

Priority 15

Mobilizing a New Generation for Hard Places Through Community & Prayer

By DR. KARA GARRISON

Dr. Kara Garrison spent 12 years facilitating Disciple-Making Movements in SE Asia and holds a Doctorate in Transformational Leadership from Bakke Graduate University. She currently serves with Cornerstone International, a mission sending organization (www.cornerstoneinternational.org) and also volunteers with Priority15 (www.priority15.org) and Perspectives (www.perspectives.org).

I didn't expect to be "wowed" when I entered the Priority 15 (P15) Conference this past spring. I was curious, however, and my curiosity led me to interview several participants. The gathering boasted more than 200 young professionals, many of whom were Perspectives alumni. What I discovered was a culture of community and purpose that was strangely similar to the culture my husband and I experienced when we visited the awakening at Asbury University a week earlier.

P15 is a mobilizing entity. Its name comes from Paul's Romans 15 commitment to relay the Gospel to those who have never seen nor heard (Romans 15:21). It exists to motivate, encourage, and collaborate with like-minded individuals committed to the last of the unreached and unengaged peoples of the world.

The P15 community gathers in three ways: an annual conference, weekly prayer groups, and goer cohort groups that meet bi-monthly. The conference is a missional on-ramp for young professionals (in training or in the marketplace) wanting to explore living, serving, and multiplying disciples in strategic restricted-access areas.

The Formation

P15 is the dream-child of a small group of physicians and residency administrators who recognized a different mobilization strategy was required for the aspiring global workers they were mentoring. The typical "go into missions somewhere" approach "was not inspiring prayer or actual going" co-founder J explained.

Co-founder T said, "Several of us who had developed friendships and collaborative relationships began talking in 2013, 'Wouldn't it be cool if we could get our students together for a weekend to help them collaborate and encourage each other?'" J expressed a hope for their mentees to consider forming teams to go to one of the prioritized hard to reach places.

What I discovered was a culture of community and purpose that was strangely similar to the culture my husband and I experienced when we visited the awakening at Asbury University a week earlier.

They expected 20–30 medical students to attend the first gathering. "We didn't advertise, but relied on word-of-mouth, and 120 missional trainees and faculty showed up from eight US cities," T recalls, still incredulous. He continued, "We didn't know much about the unreached people groups we adopted, but we kept researching, praying, and casting vision. People groups were adopted, missional trainees started language classes, and eventually became goers to closed countries."

Consultant and keynote speaker, Nathan J'Diim, provided an outsider's glimpse of his early days with P15 Organization. "I'm an unlikely guest at the P15 Conference," he began. Grinning, he shared his first exchange with P15 administrator, J:

“The first time I was invited to speak, I wrote back, ‘I’m not your guy.’ I let him know that I am only interested in groups willing to focus on skills that lead to movement!”

J wrote back, “That is what we want P15 to be.”

J’Diim confessed, “This gathering has become a very attractive place for me.”

Shared belief in God’s worthiness to be worshiped by all the world’s people groups was evident among several conference attendees.

Community

Whether I spoke to attendees of the P15 conference formally to interview or informally in a prayer group or during a coffee break, the sense of community was evident. Four impressions that most struck me were a sense of horizontal relationships, shared purpose, belonging, and shared risk.

Sense of horizontal relationships

There was no dominant voice for the conference; leadership was shared. There were no flashy musicians. Both men and women spoke from the stage and in the breakout sessions. Young parents attended the sessions sitting in the back with their children playing around them. Multiple ages and ethnicities were present.

Sense of shared purpose

Shared belief in God’s worthiness to be worshiped by all the world’s people groups was evident among several conference attendees. One pregnant mother, who was preparing her family for an overseas move excitedly explained, “When I’m here, I know I’m with people who believe Jesus is WORTH it!!!”

Sense of belonging

S explained that he and his wife appreciate being with “people who talk our talk. We need people who think our passions are ‘not crazy.’” Indeed, on three occasions, I heard different individuals express that the conference was “a place where people don’t think I’m crazy!”

R, who is preparing to go to one of the 15 prioritized places, shared, “It’s always encouraging to be with like-minded people, because it can feel kind of isolating when you are pursuing this alone, but we are united in purpose.”

