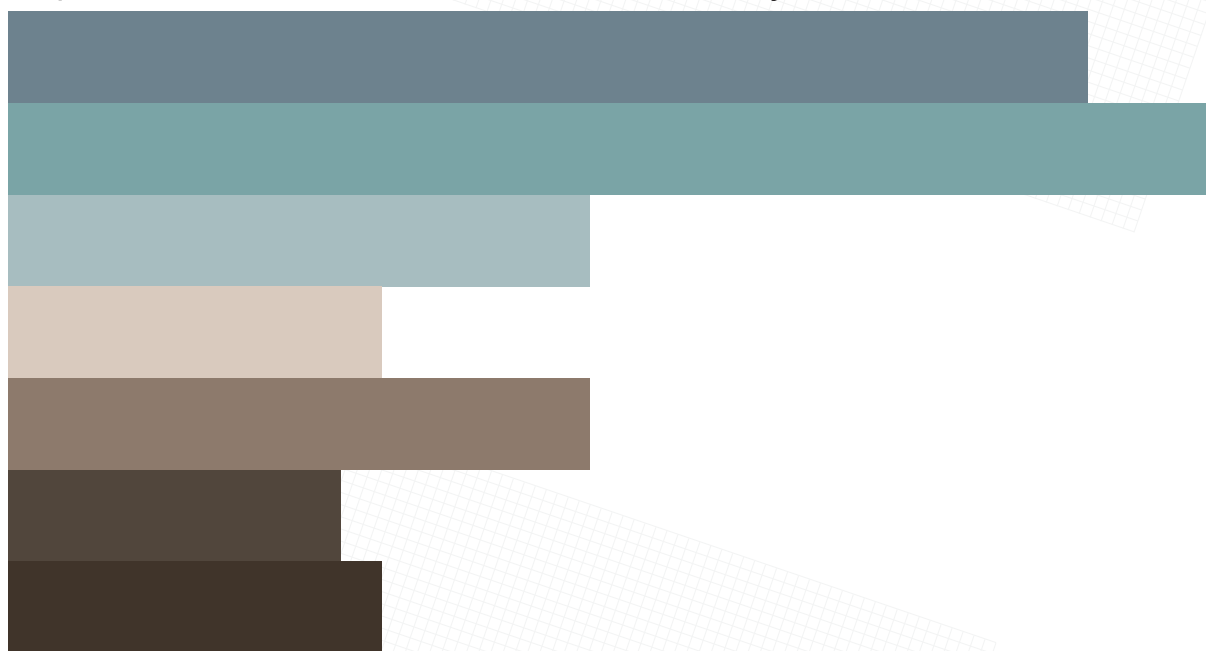


THE SCOPE OF MISSIONS:

Report For SCGM National Missions Survey 2014



scgm

Singapore Centre for
Global Missions



BACKGROUND

The National Missions Survey (NMS) was first conducted in 1988, and then in 1990, 1992, 2000, 2009, and now in 2014. Its 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 objective serves SCGM's broad strategy of shaping local missions thinking and facilitating partnerships for missions.

The following report describes the findings of NMS 2014, and offers some insights for further discussion. This report is not the final word, and it seeks to be descriptive rather than prescriptive of today's missions landscape. However, we trust that it will be sufficient for generating reflective conversation between local churches and individual Christians for more effective gospel work.

A significant feature of NMS 2014 is that, whereas NMS 2009 covered how churches mobilise their members to participate in missions, NMS 2014 focused on constructing a broader picture of what churches are doing in missions. We recognise that local churches today engage in missions through a diversity of ways. As such, churches were asked to report on the following categories of missions work:

- a. Missions Personnel (including career missionaries, missions agency staff, missional professionals, and others)
- b. Missions Partnerships
- c. Work among Unreached People Groups
- d. Missions at our Doorstep



SURVEY FRAME AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

A 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 data entry.

The survey frame (with the local church as the unit of analysis) was designed to include every church in Singapore with valid contact details¹. The team compiled a list using "A Guide to Churches and Christian Organisations in Singapore 2013/2014" (published by National Council of Churches in Singapore), SCGM's database, as well as the online Antioch Directory. The list was checked for double entries. The resulting list included 511 churches.

