

# Strengths and Weaknesses of the Iberoamerican Missionary

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## Research Questionnaire

The investigation is based on a survey of 110 questions, interviews, and case studies divided in four parts (calling, sending, training and field work). Universe: Iberoamerican missionaries working all over the world. Number of people surveyed: 428 (45.6% of those invited) selected from each mega sphere, ministry, theological position and possible sending agencies within the movement. Dates: June-August 2006. Reliability: 95%. Margin of error: less than 5%. Abbreviation: N/R = no response .

The investigation task was carried out by an independent team of the following field missionaries: Dr. Levi DeCarvalho from Brazil, Ninette Jiménez from El Salvador, Carlos González from Spain and Samuel Guerrero from Mexico.

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## Introduction

Your hands hold a tool that will help the Iberoamerican missions movement with the task of discussing and reflecting upon its own strengths and weaknesses. This document is part of a process of investigation with the hopes of improving our cross-cultural work in Christian missions to the unreached people groups. It is proof of the bravery of a movement that desires to evaluate itself and do so as a community through a dialogue that includes all participants of the mission-churches, agencies, mission boards, training centers, mobilizers, intercessors, supporters, field missionaries, senders and those sent.

In this first phase of the investigation we present a report regarding the field missionaries in an attempt to listen to the opinions, experiences and feelings of those directly involved in the cross-cultural communication of the Gospel.

We have been careful to include various types of ministries; (training, church planting, Bible translation, community development, and others); mega spheres of service (American continent, Buddhists, Europe, Hindus, Muslims, tribal and others), new and veteran missionaries; theological positions (independent, Pentecostal, traditional, interdenominational, and others), as well as persons sent by agencies as well as churches or denominations.

The second phase-to be carried out in 2007- will make an attempt at analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of what is referred to as "sending structures" (churches/denominations, agencies/mission boards, and training centers. Just as with the first, the support of all those involved is indispensable in order to obtain a better understanding of who we are on this side of missions. We count on your collaboration and we believe you have an interest in participating in this dialogue.

The third phase, projected for 2008, returns to the field to analyze the fruits and the mission models we are promoting. It will be the most complex effort and for this we also count on your input and prayer.

What you hold in your hands is a preview of a more complete report that will soon be available through the COMIBAM International office and its national and regional representatives.

This survey was organized in four large sections: *calling, training, sending, and field work*. It included questions related to opinions, feelings and behavior of the interviewees. In each section each person was provided with sufficient time to express himself/herself freely.

Due to the time constraints of the congress, this report is presented in global form and limited to the most relevant issues to the dialogue that characterizes this event. Our purpose is to aid the work tables and the national groups present to produce improvements and suggest changes in the strategies and proceedings of each of the involved parts.

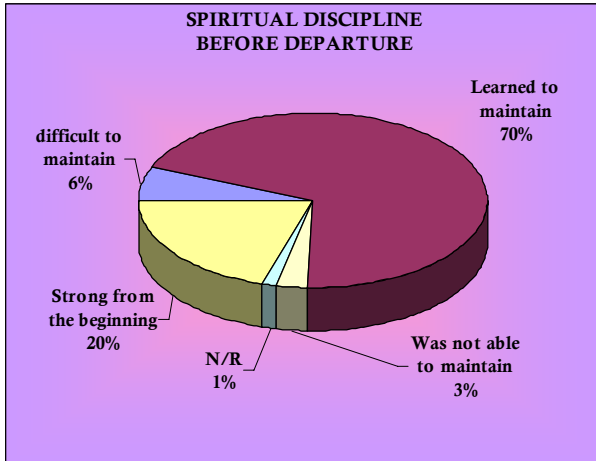
Between the weaknesses and strengths noted by this investigation, this report offers enough material for a good discussion regarding better strategies, programs and services that we can offer to all parts involved in Christian missions, in order to more effectively carry out the task the Lord has entrusted to us.

Granada, Spain, October 19, 2006

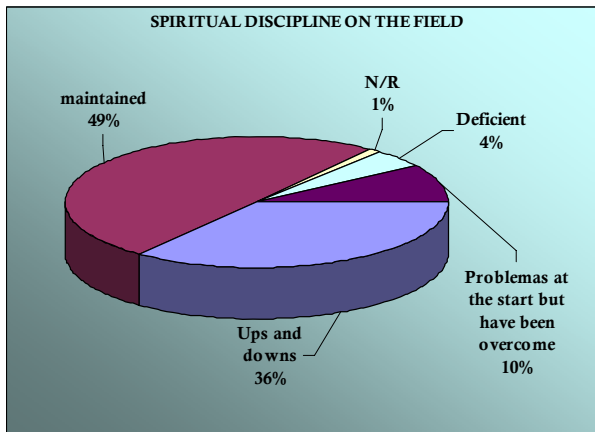
# Part 1 Calling

## 1.1 Spiritual Discipline

The following comparative graph is troubling:



Some details of those who report ups and downs of their spiritual discipline:



- Per time of service, the index figures are: 37% less than two years on the field); 40% ( 2 - 5 years); 35% (5 - 10 years); and 31% (more than 10 years). For those that report a deficient spiritual discipline, an average of 5% is added to each group. .
- Per type of work: translation (64%); community development (46%); unspecified ministries (42%); church planting (40%); and leadership training (36%).
- The men (43%) have more spiritual discipline problems than the women (39%). Marital status made no significant difference.

### Spiritual discipline before leaving for the field:

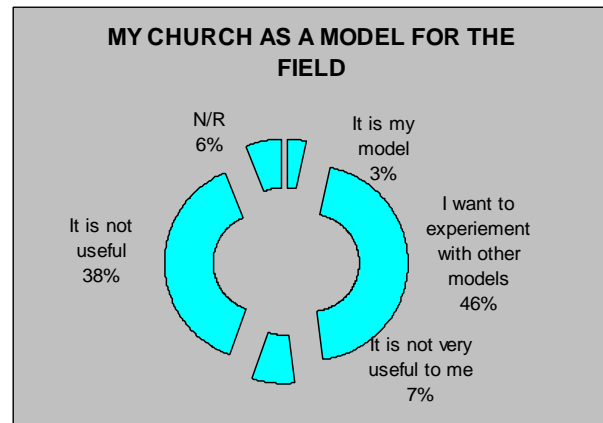
- 90% maintained spiritual disciplines.

