**MOBILIZING AND TRAINING LAY PEOPLE FOR MINISTRIES:**

**Case Study of University Bible Fellowship (UBF)**1

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**Introduction**

“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.” (Ezekiel 37:10)

In Ezekiel chapter 37, God led Ezekiel to a valley full of dry bones. The Lord asked, “Son of man, can these bones live?” The prophet answered, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” Then the Lord said, “Prophesy to these bones!“ When Ezekiel obeyed God and prophesied, the dry bones came back to life and became a vast army of God. Here “prophesy” means “preach the word.” God can surely mobilize lay people to be his vast army for world mission through prophesying the word of God. It is not by might nor by power, but by God’s Spirit through preaching the word of God. (Zech 4:6)

In this paper, we will think about four questions: (1) Who are lay people? (2) Why should we mobilize lay people? (3) How can we mobilize lay people? (4) How to train lay people? We will think about the answers through a brief review of past lay movements and a case study of UBF.

**Who are lay people?**

Lay people or laity came from the Greek word *“laos”* which means “God’s people.” At the beginning of Christianity, the gospel was spread from Jerusalem, to all Judea and Samaria, and to the Roman world by the scattered lay people (Acts 8:4). As the church grew there was a need for full time clergy who would dedicate their lives to serving the congregation. Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D) was the first who used the term *“kleros”* (English word “clergy”) which means “a lot or inheritance” to distinguish priests from “*laikos”* (English word “laity”) in their services. Through the Middle Ages, this

distinction between clergymen and lay people grew through the hierarchical institution of the Roman Catholic church. The Reformation awakened the laity to realize their priesthood (1Pe 2:9). But the Reformers did not emphasize the evangelistic mission of lay people.

In church history, Nestorian Christians, known as the Church of the East, formed a vigorous, lay-missionary community during the 7-8th centuries. They planted churches along the Silk Road, India, China and Korea. During 12-15th centuries, the Waldensians in France and Italy, who followed the teachings of Peter Waldo (1140-1205), the Lollards

In England, who followed the teachings of John Wycliffe (1331-1384), and the Hussites

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in Czech lands, who followed the teachings of John Hus (1369-1415), were lay movements before the Reformation.

After the Reformation, puritanism in England initiated by the disciples of John Calvin (1509-1564) and pietism in Germany initiated by Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) were lay movements for a holy living. The Moravians led by Count Nikolaus Zinzendorf (1700-1760) launched the first large-scale protestant missionary movement through which 2,000 lay missionaries were sent to the six continents. They were ready to go if they had a pair of shoes, and they took whatever jobs they could find in the mission fields to support themselves for missionary work. The spiritual revival of lay people continued in the 18-19th centuries through the Methodist movement in England organized by John Wesley (1703-1791) and the Great Awakenings led by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Gorge Whitefield (1714-1770), and Dwight Moody (1837-1899) in the United States.

Modern missions blossomed following these movements through William Carey (1761-1834) and Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) in England. In the United States, Samuel Mills Jr. (1783-1818) and his colleagues initiated the so-called Haystack Movement, and John Mott (1865-1955) and his colleagues organized the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) for Foreign Missions. The SVM enabled the United States to send out 20,500 missionaries to the world for over the 40 years of its lifespan until the 1920s.

Modern missions are diverse and complex, but have shown the following features: (1) Missionary-sending and support have been mainly carried out by denominational and non-denominational mission societies and agencies. Many local churches also have directly sent and supported missionaries; (2) Though the works of missionaries grow to be diverse, most of the clergy missionaries are dedicated to evangelism and church planting, while most lay missionaries carry out charity, medical, cultural and social services; (3) The main force of the missionaries is financially supported by the churches and sponsors. In his 1929 booklet, Roland Allen, a prophetic English missiologist, called the supported mission workers “professional missionaries” and self-supporting mission workers “non-professional missionaries.” He predicted that the church would need more non-professional, self-supporting missionaries for her spontaneous expansion.

**Why should we mobilize lay people?**

Today 4.9 billion people (2/3 of world’s population) are unreached. The number of missionaries does not catch up to the increase of unreached people. So the number of unreached people will grow to 5.4 billion after 10 years. After World War ll many new nations were born. Nationalism enhanced national religions or political systems, leading to rejection of Christian missionaries’ entry. Eighty four countries, mostly Moslem, Hindu and communist countries, that have 65% of world population, limit or reject entry of professional missionaries. In recent decades, the lack of mission funds due to the low growth of sending churches and the recession of the world economy has reduced the number of supported missionaries.