These churches were contacted first by email, with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey. Churches that did not respond to the email were then followed up with a telephone call, and finally by mail. Personal contacts were also employed in some cases to facilitate data collection.

The initial period of data collection was from April to November 2014. A follow-up effort to contact churches for improved survey response was done in April to September 2015.

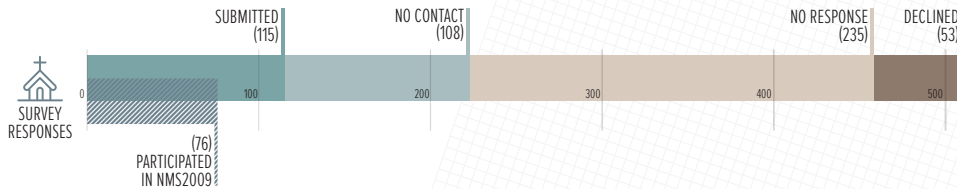
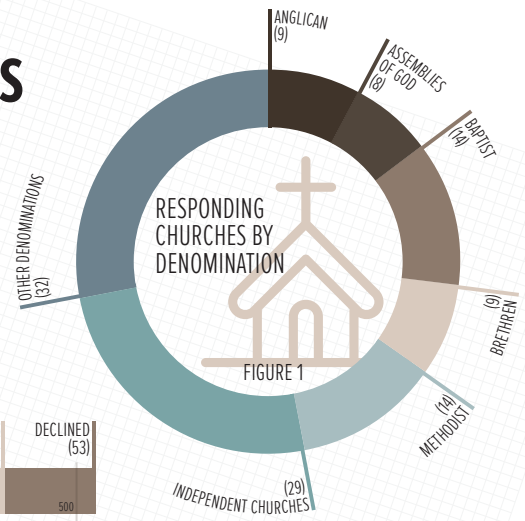
As with previous NMS, the survey form was written in English, and translated into Chinese.

¹This meant either a working email or mailing address, or telephone number. Any church from which we received no response from any of these 3 means of contact was deemed to have an invalid contact.



RESPONSE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Out of the original list, 108 churches had no valid contact. Of the remaining 403 churches, 115 churches submitted a completed survey form. 235 churches that were contacted failed to respond. 53 churches declined for various reasons². 76 of the participating churches had also taken part in NMS 2009 – this allowed some comparison analyses to be run.

