

**MISSION HANDBOOK 2007-2009: U.S. AND CANADIAN PROTESTANT  
MINISTRIES OVERSEAS (20TH EDITION)**

Linda J. Weber and Dotsy Welliver, editors.  
Wheaton, Ill.: EMIS, 616 pages, \$49.95.

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Some of us sit perched on the edges of our chairs eagerly anticipating each new edition of this book, which arrive every two to four years. The *Mission Handbook* is essential (1) as the key directory and reference tool for the North American missions movement, and (2) as the authoritative report on the status of, and trends in, this sprawling, diverse, God-driven continental missions enterprise.

The heart of the *Mission Handbook* is a set of two directories, one for the USA and one for Canada, of “all denominational and nondenominational boards and societies, and other specialized organizations involved in overseas mission” (p. 9), or at least 822 of them. For every mission listed, at least seven of the following items of information appear, depending on what was sent to the researchers: name, mailing address, phone, fax, email address, web address (hugely valuable), association membership/s, chief executive officer (by name and title), denominational orientation, doctrinal or ecclesiastical stance, primary activities, purpose, year founded in the USA or Canada, income figure for overseas ministries, income figure for gifts-in-kind, personnel statistics (by a breakdown of seven possible categories), countries of service, and numbers of workers by country. Whew.

Actually, this is not as complicated as it might seem. The layout of the entries makes them accessible, instructive, even intriguing. Try simply flipping through the pages, dipping in here and there, to get a feel for the crazy, fascinating, and inspiring diversity, unity, strength, weakness, and wonder of this movement. You will see traces of how this mass of ministries have sprouted and grown from a mix of wild roots: the mandates of Scripture, the gifts of the Spirit, our unique North American history, theology, devotion, and gumption, our ethnic and denominational diversity, our entrepreneurial spirit, and our go-for-it individualism. God gives gifts to each people, nation, and continent to be shared with the world. Here are signs of some of North America’s.

It’s no secret there are Christian organizations, ministries, agencies, boards, and societies sending people, money, or resources overseas that didn’t find their way into this directory. A few that come to mind immediately: Dynamic Church Planting International (which has trained leaders from 67 countries and conducted events in at least 23 countries in 2007), Kidzana Ministries (working in 7 countries outside the USA), the Parker Foundation (astutely supporting ministries in many countries), and CJF Ministries (formerly the Christian Jew Foundation, active in 7 countries).

The *Mission Handbook* research team has done a diligent and competent job, and we are indebted, but they toil on an impossible task. Why impossible? For one thing, there are 2 million 501(c)3 organizations in the USA alone; a fat percentage of those are Christian; and a fat percentage yet of those are involved, to some extent, in international ministry. Second, thanks to globalization, almost every day another North American Christian organization decides to go global, to expand to other countries, and, with that, to add “International” to their name. One example: “MOPS” (Mothers Of Preschoolers – a Christian ministry of support, prayer, and discipleship) is now “MOPS International” because of expansion to many countries.

Promise Keepers (also not in this edition), the prominent Evangelical men's ministry, is active in at least 6 countries. Prison Fellowship (another no-show), founded by Chuck Colson, now works in 110 countries. These are major ones. How on earth to monitor the myriads of smaller ones? The *Mission Handbook* will never be absolutely complete, but it's the best we have, and it's very good.

Both the USA and Canada directory sections are followed by indices. The first set of indices sort agencies by church tradition, the second by ministry activities, and the third by countries of activity. Those third indices (extensive - requiring 137 pages for the USA and 26 pages for Canada) add information not found elsewhere: the year that various agencies began in various countries, and for personnel from other countries (but supported from the USA or Canada), a breakdown as to how many are citizens of their country of service vs. how many are serving internationally. In the back is a nine-page Bibliography of Resources, which includes a directory of Web-based mission directories, "Ministry Resource Links" (only 3 - why so few?), a tiny selection of missions books, a good list of journals and newsletters, and then a list of general reference works. Finally, three appendices: the first, a list of associations of mission organizations, the second, the Canadian survey questionnaire, and the third, the USA survey questionnaire.

Since EMIS (Evangelism and Missions Information Service) took over stewardship of this series from MARC (Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center) with the 18th edition (1997), these *Mission Handbooks* have included advertisements. This 20th edition includes 79 pages of ads, 17 of which are EMIS- or Wheaton College-related.

Other useful and instructive parts found in prior editions have, sadly, once again failed to re-appear. Among them: (1) indices sorting agencies by the locations of their headquarters, (2) articles and statistics on the North American Catholic and Orthodox mission movements (when these disappeared with the 19th edition, the volume's subtitle was changed from "U.S. and Canadian Christian Ministries Overseas" to "U.S. and Canadian Protestant Ministries Overseas"), (3) more extensive information on associations of missions, and, most sorely missed, (4) additional articles.

