AN ANTIOCH OF ASIA



MAY GOD BE GRACIOUS TO US AND BLESS US AND MAKE HIS FACE TO SHINE UPON US, THAT YOUR WAY MAY BE KNOWN ON EARTH, YOUR SAVING POWER AMONG ALL NATIONS.

PSALMS 67:1-2 ESV



Singapore has been called an Antioch of Asia for over 40 years, with the Church in Singapore recognizing it has a role to play in the urgent task of world evangelisation. How has this been panning out over the years?

The National Missions Survey (NMS) was established as a research instrument to find answers to this question. First conducted in 1988, and then in 1990, 1992, 2000, 2009 and 2014, the NMS's objective has been to provide research-based information on the life and mission of Singapore churches to make known the Gospel of Jesus Christ beyond Singapore. This aligns with the Singapore Centre for Global Mission's way of serving the Church in Singapore by shaping missions thinking and facilitating partnerships for missions.

5 years ago, NMS 2014 narrowed the scope of study by focusing on what churches were doing in missions. However, it broadened the range of ways by which local churches engaged in missions; whereas previous surveys only asked about career missionaries, NMS 2014 asked churches to report for the first time on multiple categories of missions work:

Missions Personnel (including career missionaries, missions agency staff, missional professionals, and others);

Missions Partnerships;

Work among Unreached People Groups;

Missions at our Doorstep.

NMS 2019 continues this approach, which allows trending analyses to be done for the above categories. Based on ground observations of what churches were doing, we further expanded the scope of missions work in the following ways:

For Missions Personnel, we included the category of 'mid-term' missionaries (i.e. those deployed overseas for between 1 month and 2 years);

Short-Term Mission Trips;

Finally, in recognition that megachurches may do missions work under a unique paradigm, we sought to interview representatives of megachurches to gain a more in-depth understanding. Hence, the NMS is now more appropriately called the National Missions Study.

The NMS 2019 is not an evaluative 'report card' or a prescription. It also cannot give the complete picture of the scope of missions work. But we believe that it covers a substantial and important portion of the work actually being done. We offer this study report, in hope that it will generate thoughtful research-driven discussion in the Church of Singapore for more effective gospel work for generations to come.



A small team of research assistants was formed to create the survey frame, to execute the distribution and tracking of surveys, to conduct face to face interviews (if necessary), and to do data cleaning and preparation.

The unit of analysis was the local church, and we sought to include every church in Singapore with valid contact details into the survey frame. The team compiled its list using information from the National Council of Churches in Singapore database and SCGM's database which included the churches contacted for NMS 2014 and for the 2018 GoForth National Missions Conference. The resulting list included 498 churches. Unlike previous NMS, the survey was administered completely online (using Typeform). English and Mandarin versions of the survey were employed.

These churches were contacted by email or by phone, with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey. A suitable missions representative (with overarching knowledge of the church's missions work) was asked to complete the survey for his/her church. We sent at least two reminders to churches to complete the survey. Where possible, denominational networks were utilized to encourage their churches to participate. In some cases, personal contacts were also employed to facilitate participation.

The period of collection was from April to early October 2019. Representatives from seven megachurches were interviewed face to face.



RESPONSE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Out of 498 churches contacted, 158 churches, with a combined membership/attendance of 152,775, participated in NMS 2019.

This represents a higher response compared to NMS 2014 (115 churches, 115,000 members) and also in a way to NMS 2009 (220 churches, estimated 127,000 members).

Among these 158 churches, the number of different-language congregations ranged from one to seven, with a median of two. 31 churches had a majority non-english speaking congregation (i.e. its non-english congregation(s) outnumbered its English congregation(s) in aggregate size).

