



# A GENERATION

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## What exactly is a missionary anyway?



I have written this newsletter as though it were a screenplay. I've done it this way to help you see a story that has been unfolding over the past year.

The story will help you understand our thoughts and prayers, the complexity of where we have been, and where we are going. Please, please, read the whole letter and don't stop in the middle. I realize it may be longer than most of our letters but, as you will see, there is a reason...

*[Opening scene - Joe at his computer typing]* I've been in ministry and writing newsletters with the tagline, "A generation in need" for close to twenty years. This past year, the frequency of updates admittedly has not been adequate, and I apologize for that. The reason for fewer updates doesn't mean we've had a lack of stories to share. It doesn't mean we've been any less busy, and it certainly doesn't reflect on the many ways God has blessed our efforts on campus this past year. The reason for fewer updates has more to do with the request for financial support that accompanies each newsletter. I know how strange that must sound. I have been living in this strange place throughout the year... *[Scene fades out]*

*[Scene fades in - Joe visiting a supporting church / talking to a college-aged person]* "Hey I remember you, you're the guy who came and did that reenactment of the Sermon on the Mount, that was really cool. How did you memorize all that?" "Well it took time, but I basically recorded it, put it on iTunes and played it in repeat mode a lot while driving until I had it memorized." "That's a great idea! So



are you going to be speaking today?" "Yes." "Awesome, what are you going to do this time?" "Well, as a missionary of this church, I am going to talk about how I share the gospel with students on campus." The student then replies with a stunning question: "What exactly is a missionary anyway?" *[Scene fades out]*

*[Scene fades in - Joe at his computer typing]* Over the past twenty years, I've seen a real decline in the Church's understanding of missions. While not true for every church, I would say it's true for most churches with a younger population. Twenty years ago, most churches had missions conferences that stretched over several days and evenings, and they were all very well attended. These conferences provided me with encouragement and great exposure for potential support. I remember attending a number of regional and national missionary conferences celebrating those who were "called" to the mission field. Today, I can count on one hand the number of supporting churches who still have a missions conference, and the number of attendees seems to be declining, with fewer young adults in attendance every year. I'm not sure whether people stopped attending, so the churches stopped having them, or if the churches stopped having them for other reasons. But the end result, especially for my younger staff who are beginning to raise their financial support, is that they are facing an audience asking that disturbing question: "What exactly is a missionary anyway?" *[Scene fades out]*

*[Attempting to read your mind]* - So what's that got to do with not sending out frequent updates because of the accompanying request for financial support? You're not making any sense...

*[Scene fades in - Time: a year and a half ago. Setting: Joe at a small table against a window facing the street in a local iconic breakfast spot called The Trolley Stop.]*

Pastor Dave Libby has been the Pastor of the First Congregational Church in North Brookfield for forty-one years; I've had the privilege of knowing him for thirty of those years. Now at seventy-eight years young his breathing is labored if he talks without enough pauses, as his heart is not functioning at full capacity. He stirs his coffee slowly and smiles. I have such great respect for this man and his faithfulness. He has always been an encouragement to me in so many ways. For more than fifteen years the church has supported me as a missionary and catered a huge dinner for students at Worcester State once every month. I have taught at their youth group once a month for just as long. We talk about the usual things. He leans into the table he asks me something he has mentioned many times before, "Have you ever thought about being a pastor?" My quick response is short and the same as always, "No." However... his tone and facial expression add a heightened seriousness to his question. He is planning to retire in the next few months, and he has always thought of me as a possible replacement. While I am honored, I don't feel a call either to a pastorate or away from college ministry. We finish our time with a simple prayer for God's direction and an agreement to hold this matter in prayer. *[Scene fades out]*

*[Scene fades in - Time: Late February last year. Setting: Joe at a small table in a Coffee Shop in Franklin NH]*

Pastor Glen Carter has invited me to speak at a mayor's breakfast in Franklin and after the breakfast we walk over to a neat coffee shop to catch up. Glen is one of those friends who you

only have opportunity to see every few years, but when you do it's as though you see each other every day. I am blessed with many friends like that. As I am about to take a sip from my coffee, Glen kind of smiles and begins the conversation. "So what's next for you? Are you going to do campus ministry into retirement? Or is there something else in store?" Then he asks that question I had not at all planned to discuss... "Have you ever thought about being a pastor?"

