



THE FIELD IS THE WORLD

The Skinner Family Prayer Letter

The ministry newsletter of Mike and Cindy Skinner, serving with



Dear Family and Friends:

Yesterday, Mike returned from an exciting 3-day conference with representatives from Pioneers, Arab World Ministries, Camino Global (formerly CAM international), Trans World Radio, Mission Aviation Fellowship, New Tribes Mission, Greater Europe Mission, Operation Mobilisation, United Bible Societies and of course Campus Crusade and Wycliffe Bible Translators. It was called the Mobile Ministry Forum (MMF) because it was an event designed to make it possible for ministry leaders *using mobile devices* to share ideas.

One idea was repeated frequently: **mobile is the most disruptive technology in the history of the world.** What did they mean by that? Usually a “disruptive” thing is bad. We’re comforted by control and routine. Something upsetting that control and routine causes discomfort: *disruption*. The impact of cellphones on the world has been unprecedented. There are an estimated 1.4 billion personal computers in the world. (Remarkable, given their cost!) But more than 1.4 billion mobiles are sold *every year*. In Uganda, for instance, **reportedly there are more of them than light bulbs!**

GMO has been a pioneering organization in mobile ministry. Since we first began reaching cellphone visitors through the Internet in 2006, mobile response has increased to about 90% of our results. And it *has* been disruptive for us: it has meant harder work in our system design, restrictions in how we present our pages and communicate to contacts, and less freedom in decisions about which response channels to choose. Our options have to come from the vocabulary of our audience.

The Mobile Ministry Forum was eye-opening for me. I told another attendee how impressive it was to see the creative variety and ministry specialization. Involved as I am in an organization committed to sowing the gospel so broadly, I can only long for the day when we have opportunity to try the kinds of nuanced efforts I heard about. “Yes,” he kindly said, “but without pioneers like Global Media Outreach and Campus Crusade for Christ, we wouldn’t be able to do this kind of work,” the other attendee explained. “You guys paved the way for everyone else.”

Tuesday brought a fresh reminder of why we limit our vocabulary, design and technology to what the majority of visitors can appreciate. Nick Runyon, our Chief Operating Officer, wrote that we had met our faith goal for 2013: **we shared the gospel with 300,253,396 visitors this year, we had 31,983,873 indicate a decision for Christ, and 1,539,056 were connected to an Online Missionary.** There were also over **9.8 million visits** to our discipleship sites this year. I’m so glad to be a part of the movement to reach everyone on earth, by both sowing as broadly as possible like GMO does, and through various innovative contexts like so many of these other wonderful organizations do, in order to reach everyone on earth, *where they are listening*, with the life-changing truth about Christ.

One memorable example of this took place earlier this year. While testing our “Live Chat” system, I encountered a single mom living in a Vietnamese village many hours from Hanoi. She had heard Nick Vujicic, the limbless evangelist from Australia, would be coming to Hanoi, but she was sad because she didn’t think she’d be able to make it to see him. She said she was not a Christian but she always respected God. I told her I did not know Nick Vujicic, but I knew his message. I proceeded to tell her about Christ, asking her if she’d like to commit herself to God. She said “yes, I would” and she prayed to receive Christ along with me! It was amazing to experience such a divinely-orchestrated connection, made possible because of her iPhone.

As we’re nearing Christmas time, we are thinking often of history’s most “disruptive” event. Before we knew of Jesus’ coming, “control” and “routine” had meant being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish our own by works rather than faith. Christ was then, as now, a “stumbling-stone,” an “offense” to the status quo. But today, to us, He is elect, precious, the Cornerstone—and the only name by which we may be saved. Living a Christ-centered life means *embracing* a disruption of my expectations of approval and success. “As the Father has sent me, so send I you,” Jesus said. If He sent Jesus to be clothed in flesh and “subject to weakness,” how can we ourselves refuse to restrict and subject ourselves to limitations for the sake of those we’re sent to reach?

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This brings me to the purpose of this year-end letter. The past year has brought some dramatic changes to our ministry, including venturing into new media for greater response: video screens are now playing our ads in Times Square! It brought new headquarters in the Dallas, TX area, and a request that we consider moving there. (All others moving from Florida have already moved.) It brought new (and exciting) responsibilities, with a hint of some long-hoped-for influence for good changes in our ministry. However, it's a biblical principle that every open door attracts opposition. The challenge we're currently facing is financial.

Let me make this clear: **God has never failed to supply all our needs.** (Not our "greeds!" We have been committed to a reduced standard of living for the past ten years of our ministry, and in fact *have not increased our salary from our initial 2003 support goals.*) But over the past two years, several of our supporters have left our team or found it necessary to reduce their support. Most recently, we lost a total of \$250 in monthly committed support, ironically while Mike was in California *attempting to raise more support.*

We are now at the point where our ongoing committed support is not sufficient for Florida, let alone Texas; and my visit to California convinced me that we may be losing additional supporters in the coming months. For the past 8 years, we've always had enough extra in our staff account to cover expenses in advance, but we're no longer ahead.

It is our sincere hope that no one who receives this letter would think we are "poor minded" and believe God will not meet our needs. We hope none of you feel offended that we would ask that you pray about increasing (or beginning or renewing) your ongoing partnership. We know things are financially difficult for many of us. If circumstances do not permit you to send a special gift or increase your regular support, then we are not asking you at all. We would only ask that if this letter seems offensive enough that you begin thinking about discontinuing your support, that you please speak to us about it first, or at least pray about it. It's never been our intention to burden our friends, but in the past, we have lost partners *just by admitting needs.*

And there may be another very significant, non-financial, way you can help us. Think for a moment: *how did we meet you?* For a percentage of you, we already knew and served with you at a local church. For most of you, we began our relationship *after* our call to staff. A mutual friend helped us meet. Let me describe what that's like:

It's a little bit like a job interview every time. *It tends to take about a dozen telephone calls to set up a meeting.* About one out of three will lead to a new ongoing ministry partnership. If the meeting is with a ministry leader, it's usually harder to set up, and a positive outcome usually still means *another review process*, by a missions committee or board of elders.

This, of course, is the reality of what we call "Ministry Partner Development." Once we're in the meeting, it's usually a great experience: as I am sharing my story, others are sharing theirs. **Don't you enjoy testimonies?** I am always encouraged to hear how He has been at work in their lives, and I can see God's hand in every meeting. Sometimes I find more in common with someone I just met than people I've known most of my life.

And in reality, while I'm the one being scrutinized, *they're the ones being recruited.* Why do I do all this? Because when we joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ, we placed ourselves squarely in the position of dependency upon God. He has been so good to us! But He works through the faithfulness of others. And in a way, **it's like evangelism:** I have good news about how they can be involved in God's Kingdom, at significant benefit to themselves!

I'll be enclosing a response card and a page for referrals. If you send me the names and telephone numbers of 12-15 friends, I will telephone them before my next visit to your area, simply introducing myself, sharing a few ministry details and your name as someone who suggested I contact them because they might be encouraged to hear about what we do and how they can be involved. Thanks so much for prayerfully considering how you can help us continue in full-time missionary service! Jesus said that *even a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple* could not fail to be rewarded. How much more will He reward the ones who enable thousands to be converted and discipled?

We wish you a Christ-centered Christmas celebration, full of the peace and joy that only He can bring!

Love, in Christ,

 

Mike & Cindy