- 10% had problems.
- After being on the field:**
- 49% maintained spiritual disciplines.
  - 41% has problems.

## 1.2 The church and the field

In general, when a missionary arrives to the field he realizes that the previous home church model is not so useful within his new work context. This is difficult to communicate to his homechurch. It is often expected that the church on the field resemble the missionary's home church.

- Only 3% of the missionaries consider their home church a good model for their work on the field.
- Another 7% believes that some things from their home church could be reproduced on the field.
- 45% prefer experimenting with new church models on the field.

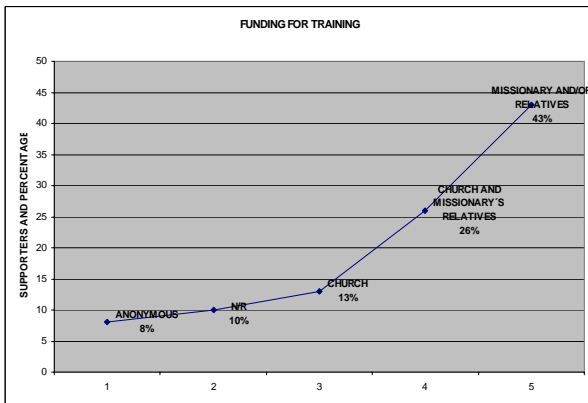
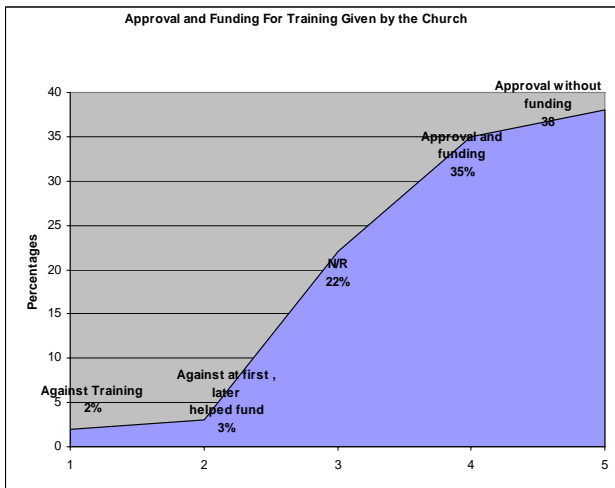


Some missionaries do not feel comfortable when they return to their home church. The majority (52%) reports that they do feel comfortable, but are conscious of deep changes in themselves. This demands an effort on both parts to ensure a beneficial and pleasant time of fellowship.



### 1.3 Approval and educational funding

Seemingly, churches do not invest much in training their missionaries before they depart for the field or in the “reinforcement” period after they arrive to the field. It is difficult to “reinforce” missionaries in their own countries because some believe that a missionary must be on the field in order to deserve their financial support. Due to this, some training centers, alongside mission agencies, have begun to offer intensive **reinforcement** courses in countries like Spain, that is half-way between the church and the field for many missionaries.

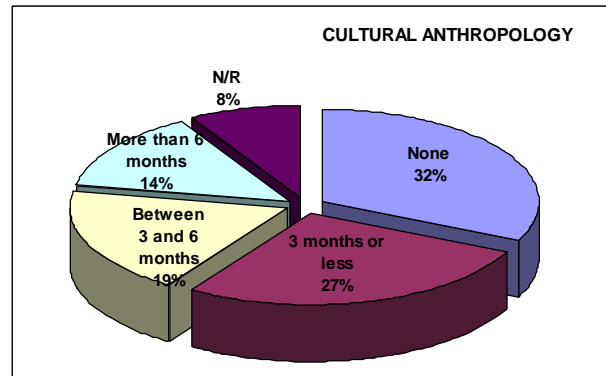


- 41% received approval and financial funding for training
- 35% received approval but not financial funding for training.
- Out of 3 approved candidates, only 1 receives financial funding from his/her church for training.

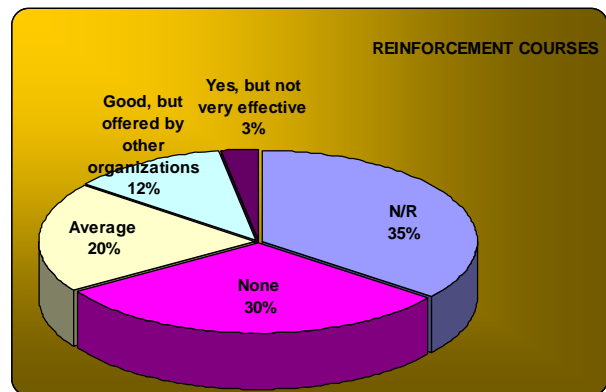
## Part 2 Training

### 2.1 Missions and Bible training

Of the total surveyed, 56% have received 3 and 4 years of **biblical-theological** training and another 20% has received between 1 and 2 years. Compared to courses on missiology, cultural anthropology and language training it is perceived that:



- Only 52% has taken missions courses lasting more than one year.
- Only 27% has taken cultural anthropology courses lasting more than 6 months.
- Only 25% has taken language training courses lasting more than 6 months.