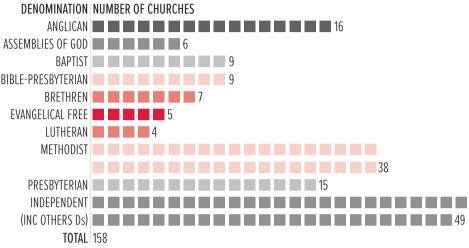


Figure 1: NMS 2019 Response by Denomination

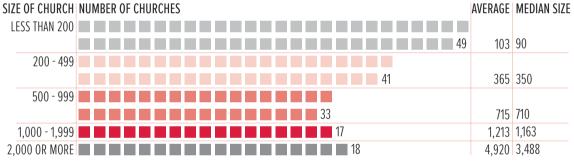


Figure 2: Size of Churches Participating in NMS 2019



THE MISSIONS FORCE: SUMMARY

The Missions Force covers the following types of personnel:

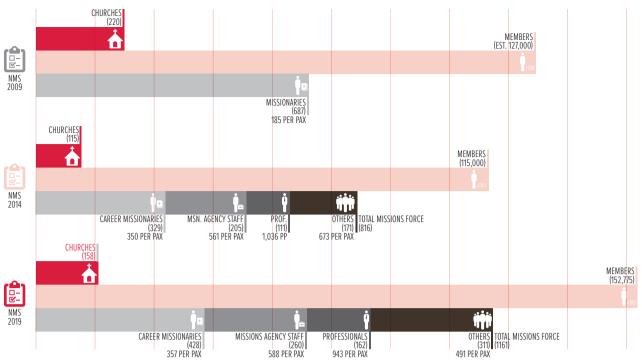
Career Missionary: One who is sent by a recognized church or mission agency, serving outside Singapore fulltime as a career missionary for at least two years. "Mid-Termers" are missionaries deployed for between 1 month and 2 years.

Missions Agency Staff: These are people working full time for at least two years in a denominational missions agency, a recognized multinational missions agency or research centre (whether based in or out of Singapore).

Missional Professionals: These are not formally sent by a church or a missions agency, but are recognized as intentionally engaged in holistic missions within their vocational capacity abroad for at least two years.

'Others': This broad category covers people who are involved in missions on a regular basis for at least two years, including itinerant evangelists, pastors who travel regularly to do missions work, non-resident missionaries and those dedicated to missions at our doorstep. This definition excludes short-term mission trippers.

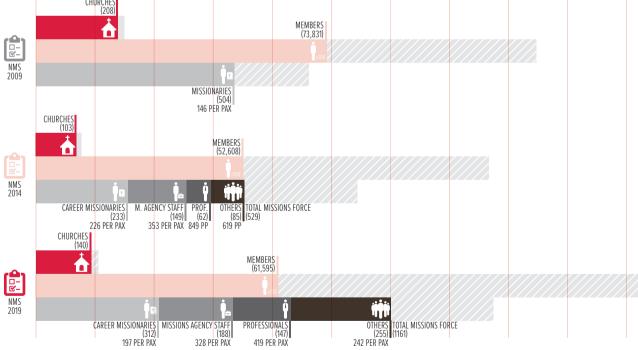
NMS2019



- * Number of career missionaries does not include mid-term missionaries, which numbered 150 in 2019.
- ** Number per pax is total size divided by number of personnel in that category.
- *** Of the 311 'Others' personnel, 224 did their ministry overseas while 87 did doorstep missions.

Figure 3: Missions Force Summary (NMS 2009, 2014 and 2019)

The picture becomes clearer when we partial out the data from megachurches (which may distort the statistics by virtue of their sheer size, difficulty in tracking every member, and unique practice of missions). Refer to Figure 4. Going by absolute numbers, there is still an increase in all categories between 2014 and 2019. But interestingly, the number of Christians per Missions personnel deployed clearly went down in all categories, especially for missional professionals and "others". This suggests that, apart from megachurches, missions sending is more substantial that what we had seen in 2014.



- * Number per pax is total size divided by number of personnel in that category.
- ** Of the 255 'Others' personnel, 168 did overseas missions work (with an average of 367 members per pax). Figure 4: Missions Force Summary (NMS 2009, 2014 and 2019) excluding Megachurches

We also compared the change in number of missionaries deployed within the same churches that participated in NMS 2009 and NMS 2014:

2009 vs 2019: Within the 102 churches that did both NMS 2009 and NMS 2019, we saw a net decrease 3



of 164 career missionaries – 45 churches saw decrease, 33 saw increase, 24 saw no change. This is in line with the observed downward trend reported in NMS 2014.

