



Heritage UMC had been doing Global Impact Conferences (GIC) for several years. While several people loved them, we were experiencing drop off in attendance (and in participation in short-term mission trips).

We had created a GIC model that we used each year. The GIC began with an opening ceremony to welcome the missionaries. That evening usually included a very casual dinner where people could mix and talk with the missionaries.

The next day, we hosted a breakfast, in which missionaries got to present to about 80 people. Later, six families hosted in their homes smaller groups, who got to hear directly from an international, national, and local missionary. On Sunday a missionary preached during our services and then again during closing ceremonies.

The GIC was the same every year. And the same people came every year. It takes a lot of effort and people to put on a GIC, and it was getting disappointing that each year there seemed to be less enthusiasm for the event. We needed to shake things up a bit--to see if there were some other way of doing things that might attract more people.

We wanted to keep the things that worked. The best part of the GIC, and the most productive, were the home visits. Missionaries are very motivational and have so many great stories of how they see God working and the miracles they see happening. Just hearing the stories of their callings into missionary work is inspiring.

The breakfasts also seem to be something people enjoyed. And having missionaries preach on Sunday was very effective.

The original GIC was Thursday evening through Sunday evening. The first thing we decided to do was shorten it and start on Friday evening with a "speed dating" event we called "Meet the Missionaries." We put a dozen missionaries, both international and national, in 12 different rooms. People signed up to participate, and groups of 10-15 moved from one missionary's room to another over the course of two hours. Every 15 minutes a bell would ring, and participants would move to another room.

It was really well received. Instead of hearing from a few missionaries over the course of the three days, people heard from eight in one night. They were inspired to go deeper and signed up for home visits to hear in more detail from individual missionaries. Relationships were formed, and some continue to communicate with the missionaries to this day.

As with most ministries, there is a need to evaluate what does and does not work and to be willing to make changes. The year of 2020 has given us even more challenges, and even though Heritage is not having a GIC this year, we plan to continue them in the future. Hearing people who have a passion to do God's work in cultures and under circumstances that few of us will experience is inspiring for all who hear them.

Heritage's vision is "Transforming the world one life at a time." We, with our missionaries, are doing that across the street and around the world.

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