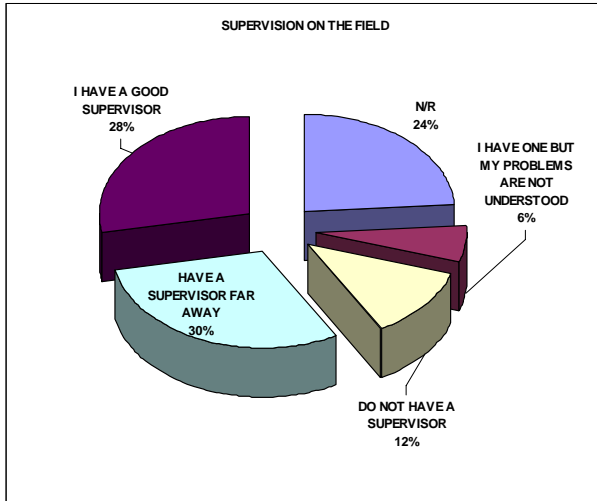


After arriving to the field:

- Only 23% report that their agencies have offered reinforcement courses.
- 12% received reinforcement courses through other agencies.
- If we add all the rest, 65% has not received reinforcement courses since they arrived on the field.

## 2.2 Field specialists

To help solve problems, recommend strategies and provide pastoral care, the missionary needs to receive specialized help. Specific problems that have to do with cultural adaptation and linguistics, contextualization and communicating the gospel cross-culturally, can only be resolved with the help of specifically trained missionaries. Our training structures are barely beginning to consider and promote this specialized help.

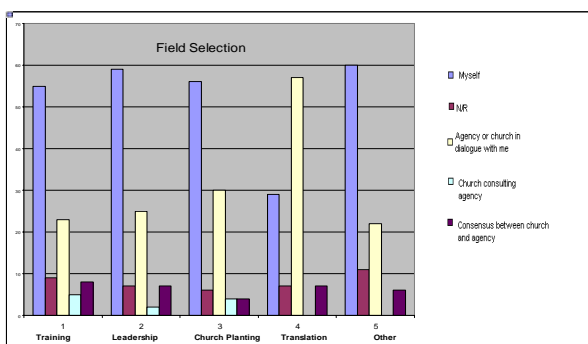


38% have access to field specialists

- If we add those that have no specialized help with those who did not report having specialized help, more than half (51%) do not have specialized help.
- 5% indicate that their agencies are in the process of forming these ministries but it still fall short of the urgent and growing need for specialized help.

Mission studies graduate	Graduate in other areas	No specialized education	In process of specialization	N/R
27%	11%	12%	5%	45%

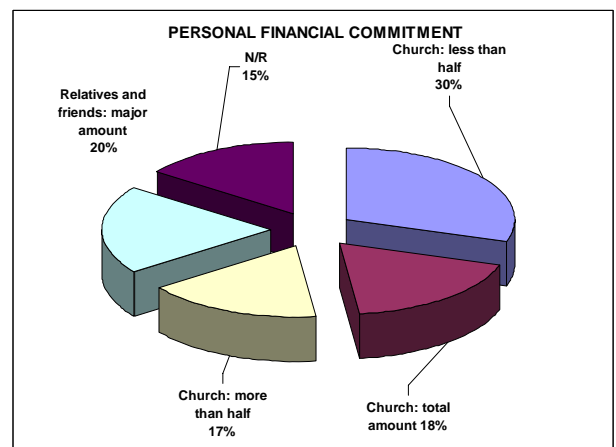
## Part 3 Sending



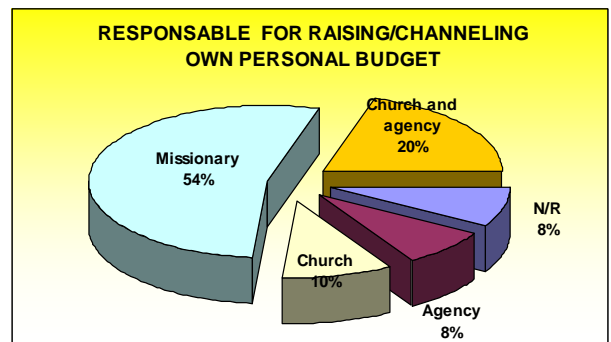
Strengths and weaknesses of the Iberoamerican missions movement

## 3.1 Budget and field and ministry selection

- 35% of the missionaries elaborate their own budget (personal and ministry account).
- 54% are responsible for raising that amount of money.
- The major responsibility falls on the missionaries in the unknown theological category (70%), followed by the independent (66%).
- The least responsibility corresponds to the traditional (41%), followed by Pentecostals (50%) and interdenominational (56%).
- 18% of the churches are committed to the total financial support of their missionaries.
- 30% are committed to less than half and 17% to more than half of these needs.

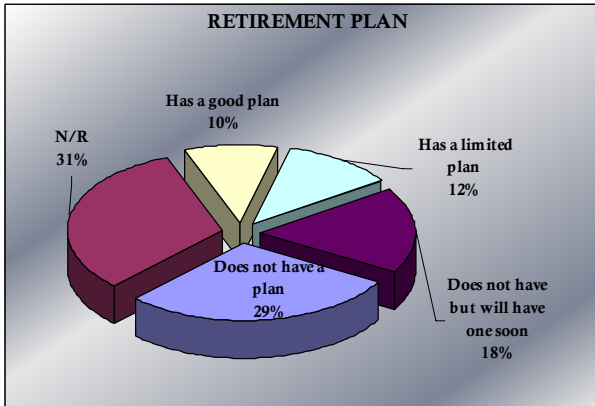


- 56% chooses his own field of service.
- The exception occurs with those who work in translation, in those cases the decision was made primarily in dialogue with the agency.
- 70% chooses his own cross-cultural ministry.
- The men were more influenced by their churches, either solely or in conjunction with the agency. The women were primarily directed in their choice by the agency (66%).