However, when we compare **2014 vs 2019**: Within the 67 churches that did both NMS 2014 and NMS 2019, we saw a *net increase of 4 career missionaries* – 20 churches saw a decrease, 23 saw increase, and 24 saw no change.

These findings suggest that while there may have been a downtrend in missionary sending from 2009 to 2014, the trend has plateaued over the period of 2014 to 2019. We also saw a net increase of 1 missions agency staff, a decrease of 4 missional professionals, and a decrease of 8 'Others'. These changes are independent of changes in the size of these churches over the last 5 years.

		UNDER 200	200 - 499	500 - 999	1,000 - 1,999	2,000 AND ABOVE
MISSION FORCE F	IO. OF CHURCHES	49	41	33	17	18
	TOTAL SIZE	5,039	14,973	23,587	20,616	88,560
	PERSONNEL (MFP)	136	188	313	308	368
	EMBERS PER MFP	37.05	79.64	75.36	66.94	240.65
	MEAN*	2.78	4.59	9.48	18.12	20.44
	MEDIAN**	1	2	7	11	16.5

^{*} Missions Force (including mid-term missionaries) divided by number of churches in that size category.

Table 1: Missions Force categorized by size of Church

For churches under 200 in size, the bulk of the sending is through a few 'missions-minded' churches (roughly half the churches of this size did not send any). This may reflect the resource-limitations of small churches.

For medium and large churches (sized 500 - 999 or 1,000 - 1,999 respectively), there is one missions personnel deployed for every 67 - 76 members. But for mega-churches, it is one person deployed for every 241 members. It appears that the large churches bear a more than expected load of deploying missions personnel (308, with an average of 1 per 67 members).

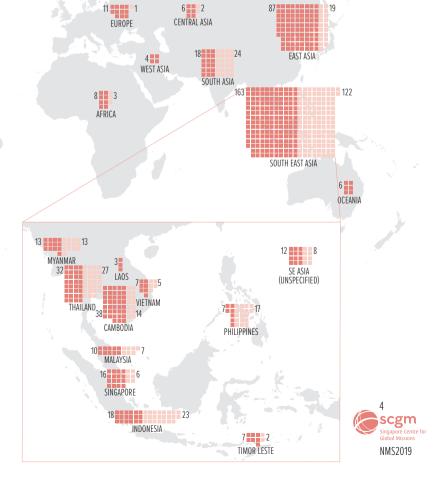




Figure 5: World map of Missions
Force global distribution

Missions Force personnel (career missionaries, missional professionals and 'others') are sent to at least 35 countries. Missions partnerships are being cultivated in at least 22 countries. The Church in Singapore is making missions impact in at least 42 countries, across every region of the world.

This is indeed indicative of an Antioch of Asia (and beyond).



^{**} Median of Missions Force for churches of that size category.

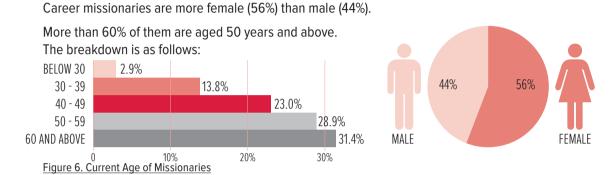


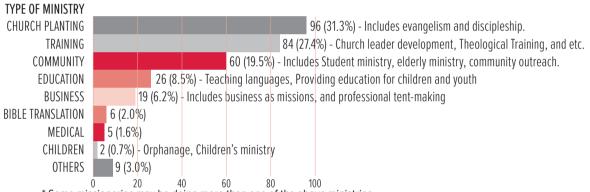
Career Missionaries

98 (62%) of the Churches reported sending at least one career missionary (not including mid-termers). This figure is higher than that for NMS 2009 where 58.5% of the churches did not send out any career missionary, but it is a slight decrease from NMS 2014 (64.3%).

