



PARTNERS

International

A SHORT HISTORY OF PARTNERS INTERNATIONAL

Partners International was born when Dr. N.A. Jepson, lay leader and a founder of the Christian Business Men's Committee, called together four businessmen and a missionary to China. Meeting in Dr. Jepson's living room in Seattle in 1943, they agreed that if China was to be reached with the Gospel, the work would have to be done by Chinese Christians.

At the time, the idea was remarkable: that indigenous believers could be entrusted with the resources to do God's work. The first partnership was with a gifted Chinese evangelist, Calvin Chao, and his "preaching bands" that took the Gospel into China's interior. Since then, that one extraordinary partnership has led to hundreds of partnerships in more than 50 countries.

1943 – 1950

Duncan McRoberts, a Scotsman and missionary to China, saw how effective teams of "native" evangelists were in their work and witness. At that time, Duncan was courting a missionary's daughter, Winnie Savage. Her parents, Fred and Geraldine Savage of England, were living and working for a commercial company in Shanghai. Being self-supporting, they were able to pass on the support funds they received from England to Chinese church workers.

Calvin Chao, one of China's foremost young evangelical leaders, was forced westward in China by the invading Japanese army. The Savage family was put into an internment camp near Shanghai. Duncan and Winnie McRoberts went to North America in 1942 to tell of events in China. Duncan's stirring reports moved many, including Cephias Ramquist. He put McRoberts in touch with Dr. Jepson, who instantly responded to the challenge that national workers, if given the funding, were the best persons to reach China's millions.

In God's plan, Krist Gudnason, Cecil Kettle, Einer Anderson, and Charlie Cooper were in Seattle on business at that time. Dr. Jepson called them together to meet with McRoberts. This led to the start of Partners International, founded originally as the China Native Evangelistic Crusade (CNEC). They sent a cablegram to Calvin Chao saying that God had led them to form CNEC for partnering with a Chinese evangelistic movement and asked Chao if he would prayerfully consider leading such a ministry in China.

To Calvin, it was God's answer to prayer. He and his co-workers had been praying for the Lord to somehow provide the resources for them to evangelize their own people.

Cecil Ramquist described Dr. Jepson as follows:

"Dr. Jepson, fondly known as Doc, was a man of deep faith and knowledge of the Bible with a great love for souls. He had a private practice as a chiropractor and was also appointed chiropractor for the fire department and the police department of Seattle. His qualities contributed to making Partners International what it is today.

First was his devotion to the Lord. Second, he was an energetic innovator, a profile of vision. Third, he was teachable."

In his book, While China Bleeds, Duncan McRoberts (employed as Field Director of the embryonic organization) described the philosophy and ministry of CNEC:

First there is the foreign missionary like those who carried the Gospel from Rome to the British Isles. Then when the church is strong enough, the native Christians carry the Gospel to their own native fellows. Natives understand the mind of their own people; they have a thorough knowledge of their background, are familiar with their manner of reasoning. Thus the native can easily win the confidence of his fellow and plainly present the message of Salvation. The native has no need to acquire the ability to live under the new conditions.

By February 1945, there were 22 national workers and 22 students in training. It was agreed to sponsor a conference of college students from 40 Chinese universities in April 1945. Many Chinese Christian student groups around the world today can trace their roots to the movement birthed by this conference. By 1949, under the leadership of Calvin Chao and Chang Hsue Kang (Paul Chang's father), there were 150 evangelists, two Bible colleges, and a seminary.

1950 - 1960

The office was in Dr. Jepson's office in Seattle where his nurse took care of the mission's details until the work became too time-consuming. Then CNEC rented a small office and Dr. Jepson's daughter, Bonnie, took over. Later, as the work expanded, another daughter, Ruth, was hired part-time. When Dr. Jepson passed away, Board Member Cecil Kettle took over the leadership of the mission, providing much needed continuity after the death of Dr. Jepson in 1951. The office was moved to Menlo Park, California, and later to San Jose.

By 1949 it was clear that there were drastic changes in China with the Communist takeover. If the work was to survive it had to expand beyond mainland China. The ministry extended throughout Southeast Asia so the name of the organization was changed to Chinese Native Evangelistic Crusade. Fred Savage, who had spent 40 years in China, handled the field administration from an office in Hong Kong.

1960-1987

In March 1960, Mr. Kettle recommended that the mission consider a paid, full-time director. Allen Finley was hired from his position as west coast director of International Students.

At this time the name was again changed. It became Christian Nationals Evangelism Commission (still abbreviated CNEC), reflecting a global outreach into other regions of Asia and to Africa, Latin America, and Europe. Also, a major philosophical shift was taking place as it became evident that national leaders in many countries were able to take on leadership. The primary role of Partners International was to respond to the initiatives of national leaders.

Sister councils developed in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The heart of CNEC was to model "the sharing of resources with good results," without extending its structure to the ministries it assisted. In 1985, CNEC changed its name to Partners International. Annual income grew from about \$80,000 in 1960 to over \$5 million when Finley resigned in 1987.

1987 - 1999

During this period, leaders supported by CNEC/PI became recognized leaders in their regions and the visibility of Partners International increased.

In 1987, Luis Bush, an Argentinean, former pastor of a large church in Central America, and Latin America coordinator for Partners, became president. Under his leadership, Partners gained exposure at international conferences such as GCOWE (Global Consultation on World Evangelization) and Lausanne II (Manila 1989), as well as being a strong backer of COMIBAM (Latin American Missions Conference and movement). When God led Luis to lead the AD 2000 Movement in 1991, he was succeeded by board member Chuck Bennett, formerly of Mission Aviation Fellowship and Food for the Hungry. In 1996, Partners International was helping to sponsor 3,300 workers in 52 countries.

1999 - Present

Partners International began a program of organizational change in 1999 with the appointment of Paul-Gordon Chandler as President/CEO. The board of directors instructed staff to re-examine the purpose and place of Partners International in the global missions movement.

The most immediate outcome of that re-examination was the adoption of a new mission statement: "Partners International is a global ministry that works to create and grow communities of Christian witness in partnership with God's people in the least Christian regions of the world."

That statement made four fundamental changes to Partners International's mission:

1. It specifically highlighted a *greater focus on the end result* of our partnerships ("communities of Christian witness").
2. It geographically focused our ministry on *the least Christian regions of the world* which, briefly stated, are those places where another religion has a majority of adherents.
3. It emphasized the *proactive nature of our work* ("works to create and grow"), calling us to move from a primary focus on financial assistance to a greater focus on developing a partner's full potential through deeper and broader levels of involvement.
4. It purposely used the phrase "in partnership with God's people" to mean *all God's people wherever they are located*, be it in the Southern or Northern hemispheres.

Chandler received a call to pastoral ministry in Egypt in 2003, and his successor, Jon Lewis of Mission Aviation Fellowship, received the board's mandate to build on the changes. Lewis has initiated a wide-ranging discussion about the nature of mission partnership in the 21st century, the external realities affecting partnership, and its biblical basis. As these discussions progress, Partners International remains faithful to our core ethos: the empowering of locally led ministries to carry out God's work in culturally appropriate ways in partnerships of mutual trust.