group is already on the same page because membership is based on the fact that they all want to be missionaries. This is the core of the Future Missionary Clubs membership covenant, often which is left unspoken. All the members of a Pre-Candidate Fellowship have in addition to their commitment to serve as long-term missionaries, by joining the group, made the same oath...to one another...to help each other get to the field. You help me, I will help you, we are a Band of Brothers...and sisters!

Most churches are currently focusing so much energy on the ever-exploding STM movement. The STM movement has great potential to harvest pre-candidates if indeed every church currently operating regular STM trips would also just as enthusiastically operate permanent Future Missionary Fellowships in their churches. A fundamental way of harvesting fruit from the massive STM movement could be the formation of Future Missionary Clubs along with McGavran's Missions Fellowships (primarily made of Senders) in every church that operates STM programs.

One of the main fruits of the birthing of this new category could be that 5-10 years from now we could see the average age of a new career worker drop from 32 (Ben Sells wrote in Mission Frontiers) to something like 25. Some wonder why the average age of a new long term missionary is 32? Does it need to be this late and does it need to take this long to get to the field? No! We fully agree that it would be much better to see the average 10 year preparation pattern of 22 year old mission conference decision makers to 32 year old mission agency joiners (we saw this same 10 year pattern in both Korea and the USA), cut in half and shift down to 25 as the new average agency joining age. For language learning, boldness to try new things (as Sells mentioned) and most of all, less time to sit around and change their mind and NOT GO, getting pre-candidates into Future Missionary Clubs as early as possible would be essential.

Several are currently looking at encouraging people to join such clubs while in college. The formation of this new category (Pre-Candidate Fellowships) that exists in order to aggressively and exclusively follow-up any and all who have indicated a career mission calling, could be a major factor not only in increasing the numbers who make it to the agency door, but getting them there 5 years earlier than the current average. This is one of the major fruits this new category of ministries could help steer and guide into reality.

Another one of the main by products or tools that this new category of ministries could both help to further

develop and use is a **single** master database of all pre-candidates. The most crucial task in using such a database would be plugging pre-candidates into local PCF groups as early as possible, soon after their decision to become a missionary. Tracking mission decision makers (pre-candidates) is actually much easier today thanks to modern databases, email, cell phones and the Internet. Collecting data from the many avenues available today to discover those who have already decided to be missionaries would be a fundamental function for the Pre-Candidate Fellowship movement. Decision makers from Urbana, Perspectives, Passion Conferences, Right Now, SVM2, Mission Next, and STM participation could all be tracked in one central shared database (which Mission Next essentially has already created).

The current mobilization focus on calling the whole church to have a missions vision and to be involved in missions action should not and must not stop. The focus of this new kind of ministry would be on those we have already successfully mobilized. Thus, the need for a new category that exclusively helps pre-candidates may better be understood.

I would say that very few mission mobilizers are focused on fulfilling the five (to ten) year process of face-to-face follow-up of these missions decision makers. Most in the mobilization industry are constantly focusing on mobilizing those with little or no mission vision at all or focusing primarily on helping Senders and lay mobilizers. This must not stop.

We are currently working on collecting accurate statistics of the total number of full-time mission mobilizers in North America, both agency and neutral. Our guesstimate is that it would be fair to say that the number of full-time mission mobilizers is actually relatively small. Some have expressed fears in recent years that if everyone stays to mobilize, we will eventually not have any Goers. No, the greater concern should be that if we do not focus attention on those we have already mobilized, especially those very willing and desirous (and feeling called) to serve as Goers, then that lack of focused attention on pre-candidates will be the prime reason we soon will have few if any Goers.

The problem is not too many staying to serve as mobilizers. The problem is that few if any mobilizers are currently working full time to exclusively follow-up pre-candidates until they join mission agencies. The one or two exceptions may be Right Now and SVM2, both excellent mobilization ministries calling young people to serve as Goers. We welcome and suggest that if both of these fine mobilization ministries adapt and adopt their own form and style of “pre-candidate fellowships” to their existing offering of programs, then we believe their

core vision goals could greatly be fulfilled. We welcome this.

All along we have hoped and prayed that mobilization ministries like SVM2 and Right Now would adapt and adopt this idea using their own terms, names and ideas. In fact, in the book we will give a bold public challenge for many if not all current mission mobilization movements to engage the “Pre-Candidate Fellowship” concept in any or all of the following ways:

1. Add Pre-Candidate Fellowships as a major activity they sponsor (using whatever name they want to call it).
2. Shift the focus of their mobilization ministry from initial mobilization to exclusively doing one thing: helping pre-candidates all the way until they actually sign up and join mission agencies (and GO!).
3. Help foster the vision for others to start completely new ministries (Pre-Candidate Fellowships) which **ONLY** help pre-candidates join agencies, nothing else.