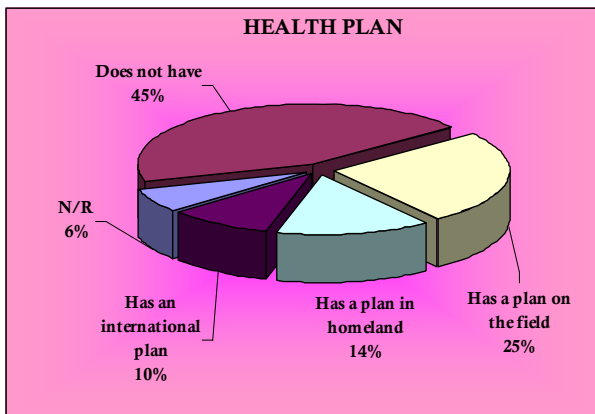


### 3.2 Benefits

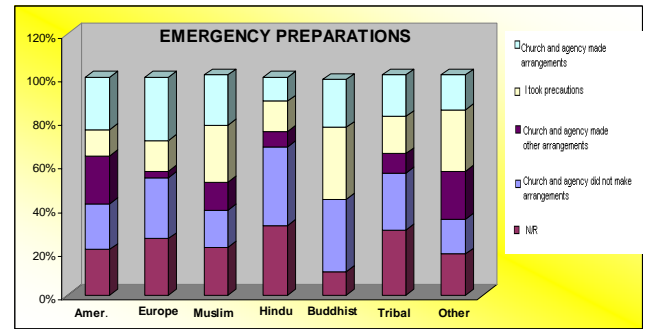
- If we add those who do not have a retirement plan with those who hope to have one, 47% does not have one.
- 47% are married and 45% are single
- 44% of missionaries with more than 10 years of service have no retirement plan.
- 31% did not respond.



- If we add the 25% that state they have a health plan in their own country (for many it is ineffective on the field) to the 45% that do not have a health plan the sum would be 70%.
- Of these, 55% are married and 66% are single.
- Besides this, 68% are in the Hindu world, 67% among Muslims, 66% among Buddhists and 59% in tribal areas.



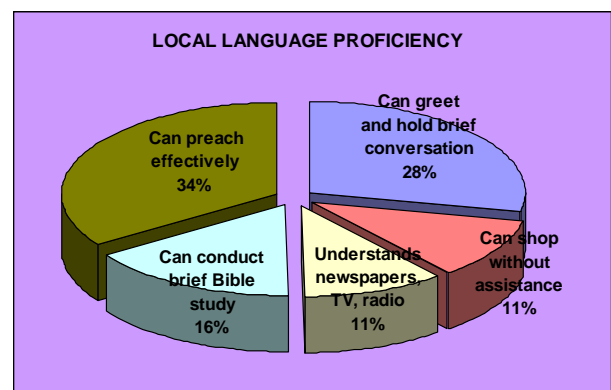
- For 24%, the agency or church has made arrangements in case of emergencies.
- 22% have taken their own precautions.
- 54% have not made preparations for emergencies.
- All of those working in Bible translation state that they have made preparations for emergencies.
- The rest (training, community development, church planting or other) are basically at a level of 54% unprotected.
- The churches and agencies did comparatively more arrangements for single than for married missionaries.



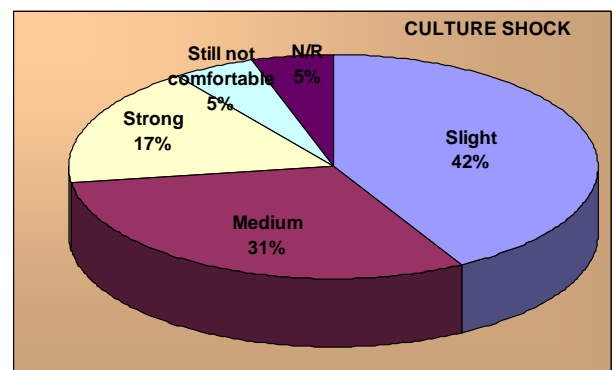
## Part 4 Field Work

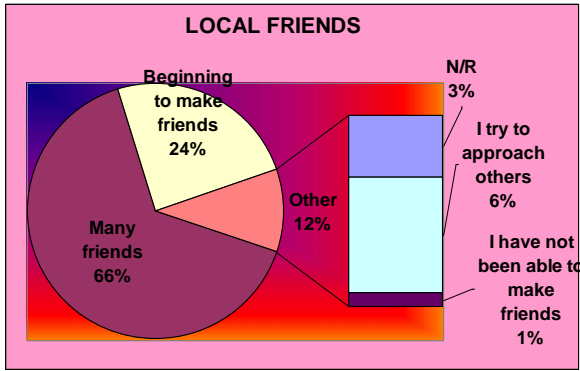
### 4.1 Adaptation to the field

The missionary's adaptation to the host culture is one of the key factors to success. The survey measured the language proficiency and relationships with nationals according to the evaluation of the missionaries themselves.



- 34% affirms being able to preach effectively in the local language.
- 2/3 of the missionaries on the field have important linguistic limitations to communicating the Gospel.
- 22% have experienced strong culture shock, or still feel uncomfortable in the host culture.



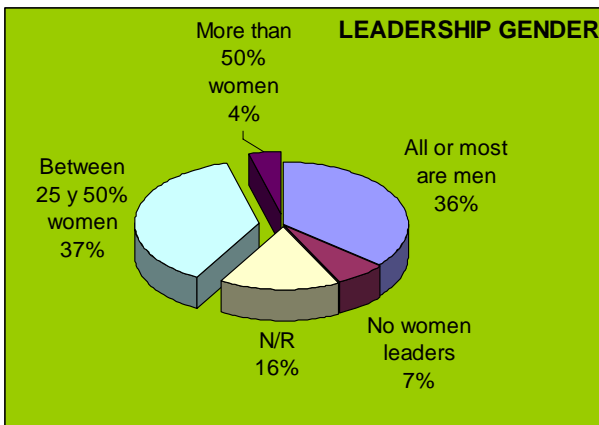


- 66% manifested having many friends.
- Less than half have made friendships with civil authorities.

### 4.2 Gender, marital status and leadership

Of those who responded to the survey:

- 48% are men 52% are women.
- 66% are married and 34% are single.