The bulk of them were sent by an established missions agency (56%), while 37% were sent directly by the church, and another 7% by some other organization. These figures are similar to those observed in NMS 2014.

With detailed information from at least 239 of the missionaries, we can paint the following profile:





^{*} Some missionaries may be doing more than one of the above ministries.

Figure 7: Type of Ministry undertaken by Missionaries

Compared to NMS 2014, Church planting and training of indigenous leaders remain at the top. Community Development is new in the top 3 of the list. Between missionaries sent directly by the church versus by an agency, we observed that both were equally likely to do training and community development. However, missionaries sent directly by the church were more likely to do church-planting (39% versus 27%). Those sent by an agency seem to do a wider range of work (e.g. bible translation.)

	AGE	1979 OR EARLIER	1980 - 1989	1990 - 1999	2000 - 2009	2010 - 2019	TOTAL
	20 - 29	-	-	-	-	7	7
	30 - 39	-	-	-	11	22	33
	40 - 49	-	1	2	29	23	55
	50 - 59	-	2	9	29	29	69
	60 - 69	4	11	17	10	18	60
) ANI	D OLDER	6	2	-	2	5	15
	TOTAL	10	16	28	81	104	239

Table 2: Year of Deployment and Current Age of Missionaries

70

Among currently deployed missionaries, only 17% (40) are under the age of 40. Around 60% (144) of them are aged 50 and above, and over 30% (75) are in their 60s and above. Within the last decade (2010 – present), half of the missionaries (52 out of 104) are in their 50s and older, and so were first deployed in their 40s or later. Less than 30% (29 out of 104) are under the age of 40. These are signs of an ageing missionary force.

It is sometimes remarked that young people are willing to go to 'exotic' places for missions. This may not hold true when we compare career missionaries under the age of 40 years and those 50 years and older – both groups are deployed to diverse countries, with the older ones serving in a wider range of countries.

Missions Agency Staff

The supply of missions agency staff came from 42% (67) of the churches, which is less than the 48% for NMS 2014. These staff serve in a range of missions agencies, the majority of which are affiliated with the Fellowship of Missions Organizations in Singapore (fomos.org).

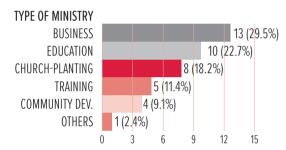
In summary, the missions agency staff are slightly more female and over the age of 50. From available data on over 90 staff, 43.4% were male, 49.5% were female, while the remainder were serving as couples. 21% were aged under 40, 17% were aged 40 - 49, 33% were aged 50 - 59 and 30% were aged 60 and above. As with career missionaries, these are signs of an ageing mission agency staff.

39% started serving as agency staff after 2010.



Missional Professionals

The supply of Missional Professionals came from 26% (41) of the churches, which is a slight drop from the 30% reported in NMS 2014. The type of work they engaged in includes the following:



* Some missional professionals may be doing more than one of the above ministries. Figure 9: Type of Ministry undertaken by Missional Professionals (based on 44 professionals)

'Others'

35% (56) of the churches reported having at least one member doing missions in 'other' ways, representing a slight increase from 31% for NMS 2014. Out of the 311 'Others', 87 were regularly doing Missions at our Doorstep work (especially towards migrant workers). If we focus only on those who go overseas, we find that they do work similar to that of career missionaries:

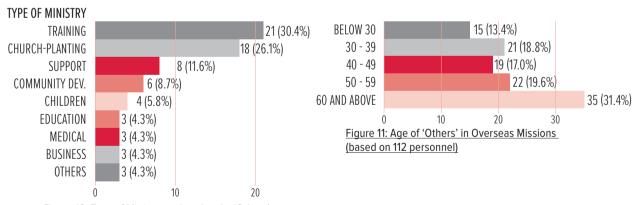


Figure 10: Type of Ministry undertaken by 'Others' in Overseas Missions (based on 69 personnel)

If we only considered those going overseas, these 'Others' are more likely to be aged 50 years and above (More than 50%) than under the age of 40 years (18.8% aged 30 – 39 years and 13.4% below 30 years).

