

Texas Ministry Has New Goals After Rocky Leadership Transition

Mission Possible, founded 25 years ago by Ralph Mann, is now led by Mark Krantz

A charismatic missions organization that was formed 25 years ago to smuggle Bibles behind the former Iron Curtain is heading in a new direction after completing a difficult leadership transition.

Mission Possible, based in Denton, Texas, maintains half a dozen field offices in Eastern Europe. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the ministry has shifted its efforts to church planting, humanitarian aid programs and literature distribution. Mission Possible also began sending short-term mission teams overseas last May.

But change has not been easy for the ministry. Things got especially difficult last year when founder Ralph Mann, 62, abruptly resigned from the ministry's board after clashing with the new president, Mark Krantz, 45, who joined the board in 1998 and was Mann's handpicked successor.

Mann told Charisma that he resigned from the board 11 months after he departed as chief executive officer. "I felt I had done my job," he said. "My skills are those of a visionary. They needed someone who was a strong administrator and could raise money. I felt the organization would do better if someone young could develop a new donor base."

But two former employees of the mission, including Mann's son, Jim, claim that Ralph Mann was forced out of his post. Jim Mann quit as director of the group's International Educational Fellowship (IEF) last October after he witnessed obvious signs of disagreement between his father and Krantz. Jim Mann said his father was demoted to a lesser position, which led to his resignation.

"It was very disappointing to see how my dad was being disrespected," said Jim Mann, who pastors an independent charismatic church in the Dallas area. "Going to work every day was a test of character, not to blow just do my job."

Krantz acknowledges demoting Ralph Mann, but he said he took that action after Jim Mann discussed a significant change in the ministry with an employee without informing Krantz first. Meanwhile, tensions grew between Krantz and Ralph Mann over new ministry initiatives, including acquisition of a ministry center in Bulgaria.

And after taking office, Krantz discovered that the ministry's income had spiraled downward in the months prior to his assuming leadership. Tax returns show total revenue had plunged from approximately \$974,000 in fiscal 1997 to \$596,000 a year later.

Krantz also learned that the organization's mailing list totaled a little more than 1,300 names and only 580 donors. Today Mission Possible's mailing list numbers 6,500, with a donor base of 1,370. Its revenue for the

latest fiscal year was nearly \$658,000.

But Jim Mann attributed the income decline to increased

competition among nonprofits and the completion of an intensive mission-sending program. Revenues peaked during that missions effort, but much of those funds passed through ministry coffers and were used to support missionaries on the field, he said.

"There were some lean years, which is why [Krantz] was brought in," Jim Mann said.

Krantz told Charisma he understands Ralph Mann's difficulty in leaving a ministry after 24 years at the helm. "But I never expected this," Krantz said. "I've taken an immense amount of grief the last year and a half."

Three board members contacted by Charisma all support Krantz. "I can say with all assurance that [Krantz] is the right person," said Jan Birkemeier, an eight-year member. "We're at a time of transition. Mark is an excellent leader."

Birkemeier backed Krantz's contention that Ralph Mann was not forced out, and said Mann flamboyantly resigned before walking out of last November's meeting. Although Birkemeier respects the founder for his accomplishments, she said meetings run much smoother now.

"Personally, I feel very comfortable with [Krantz's] ability and commitment to excellence," said corporate officer Harry Schmidt, who also is president of Christian Life College near Chicago. Schmidt has served on Mission Possible's board for 10 years.

Added Schmidt: "I sense [Krantz] has the integrity and is walking with appropriateness to the call he's been given."

More changes are ahead for the ministry. The group also has appointed a new vice president, Ignat Ivanov, who is stationed in Finland. And Krantz said the ministry may relocate its headquarters closer to Dallas.

“This is God’s ministry,” Krantz told Charisma. “It is not Mark Krantz’s ministry. It wasn’t Ralph Mann’s ministry to begin with.”