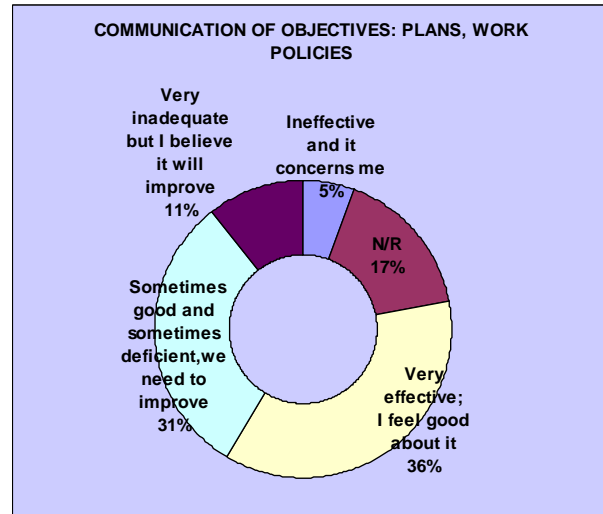
In the area of leadership, the surveyed informed that:

- 37% have between ¼ y one half women leaders.
- In 4% of the cases more than half of the leaders are women
- 14% report that all of their leaders are married
- Over 58% report the majority of their leaders are married.

### 4.3 Communication between agency leaders and missionaries

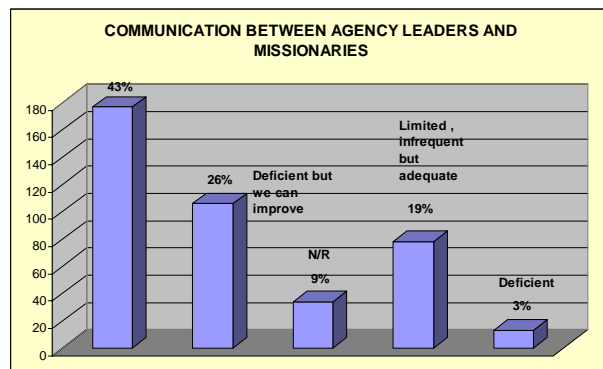
Communicating with missionaries frequently in a balanced and open way is a key factor in the missionary's and agency's success. In general terms:

- The missionaries are between 19% of limited and infrequent communication and 43% of good, open communication without major problems.
- The sum of the deficiencies reaches 29% (or 38% if we add the N/R).



Communicating plans, objectives and work policies demands more effort than daily communication:

- One third of all missionaries consider the strategic communication ineffective or inadequate. ( the N/R group added).
- The other third considers it irregular.
- The other third considers is very effective



### 4.4 Relationships among missionaries

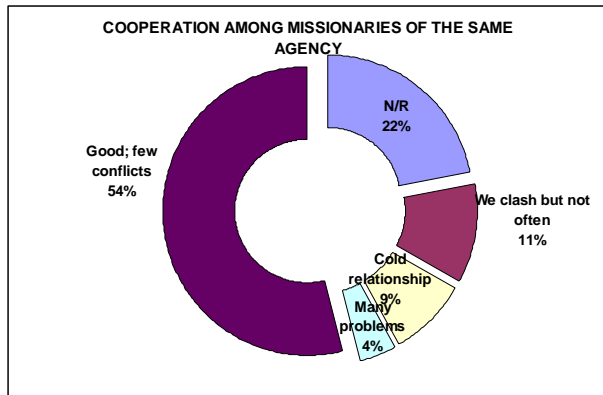
Learning to live in harmony requires time and effort. The graph below represents a condensed version of the missionary's feelings regarding the cooperation between colleagues of the same agency.

- 24% of the missionaries have relationship problems within the same agency (35% if we add the 11% that reports sporadic clashes)
- More than half (54%) have learned to cooperate dynamically, with few personal conflicts.

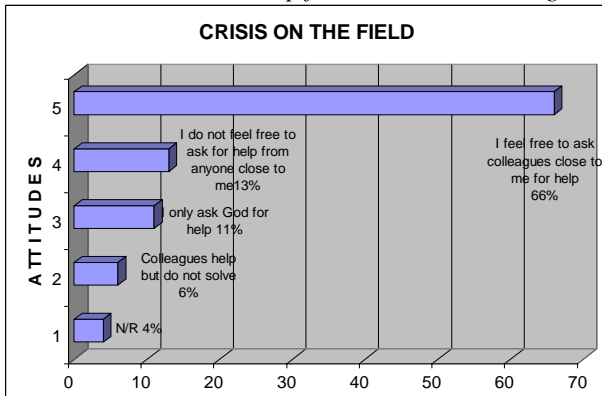


crimination (24%), depression (23%) and the harassment (15%). In men, the loneliness (40%) is followed—in equal proportions—by the other prob-

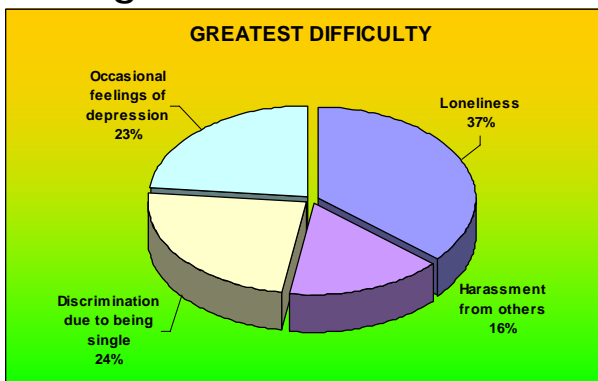
We also asked how the missionaries react to crisis situations:



- 2/3 feel free to ask for help in times of crisis.
- But 1/3 does not feel the same freedom or does not receive the needed help from his closest colleagues.