Apart from these two ministries, it is hard (outside the professional agency recruiter paradigm) to think of any US mobilization ministries that are exclusively helping pre-candidates all the way until they join agencies (if you know of more, write me so I can learn of them and share these ideas with them). Many current mobilization efforts and training programs do indeed help pre-candidates along the path, but most pre-candidates (we could fairly say almost all) get side-tracked and never stay on the path all the way to the agency door, much less, the field.

I never have been concerned that too many will stay and mobilize instead of going. Rather, everyone we are currently mobilizing will more likely become a Sender, but very soon with no one to send, not due to too many mobilizers, but due to few if any mobilizers willing to let go of the program and event approach and instead, who can step out and start these Pre-Candidate Fellowships ministries.

Perhaps God will call one of the excellent current mobilization ministries to help engage in fostering the birthing of this new category (number 3. above) by releasing one of their staff, and sending them out (like a missionary!) to pioneer and launch the first pre-candidate fellowship ministry.

Another great fruit that could come from launching this new category (Pre-Candidate Fellowships) would be more research on the true statistics of the numbers of those who commit and drop out. Currently Winter and others state that 99 of 100 pre-candidates drop out and never join an agency. The old Urbana survey from the

late 90's stated that 90 percent drop out after 7 years (only 10 percent of the Urbana card signers joined agencies).

This new category of ministries, Pre-Candidate Fellowships, could sponsor research in this crucial area. Getting a better handle on the "actual" number of potential future missionaries would be fundamental data for the new movement to monitor. Ten years from now, if the current statistics of 1 out of 100 goers or 10 out of 100 goers (Winter's number or the Urbana survey number respectively) is increased to 2 out of 100 or 20 out of 100, worldwide, this would double the current annual number of new missionaries. That tiny statistical increase (of roughly 1-10 percent) in Goers would collectively actually work out to twice as many new missionaries as we have now each year, partially because the number of new missionaries annually is so extremely low.

How plausible would it be to see an entire new category birthed? Very possible. The history of the birthing of so many special mobilization movements and ministries the past few decades, as well as the hundreds of new mission agencies that have popped up around the world clearly can give us hope that God can raise up these new visionary leaders to start these new pre-candidate fellowship ministries (for example: I believe there are about 4200 mission agencies in the world today after just 200 years...the vast majority of those formed since 1950). The forthcoming book will serve as a sort of manual for those visionaries challenging them to start pre-candidate fellowship ministries. Essentially, the book will help to legitimize the need and explain the practicality for launching this new category.

I look at this stage we are currently in (late 2007), similar to the pre-birthing stages of other missions industry concepts which have emerged the past 30 years. In the past 6 years of active development of the PCF concept, a surprising number of professional mission mobilizers have not understood this concept (yet almost all mission agency recruiters and pre-candidates I have interviewed for a decade now totally understand this pre-candidate fellowship concept). This may well be similar to the early pre-birthing stage confusion of a number of other movements in the arena of mission mobilization and the larger mission industry. In other words, the birthing of other new categories were also met with confusion and misunderstanding in their formative years simply because they were new and different with few reference point handles for people to grasp onto. Here are several examples of well-known concepts which were met with confusion in their pre-birthing stages:

When Winter introduced the Unreached (or back then Hidden) Peoples concept, many did not understand what it was or even why it was needed. Part of what Winter pointed out in the birthing of that new category (UPG or Frontier Mission Movement) was that right before the concept was introduced, many agencies and churches were calling for missionaries to come home since the world was already reached (so they thought). Now the UPG strategy is well accepted around much of the world (but sadly rarely used by the vast majority of agencies in my observation...but that is another topic outside of our presentation here).

The same could be said for the Senders movement which we now see spreading around the world, thanks in a major way to Neal Pirolo's book "Serving as Senders" primarily, as well as many others who picked up on and promoted this simple concept. (I hear that Neal is now traveling the world promoting the Senders concept to the church in the Global South and elsewhere). Before Neal's book, if someone in the local church said we need more "senders," it likely would have been interpreted as a call for ladies to come to the church to stuff envelopes for the monthly church newsletter mailing!

The same could be said for Member Care which now has several great books, conferences, seminars and many mission agencies now with full time staff focusing primarily on member care. All of this would have been quite hard to picture 20-30 years ago if someone sat down and told you that 30 years later there would be a whole category called Member Care. Sure, most would have understand and agreed with the NEED for any and all of these new categories which have come into place, but in their pre-birthing years, few would see or understand what would eventually exist today.