*[Scene fades out]*

*[Scene fades in - Joe at his computer typing]* One of Campus Ambassadors' four distinctives which define our core values, is to be "Church Related." This is something I've always taken very seriously. The relationship between our ministry and our supporting churches, to me, is not just a one-way street; it operates in both directions. With this philosophy, I have often helped churches in transition with pulpit supply, youth ministries, and evangelism training. So it was not at all unusual for me to step into the role of preaching on Sundays when Pastor Libby was not able to, and subsequently after his retirement. *(Important side note: this assistance did not take away from our campus ministry and all honorariums went directly into our Missions Door ministry account.)*

*[Scene fades out]*

*[Scene fades in - Back at the Coffee Shop in Franklin NH]* There is that question again... "Have you ever thought about being a pastor?" I am taken aback. I have been speaking at this church most Sundays for over five months, all the while praying and looking for signs of God's direction. I was actually beginning to feel a call toward being a candidate for this position. However... at the same time, I was not feeling called away from the campus ministry in any way. Having

the privilege of speaking and preparing a sermon each week was so cool to me. Over the years increased staff (a good thing) has resulted in decreased opportunities for me to prepare and speak regularly. Now speaking every week I was beginning to realize how much I was truly missing that... So I was jazzed with preaching, falling in love with the congregation, connecting at all age levels, and seeing attendance increase. Ministry was happening! On the other side... On the campus where I do hands-on ministry, the number of students attending our Bible study was increasing. The college started funding an ethnic and diversity focused worship service once a month called "Soul Sunday." My teaching role as an adjunct professor has been expanding with new opportunities to share Jesus with students and faculty. The area I direct is also seeing new staff and greater potential... Ministry is happening!

I was truly in a quandary. I didn't want to tell supporters or staff that I might be leaving, because I did not feel called away from campus. I didn't want to seek and ask for new support if I was going to pursue leading a different ministry. Every month I was thinking I would have an answer by the following month and each month it was just not clear what God was calling me to do. And so there I was in this strange place. All of that was going through my mind when Glen asked that question, "Have you ever thought about being a pastor?" He had no idea all that needed to be unpacked to answer his question, and I had no idea how much I needed to talk with someone about it.

"Well, Glen I am not quite sure how to answer that..." And so, as our coffee got cold and had to be refilled a few more times, I opened up and

shared all of what I was going through and how I was just trying to understand God's will and direction in it all. Our conversation was far more profound than I can put into words but the gist of it was that Glen challenged me with two huge questions. The first one was this: "Can a person like you who loves to share your faith outside the church in the thick of the college culture be happy inside the church?" This question was not new to me; I had been thinking and praying about that a lot. He then said to me, "But I will tell you this: If you are able to do it, the Church desperately needs pastors who have your passion and ability to lead the church outside its walls." That was a statement I needed to ponder more, much more. His second question that set me in a whole new direction was one that I had not yet entertained, and I was surprised I had not been thinking in this direction already. Glen just simply said, "Maybe God is leading you to do both?" *[Scene fades out]*

*[Attempting to read your mind again]*

- I get it. You didn't want to ask for support or give the impression of needing support if you were being called away and at the same time did not want to disrupt things if you ended up not moving forward in the direction of being a pastor. So what are you being called to do?

*[Scene fades in - Time: November Setting: National Area Directors (AD) meeting held in a hotel conference room in Albany NY]* Around the table are all the Area Directors of Campus Ambassadors, people I have worked with for many years and consider much like family. They are people who are the best at what they do and are truly sold out to reach college students both nationally and internationally. The purpose of the meeting is to zero in on specific ways to be even better in the area of evangelism and to come up with new creative ways to help fund our staff and ministries. One new AD at the table is Elizabeth

Cernoia. Before the idea of pastoring a church came into play, she had already been identified as the one I would train to either replace me or, at least, take over part of my area as it grew. She is so gifted and qualified to take on this role that it is truly a joy to think about the possibilities. We are all asked to give a brief update for our areas and I am asked to go first. While some of the people at the table already know, some don't. I take a silent, deep breath and say something like... "First let me start by saying that I am not leaving or going anywhere..." *[Scene fades out]*

*[Scene fades in - Joe at his computer typing]*

And so there were now two questions causing me a great deal of thought and prayer. The first question, "What exactly is a missionary anyway?" and the second, "Have you ever thought about being a Pastor?" The difficulty facing our younger staff with raising their support around many of their peers who don't really grasp the importance and concept of being a missionary, and the increasing cost of doing ministry, is a real problem that threatens the future of all missionary work! It is a problem that deeply burdens me. I have seen so many great staff leave the mission field because they were not able to raise enough support. The second question concerning being a pastor was becoming uncomfortably comfortable the more I stepped into the pulpit on Sunday mornings. So I began looking more into this idea of doing both, and how God may be working.

