

ENDORSEMENTS



Freeing Congregational Mission *A Practical Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility, and Co-Development*

January 25, 2022 | \$26, 288 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0068-7

North American congregations face a deepening crisis of consumer-oriented “selfie missions” and practices based on colonial-era assumptions. Seeking to free congregational mission from harmful cultural forces, this book helps churches better partner with God’s work in the world, offering the latest research and practical, step-by-step tools for churches.

Laying the Foundation for Faithful Mission

“Hunter Farrell and Bala Khylllep bring decades of hands-on mission experience to the urgent task of reframing congregational mission. This book rejects ‘selfie mission’ and affirms that God is calling North American Christians to walk alongside others as companions in Christ. I highly recommend this book for classroom use. It is refreshing and accessible. Most important, it is full of faithful wisdom.”

—**Dana L. Robert**, Boston University School of Theology, author of *Faithful Friendships: Embracing Diversity in Christian Community*

“Hunter Farrell and Balajiedlang Khylllep have a message for congregational mission leaders: what you do matters. In fact, when mission wanes, the very identity of the church comes into question. The authors provide fresh theological insights for mission as well as practical tools to help God’s people recalibrate their ability to participate fully in what God is doing in the world.”

—**Al Tizon**, associate affiliate professor of missional and global leadership at North Park Theological Seminary

“Hunter Farrell has written a seminal work for parish mission that promises freedom from the limitations, failures, and even harm of short-term mission trips and parish partnerships. More importantly, he and his companion, S. Balajiedlang Khylllep, provide a vision, a road map, and a vehicle for parishes to revitalize their mission in the world. This is a must-read for every pastor, mission leader, and Christian who longs to participate in the *missio Dei*, because it is accessible, honest, hope filled, and doable.”

—**Donald R. McCrabb**, executive director of the United States Catholic Mission Association and partner in the Third Wave of Mission

“Much of what goes by the name ‘missions’ in American Christianity is captive to the habits of settler colonialism and slaveholder religion, squelching the good news both for those who proclaim it and those who hear it. *Freeing Congregational Mission* offers hope that churches can discover the gospel anew and the world can hear and see God’s mission in a way that brings hope and healing for all.”

—**Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove**, author of *Revolution of Values*

“*Freeing Congregational Mission* is a must-read book for anyone who wants to engage in mission faithfully. In my ministry, I have been to over eighty countries and interacted with both senders and recipients of mission. The criticism of colonial models of mission as well as self-serving mission practices is a common theme. And yet there is the understanding that most mission teams mean very well. This book is the first of its kind that I have seen address this in an open, critical, and sensitive fashion. I will recommend it highly for both academic and mission practitioners’ use.”

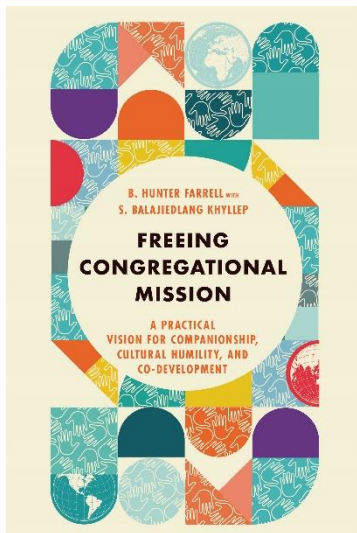
—**Setri Nyomi**, senior lecturer at Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana, and former general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches



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“*Freeing Congregational Mission* is a welcoming multicultural, postcolonial, and interdisciplinary work that encourages a critical forward view of God’s mission (*missio Dei*) aimed at encouraging more faithful and effective mission engagements. With a distinct focus on the transforming energy of the short-term mission experience, the authors have produced an essential mentoring text to theologically encourage church mission leaders and seminarians who yearn for a more inclusive understanding of God’s mission. By examining three core elements necessary to overcome current destructive cultural forces, this book demonstrates how churches, by valuing human diversity, human agency, and ethical behaviors, can learn to model dignity, respect, humility, and love of neighbor related to missions in both local and global contexts.”

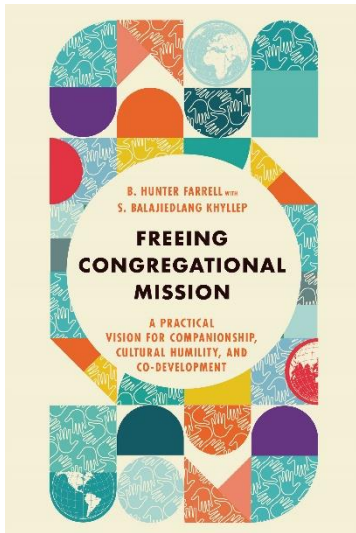
—**Marsha Snulligan Haney**, intercultural theological education consultant, founder and editor of UrbanMissiology.org



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The Energy Behind the Short-Term Mission Trip

Christians have always been a generous people. Since the era of the early church, non-Christians and even the opponents of Christianity (like the Roman emperor Julian) noticed Jesus' and his followers' exceeding generosity and particular concern for people living under the weight of poverty and oppression. This lifestyle is embodied in the apostle Paul's call to follow in Christ's example of setting aside self-interest and living in service to others: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:3-5).