In a similar way, Livingstone has suggested that Tentmaking was a little known concept until several key books came out about 20 years ago helping to explain and promote that ministry category. Tentmaking, as well as many of these ministry concepts, was not new. What was new in each of these cases was moving a little known or relatively unused concept into popularization and large scale use.

Look at BAM. I recently spoke with Mike Barnett and then picked up the BAM (EMS #14) book Dr. Winter had given me in his office a few months before. The opening chapter (by Johnson and Rundle) which tries to spell out the differences between BAM, Tentmaking, Micro enterprise and Marketplace ministries is a good example of early stage confusion for a new ministry category. Johnson and Rundle talk about how there has been so much confusion as the BAM category emerged

in recent years. Confusion about “what it is” and “how is it different than” other similar ministry concepts is a common dilemma new ministry concepts naturally face.

This type of confusion, placing a new category in an old category (ex. “Oh, BAM, hmm..what is it...well it is really just Tentmaking”) is closer to where we are at with the emergence of the Pre-Candidate Fellowship concept. Actually, we are not even there yet because so few have even heard of or thought about this new category. Indeed, many are aware of the “follow-up” problem and the need for more missionaries. But the issue has yet to become an issue. As Scott White wrote me in an email (in late 2006) when he heard of the forthcoming book “glad you are throwing down the gauntlet on the subject.” (by the way, the On Ramp ministry White and others designed may be one of the first PCF models in the US). Maybe 5 years from now we will be where BAM is today in regards to clarifying this new category we call Pre-Candidate Fellowships. It is so new that folks do not understand what it is. There is no reference point or similar ministry to compare it to.

To date, the major category confusion which the pre-candidate fellowship concept has had is with the idea of mentoring pre-candidates. In 2000, just before we shifted into high gear development of the PCF concept, we were proposing that every local church initiate simple mentoring of missionaries by having a pastor, elder, furloughing missionary or other church leader meet monthly over lunch with a pre-candidate and commit to do this for five years. We understand that many are aware of the idea of mentoring future missionaries as a practical solution for the “follow-up” problem. In fact, the Future Missionary Club decided to require all of their members to have a personal mentor. We also encourage use of a mentoring program called “Operation Launch.” But the core category confusion between mentoring pre-candidates and the PCF concept is that all the mentoring programs we have learned of so far are just that, “programs” with a start and stop date.

STM (Short Term Missions) is fascinating in that it is likely larger, as far as total number of active participants, than any of these other category examples listed above, yet how the STM movement was birthed and evolved and then exploded is harder to pin down. Sure, we can point to certain books, conferences and such that spawned its explosive growth, but we are so far from that (STM) starting point now that it is harder to picture the pre-birthing stage confusion that may or may not have existed.

STM is a true movement in that it exploded largely due to grass roots sharing of the very simple concept from church to church rather than the way many of these

other new ministry categories (mentioned above) have initially been promoted via books, papers, and consultations. Not that we do not now indeed have such in STM, but most are being slapped on top of this spinning out of control animal after the fact of its birth and explosive growth. Even the recent EMS 2007 meetings, papers and forthcoming book focused on STM. We can only dream (and pray!) that PCF would explode as much as STM as a simple idea that can be shared from church to church via a grass-roots movement!

I would like to suggest that the same could be said even for the concept of the modern full time mission mobilizer, which I would argue was greatly advanced by Winter, both via the creation of ACMC and the FMF (which I have been a member of now for the past 10 years). Granted, there were already hundreds of full time mission mobilizers working as recruiters and mobilizers for denominational and faith missions, recruiting new missionaries and mobilizing the churches with a missions vision. These type of mobilizers have been around since the early days of mission agencies the past 200 years (the classic and much respected type of mobilizer in my book...the grey haired traveling veteran missionary speaking at churches and campuses from a few generations back).

But I would say Winter helped legitimize the new professional neutral mission mobilizer these past 30 years, which has legitimized both that role and category for so many mobilizers as well as the existence of the ministries they serve with. Thirty years ago if people would have talked about ACMC conferences and full time mission mobilizers (ACMC regional consultants) going around to advise churches, most would not have understood what they were doing, because there was no reference point for that type of ministry as a legitimate category or for that role as a legitimate role for a minister to function in full time.

There is no doubt that all of the categories we just listed are still developing and could each greatly advance by more promotion, exposure, education and awareness. I am sure leaders in each of these movements would be elated if more of the church and mission worlds understood, accessed and used their concepts.