The seven editions from the 12th to the 18th each included articles by outstanding mission leaders and scholars of the day, giving astute commentary and analysis of current trends that went beyond the "Putting the Survey in Perspective" analysis article that remains. Readers could look forward each time not only to the updated directory information and the report on how the numbers had shifted, but also to this set of significant essays that complemented each edition and increased its value. Articles in the 18th edition, for example, came from Paul Borthwick, John Orme, and Luis Bush. "Background Essays" in the 14th edition were contributed by William A. Dyrness, Samuel H. Moffett, J. Christy Wilson, Jr., and Arthur F. Glasser.

This is a reference book. It helps us find things. On that, with the North American missions movement there is a big problem: mission agencies change their names a lot. Many change their names repeatedly. The present trend is for new names to depart greatly from whatever appeared before. For example: the "Evangelical Foreign Missions Association" (EFMA) changed to "Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies" (still EFMA), but now just recently has been re-christened (reborn?) as "The Mission Exchange." The *Mission Handbook* helps readers with this, but could do better. For example, if you look for "Mission Society for United Methodists" you will find the note saying, "See: The Mission Society." But if you look for "RBMU International" or even "Regions Beyond Missionary Union," nothing appears to tell you the name is now "World Team." I would recommend a policy change of waiting many more years before discarding these directional signposts. Similarly, if you look at the entry for World Team, there is no hint of its prior names. It would help if a line like this: "(formerly Overseas Crusades)" would appear, in small type, under "OC Ministries," and so on with all the other name-changers.

Another idea: some readers could make good use of a companion CD-ROM version with information in database and spreadsheet format, for research, analysis, and comparison. It could include complete statistics from prior editions, thus allowing scholars, activists, teachers, and others to map trends more thoroughly and accurately.

Note that we are now served by a related website, [www.missionhandbook.com](http://www.missionhandbook.com), whose most helpful features are “Update Your Listing” and “View Updates.” Mission agency information changes constantly, and the *Mission Handbook* office never rests. When an agency changes even so much as the area code of its phone number, they can go to this website and let the missions community know. Within days of the release of this edition of the book, already more than a dozen agencies had posted new information on the website.

This is not just a directory; it is a survey. Here is the definitive, perennial research project on the statistical status and trends in the North American missions movement – thus enormously important. At the front of the book there is a detailed, 65-page article by Scott Moreau, replete with tables and graphs, telling key findings from this massive collection of data. Moreau’s article expounds several key trends or shifts. Among them: (1) in the past four years the number of North Americans in full-time missionary service declined by 3.8%, while (2) in the same four years, the number of non-U.S./non-Canadian workers supported from North America increased by 32.3%. In other words, the sending of North American missionaries is in decline while the support of national workers is growing rapidly. North American Christians are now doing more spending than sending. Also, (3) in the past four years, “Increasing financial and human resources shifted away from agencies reporting primary activities in the evangelism/discipleship category and towards agencies reporting primary activities in the relief and development category” (p. 47). The North American missions movement is investing more money in meeting physical needs than in gospel proclamation.

Then this: (4) “The explosion of short-term missions has yet to have any type of proportional impact on long-term missions” (p. 27). In other words, the idea that an increase in the number of short-termers going out will result in an increase in the number of long-termers going out – that idea is a myth. It would seem to make sense, but the firm statistical facts of the *Mission Handbook* series prove it simply has not happened. The number of short-term missionaries going out from North America has been expanding and growing rapidly for many years, while the number of long-term missionaries going out is stagnant or in slow decline.

The *Mission Handbook* is essential for all mission organizations, missiologists, mobilizers, intercessors, local church mission leaders, potential mission recruits, networkers, partnership facilitators, researchers, and ... (have I left anyone out?) As Daniel J. Boorstin said, “As a longtime aficionado of ... reference books ... I have found no substitute for owning the basic works. Then there is never an excuse for not pursuing the fugitive thought or checking the puzzling or uncertain fact” (The Discoverers, p. 685). For all leaders in the North American missions movement (and beyond), there is no substitute for having this book on your shelf, close at hand. We receive it with deep gratitude to EMIS and the editors.

A shorter version of this review appeared in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 43:4, Oct. 2007, pp. 536-538.

A more thorough analysis of the findings of the *Mission Handbook* can be found in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* in January 2008, under the title, “The Statistical State of the North American Protestant Missions Movement, from the *Mission Handbook*, 20th Edition.”