

## Sign Me Up Again!

By

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Time has speedily passed since the first night I stepped into an apostolic church in Herrin, Illinois where Lee Roy and Becky Sherry pastored. I saw immediately our potential in reaching the world through an organization with an impacting, sacrificial global outreach. My first Foreign Missions Service was in a St. Louis conference. I think it was 1967. I was thirteen. I enthusiastically saw in the United Pentecostal Church International an authentic, relentless desire to evangelize the world. "Sign me up," I thought! I wanted to be a member of such an impressive church.

Several decades later, I still feel the same way. Not only does our church continue to hold to the same basic Bible doctrine of salvation, it endeavors to walk and live in holiness, and maintains an aggressive program of reaching the world. We must always sustain our momentum in taking the whole gospel to the whole world by the whole church. We are committed to that vision. Although we have challenges we doggedly keep focus and press toward the goal. This insistent aspiration permeates all we do.

God called me to preach, as a young person, kneeling beside my bed praying one night. I will never forget that occurrence. It was a God-moment. My brother, who often had made fun of my experience, was just a few feet away in the small back bedroom of our humble home. My parents divorced when I was three and my father died when I was ten. Although my mother fought against me being part of the church, she had always taught me to be steadfast in whatever organization I was working. My mother was loyal to her union at the factory where she worked for years. She had great qualities as a citizen of a small town. She infused those in me. It has never crossed my mind to be part of anything else. Mother received the baptism of the Holy Ghost before she passed away.

When the Sherry's left for Australia in 1967, Robert Miller became my pastor. He is tremendously loyal to the UPC and he implanted that in me. He was a shining model of all that a Christian should be. When the Lord called me into ministry, I said, "Sign me up!" I've never looked back.

The horizons afforded me by our great organization are too numerous to mention. I've traversed the globe and have seen multiplied thousands receive the Holy Ghost. I have

seen phenomenal church growth exploding in many nations. Every soul counts! If I had not been part of the organization I shudder to think of where I'd be.

I would live my life of ministry within the UPCI over again. Why? I would have a platform to reach the lost. That is what it is all about. Nothing else matters. It is not about positions, or offices, or salaries. All of those have their place. It is all about souls! This organization has empowered me to go boldly to the ends of the earth. Sure, there are a few hoops to jump through, but those are there to maintain the purity of the ministry and ensure that we are good stewards with our resources. Look at the unlimited possibilities. Better still, lift up your eyes and look at the fields. They are ready for harvest.

I began to give to missions when my pastor and his wife were appointed to go to Australia. I probably even started before that because, as a new convert, there were missionaries that came to our church and instilled in us the desire to fulfill the great commission. I remember driving past the house where Robert and Evangeline Rodenbush's container was under the car port. I was about fourteen. That impacted me. I can think of no matter investment or knowledge than realizing your offerings are reaching lost souls.

One major stimulus in giving to missions is the nearly twenty countries that still need a UPCI work. There are hundreds of people groups in other nations still waiting to receive the truth. There is no greater investment than into the lives of those that we reach and train, who in turn reach others. The dividends are compounded and they are eternal. Pass the missionary offering plate. Send me a partner in missions form. Sign me up again!

While the dean of Christian education at Jackson College of Ministries I went on a mission's trip. You really could not be a part of the First Pentecostal Church pastored by T. L. Craft and not have a love for missions. He is my wife's pastor and now mine. He drilled missions into all that came around him. My trip was to Central America. God called me. I went back to JCM and remember the services where all I could do was sob as I thought of the lost in El Salvador. Wynn and Wanda Drost had done such an extraordinary work there. Revival was flourishing. I longed to join them. Civil war was raging at the time. I met the board in 1978 and was turned down. I pressed on. Paul Leaman called me in the month of February asking me to consider Panama. I told him I would pray. I did, and could not get away from the call to El Salvador. I met the board again for El Salvador and was appointed. I went to language school for ten months, and arrived on the field. I met the negatives of guns, bombs, civil war, and dead people. But more than any of that a call and the UPCI made it possible for me to go and

there were many lost souls anxious to hear the gospel. Why UPCI missions? That is simple. It is the leader in world evangelism when it comes to the Acts 2:38 message; the only scriptural plan of salvation. I only deputized for four and one half months. Those were the days!

The work had sixty-six churches and some preaching points. In twenty years we grew to 300 churches and over 600 preaching points; from seven sections to nine districts with over fifty sections. We had an office with several full time employees, a complete three year Bible School program, two Bible Schools, a day school that my wife founded, a clinic that later developed completely under the ministry of Scotty and Krista Slaydon and Cathy Killoren, and a twenty-four hour radio station. The dream was born in the heart of the missionaries, but after we left, the men carried it on. El Salvador continues to grow. I just received a note from the newly elected superintendent, Ricardo Mendoza and they have started eleven new churches in the last few months. Brother Abelino Pleitez led the church through some rough times, but he did a job like no one else could have done. He was tenacious and firm and has brought the church to a new level.

At the time of the merger, establishing the UPCI we had forty missionaries, five hundred ministers, working among 240 churches in nine nations. Recent annual reports show we have over 891 missionaries, thirty nine-regional missionaries, 17,020 ministers, working in 192 nations among 24,947 churches. We are quickly approaching two million constituents with over 100,000 people being baptized and receiving the Holy Ghost every single year.

We have stepped into a new decade. As I look to the future, I am excited, and envision many things happening. I still advocate an open door policy with our foreign missions endeavors. We are seeking better ways to communicate all the great things that are happening. There is so much still to be done. In an uncertain economy we have the best job security in the entire world. As long as there are souls, there is a work to do. We need every member, pastor, and church to be a part of our team. As for me, sign me up again! What about you?