Likely in none of the cases above were the terms used to describe the concepts problematic nor did those concept terms lend to pre-birthing stage confusion. Most of the above terms fit the old genre where the name clearly tells what it does (compared to today’s popular trend to name ministries with catchy slogans that are a far stretch from defining what they functionally do). Granted, many may better understand what we mean by PCF if we switch and use the older terms such as the “follow-

up” problem or perhaps even the more recent term “pre-candidate initiatives” to describe this category of ministries. But here is the key point of transition we may well currently be undergoing: the transition from recognizing a ministry need to proposing an overall solution. (Note in these three terms the progression from “problem” to “initiative” to “fellowships.”)

Yet, if only the simple solution we are proposing (organize pre-candidates into permanent ongoing fellowships) is looked at, many who hear of the concept simply throw it in the heap of filaments (i.e. the stack of hundreds of failed light bulb filaments outside Edison's two story laboratory window) with all the other attempts that have been made over the past 20 or more years to try and solve the “follow-up” problem. (In the forthcoming book we have a chart that shows all the things that have been attempted the past 20 years to try and solve the “follow-up” problem.) We recognize that some degree of pre-birthing stage confusion is inherent in the term we are proposing “Pre-Candidate Fellowships.”

But this same type of initial simplification of concept terms can also be found in almost all of the new ministry categories we have just mentioned above. Each new ministry category we used to illustrate above can be simplified down to its core defining activity. Yet each new ministry concept has also now been raised to its own accepted and well established category level. In fact, each of these new ministry categories now is dealing with the much more complex multifaceted issues within each of their own respective categories mentioned above.

Let's look briefly at these other categories and their boiled down bare bones “what is it” and “what does it do” type of definitions:

UPG: Focus agencies, churches and missionaries on church planting in UPG.

Senders: Get church people involved in many practical aspects of supporting and helping missionaries.

Member Care: Help churches and mission agencies care for the complex needs of field missionaries.

Tentmaking: Use a job as a witnessing platform in a creative access country.

BAM: Use business and businessmen as missionaries by establishing businesses in other countries.

Micro enterprise: Teach developing nation people how to run small businesses and provide small loans.

Marketplace: Call all Christian workers to break down secular/spiritual wall by being a light at work 24/7.

STM: Go overseas or cross cultural for a week to 3 months and do missions work for this short time.

Mobilization: Work part or full time in calling other Christians to be actively involved in world missions.

There are many more examples of pre-birthing confusion of new ministry categories which we could give. Our point here is that each of these can be defined for what they are or what they do in one sentence. Yet as each ministry concept has grown, their complex realities have been discussed, researched, written about and promoted moving them into the realm of well established ministry categories. All the more importantly, as each concept evolved into full-fledged ministry categories they now involve thousands or even millions (STM, Senders) of active participants in each one of these ministry categories.

Thirty years ago, no one in the church or mission world even knew most of these terms or concepts (ministry categories) listed above. That is not to say that all of the above are completely new. Many of the above ministries have actually been done by Christians the past 2000 years since the time of Christ's resurrection. Yet the popularization of each ministry category has been in a big part due to the tremendous growth of the sodality category known as mission agencies and also due to the growth of the partner sub-category called mobilization, both of which have had major roles in helping each of the above ministry categories move from simple concept or idea stage to their current popularization, albeit, not for popularity sake, for the sake of the kingdom expansion and the glory of God amongst all nations!

To add one more to the above list, we believe we are in the seed or pre-birthing stage of a new category:

PCF: Fellowship groups that serve primarily to help pre candidates join mission agencies.

A new dream we have is that 5 years from now we will see this topic, the “follow-up” problem (or Pre-Candidate Initiatives or our term for the category “Pre-Candidate Fellowships”) become such a talked about, even debated about topic that it could be the title of EMS#20! That really is what we are after: bringing the topic to the front burner and getting the missions world talking, thinking, and most of all taking action about the “follow-up” problem.

As we have been gripped by this new concept primarily the past 6 years actively, but really for more than a decade (with almost 20 years of passion to see more missionaries as the driving motivation that led us this way), we have been quite surprised that we, the mobilization community at large, are doing little to nothing about what often is referred to as the “follow-

up” problem. As a full time professional student mission mobilizer the past 2 decades, my own shock and awakening is what is driving much of this. I have been awoken. As recently as 1999, when I had one empty file folder on my Windows desktop entitled “Follow-Up,” I never really thought I would have much of anything go in that folder. I was too busy to do anything about it because I was all caught up in running programs and putting on events.