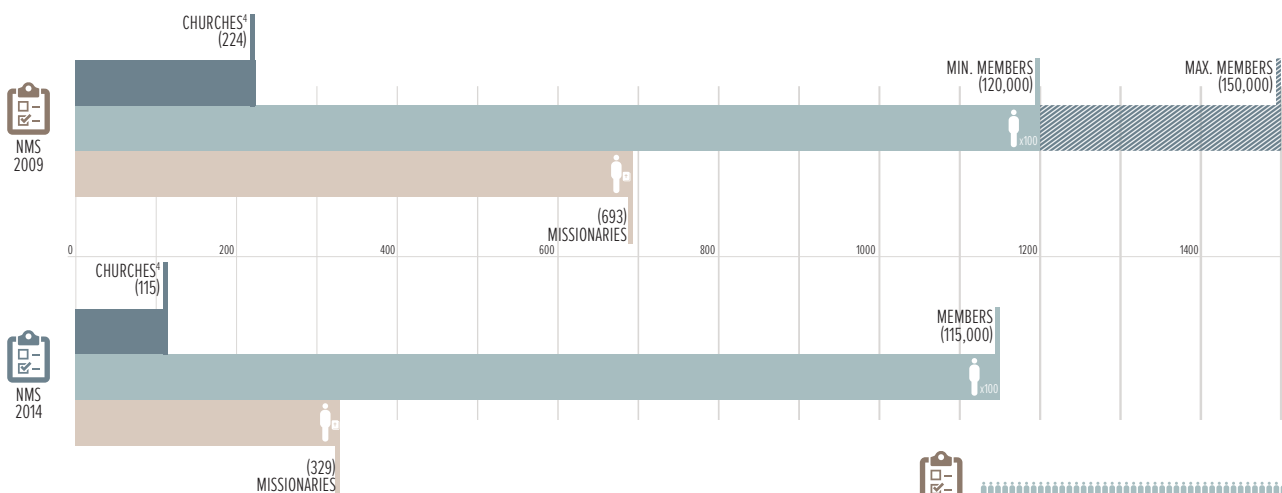


MISSIONARIES

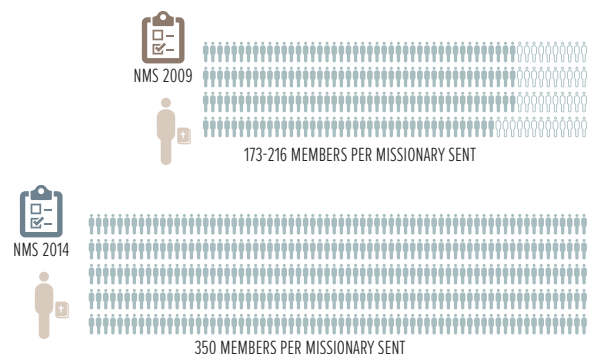
Career Missionaries

We followed the NMS 2009 definition of a career missionary, namely: One who is sent by a recognized church or mission agency, serving outside Singapore fulltime as a career missionary for at least two years.

The 115 churches reported sending 329 missionaries. Compared to NMS 2009, our data suggest that local churches are sending out fewer missionaries. Two observations bear this out. First, as a proportion of the number of members represented by the churches, career missionary sending has clearly gone down (See Infographic below)³.



Second, if we only considered the 76 churches that participated in both NMS 2009 and NMS 2014, the number of missionaries sent by them went down from 324 to 265. Fewer missionaries were sent by the majority of these churches, some of whom were known for having a history of involvement in missions.



² Reasons given included: (a) Unique characteristics of the church's missions philosophy, without specifying further; (b) unwillingness to share missions information that is deemed confidential or sensitive; (c) not interested, without specifying why. Occasionally, our data collection staff encountered unpleasant responses from church pastoral and administrative staff.

³ Due to imprecise data in NMS 2009, we estimate that the total number of members to be between 120,000 and 150,000. If we assume 150,000 members for NMS 2009, that's 216 members per missionary sent. Compare with NMS 2014 which is 350 members per missionary sent.

⁴ This is the number of churches that reported data on career missionaries in NMS 2009.

Number of Career Missionaries sent per church

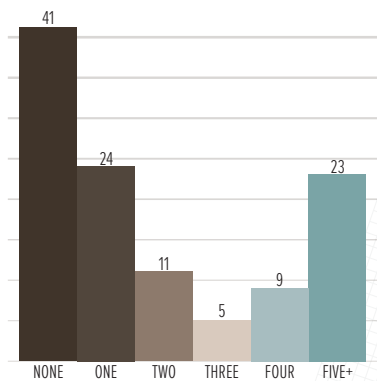


FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF CAREER MISSIONARIES SENT PER CHURCH.

41 (35.7%) of the churches reported not sending out any career missionary. This may represent a decrease from NMS 2009 where 41.5% of the churches did not send out any career missionary.

Where are the career missionaries being sent?