A solution to these challenges is to mobilize lay people who compose almost 99% of church membership. In today’s global world many lay people have more opportunities to go overseas on business trips or to stay as resident workers in foreign countries for many years. There are greater opportunities for lay people for ministry even in the Muslim, Hindu and communist countries, if they are mobilized and trained as missionaries. The greatest discovery of the 20th century is not the internet or television, but the laity—called “God’s frozen assets” by Dutch missiologist Hendrik Craemer (1958). In addition to the restoration of the priesthood of laity through the Reformation, now the evangelistic mission of all believers should be restored, for 1 Peter 2:9 says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” If we believe that the Lord gave his Great Commission to his church, we should awaken and equip all lay people to carry it out.

The awakening of the laity was facilitated by theologians in the first half of the 20th century. The Catholic Church was proactive in initiating lay missions. Protestant churches also began to emphasize mobilizing laity in the spread of the gospel at the World Council of Churches in 1968, and the Lausanne Congress in 1974 and 1989.

Lay missions have grown since the 1960s. Many lay mission societies and agencies arose that mainly provide charity, medical and social services. Lay missionary organizations arose like UBF and InterCP (International Corporation). InterCP has sent out 920 lay missionaries to 40 unreached people groups since 1983. Many local churches are carrying out lay missions like most of KIMNET member churches. For example, the Antioch Church in Philadelphia, USA, has been sending out lay missionaries through “Professionals for Global Missions (PGM)” program since 1998.

There are challenges in mobilizing laity. Roland Allen (1929) said, “A person could not be a missionary without being evangelistic. A missionary is therefore an evangelist.” The greatest challenge is how to train lay people to be real missionaries who are evangelists, Bible teachers, disciple-makers and church planters, like most of the clergy missionaries. There are challenges of maintaining self-support in the mission fields. Continuing care and education of the lay missionaries by the sending churches and agencies are a daunting task. There is a great need of developing a good cooperation model between mission societies/agencies and churches. There is also a challenge for cooperation and mutual support of clergy missionaries and lay missionaries in the mission fields. But these challenges are all possible to overcome.

**How can we mobilize lay people?**

1. A paradigm shift

Both the clergy and the lay people must change the common idea that ministry belongs to the clergy and the lay people are the passive receivers of the services of the clergy. Both must see that the pastors as well as the lay peoples are called to work together for the ministries of God. The clergy has traditionally thought that they are like a pilot who asks the passengers to put on their seatbelts and to do nothing while they safely brought them to their destination. But today’s world demands the church to be rather like a ship with a captain and sailors. As the sailors do many jobs with the captain for the ship to arrive safely at the destination, the lay people need to work in many roles with the pastor for the growth and mission of the church. Thus they together can save many drowning people in the world and bring them to the heavenly kingdom. This paradigm shift from the traditional concept of roles and status of clergy and lay people must first occur to mobilize lay people.

2. Start with young people

We can start with the young people in our churches. Acts 2:17 says, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people….. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions.” Throughout history, God has raised young people and given them visions. God called young individuals and raised them to be shepherds of his people—individuals such as Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, and Daniel. In a dark time, Samuel and Elijah recruited young people in the school of prophets and trained them to be future spiritual leaders. Jesus raised 12 young men as his disciples. Apostle Paul raised young Timothy as his coworker and future leader. As we learned from a brief review of the modern mission movements, the fire that began in the hearts of young people grew to influence the church and the world. Young people are open to the truth; they are teachable; they have passion and devotion. When young people are spiritually alive, there is a bright future. Let’s pray to train and empower the college and graduate groups in our churches.

3. Raise a Bible-studying community

We know that, in church history, whenever there were people who studied the Bible sincerely and prayed, there was a great work of God. We can mobilize our young people and the whole congregation in our churches through the Word of God. I’d like to suggest to all pastors to organize your congregation into Bible-studying groups (not just Bible study groups, but really Bible-studying groups). Of course, raising and training excellent Bible teachers among lay leaders is the key to mobilizing the whole church for spontaneous expansion and missionary work. The growth of UBF and her missionary work show how God works through a Bible-studying community.

4. Case study of UBF

The University Bible Fellowship (UBF) began as a student Bile study movement in South Korea in 1961. In the political and economic situation of South Korea after the civil war and a military coup, students were wandering without hope for the future. At that time, God brought together Dr. Samuel C. Lee, a Presbyterian pastor with a passion for helping young people and Sarah Barry, a missionary sent by the Board of World Missions of the Southern Presbyterian Church, USA. They shared a common belief that the best way to help Korea was to plant faith in Christ in the hearts of college students, so that they would grow to be future leaders. Their prayers and Bible study ministry quickly erupted into a movement of students for Jesus Christ.