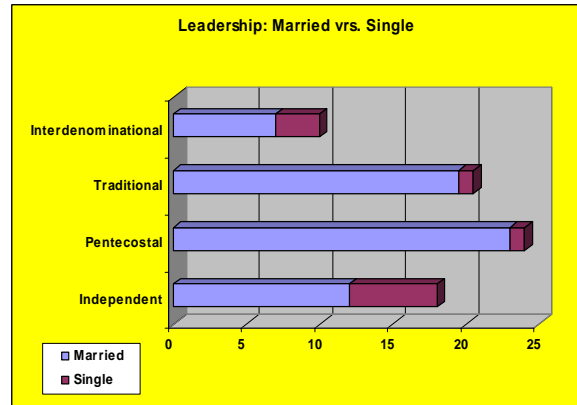


### 4.5 Singles



Some of the details observed:

- **Time of service.** Between those that have less than two years and up to five years of service, the major feeling was loneliness (42%). For those with 5 -10 years, the major difficulty is occasional depression (31%), followed by loneliness (28%). For those that have served more than 10 years, it is the discrimination, (39%), followed by loneliness (33%).
- **Gender.** The feeling that is most manifest among the women is loneliness (36%), followed by dis-

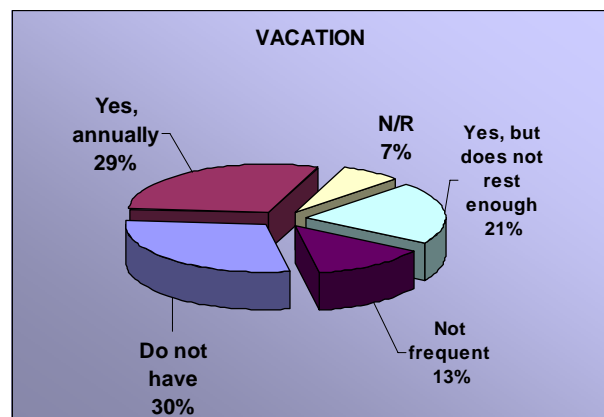


lems (20%).

### Leadership and marital status:

- 66% are married and 34% single.
- **Sending structure.** For 76% of the missionaries surveyed, the agencies prefer that the leadership be married versus a 3% majority of singles. 20% did not give information.
- **Theological group.** In descending percentages the Pentecostals (23%), traditionalists (19%), independents (12%), interdenominational and the interdenominational (7%) report that all their leaders are married. On the contrary, those who state that their leaders are single are: independent (6%), interdenominational (3%) and in the same proportion, the Pentecostals and traditionalists (1%).

### 4.6 Work and rest

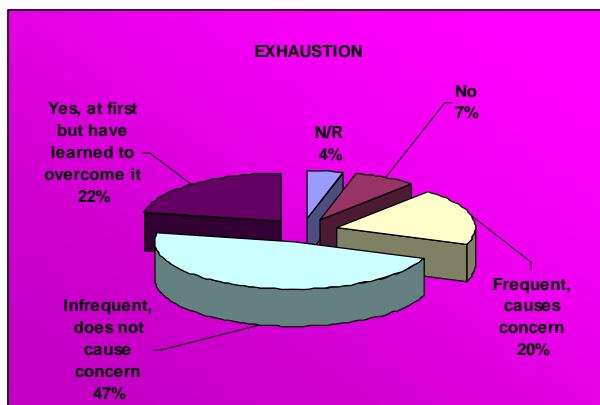


- Of those who take vacations but do not rest enough 20% are married and 23% single.
- For a term of service, 25% has 5-10 years and 21% for those with more than 10 years on the field.

The following table adds details about those who **do not** enjoy vacation or have them infrequently:

	No vacation	Infrequent vacations	Total
Women	31%	12%	43%
Married	30%	15%	45%
Single	27%	11%	38%
5-10 years of service	36%	13%	49%
More than 10 years	26%	17%	43%

We comment as well that 17% that does not count on a regular work schedule, 6% do not have a weekly day of rest and 10% are always busy.

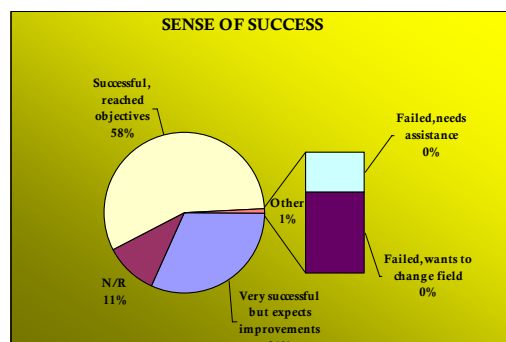


17% of those married and 25% of those single report experiencing exhaustion frequently. Women (25%) suffer more exhaustion compared to the men(14%). 22% has between 5 and more than 10 years of service on the field.

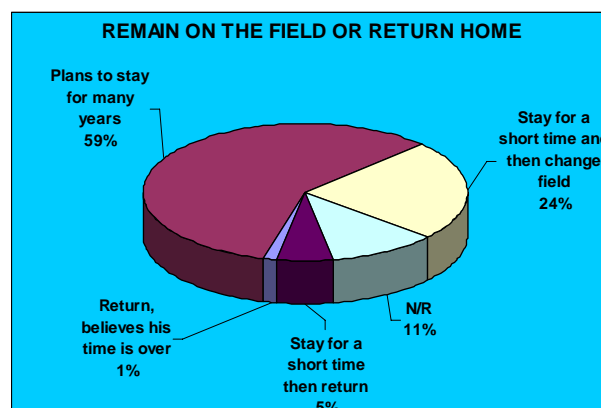
- 47% reports suffering infrequent exhaustion.

### 4.7 Successes and failures

Feeling like one has reached the objectives he went to the field to achieve is an important factor, for the missionary's sense of well-being. The next graph expresses how the missionaries feel about successes and failures. 58% expresses having success and 31% expresses not having much success in his work:



- Of these, according to **time of service**, 26% have less than 2 years on the field, 41% have 2-5 years, 28% have 5-10 years and 26% have more than ten years of service.
- Besides, 38% work in community development, 32% in church planting, 28% in training.
- 11% of those who were not able to answer this question, 17% less than two years, 9% has between 2-5 years, 9% between 5-10 year and 11% has more than 10 years on the field. This reflects that they do not know how to evaluate their work or that they admit to failure.



