

The Ethnê Initiative

a process illuminated

The Ethnê06 Consultation was a culmination of a careful effort which envisioned building a strong foundation for a long term process. Some (mainly from the West) urged the smaller Steering Committee to set out “specific” goals and outcomes which would be “presented” for “adoption” by the “rest” of the Body. Yet, this urging was resisted because it was felt that to do so would be presumptuous, and would prevent true collaborative planning. Some key initiatives were offered (the Harvest Linked Prayer Initiative, the Frontier Crisis Response Network, etc.) but even these were developed by careful consensus process with a large, multi-national grouping. Further, all understood that no movement or initiative really gains ground if just “announced.” True movements gain momentum only as all feel that they are full participants in shaping and leading the effort. This “shared ownership” was a key desire and goal.

The following is some discussion of the processes put in place which hopefully will help achieve the ultimate goal of giving a witness to all peoples. The discussion is grouped under the Purpose and Vision (in reverse order).

Our Purpose

To energize the Body of Christ for continuing initiatives among the 'one-fourth world' or 27% of the world who have almost no access to the Gospel by...

Many “UPG-focused” leaders around the world shared the concern that with the phasing out of the AD2000 movement came a reduction of emphasis and collaborative global planning focused on UPGs. The recommendation of the UPG work group at the Great Commission Roundtable was that UPG “global forums of relationship” should be continued. Singapore02 and the resultant Ethnê06 is the direct result of that recommendation.

This seeming downturn seems to be based on a reaction to what some consider simplistic phrases, reductionistic theology/methodology, and poor caricatures of church planting as mere “word” evangelism which does not transform society. Few UPG-focused leaders seem to have such poor missiology, and certainly, the core vision of Ethnê rejects such caricatures. Ethnê was part of the effort to clarify, re-energize, and enhance UPG efforts.

One of the results of the AD2000 movement was the creation and continuing operation of many national and UPG-focused and regional mission networks and associations. In light of a

shared belief that the Body of Christ must work together, Ethnê partially arose out of a desire of leaders from many of these networks to connect and to synergize. Many of us felt at a loss without an ongoing “forums of relationship and strategizing,” so Ethnê emerged.

The sub points of Ethnê’s purpose include:

- *CELEBRATING Great Commission progress among the least reached Peoples.* This is important for acknowledging and building on all of the strength of past initiatives, honoring pioneers who led the Body forward, and for knowing and being challenged by the many initiatives and strategies which continue to move forward in great ways. The very fact of celebrating many of the details of this progress at the Ethnê06 consultation is an successful achievement in itself.

- *ASSESSING current opportunities and resources.* Ultimately, a main way to assess these opportunities is to examine trends, share ideas and resources, and maybe most importantly, build relationships which will create the synergy by which this effort can move forward. Many tangible and intangible successes were experienced at the Consultation, and processes are being worked out for the future – Strategy Groups which are already functioning and planning and leading; website connections, etc.

- *ACCELERATING movements to Christ among every People.* This will ultimately be seen in the long run but some of the emerging action plans of the Strategy groups will most certainly achieve this goal.

Our Vision

Peoples joining together to glorify God among all peoples.

Probably the most important achievement of Ethnê06 was the strong feeling of many non-Western leaders that “for the first time” they were not only participants, and even speakers at these meetings, but they were “decision makers” and equal leaders. The significance of this cannot be overstated. Several, especially from COMIBAM and Korea, strongly reiterated this affirmation to several of us on the Steering Committee. Several also admitted their initial skepticism when they were invited to be involved. They implied they anticipated a “tokenism.”

By Dr. S. Kent Parks, co-facilitator, Ethnê06.

While many of us had hoped one of the main outcomes would be a strong sense by the majority that we really were a “family” which must work together, the strong affirmation that this had occurred was overwhelming for all of us. We feel God achieved a massive step forward in this area which exceeded our expectations.

Some might not consider this goal important, but we are looking at a “marathon” process and we feel Ethnê06 was a key “foundation” building for a new, intentional “Body of Christ” missiology. Because this was achieved, we feel that specific steps and shared ownership will now more quickly emerge.

Some asked us to “announce” Ethnê06 would be the “launch” of a “network of networks.” We resisted this because we felt such an announcement by such a small group would be presumptuous. We do feel this may be the long term result and that some steps toward that effort might even have happened, but even now resist naming “Ethne” as more than a shared initiative. This decision may change soon due to the positive response but must come from the larger group.

One Ethne distinctive was that the core of the effort was outside of the West even though several Westerners, mainly living in cross-cultural situations, were involved.

The realities of a globalized world which still requires great cost to travel is that any major meeting will tend to have more representatives from the region where it is held and from which the majority of the leadership comes. Thus, the majority of this meeting was Southeast Asian although significant effort was made to have significant leadership from other region. Our desire is that the next Steering Committee and consultation will mainly have the flavor of another region but with strong continuing emphasis on UPG-focus and on “Body of Christ” missiology.

The three main ways the Ethne Steering Committee sought to deal with this were to:

1. Invite representatives from every continent not only as participants but equal decisions makers.
2. Intentionally plan to surrender main leadership for the re-formed Steering Committee to another major regional network. First, agreement in principal has been reached with another major regional network (COMIBAM) for them to form up to half of the next Steering Committee (including their representative on this past Steering Committee). While this agreement has not been finalized, positive discussion continues. The other half (hopefully still including at least one from each region) will be from the current Steering Committee in order that momentum and core values will be continued.
3. Further, the several strategy groups are moving forward with strong action plans and shared leadership. The larger Convening Group (which will also be reformed) and the new Steering Committee will offer connectivity and communication but not control this progress.

Continuing pattern:

It is crucial to emphasize that what happened at Ethnê06 and what hopefully will continue to happen is *not* a “passing of the Baton.” This is not biblical. What happened may be the real emergence that all peoples now share the baton. Neo-colonial and neo-national missiology extremes are being rejected.

Further, no group involved is “assisting” the Ethnê effort as if the Ethnê effort is separate. Rather all participating individuals, organizations and networks are full partners and leaders in the Ethnê movement and simultaneously fulfilling their own distinctive callings.

Key processes that made Ethnê successful:

First, we continue to emphasize the only decision process is “consensus.” This does not mean complete unanimity all the time, but that discussion continues until all agree at least to support one course of action even if some don’t prefer it. Consensus is built out of long-term trust building and relational efforts. Consensus is not only Asian or not only Western. Nor does it mean all decisions have to remain in the group. As trust and relationship grow, the group offers decision prerogative to smaller groups and to individuals at appropriate junctures.

The main pattern of building this network effort actually came out of the success found in building the country-wide mission networks in Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines. Sometimes this process seemed to some Westerners as lacking “specific” goals or as being a little too messy, but the emerging action plans which have been the result of joint decision processes are proof of the wisdom of these approaches.

Ethnê involvement was based not on a centralized invitation system but on relational invitations, where trusted partners were given the responsibility of inviting and recommending key leaders. When someone said “So and so should be invited,” the responsibility fell to them. This process resulted in some confusion and some people who should have been invited were not, but, overall, many feel it was successful.

The prerogative of Ethnê grew not out of authorization of some central body but out of growing and strong relationships of mission leaders around the world. Ultimately this resulted in a shared and growing credibility. Some key leaders in various regions were skeptical at first until they were invited by someone they respected, and until some critical action steps emerged.

Finally, many have expressed they feel this movement is moving forward with shared leadership and shared vision. The amazing development of relationships which appears to have happened at a new level is crucial to the development of real action. Many of us are confident the UPG movement has been re-energized and re-connected in some new ways. Time will tell.

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