Over 50 years, UBF grew to be a highly evangelistic and missionary-minded church that has sent 1,700 lay missionaries, including 75 native missionaries, who are actively engaged in ministries in 99 countries. When UBF missionaries go to their mission lands, they engage in the evangelism and discipleship of native college students from the start. Today, UBF has 9,000 active members in 440 chapters world-wide. Members are composed of 3,400 in Korea, 2,300 in USA/Canada, and 3,200 in six continents with 110 fulltime staff couples.

The UBF movement is an outcome of Bible study, prayer, and simple obedience to God’s word. Historically, it resembles the Moravian movement that trained and sent out lay missionaries all over the world in simple obedience to the Lord’s Great Commission. UBF also resembles the Holy Club movement initiated by the Wesley brothers in that lay people sought to live a holy life through Bible study and prayers. UBF is like Hudson Taylor’s China Inland Mission (CIM) and the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) in that it equipped young people to carry out the calling for world missions. UBF prays for raising 100,000 Bible teachers and missionaries for the evangelization of all of the major cities and campuses of the world in this generation.

However, the beginning of UBF ministry was like the Lord asking Ezekiel, “Son of man, can these bones live?” For us it was a question, “Can these students live?” Then God inspired the late Dr. Samuel Lee and Sarah Barry with the command he had given to Ezekiel, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’ I will make breath enter them, and they will come to life!”

So the mobilization of students became possible through Bible study. As the dry bones came back to life through the word of God, so college students became alive by receiving God’s life and vision through listening to the word of God. Here are some example stories: When students studied John chapter 2, “Jesus changed water into wine,” they accepted Jesus’ power to change them from tasteless and cheap people into fragrant and valuable persons. When they heard Jesus’ words, “You give them something to eat” in Mark 6:37, they responded, “I am a poor student busy with school work. But I bring to you my five loaves and two fish—my small knowledge of the Bible and hours a week to invite other students to Bible studies.” When they heard the Lord’s command, “Go and make disciples of all nations,” they responded, “We have no passport, and no money to go to other countries. We don’t have seminary certificates. But we will obey to go out if you open the door.” Then they began praying to go out as missionaries. God indeed opened the doors for them to go out to Germany, the USA, and later to all six continents. They went out as nurses, students, doctors, embassy workers, company workers, and businessmen.

Here we see that studying the word of God is an effective way, and maybe the only way, to mobilize lay people for world mission. Certainly there are many mission strategies and programs to mobilize people. But there is nothing that has the power to change and equip people like the word of God. If we teach the Bible faithfully as Ezekiel prophesied toward the dry bones again and again, God will raise lay people back to life to become a vast army of God. These people not only live, but also become Bible teachers who prophesy the word of God to many souls at home, at school, at work, and even in foreign lands.

**How to train lay people?**

Most UBF lay missionaries have successfully settled in the foreign lands they were sent to, planted churches, and raised disciples among the native college students they have served. It is all possible to equip lay people to be evangelists, Bible teachers, disciples-makers and church planters. Here are 8 ways of training lay people that UBF has employed.

1. One to one Bible studies

When a person is invited to UBF, the person begins Bible study in a group or one on one. Usually the person who invited him or her becomes Bible teacher and spiritual mentor (shepherd) of the invited (Bible student). The Bible study continues on a weekly basis following the Bible study questions prepared for each book of the Bible. This requires commitment for both parties. The Bible study and the long standing relationship between the shepherd and the Bible student are the basic elements of nourishment and discipleship in UBF ministries.

Our Bible study method is called inductive Bible study. Bible study questions are made by the committees that are composed of trained staff and theologians through observation, interpretation and application of a Bible passage. Through this method, all members are guided to read the Bible, observing what the author wanted to say. Then they must interpret the passage from the author’s point of view contextually. Then they are to apply the teaching they learn in their life situations.

A chapter’s Sunday message is usually about the Bible passage the chapter members studied during the previous week. So when a Bible student attends Sunday worship service, he or she can deepen the understanding of the Bible passage he or she studied with his or her Bible teacher.

1. Bible reflections (testimony) writings and sharing

Understanding the Bible through Bible study and message hearing is not enough for spiritual nourishment and inner transformation. Inner transformation occurs when a person accepts and obeys the word of God. This internalization of the word of God is lacking in many Christians’ lives and this is why many Christians remain immature even after they have attended the church for a long time.

The Lord said in Mark 4:24, “Consider carefully what you hear.” He also said in Matthew 7:24, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” All UBF members, new and old alike, are encouraged to have a weekly time of personal reflection on the Bible passage they learned through Bible study and Sunday message, writing their reflections. Though writing requires dedicated time, it is an excellent way for thinking of the Bible teaching deeply. Then they can apply it in their personal life. Through Bible reflections and testimonial writings, each member makes personal decisions to obey God’s word (we sometimes call it “a small decision”). All committed UBF members are encouraged to share their reflections (testimonies) at a small group or a chapter meeting weekly. This training for internalizing God’s word is an essential element of discipleship in UBF.