In comparison to career missionaries, we find that for every career missionary under the age of 40 (40 people), there is about one 'other' (36 people), although this number doubles when we consider doorstep missions as well. This suggests that while the 'next generation' are engaged in mission, they are more likely to be involved in 'other' ways than through the career missionary route.

NMS2019



64% (101) churches reported being engaged in at least one missional partnership. This is noticeably less than the proportion of churches (76.5%) in NMS 2014. The number of partnerships undertaken by a local church ranged from 1 to over 20.

While missions partnerships cover at least 22 countries, the bulk of them are concentrated in Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, China, Cambodia and Myanmar – these are the same countries where many career missionaries are sent (except for Myanmar) and where most UPG work has been taking place for many years.

Of these missions partnerships, 31% of them are with an established missions agency, 45% with an overseas partner (e.g. indigenous church or organization), and 24% with others. We observed how partnerships with an agency and with an overseas partner are similar and yet different:

The majority of missions partnerships with both kinds of partners concern (a) supporting and caring for VA missionaries, (b) training of indigenous leaders and (c) the sending and receiving of short-term missions teams.

On the other hand, partnerships with an overseas partner are concentrated in South East Asia (especially in Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia and Myanmar), while partnerships with an agency are more globally dispersed.

REGION	NUMBER OF MISSIONS	NUMBER OF	
	FORCE PERSONNEL	PARTNERSHIPS	
CENTRAL ASIA	6	2	
EAST ASIA	87	19	
WEST ASIA	4	-	
SOUTH ASIA	18	24	
SOUTH-EAST ASIA	163	122	
THAILAND	32	27	
INDONESIA	18	23	
PHILIPPINES	7	17	
CAMBODIA	38	14	
MYANMAR	13	13	
MALAYSIA	10	7	
SINGAPORE	16	6	
VIETNAM	7	5	
TIMOR LESTE	7	2	
LAOS	3	-	
ARIOUS/UNSPECIFIED	12	8	
AFRICA	8	3	
OCEANIA	6	-	
EUROPE	11	1	
NORTH AMERICA	4	1	
SOUTH AMERICA	3	1	
WORLDWIDE	31	4	
/ARIOUS/UNSPECIFIED)			

(VARIOUS/UNSPECIFIED)

<u>Table 3: Global distribution of Missions Force</u> and Missions Partnerships

A WORK AN

WORK AMONG UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS (UPGs)

While recognizing that the definition of an unreached (or least-reached) people group is evolving, we have abided by Patrick Johnstone's definition to maintain consistency with NMS 2014:

A UPG is an ethno-linguistic group among whom there is no viable indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize their own people without outside assistance^{1.}

32% (50) of the churches were involved in at least one UPG work, which is less than the 36.5% reported for NMS 2014. The type of work primarily concerns church-planting (including discipleship and evangelism), but a significant number covers education and community development.

The total number of UPG works by these 50 churches is 120. Much of this work has been ongoing for many years, with over 60% of them lasting at least 7 years, about half for at least 10 years, and 1/6 for 20 years or more.

The top 5 countries where UPG work is being done are Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia and Japan. New to this list is Myanmar, which was scarcely featured in NMS 2014 as the locus for UPG work.

Of note is the relative "lack of take-up" for global UPG work. More than 60% of churches are not engaged in UPG work, and there has been limited take up of such work over the last 6 years. It is worth noting that the bulk of UPGs live in parts of the world where the Church in Singapore has not been reaching in significant numbers.

¹ Patrick Johnstone, The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities (Authentic Media: Milton Keynes, UK, 2011), xiii.





MISSIONS AT OUR DOORSTEP

52% (82) churches reported having a ministry that intentionally reaches out to members of the international community in Singapore. This marks a drop from 60% reported in NMS 2014.