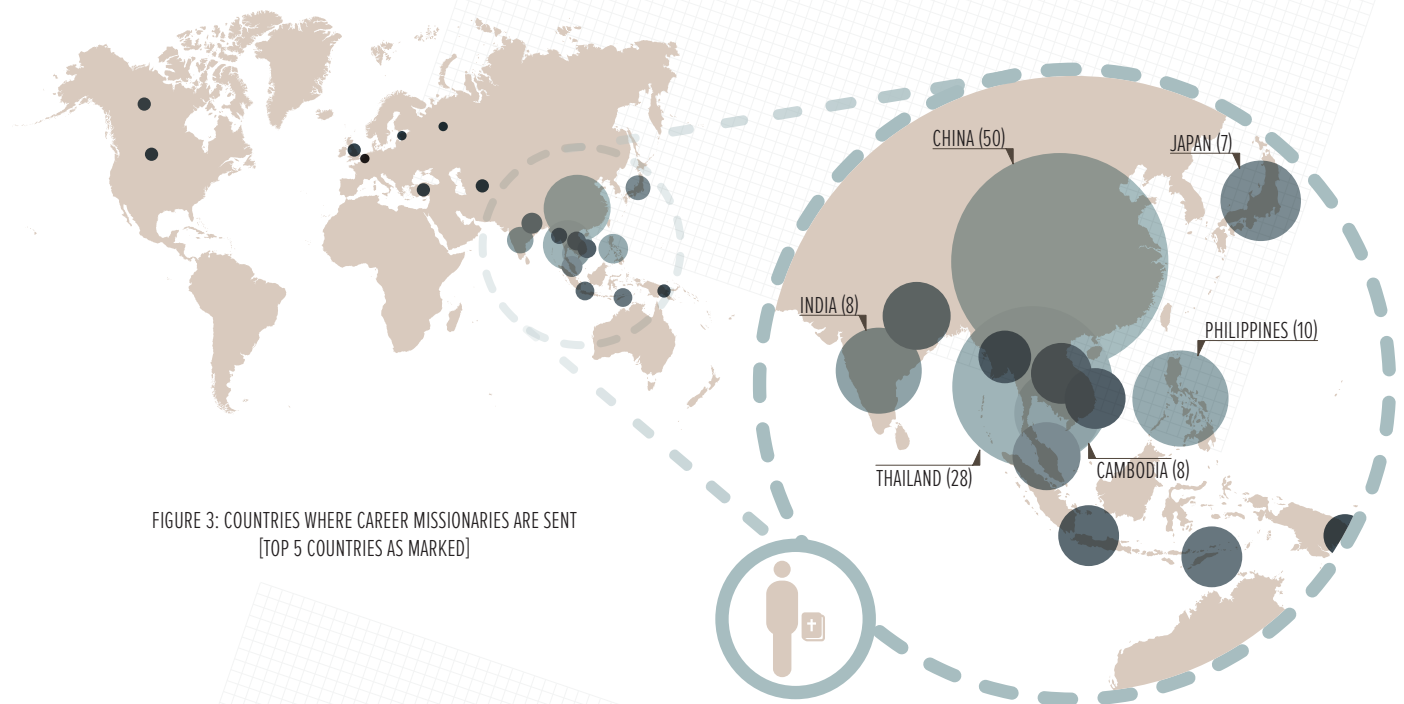


FIGURE 3: COUNTRIES WHERE CAREER MISSIONARIES ARE SENT [TOP 5 COUNTRIES AS MARKED]

Compared to NMS 2009, China and Thailand remain the top 2 countries receiving career missionaries. New to the top 5 are India, Japan and the Philippines. Our data also indicate countries that have at least one Singapore career missionary sent there – Countries such as Bangladesh, Estonia, Russia, Timor Leste, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. This is testimony to the breadth of Singapore missions to ‘the ends of the earth’.

What are the Career Missionaries doing?⁵

The majority of career missionaries are engaged in church planting work and the training of indigenous Christian leaders. The third largest category is Education – which involves the teaching of knowledge and skills apart from Christian education. Some of the work under “Others” include ministry to prostitutes, drug offenders and HIV sufferers.

