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August 23, 2010

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Magazine Examines Potential Damage of Short-Term Missions

New Issue of 'Unfinished' Provides Principles for Avoiding Problems

NORCROSS, Ga. – For decades, short-term mission teams may have unwittingly caused long-term harm to the communities they have tried to help. In the current issue of “Unfinished,” the quarterly publication of The Mission Society, Jim Ramsay acknowledges how the short-term mission phenomenon can lead to unhealthy dependency, inappropriate structures and lack of ownership, and suggests ways teams can be more effective in fulfilling the Great Commission.

To read Ramsay’s article – which includes “do’s and don’ts” for short-term teams and a “dependency check list” to assess whether to fund a missions building project - and to sign up for a free subscription to “Unfinished,” visit www.themissionsociety.org. The issue also includes an excerpt from the book “When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself” by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert.

Because of missteps that have become common since the short-term movement took off about two decades ago, The Mission Society’s Jim Ramsay writes, “Long-term missionaries and missiologists often cringe at the mention of short-term mission teams.”

A former missionary to Central Asia, Ramsay goes on to show how a long-term missionary couple ministering in a Nicaraguan village helped visiting mission teams avert those missteps for an outreach that successfully assisted the receiving community. Their example, Ramsay writes, provides a framework of principles that U.S. churches, missionaries and receiving churches should consider before embarking on short-term missions:

- Focus on long-term relationships
- Long-term missionaries who know both cultures can be an important bridge for visiting teams
- Teams from the U.S. should be small, usually under 12 in number
- Projects should start small and be defined by the community
- The bulk of construction should be done by local people
- Short-term team members should listen

“In effective short-term missions,” Ramsay writes, “the results are usually slower, less tangible, perhaps even less gratifying and exciting in the short run.”

Ramsay, The Mission Society’s senior director of field ministry, joined its staff in 2006 after serving as a missionary with the organization for 10 years. He and his family lived in Kazakhstan, where they worked in a variety of ministries, and where he served as field leader and Asian regional coordinator.

Founded in 1984 in the Wesleyan tradition, The Mission Society recruits, trains and sends Christian missionaries to minister around the world. At present, it has more than 200 missionaries in 38 countries. The Mission Society develops diverse programs and ministries in accordance with its missionaries’ unique callings and gifts, ranging from well-drilling and the arts to more traditional ministries such as teaching English and church planting. Its church ministry department provides seminars, workshops, and mentoring for congregations in the United States and overseas, helping equip churches for strategic outreach in their own communities and throughout the world.

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To schedule an interview with Mr. Ramsay or another staff member of The Mission Society, contact Ty Mays at (770) 256-8710 or tmays@inchristcommunications.com.