The range of work covered migrant worker befriending and outreach (37% of ministries), special church services including cell groups (23%), evangelistic activities (20%), and education (e.g. English classes; 8%). New to this category is migrant worker ministry (which was scarcely on the list in NMS 2014).

The people reached are from at least 16 different ethnicities, most of whom are from the Philippines, China, Indonesia and India.



SHORT TERM MISSION TRIPS

The statistics presented below reflect a popular means of mobilizing the Church to be involved in foreign missions. We defined ST mission trips as overseas trips commissioned by the church, lasting up to one month and having any number of persons. Churches indicated the total number of trips and total number of members involved, over the period of 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2018.

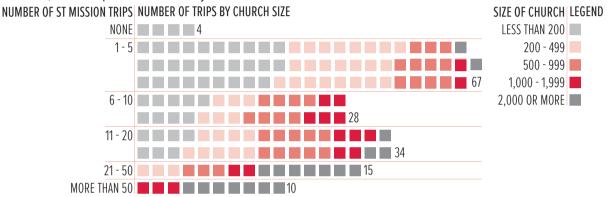


Figure 12: Number of ST Mission Trips sent by Church (Jan 2017 – Dec 2018), classified by Church Size



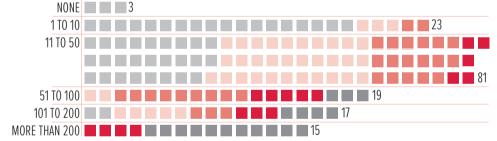


Figure 13: Number of Members sent on ST Mission Trips by Church (Jan 2017 – Dec 2018), classified by Church Size

Desired Outcomes of ST Mission Trips

The figures above may suggest extensive involvement. However, we also looked at the purposefulness of these ST trips by asking churches to indicate up to three desired outcomes for their ST mission trips.

The following table presents the stated outcomes in order of frequency:

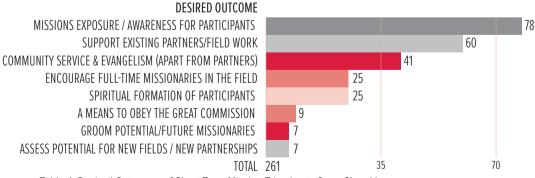


Table 4: Desired Outcomes of Short-Term Mission Trips (up to 3 per Church)





Prior to our data-collection, we understood that mega-churches (i.e. with membership in excess of 2,000) may have a different philosophy and paradigm of missions which our survey questions do not accurately reflect. This may be particularly true of independent mega-churches. Accordingly, we offered the opportunity to interview the relevant missions director or pastor of the mega-churches in order to do due justice to their missions strategy.

Seven mega-churches were interviewed (five independent and two denominational), while eleven others completed the survey.

A short description of each of the interviewed churches is given below:

Church #1 has had a relatively recent emphasis on missions work (within the last 10 years) through church-planting by replicating a discipleship model that is integrated with its pastoral staff structure. It also has a ministry for disaster relief work. It's extent of long-term sending and partnership building may change over the next 10 - 20 years. It does extensive doorstep missions work.

Church #2 deploys a diverse Missions Force, through a tiered structure for people sending (i.e. through Short Term Mission Trips, Mid-term and Long-term missionaries). It nurtures its own network of global partners that share the same 'church DNA'. The partnership focuses on church-planting, but also on addressing social issues. It has an extensive doorstep missions work in the form of its diverse language services.

Like #2, **Church #3** deploys a fairly large and diverse Missions Force through a tiered structure for people sending (more diverse than #2). It also nurtures a network of global partners that share the same 'church DNA', with a focus on church-planting. This is done largely through its platform for promoting disciple-making.

Church #4 provides consultation for churches from overseas in the area of church-planting and growth. Its own church planting takes the form of regional plants bearing the same church name. It employs missional business and other means to gain access to some countries. These efforts are mainly organizational (with as yet limited mobilization of individual members as missions personnel). It has an extensive doorstep missions work through multiple language services.