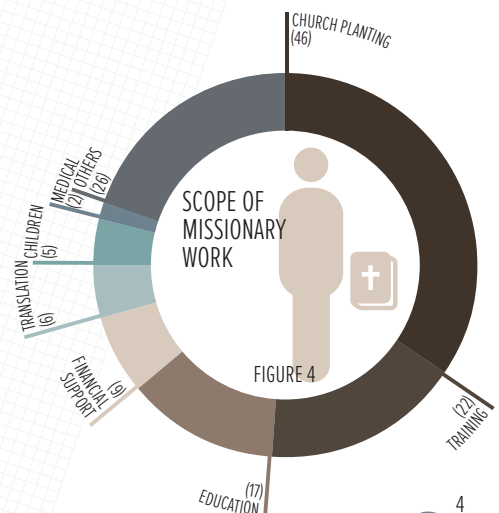


FIGURE 4

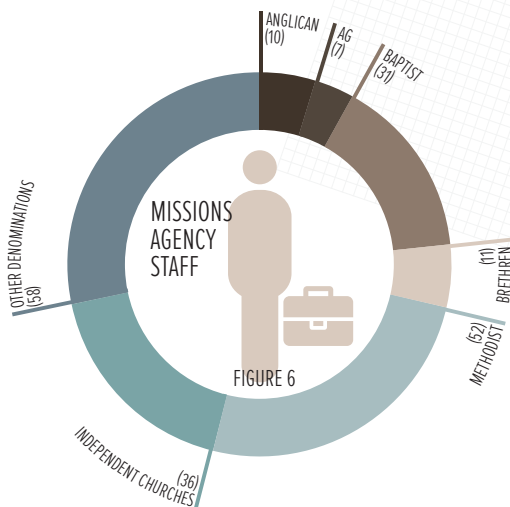
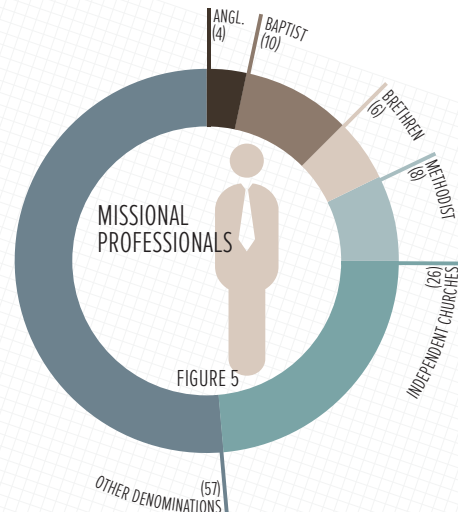
⁵ Not every church provided data on this.

Missional Businesspeople / Professionals

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

115 churches reported having sent 111 such people, with one church sending out 40.

About 1/3 of the churches reported having at least one missional businessperson or professional. The actual figure may well be higher as churches may not be fully aware of such work being done among their members.



Missions Agency Staff

This is defined as someone working full time for at least two years in a denominational missions board, a recognized multinational missions agency or research centre (whether based in or out of Singapore).

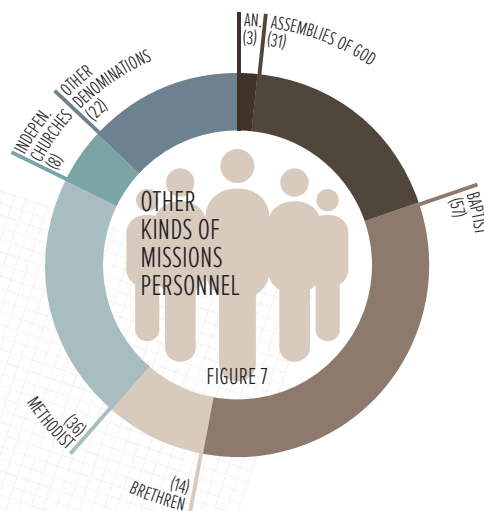
The number of agency staff from the 115 churches was 205.

58 churches (or 53%) have at least one missions agency staff.

'Other' Kinds of Missions Personnel

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, Salvation Army officers, and non-resident missionaries. This definition excludes short-term mission trippers.

The 115 churches reported sending out 171 such people, with 40 churches sending out at least one.



Summary Observations on Missions Personnel

At this point, we may draw a tentative conclusion that slightly more churches are sending out career missionaries for the first time, but that the local churches who used to send out career missionaries are sending fewer out this time. However, we recognize that the scope of missions involvement by individuals is not confined merely to career missionaries. There is a diversity of ways by which people are getting involved directly in missions.

PARTNERSHIPS

This has sometimes been called the ‘local church to local church’ missions model. We adopted a broad definition of a missions partnership: One where a Singapore church engages in sharing resources, strategies, support structures and personnel with an indigenous church, an indigenous organisation, a missions agency, or another Singapore church, for the work of missions in a region outside of Singapore. We explicitly stated that the provision of financial contributions alone did not fall under this definition.