The eye-opener came the day the 12 month initial pilot “program” ended and the pre-candidates said “we want to keep meeting.” In addition, the fact that I had to run this entire experimental test group on my own free time as a moonlighting project outside of my duties as a full time student mission mobilizer, essentially because what we were doing (the pilot group that led to the Future Missionary Club birthing) was not a start-stop program, was another part of my personal awakening. The simultaneous pull of these two ministries (running mission mobilization programs and events vs. birthing a lasting fellowship) caused my own rude awakening as a mobilizer who had run events and programs for so many years. I too saw no other option except to create another new program. PCF is not a program.

I have tried to use the most simple parallel reference points I can to provide some handles for folks to attach this concept of PCF to, knowing how crucial it is to make this kind of comparison and connection when introduced to a new concept. All new categories need these handles. (What is BAM...well it is like Tentmaking and Micro enterprise and Marketplace ministries in this and this way, but it is different in this and this way...see the Rundle and Johnson article in chapter 1 of EMS #14). We share this illustration in order to help people better understand the new category of ministries we envision.

The two parallel reference points I often use to explain the vision for birthing this new category (PCF) are the birthing of mission agencies and birthing of campus ministries. Both fit Winter’s idea that we need para-church sodalities to provide revival, renewal and challenge to the modality church. The church has always had inspiration from the sodalities, going all the way back to Paul’s traveling band of missionaries as the first sodality mission agency of sorts.

There are three reasons I share the birthing of these two sodality categories (mission agencies and campus ministries) in order to try to give people a handle or reference point to latch on to in order for them to understand and perhaps even catch the vision for birthing another sodality category called “PCF”:

1. The parallel is that all three ministry categories (mission agencies, campus ministries, and pre-candidate fellowships) are fellowships, not programs or events.

2. The unique situation in this case is that the new category we are proposing fits very well in the middle between involvement in a campus fellowship and a mission agency fellowship. We are suggesting involvement and membership in a pre-candidate fellowship in between involvement in the other two fellowships.

3. The biggest common reference point with these two parallel categories and all the other ministry concept examples just given above is that before each category was defined, in most cases, they were little known or barely existed (compared to their growing prevalence today).

This is where we are today. We are in the pre-birthing seed steps of suggesting the great need for this new category. I have been greatly encouraged in the recent weeks as we finally went public (via Go Connect, Missions Catalyst, Perspectives and our new website <http://www.seeoursite.org/pcf/>) to discover that there are Pre-Candidate Fellowships that have been operating for some 10-15 years or more in Australia and especially in Mexico. The test group referred to in this article was developed in Korea and we recently promoted the concept in Nigeria. The new category (PCF) we are suggesting is a global one, not just for North America.

Perhaps it is time for a major wake-up call to the mission mobilization world. A wake-up call for the modern professional mobilization movement. A call to see that through what God has done, we actually have mobilized millions around the world who 30 years ago DID NOT HAVE A MISSIONS VISION. Should these mobilizers stop? By all means, no. We all know that world-wide only about 10 percent of the church is doing much of anything about the great commission. We need the regular mobilization efforts (programs and events) of so many professional mobilization ministers and ministries to continue and increase, no doubt. None of this should stop.

Rather, what we are praying towards and calling for is that God will raise up (in the next 5-10 years) a handful of full-time mission mobilizers who will serve full-time in exclusively promoting and operating this new category called “Pre-Candidate Fellowships.” The spin-offs could be many under the umbrella of this new category. The kinds of seminars, books, conferences, research, master pre-candidate database and many other things this new category could develop are quite numerous. But the root or main thing these new

mobilizers and mobilization ministries will do is gather pre-candidates into fellowships of those who want to be missionaries.

The simple point here is that many of the millions that have already been mobilized the past 30 years have pretty much been told: "Good luck! You're on your own now." The wake up call will come when we decide to do something lasting which will impact the thousands that already are willing or even called to go. Case in point: the 2-4 million a year going out each year on STM from North America alone constitutes a massive group of those we have already mobilized. Many of these STM alumni are willing pre-candidates. We need a frank evaluation of our current mobilization efforts in order to help us admit that little to nothing is being done today for pre-candidates.

The soon to be completed PCF booklet (which will precede the book) will be designed for more general Christian audiences and will be more user friendly (in language, style and simplicity...quite different from this article which is written to professional mission mobilizers) in order to share the vision of the concept so that anyone anywhere in any church or any city can immediately start their own pre-candidate fellowship. They do not have to wait for the book! And they certainly do not have to wait for the launching of the pre-candidate fellowship ministries and the establishment of this category which will pioneer this new path.