1. Shepherd training

When a Bible student confesses his or her faith in Christ and accepts God’s calling to participate in evangelism and discipleship, he or she is encouraged to become a shepherd for one person or more. Shepherd training begins with going to the college campuses and inviting students to Bible study. Then the shepherd meets with his or her Bible students one-to-one weekly for Bible studies. This is a practice of active evangelism and discipleship. The shepherding requires self-denial, sacrifice, devotion and spiritual battle through prayer. Through this training, committed UBF leaders are trained to be evangelists, missionaries, and disciple-makers.

According to the American educationist Edgar Dale’s theory of Cone of Experience, people learn 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what they say and write, and 90% of what they do as they perform a task. UBF leaders are trained to deeply learn a Bible passage through a series of Bible study (read and discuss), message (hearing), testimony writing (thinking and writing) and sharing (saying), and Bible teaching (doing) over a week.

1. Daily Bread devotion (Quiet Time) training

God trained the Israelites during 40 years in the wilderness to eat Manna daily so that they might learn to depend on God in daily life. All UBF members are encouraged to have morning devotion utilizing Daily Bread devotion booklets which cover the whole Bible in every 5 years. Many members keep early morning devotion for their life time. This training enables lay people to survive spiritually when they are sent to work and serve ministries all by themselves.

1. Messenger training

We teach lay leaders how to write and deliver Bible messages. Most chapters hold annual 2-4 day Easter and Summer Bible conferences, inviting students. All the messages at these Bible conferences are delivered by lay leaders. They prepare messages through a series of Bible study, personal reflection writing, and then writing a draft message and its revisions through guidance from staff. Finally they memorize their messages and practice delivery. In this way, UBF trains lay people until they can write and deliver expository Bible messages independently. This enables them to start a ministry all by themselves when they are sent as missionaries to plant a church.

1. Fellowship (small group) meetings

A UBF chapter is composed of several fellowships (small groups or cell groups). Mature lay leaders work with the chapter leader (pastor and staff) to lead their fellowships and carry out ministries. They weekly meet with the chapter leader to study the Bible passage of the week, report and pray for ministries. Fellowship members are inter-connected through shepherd-Bible student relationships and form a spiritual family in which all members support and encourage one another. Fellowships have weekly meetings for Bible studies and/or Bible reflection (testimony) sharing, student out-reach, prayers, etc. Many UBF members remain after college education, marry spouses who have accepted the same calling, and continue ministry at a campus and at work in their fellowships and the fellowships they newly start.

1. Staff training

Most UBF chapters are run by a lay leader (staff). They are selected from among the fellowship leaders who have shown fruits in campus ministry and spiritual and emotional maturity. Chapters that have grown in size (usually with more than 50 members) raise one or more full-time staff. The staffs are educated through a M. Div. equivalent program tailored to our needs, national and regional staff conferences, and leadership development workshops. Selected full time staffs are given opportunities to study at reputable seminaries.

1. Spirit of giving

Christianity teaches that God gave his one and only Son for sinners. Therefore UBF has taught its members to live by the spirit of giving. UBF lay leaders generously give their time after work or school to ministries. They sacrificially serve their fellowship members and support missionaries materially. UBF lay missionaries went out to Latin America, Africa, CIS and Middle East, giving up their comfortable life in Korea. Many of them have suffered to maintain a tent-making missionary life in countries that are economically poor and insecure. Several missionaries in Africa and Latin America were robbed; a missionary in Honduras, Central America, was shot by robbers on the head but survived.

For the past three decades, Korea UBF sent out one-third of their members as missionaries. This is a rate of missionaries/sending church members four times higher than the Moravian church that sent one of every 12 members as missionaries and is known as the most mission-minded church in Christian history. This spirit of giving sustains UBF to be an instrument of the Lord for carrying out his Great Commission. We pray that we may continue to live the life of giving, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Ac 20:35)

**Conclusions**

Mobilizing laity is a mandate for the churches to carry out the Lord’s Great Commission in these last times. The key to success of lay missions is to train lay people to be evangelists, Bible teachers, disciple-makers, and church planters like the clergy missionaries. This is possible through an absolute faith in the power of God’s Word.

As God raised dry bones to be his vast army through prophesying the Word of God, so we can mobilize lay people by giving them the Word of God. The UBF church and its mission work is a testimony of the power of the ministry of the Word of God. We believe that if each and every church embraces God’s vision and engages in the ministry of the Word and discipleship, beginning with young people, many lay people will come to life and give their lives for the Lord’s Great Commission as a vast army of God.

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