88 (or 76.5%) of 115 churches reported being involved in at least one missions partnership. Roughly half of the reported partnerships were with an established non-denominational missions agency. The others were either with an indigenous church, an indigenous Christian organisation, or a denominational agency.

Figures 8 and 9 list the countries and nature of missions partnerships.

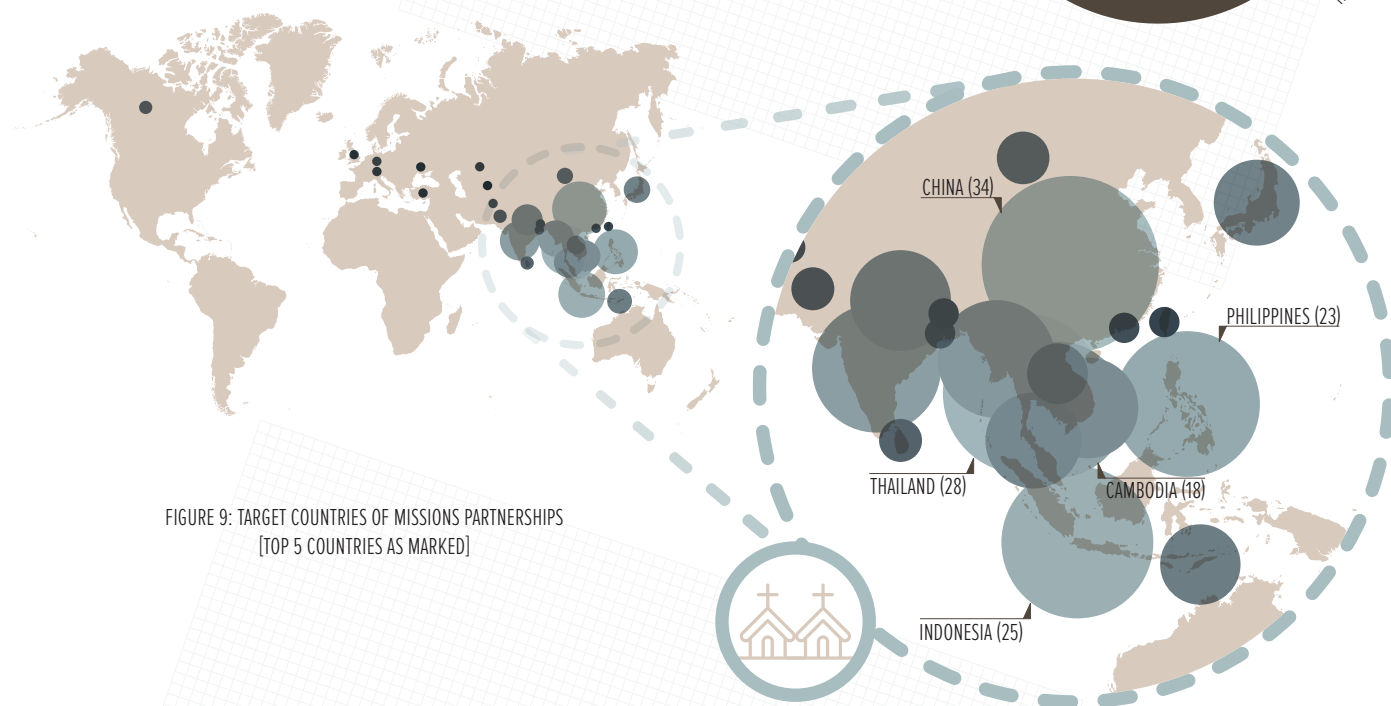
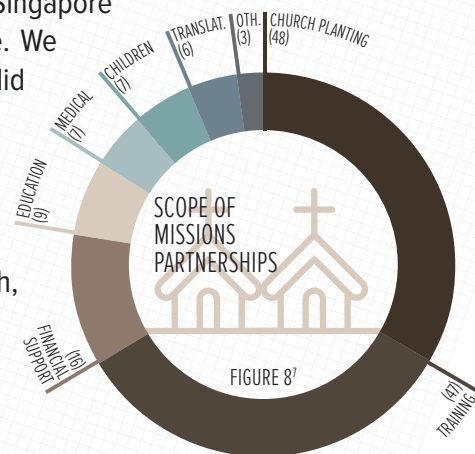