In the United States, the mission of the church has often been considered one of the highest priorities of Christian congregations, whether evangelical, Catholic, or mainline Protestant. Many congregations proudly identified themselves as "mission churches" because of the prayer, funding, and time they poured into God's global mission—sometimes 10 percent, 20 percent, or more of their total congregational budget went to missions, local and foreign. "Mission" was all the activities done *for the people outside the church's walls* in the name of Jesus Christ, from the "clothes closet" or soup kitchen for our city's economically disadvantaged to prayer and financial support for overseas missionaries. In obedience to the Great Commandment ("Love your neighbor as yourself") and the Great Commission ("Go and make disciples of all nations"), mission was about reaching out in love to our neighbors across the street and around the world.

In each of these "mission-minded" congregations were the "mission advocates" who lifted up the cause of God's local and global mission—and sometimes even battled the finance committee members, resisting the constant pressure to increase the percentage of the annual budget dedicated to staff salaries, member services, special projects like sanctuary carpeting, or a host of other legitimate operating needs. To these advocates, the mission budget was sacrosanct because it represented why the church existed—its very essence. "If we can't support Christ's mission in the world, we shouldn't call ourselves a church" was their attitude.

But over the last few decades, an almost imperceptible cultural undertow has been pulling the church off course. Even some of the most dedicated mission leaders haven't noticed the changes because of the subtle cultural shifts taking place in US society. Somehow, the outward nature of mission, the powerful flow of God's love and grace through our congregations and parishes out into the world, is being short-circuited. And ironically, we have increasingly become the beneficiaries of our own mission work. You don't believe me? For just one example, let's take a look at the short-term mission trip phenomenon.

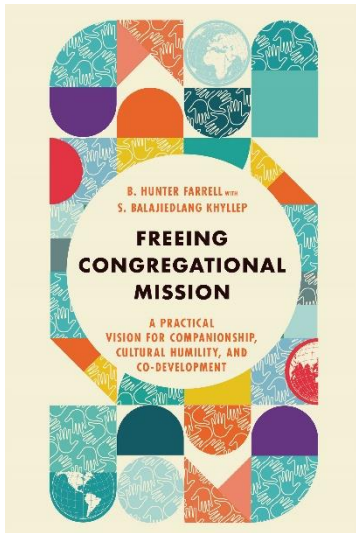
Just a small blip on the mission radar of most churches fifty years ago, today short-term mission (STM) trips have exploded into a booming industry that *Toxic Charity* author Bob Lupton estimates between \$3.5 and 5 billion a year. Nearly two million Americans participate in an STM each year. One of the largest financial contributions that many congregations and their members make toward the global mission of the church is for these trips to both domestic and international destinations. At an average cost of \$1,000 per individual for the typical eight-day trip, a congregation and its members can together spend tens of thousands of dollars to prepare, equip, send, and support one STM group overseas. Yet an increasing number of books and articles—from scholarly missiological journals to popular books like *When Helping Hurts*—are raising critical questions as to the impact of STM trips on both the travelers and the "host communities."



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Most of us understand intuitively that crossing the seas to build a house in Tegucigalpa, teach a Vacation Bible School class in Bangkok, or feed and hold babies in Kampala is simply not an effective—and probably not very faithful—use of God’s resources. Even the members of the congregation’s finance committee are questioning the impact of these expenses! Some critics maintain that this significant investment in our own international travel to distant lands may be decreasing the funds contributed to support long-term mission workers and the work of global partners, yet we continue to invest in this most attractive of congregational mission strategies.

These critiques of STM are not new. But neither scholars nor practitioners seem to be asking the *why* question. How do we explain the energy behind the North American church’s fascination with short-term mission trips? What is it that keeps the North American church—embedded as we are in a culture that so highly values efficiency and measurable impact—pouring money into a mission strategy that research indicates simply doesn’t generate lasting positive impact for the “host community”? If this most popular of US congregational mission strategies isn’t helping the neighbors we’re called to serve, then why do we keep doing it?

A common answer is because the trips are said to be *transformative* for our congregations. Could it be that the outward mission focus we received from previous generations is being eclipsed by a more modern, inward focus that is “all about us”? Through our research, we’ve heard from the mission leaders of African American, White, Latinx, and multiracial churches who feel uneasy about some elements of their short-term mission trips and yearn for the insights and tools they need to channel the transformational energy of STM into strategies that actually deepen trust and relationship and enable diverse Christians to participate in Jesus Christ’s transformation of the world.

—Taken from chapter 1, “The Crisis We Face”



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