Church #5 adopts a somewhat decentralized missions strategy – It empowers members to go abroad to seek opportunities for church-planting. Having previously sent mid to long term missionaries, the church focuses now on short-term trips (to exploit cheap airfares). It has sent out members in large numbers (480 - 800 a year.), in hope that some may go on to be long-termers. The church is looking to telecast its worship service to reach other cities. It also has diverse doorstep missions work through its multiple language services.

A few years ago, **Church #6** adopted a shift in missions strategy by ceasing to send career missionaries. Instead, it employs staff serving as 'country overseers' who work with their indigenous missions partners for a range of work (church planting, evangelistic rallies, leadership training and etc.). Its support for church planting work intentionally respects the 'brand' and ethos of their local partners.

Church #7 deploys its members on short-term mission trips, as career missionaries, and as missions agency staff, but it sends no missional professionals as a matter of missions policy. It supports a large number of missions partnerships to do various kinds of work across the world, usually with established missions agencies.

A few summary observations may be made:

With one exception, these mega-churches adopt a structured organizational approach to doing missions.

These churches conduct missions mostly independent of other agencies/churches. In other words, they effectively establish their own missions agency.

The focus of their work is often on church-planting. Towards this end, they employ diverse strategies and expressions, which is typically a reflection of its own model of church growth and culture.

These mega-churches have an active and extensive doorstep missions work, at a scale which creates unique opportunities for reverse missions.



Our findings are based on data from 158 churches covering a broad spectrum of the church in Singapore, across denominations and sizes. A few caveats are in order: First, the survey mainly covered churches that had English or Mandarin as the main language. We have limited data from churches that primarily cater to regional ethnic groups, such as Myanmar, Filipino, and Indonesian churches. Second, our data do not include (a) missions work done by people who go without informing or updating their local church (this may be especially applicable to large and mega-churches), (b) the training of foreign students in Singapore's theological institutions, (c) the follow-up of doorstep missions work back in the home country, and (d) missions work via radio, television and digital platforms.

Nonetheless, our findings do seem to keep pace with the missions trend in Singapore, and reflect the wider missions landscape that we had been tracking 5 years ago in NMS 2014. We discuss these below and suggest some implications for the Church.

The Growing (and Ageing) Diverse Missions Force

The Missions Force has grown in size in all categories. Where career missionaries are concerned, this marks a stop to the downward trend from 2009 to 2014. Furthermore, compared to 2014, the number of missional professionals and 'others' now exceed the number of career missionaries. Yet they are doing similar work (church planting and training) and often in the same countries.

We must give thanks to God for this growth. At the same time, the missions force expansion raises many issues for the Local Church. We have been tracking the diversification of the Missions Force for some time:

To what extent do church missions policies and strategies acknowledge these realities, and enable such diversity?

How do churches effectively mobilize, train and care for its people on mission, in particular those who are sent directly as missionaries (and not through an established missions agency), and those who go as missional professionals or in 'other' ways?

And how may short-term mission trips be better leveraged to disciple members and to raise a new generation of long-term missions personnel?

This is a multi-generational issue as we see that the missions force spans all generations. However, the challenge may be especially pertinent for mobilizing the next generation: They are engaged in mission, but more often through 'other' ways than as career missionaries. Even if young people seek fresh expressions of global missions, the ideal should be that people go on mission and flourish not in spite of but through the active role of their local church. This may call for the reform of foreign missions policies and practices. There is scope for mission agencies to share their expertise in the raising, training and sustaining of missionaries. It may also be worthwhile to further study the motivations and thinking in the minds of the next generation who are involved in mission – especially those who go in 'other' ways.

The Globally Connected (Local) Church

The Singapore missions force is distributed across the globe, with concentration in South-East Asia and East Asia. At the same time, there are certain regions of the world that seem to be relatively under-reached. Missions sending to West and Central Asia, as well as to Africa, are low in number. India, which has one of the largest numbers of unreached peoples in its 1.3 billion population, remains very unreached. The extensive doorstep missions work among people from India may hold out promising opportunities for churches in Singapore.