FIGURE 9: TARGET COUNTRIES OF MISSIONS PARTNERSHIPS
[TOP 5 COUNTRIES AS MARKED]

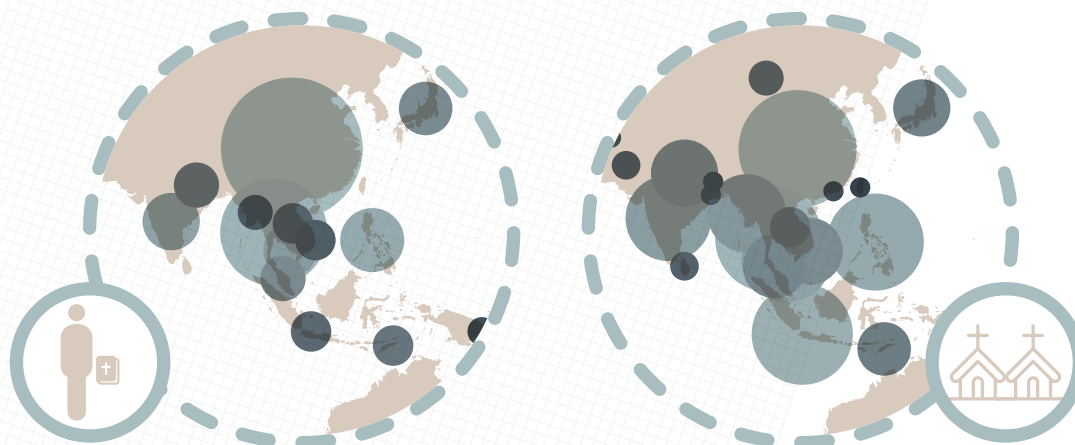


FIGURE 10: COMPARISON OF MISSIONARIES SENT AND PARTNERSHIPS IN ASIA

⁶ E.g. CRU, OM, OMF, Pioneers, SIM, WEC, Wycliffe, YWAM.

⁷ Number of churches for different categories of missions partnerships.

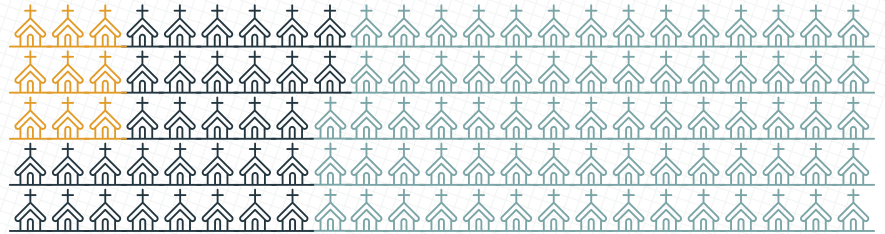


WORK AMONG UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS (UPGs)

This is a special subset of missions work (i.e. missionary sending and partnerships), focusing on UPGs.

We followed Patrick Johnstone's definition of a UPG: An ethno-linguistic group among whom there is no viable indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelise their own people without outside assistance⁸.

42 churches (36.5%) reported being engaged in UPG work. Of these churches, only 9 reported working through an established international missions agency.



