



# A NEW KIND OF MISSIONARY

By Ron Burdock Global Mentor, North Park Community Church

At North Park we have been considering the work of God's mission in the world and our unique place in that mission. Like many Churches, we are on the edge of our seats as we witness the rising advance of the Global Church. We sense a new season at hand and it is causing us to rethink our role in the mission cause. Our commitment to sending has grown deeper, and we are asking important questions around what sending means in this globalized world.

Ten years later and we have a growing movement of what we now call Influencers. An Influencer is a person who rises up to explore and engage in a global challenge and who embraces that challenge in a thoughtful, regular and faithful way. They live and generate their income through their work here in Canada, and they make focused space available in their hearts and schedule for the world. We have chosen to shift away from the general short term team movement, and to call individuals into considering what added value life has given them for global service. For some it is their vocation, for others it is their personal or ethnic story.

of wisdom and so people are seeking her out for input for their spiritual life and direction. Kathie comes on her own time and with no remuneration so they marvel at her faithful love for them and wonder what compels her to return. Each year we see a growing number of friends asking deeper and deeper questions about her life and faith. Kathie has just completed her tenth annual trip to South East Asia and it is clear that her influence is significant, both professionally and spiritually.



Early on in my tenure as North Park's Mission Pastor I noticed that we had a handful of "short termers" who seemed unique in the way in which they were engaging. They were sticking with a challenge that was on their heart and they were traveling regularly on behalf of that challenge. The way that they talked about their work was less about their own experience and more about the people and the actual work that they were doing. I noticed as well that they were traveling in the context of their vocation, a set of skills that they had developed through their working life in Canada. In each case they were traveling alone or as couples rather than in a larger team setting, which seemed to act as a catalyst for placing greater weight on their individual shoulders. That weight appeared to be producing in them a discipleship that was different from other short termers.

Kathie is a Nurse that travels annually for four to five weeks to South East Asia to equip nurses in the largest hospital in Hanoi. It was Kathie's work that caught my attention early on. Because Kathie shows up regularly year after year she has made herself a part of the fabric of the hospital and she is welcomed into the hearts and lives of people there. The fact that she is from the outside is actually an advantage to relationship building as they aren't threatened by her presence; she has become the confidant and friend of many of her colleagues. She has been patient to love genuinely and to care deeply for the professional careers of her nursing friends. Kathie's regular engagement in her career in Canada give her the opportunity to learn new and ground breaking methods that she is passing on as she travels.

Kathie began her work as most do, by traveling with a Christian agency as part of a broader team. After traveling for a few years in team mode, she requested the opportunity to engage on her own and with the idea of sticking with one hospital. It took a while for the agency to understand Kathie's request but her credibility and the response of the South East Asian convinced them to open a channel for her to follow her ideas. The best case scenario is to bring the wisdom of the Church alongside the work of the Agency, and so we have forged a bond with Kathie's agency and we meet together regularly with Kathie and her agency to strengthen her strategy as well as to map out goals for each trip. Kathie has grown a team of people at North Park who pray regularly with her and who stay in close contact with her when she travels. If you meet Kathie her love of South East Asia and her passion for the people will spill out into the conversation and sweep you up in the story of her work in South East Asia. Kathie's presence with us at North Park is a beacon calling others to consider their life and work and its importance to the mission of Jesus.

## Kathie travels annually to South East Asia building into the lives of Nurses and medical professionals.

Kathie's passion for nursing and for the people of South East Asia inspires confidence in Kathie as a reliable source

A hundred years ago when it took months to travel or communicate with remote places such as Africa it made sense that the only response was to leave everything behind and move to these remote places full time. As a Church we celebrate those who rose to





**Don is highly skilled in maintenance and electrical knowledge.** He travels annually (and sometimes twice a year) to Belize where he teaches a course to local Pastors and others in electrical wiring. He is currently working to equip two Belizeans to take over the course, and is inspiring other skilled trades at North Park to see the possibilities for their global service. Don is a new kind of missionary and we celebrate the deep impact he is having. If you meet Don, you will be inspired by his passion for the marginalized and for the gospel.