Concerning missions partnerships, the signs are that churches in Singapore are actively making global connections by cultivating missions partnerships across many countries. Many of these are directly with an indigenous partner. We need to ask what this means: Is the growth of missions partnerships a sign of maturation in the field —

Are indigenous churches starting to better stand on their own feet and reach their own people?

What is the unique value-add of the church in Singapore and how does the church in Singapore receive and be blessed by its partners?

And what is the long-term strategy for these partnerships?



If it is indeed the case that much missions work is in maturing fields, the church in Singapore must not lose sight of the remaining task of world evangelization to the unreached (or *least reached*) peoples. As opportunities to venture into unreached regions of the world arise, it is a challenge for local churches to 'dis-engage' from their existing and maturing work so that they can shift focus and dedicate resources to new UPG work. If this is not easy or wise to do, then the onus may be more on local churches which still have potential to engage in foreign missions: There are still many churches who currently do not deploy missions force personnel or are in a missions partnership. To this end, there is a place for mission agencies that are dedicated for unreached people groups to play a significant role, to engage the churches and earnestly explore the potential for missions partnerships.

Finally, we must make mention of the unique case of megachurches. There may be special lessons to be learned from megachurches, which are studies on how a local church and missions agency can be integrated, and on how megachurches perceive the missions landscape and form their own networks of global partners. Likewise, mega-churches may also learn much from the experience of other churches and missions agencies. There is much scope for platforms to bring churches and agencies together and learn from one another in the spirit of the Kingdom of God.

All in all, we are encouraged by the extensive work of the Church in Singapore, as reflecting an *Antioch of Asia* (and beyond). We hope this report will stimulate among the churches creative conversations, deep reflection and active adaptation, so that the Church remains well-geared to serve its role in our God's global missional purpose for decades to come.

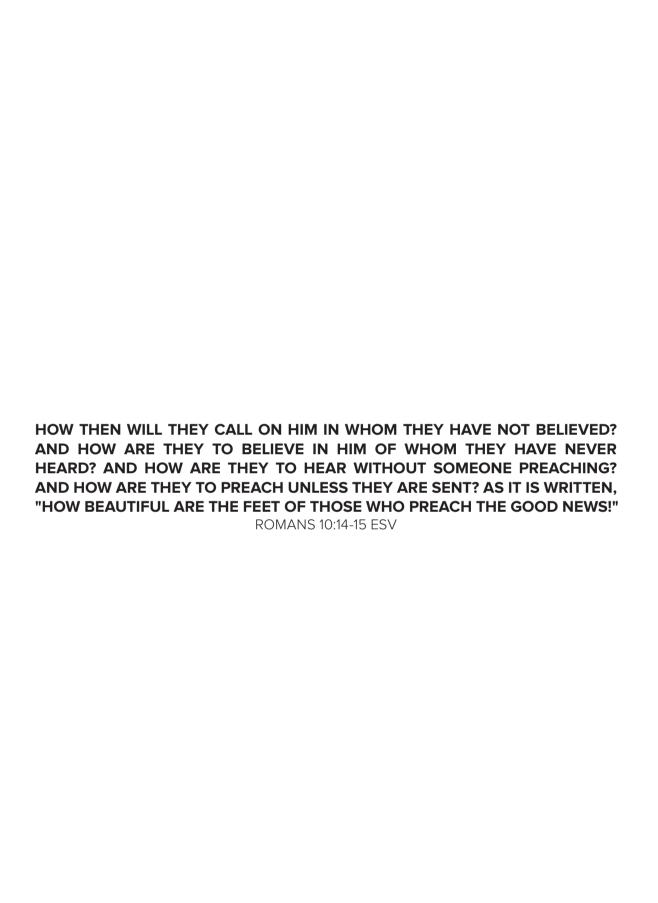
Soli Deo Gloria!

We gratefully acknowledge the invaluable help of the following team members:

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AN ANTIOCH OF ASIA THE NATIONAL MISSIONS STUDY 2019 REPORT

