

A Vision for EMS: Increased Momentum and Sharper Focus

by Kenneth B. Mulholland, Former President (Fall, 1996)

The dictionary defines momentum as "the impetus of a moving body." This is what the Evangelical Missiological Society is experiencing.

Founded in 1962, the attendance at the 1979 national meeting had bottomed out at only 8 persons when J. Raymond Tallman was elected president. The decline was reversed and this past September the attendance at the national meeting approached 100. A total of nearly 600 members are enrolled. What do I see for the future? Increased momentum and sharper focus in...

Engaging the Issues

Rather than a quarterly journal, EMS has opted for an annual book focused on a single theme of significance for global missions. Four volumes, each focusing on a vital topic, have been published thus far and a fifth is in process. The books emerge from a focus on a single topic which is addressed in papers at both the regional gatherings and the national meeting. The best of the papers, sometimes with lively responses, are published. These volumes are useful not only as texts for missions courses, but also as valuable in-service learning resources for field missionaries, mission executives, mission mobilizers and "World Christian" pastors. The 1997 volume, based on this year's work, will highlight the Holy Spirit and mission dynamics. Next year, our theme will be "Reaching the Resistant: Theology, Models, and Cases."

The annual publications is supplemented by the Occasional Bulletin, which appears three times a year. Through its publications, I believe the EMS has the responsibility not only to reflect on contemporary currents, but to shape those currents along lines congruent with both a high view of Scripture and a high view of culture.

Engaging the Academy

During 1988, the EMS began to engage evangelical Biblical scholars and theologians by holding parallel meetings with the Evangelical Theological Society at both the regional and the national level. This serves to enhance interaction and fruitful dialogue on the part of the mission community with ETS members both formally and informally. Whenever appropriate, a common theme at the joint EMS/ETS meetings will facilitate our goal.

Engaging Missions Sending Structures

In recent years, an increasing number of mission executives have joined the EMS. This is a vast resource and it must be tapped more vigorously. A major distinctive of EMS that distinguishes it from many professional societies is its commitment to the practice of mission, to the fulfillment of the great commission. The relationship forged with the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association (IFMA) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (EFMA) needs to continue with increasing strength. Segments of our meetings need to deal with the issues confronting the leadership of mission structures.

Engaging the Frontiers

In response to a need to focus on unreached people groups, the International Society of Frontier Missions (ISFM) has come into being. The ISFM usually meets following the meetings of the

IFMA and EFMA. A number of EMS members belong to the ISFM and are avid readers of the Frontier Journal of Missiology. Other EMS members are involved in the AD 2000 Movement with its concern about "a church for every people and the gospel for every person." Significant engagement with the frontier emphasis merits our attention in these coming years.

Engaging the Grass Roots

A mark of increasing momentum in recent years has been the resurgence of participation at the regional level; this is due in large part to geographical restructuring and quality leadership. Regional meetings are more easily accessible and less costly to our members than attendance at the national gathering. Also, they provide opportunity for wider participation, particularly for younger, less-known members. I would like to see greater student participation at our regional meetings. What about setting a goal of half our members present at regional meetings, including students, and one-sixth at the annual meeting?

Certainly, there are other components of the missionary enterprise with which we should be engaged. Perhaps these will emerge and come into clear focus in the coming years. For now, let's increase our momentum and sharpen our focus.