**Ron and Rita are a retired couple that have had a lifelong passion for missions.** They built a relationship with one of our missionaries working in Thailand and found themselves spending time learning about and praying for the unreached peoples of the region. Ron and Rita are both teachers, with Rita highly experienced in ESL. They are in their 70's and the full time option did not seem wise; so we worked to discern how they might travel annually and teach ESL in Northern Thailand. Their skills in ESL are exemplary, and their trips see them on the frontline of mission teaching monks on the Thai/Burma border.

**Peter and Loan are a young Cambodian couple who were carried through the Killing Fields of Cambodia as children to safety in a refugee camp in Thailand.** Throughout their lives, they have sensed a sacred responsibility for their story and are seeking to know how to connect on behalf of their people who are suffering back “home” in Cambodia. We introduced them to the idea of being an Influencer and exploring how they might live here while making a difference in one location in Cambodia over an extended period of time. We hope soon to send them to Cambodia to retrace their steps through the Killing Fields with their teenage boys at their side, with the goal of strengthening their own commitment and understanding of their story. We are walking closely with this couple, sensing the importance of their story and how we might coach them through to being a new kind of missionary.

that challenge; they have left an indelible impression on the world and moved the needle forward. But we don't live in the same world anymore as we can be in remote places in most cases with one days travel, and we can Face Time people regularly and talk face to face through video. In some cases it makes sense for us to pack our bags and move full time to a foreign country, but there are a vast number of ways that we can make a significant positive and lasting difference in the world through continuing to live and work here in Canada.

Our role in the development of Influencers includes spending time helping individuals think through their story and their options for engagement. In some cases people come to us with firm ideas and in others we shape possibilities together. We recommend a season of exploration where people do research and then travel to visit and serve in different locations in order to explore what's possible. A season of exploration allows us to train and grow peoples cross cultural capacity as well as test their perseverance for the deeper work of being an Influencer. We offer no financial assistance although we have developed the administrative capacity and systems to offer charitable receipting. We help people set goals and to think strategically about their actions, and we are currently forming teams of Influencers who coach one another.

What we are discovering is a deep well of discipleship rising up in the people who are becoming Influencers.

**As they embrace a global challenge and learn how to make a positive difference the weight of the mission is driving them to a deeper relationship with God here in Canada.**

In many cases they travel alone so the weight of the mission is on their shoulders in a serious and compelling way.

Our sense of the story of the missionary in North America is that a one size fits all approach in this era leads to a slim few rising up to the discipleship challenge, with the vast majority sinking back into their couch as donors. Recent declines in sending affirm my concern for the one size fits all approach.

The Influencer idea calls our people to wise engagement in the world, where nationals are at the forefront and we are in the shadow. The Influencer idea calls a person to embrace their vocation and seek to discern its value to the world. The Influencer idea is financially viable and lean, allowing many to engage

without limits to their engagement. Most importantly the Influencer idea puts the weight of discipleship and mission on the shoulders of individuals. What we know so far is that this approach is growing a new generation of vibrant disciples at North Park Community Church. We have nine couples/singles actively engaging the world and a lineup of people wanting to learn.

I had to smile recently when my wife and I returned from a trip overseas to where we are engaging as Influencers. A woman came up to us and asked us questions about the experience. She looked intently at me and said, “Do you feel called to go?” I said “Absolutely, and we just went!” She said, “No...do you feel called to GO?” I repeated myself and said, “Absolutely, and we will go back next year!” She seemed bewildered by my response. It made me realize how much we need to reflect upon the missionary idea and one size fits all approach that is so prevalent out there. We have to break open peoples thinking in this area in order to mobilize the vast numbers of people who are content to be donors when we ought to be calling them into the challenges of the world as disciples living on mission.

Our prayer is that we can grow an entire new movement of Influencers as a new kind of missionary. Imagine how that would impact the world. Imagine what that would do to our own Church in London Ontario Canada!

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