In spite of this, all the missionaries interviewed plan to remain on the field:

- 59% for much longer time
- 24% shorter term and then move on to another field
- 6% plans to return home.

## Conclusions

Due to the lack of space we will limit ourselves to focusing our comments on the subjects that pertain to this brief report, following the proposed themes (calling, training, sending and field work).

### The calling

The majority of those interviewed have sensed their calling through a God-given restlessness placed in their hearts. Therefore, the church plays a prominent role in nurturing the church with a missionary vision based on Scripture. On the other hand, there is a need to strengthen the missionary experience within the ministry of his/her local church as a preparation for a better performance on the field.

In the same way, the majority of the interviewees have expressed a concern with the fact that in spite of having learned from their churches through the years, the church must improve the way it encourages those who feel called to the mission field. For some of them, the feedback they receive is still negative and it needs to change in order to help these people in their training, sending and work on the field.

Single people play an increasingly more important role in the work of missions. A great number of single interviewees reported that their churches supported their missionary call without reservations. The majority felt secure in the decision of going to the field as singles; only a minority resented having done so unmarried.

In general, single missionaries chose their fields of service without having to be concerned about their marital status. A low percentage expressed that they were not in the field of choice due to being single.

### Training

There is an evident lack of balance in the time invested in training the missionary in biblical and theological studies and in training them for missionary service. The great majority invest 3 to 4 times in the first versus the second. For those committed to crossing into new frontiers, more or less culturally distant, it is fundamentally important to consider the proper balance that must be given to both areas of study.

This preparation must include an awareness of the cultural differences that he/she will face on the field, even though it might not be specifically related to the group with whom they plan to work. The curriculum of Bible schools and seminaries, in general, does not contemplate cross-cultural subjects. It is imperative to reconsider the minimum and specific needs that we want to provide our missionaries. In this way, we will be able to provide a quality education that focuses on the needs of the field.

### Sending

The delicate balance between “feeling called” and field choice, type of work, sending agency and setting their personal and ministry budget needs to be considered by all. If the leadership would play a leading role in these decisions, perhaps the missionary-leader relationship would be closer.

It is necessary to acknowledge the spirit of sacrifice of thousands of men and women who leave for the field without a minimum financial support, trusting God to supply their needs. The majority does not have a health plan or an adequate retirement plan. Precautionary emergency plans must be more prevalent in the training process.

It would be recommended that we reflect together on the basic/minimum requirements for the work on the field so that we may consider different ministerial contexts and the spiritual and ministerial training we want to promote. Many on the field are faced with the task of developing contingency plans for activities for which they were not prepared.

The burden of raising necessary funds to do the ministry falls on most of the surveyed missionaries. We believe that a dialogue between those sent and those sending is fundamental to energize this process and minimize the conflicts that arise due to this lack of balance.

In our conferences and missionary summits we frequently speak of the un-reached people groups, but for the majority of interviewees the needs of these people groups have not been a deciding factor in their field selection. We urgently need to re-think our mobilization strategy regarding this issue.

### Field work

The definition of objectives and strategies according to the agency leaders/mission boards and the good communication of these ideas are fundamental so that those who are on the field can clearly know what is expected of them. This weakness we have detected in the “strategic communication” between leaders and those lead has complicated the evaluation of effectiveness on the field. On the other hand, the missionary “member care” cannot be separated from his/her evangelistic/missionary performance. There is a great need to unify the two through people with field experience that can help the missionary’s specific ministry needs as well as spiritual needs.

The cooperation among colleagues, in a way, reflects the communication between leaders and those lead. Those who do not receive sufficient assistance for their needs on the field, whether personal, family and/or ministry related surely will evidence medium or long term relational problems. When we add the exhaustion that the majority of missionaries experience, the scene is troubling.

We need to train more specialists to assist the missionary’s needs. The investment being made is still too defi-

cient to cover the growing need for this type of “member care”.

Despite the fact that most of the interviewees lack funds to meet the minimum requirements to develop their ministries, they remain firm in their positions. If there be any praise for our missionaries it is for their spirit of sacrifice for the task that the Lord has entrusted in their hands. Men and women receiving a salary in the business world would have already given up and turned back, but not our missionaries. The Lord’s hand has pushed them forward and His Spirit has used them to complete the task He has given them. As a movement, we are proud of this.

On the field, many missionaries, single as well as married experiment feelings of loneliness. Some singles mentioned that they did not feel unaccepted by the nationals while others reported some limitations in certain situations. They also report that the majority of the agencies prefer their leaders be married.

The Bible says a “laborer is due his wages”. The same Jesus pulled his disciples out to places where they could find rest. Just the same, our missionaries need to be taken out to a separate place, from time to time, to renew their strength, receive counseling, take courses that are relevant to their ministries, and renew their relationships with their spiritual families that have recognized their calling and have invested in them, either financially or through intercession. We must reconsider our way of assisting them on the field-not to spoil them, because that is not what it is about, but in order to take care of the treasured vessels of clay that the Lord has put in our movement’s hands.

We would like to take advantage of this opportunity to thank all those who have helped conduct this investigation, especially those persons that have allowed us to ask them so many questions and analyze their answers, their interviews, and case studies. This investigation does not only reflect cold numbers on a page. It represents precious lives and strategic ministries that the Lord has used to make the good news of Christ known to all those who hunger and thirst for Him. The next steps in this project are destined to deepen our perception of the whole scene-from the church, the agency and the training center, to the missionary’s arrival and the fruits he bears on the field. We are counting on your help to do a good job.

This project does not end here, it begins. The big question is, what are we going to do with all this information? Why have we come together around discussion tables, in the presence of our missionaries that honor us with their presence?