Sense of shared risk

Rick Donlon, a missional physician, led two break-out sessions titled, *Suffering and Missions: Counted the Cost?* I attended the second session along with at least 40 others. When the facilitator asked, “Why should good people expect suffering?” a young woman several rows behind me shouted, “Because we serve a suffering Savior!”

There was hushed reverence over the room. I was reminded of a young mother I had spoken with earlier in the day who said, “I look around and I see beauty in a room full of people willing to go and possibly not come back... people here don’t just talk the talk.”

Teasing out organizational culture

After the conference, I followed up with future goers, mobilizers, and prayer warriors to gain further understanding of the P15 culture.

The topic that came up most frequently was prayer. This sparked my interest: How was prayer commitment sustainable beyond the conference itself? Mission mobilizer Ryan Shaw explains attendees of globally focused gatherings typically return home only to be deflated. “Their vision for the nations is dulled because there is no ongoing mission fuel at the local-ministry level.”¹

P15 leaders avoid this problem by inviting attendees to be involved in a weekly prayer group. P and her husband have been in one for more than two years. “We have been involved in churches but...involvement in the unreached wasn’t even on their radar,” she shared. The P15 prayer groups keep potential goers’ visions from dulling.

On the P15 website, two types of prayer groups are described:

Priority15 Prayer Teams meet virtually once a week for 30 minutes to pray the Scriptures over the P15 unreached regions of the earth.

Priority15 Goer Cohorts are for those focused on leaving their homeland as long-term career goers to the unreached within the next five years. We are all active on a weekly Priority15 Prayer Team and we meet virtually every two months.²

1 Ryan Shaw, “Developing Mission Mobilization Movements in Local Ministries,” *Mission Frontiers*, Nov/Dec 2022, 9.

2 <https://priority15.org/partner>

So, what is P15 doing right?

When I asked conference attendees what they perceived as pillars of P15, responses always emphasized prayer and/or a faithful, like-minded community. P offered three: “I think ordinary people investing time in prayer; praying for God’s glory to be made known where it is not yet known; and believing that interceding for the nations changes history.”

A and his wife are both in a prayer group and Goer Cohort. A and M say, “Prayer is a priority for us and praying through Scripture regularly with others for unreached people certainly is in line with what we feel God made us for.” A second priority is “meeting regularly with others who also believe Jesus is worth everything, including moving to difficult places and even suffering to make disciples.”

S, a preparing goer, explained, “P15 has a solid foundation because they seek to be a prayer movement more than being a people movement.” He enthusiastically shares, “In Luke 10:2, Jesus says the harvest is plentiful but workers are few, and praying is the answer to that problem! Our tendency is to start making things happen, but *praying* is to be our first

response!” Smiling, he adds, “Although many of those prayers conclude with us asking, ‘*What if we are the answer to our own prayers?!*’”

A writes, “Since we were still in the U.S., I felt I needed fellowship and encouragement to continue focusing on unreached people and preparing to go.” M also expresses gratitude for their praying community and the relationships that are built through shared prayers and goal setting for Scripture memory. “Without prayer, strongholds cannot be broken. We pray for breakthroughs, laborers to be sent, and current laborer requests. These groups are so worth it.”

In Summary

M summarizes the emerging culture I found within P15 best, “We all have this innate desire to be a part of a grand adventure, this bigger story that God is writing, and we recognize that ‘missions as usual’ isn’t going to get us to these remaining people groups. Prayer is the strategy, and any of us going is just a bonus.” Prayer and consistent community with others who believe Jesus is worth everything are the distinguishing values of the P15 culture. I didn’t expect it, but I was wowed by a new generation of passionate followers of Jesus. 📖

ISFM

International Society for Frontier Missiology

2023

Formation for the Frontier

The intersection of education and mission produces a maze of models and practices.

This year’s EMS/ISFM conference will offer different perspectives from the academy, the church and the field practitioner.

The ISFM track of presentations will focus particularly on the formative principles, structures, and curricula required for effective service in frontier contexts.

Plenary Speaker:

Dr. Paul Cornelius, President, William Carey Int’l University

“Rescuing the Mind from Academics:

A South Asian Perspective on Education for Contemporary Engagement”

October 13–14, 2023 • New location: Dallas Theological Seminary



Educating for contemporary mission

Conference details at www.emsweb.org • Online or in person • Registration is open