As I did every month, I reviewed a monthly spreadsheet revealing the status of my support and the needs of my staff. This time, however, I began to envision the amount of my own support that could be freed up if I reduced my hours and were able to redirect those funds to the immediate needs of my staff! And the reality was this: it would enable more staff on more campuses and more hours than

would be possible if I remained full-time. The difference in the amount of funds I need to raise (having a mortgage, a large family, family medical expenses, etc.) compared to the amount needed for a younger staff or student interns was significant. If I were to maintain a part-time position on campus continuing to do ministry, consult other campuses in the area of evangelism and help to raise funds for existing staff, the end result would be greater: I could infuse other staff with the support they need to be on campus more!

I approached the Congregational church, who had unanimously agreed to hold off seeking other candidates until I had an answer, and told them how I thought God was calling me to do both. They were in full agreement. We quickly settled on a thirty-two hour per week position with a full endorsement of me maintaining a flexible part-time role on campus. The last remaining confirmation was a church vote revealing a mandate. *[Scene fades out]*

*[Scene fades in - Time: October 29th Location: First Congregational Church, North Brookfield. Setting: Special business meeting.]* Annie and I were waiting in the church office building while the congregation discussed and voted whether to extend a call to me as their next senior pastor. This had not been done for 42 years, but had been done dating all the way back to its beginnings in the original town of Brookfield in 1665, before the birth of this country. I was humbled at the idea of being called to a position of history, where the gospel has been proclaimed without compromise for over 350 years. We were invited back into the sanctuary to a standing ovation. As the applause continued, I was overwhelmed with everyone's enthusiasm. The vote was unanimous minus one, satisfying my final need of confirmation by having a mandated vote. I was led to the microphone to

say something and I was at a loss for words and just said, "No turning back, let's see where God takes us." Again the congregation applauded, and people formed a line to congratulate us personally. *[Scene fades out]*

*[Scene fades in - Joe at his computer typing]* While I have been able to connect with many of you personally about this new direction and vision, if you are reading about this for the first time I am really sorry. I wanted to connect with each of you personally first. I just had no idea how the closing of the semester, grading papers, and the holidays would slow the process of connecting with you.

Currently we have 19 staff in our area with most needing to raise additional support. One example, and a critical way this new vision could have an impact, is with student interns. Christian students with the potential to be leaders often cannot be involved in ministry on campus because they have a real need to work while going to school. Offering them a part-time position as an intern eliminates their need to work off campus and frees them to be on campus in ministry. Second, it's extremely hard for interns to raise support while going to school and working part-time. Third, the ability for an intern to invite other students to our events and bible studies is far greater than with our older staff who are not students. Fourth, interns are our most valuable pool for recruiting future full-time staff. Combine this with a student who needs less income, without medical and other benefits, and that maximizes the amount of "donations per hour" on campus. With me shifting to part-time, we could fund all of our existing interns to be on campus, in addition to freeing up other staff who currently work part-time outside of ministry because they need more support. Again this would result in more

hours, more staff, and more campuses reaching more students with the Gospel.

I am so grateful for your support to our ministry over the years, and again, I am not leaving, so please continue to support what God is doing in the area and help us keep the momentum going! I am still working out the details of this transition and still plan on connecting with you about how this will look, how I will communicate the way funds are distributed, and most importantly how your investment in the kingdom is bearing His fruit on campus as we continue to reach...

"A Generation in Need."

*[Scene fades out]*

=== JOE ===

## Please help me connect with you.

If you have not already been in contact with me, I'm looking forward to connecting with you. Could you possibly take a moment to email, text or even Facebook message me the best time I could call to answer any questions and/or set up a time to get together? That would be really very helpful to connect with everyone faster. 508-873-2838

[joe@agenerationinneed.com](mailto:joe@agenerationinneed.com).

If you are one of our supporting churches could you let me know when your missions committee meets and if I could either attend in person, or conference into one of your meetings?

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have as well. Again, I am not leaving the campus and still need your support so please don't make a decision to withdraw without us first connecting and having the opportunity to talk more about increasing ministry on campus together!