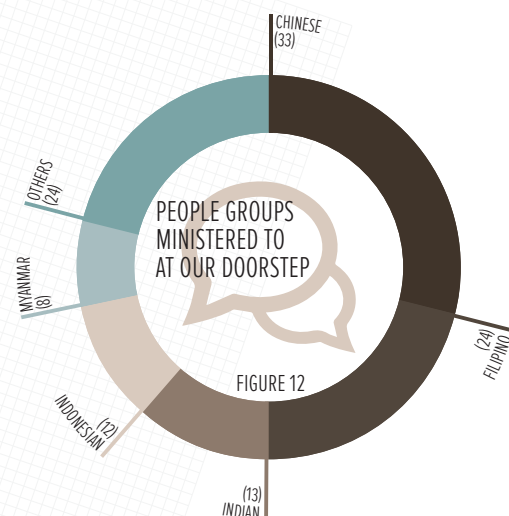
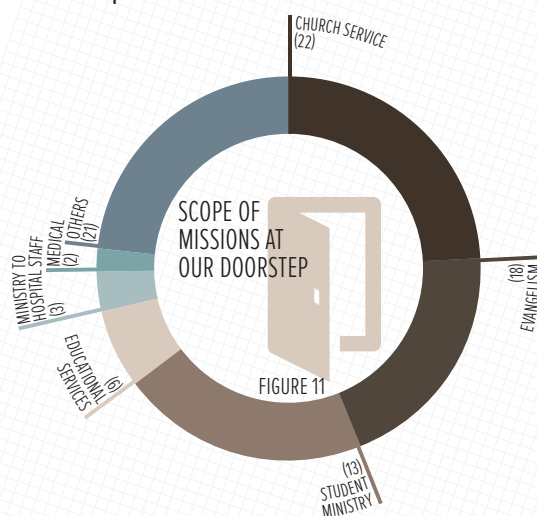
The top 3 countries where UPG work is being done are Thailand, China, and Indonesia. Most of the work involved church planting, training of leaders, education, and translation.



MISSIONS AT OUR DOORSTEP

For this category, we asked churches to report whether they had a ministry intentionally reaching out to members of the international community in Singapore. Members of the international community included expatriates, migrant workers, foreign domestic workers, and international students.

69 (or 60.0%) of 115 churches reported being involved in at least one form of missions at our doorstep, with the majority focused on migrant workers. Figures 11 and 12 present the diversity of work and people groups being ministered to at our doorstep.



⁸ Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities* (Authentic Media: Milton Keynes, UK, 2011), xiii.



OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

Our findings are based on data from 115 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 do not have data from churches that primarily cater to regional ethnic groups, such as Myanmar, Filipino, and Indonesian churches. Second, data from more churches are clearly desired, to help us paint a more accurate picture of the scope and extent of missions work. Nonetheless, we believe that the findings are useful – the churches are fairly representative of the demographic diversity of the local churches in Singapore. Furthermore, the findings do seem to describe trends that reflect the missions landscape of the 21st century. We discuss these trends below.

The Broader Role of the Local Church. Our findings indicate that many local churches no longer view themselves merely as missions mobilisers – that is, raising and sending out missionaries. Churches are directly involved in missions work abroad, and much of it is in the form of partnerships with indigenous pastors, churches, and Christian organisations. Furthermore, missions at our doorstep is being done by a significant proportion of churches. More local churches are also having at least one career missionary sent out from among their members.

It is interesting to note that such partnership work is being matched with a downward trend in the sending of career missionaries. There are some possible reasons for this: Are churches finding it harder to raise and send out full time career missionaries? Are Singaporean Christians discovering that there is a wider variety of ways by which they can get directly involved in missions work? Are local churches reasoning that missions partnership with indigenous Christian groups is a more feasible and effective strategy?

If this really is a trend, then further important questions must be raised:

To what extent are Local Churches equipped for direct engagement in Missions? And how effective have they been?

What are the strategies and lessons learnt in forging effective missions partnerships?

We note also that much missions work is not being mediated through a missions agency or a denominational board. What then is the role of missions agencies vis-à-vis the local church today? How does each one's work add value to the other?

Finally, how much collaboration and knowledge-sharing is there between local churches who are reaching out to the same people group or region? In other words, how can Singapore churches partner more effectively together for God's global kingdom business?

Missions by Anyone through Many Means. Individual Christians no longer think of themselves as needing to be career missionaries in order to be directly involved in missions. There is a greater diversity of ways to 'put one's hands to the plough'. This has probably been the reality for some decades, but with NMS 2014 we have for the first time data on such a trend.

These trends underscore the decentralization and diversification of missions in Singapore's landscape today. It has its fair share of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The church has much to reflect on in order to best follow the Spirit's leading in today's changed context of missions.

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