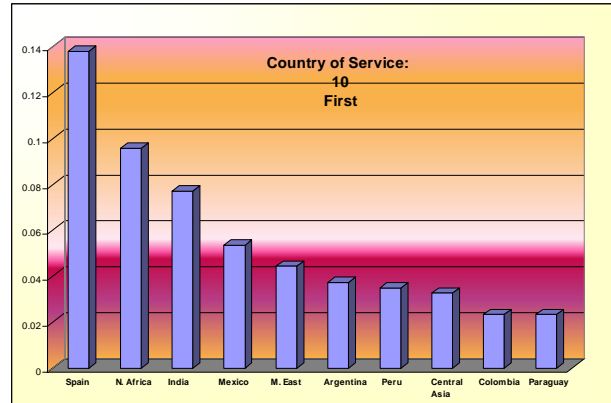
Our movement must recognize its strengths, but also the weaknesses that need to be confronted and resolved. May God give us the humility and courage to acknowledge our weaknesses and change our efforts so that His name may be even more glorified among the nations.

*The investigation team*

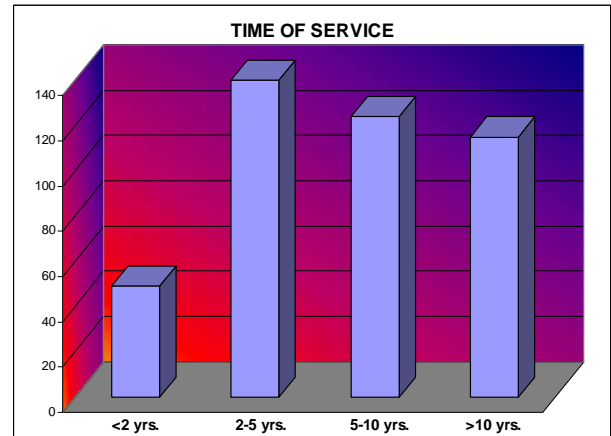
## Data Appendix

All data refers to the missionaries surveyed.

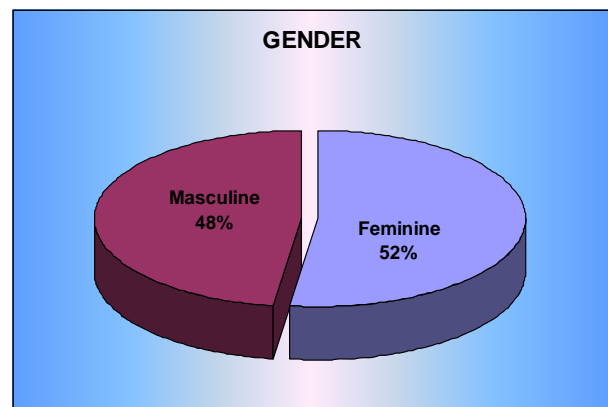
### A.1 Country of service



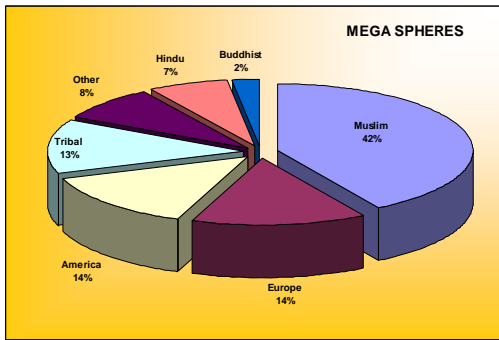
### A.2 Time of service



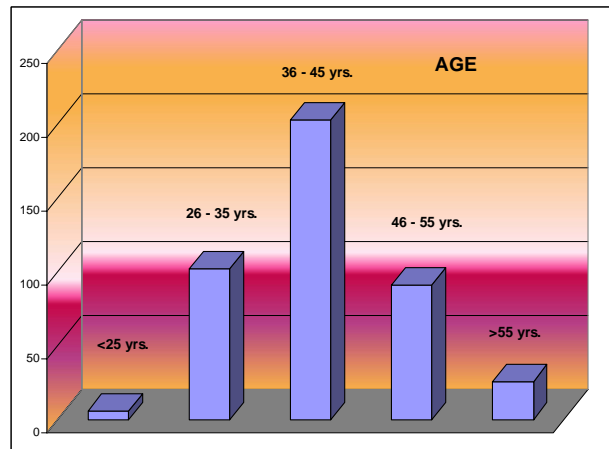
### A.3 Gender



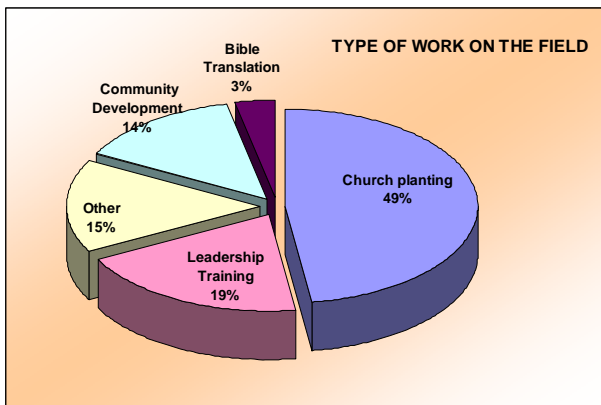
**A.4 Mega spheres**



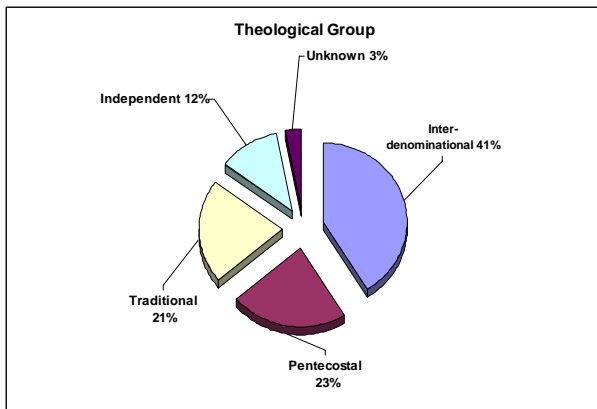
**A.8 Age group**



**A.5 Type of work on the field**



**A.6 Theological group**



**A.7 Marital Status**

