

How a Single Vision Led to 7,000 Churches Springing Up Around the Globe

In 1980, at age 59, Dois Rosser Jr. sat at his kitchen table, staring at two columns he had drawn on a piece of paper. One was labeled “Kingdom Business”; the other, “Secular Business.”

For years, Rosser had wanted to involve himself in ministry, but he didn’t know how. The founder of POMOCO Auto Group in Virginia and a successful real estate developer, all Rosser knew was business and his love for the Lord. How could he cross the barrier between the secular and the sacred and follow the call on his heart?

Then the answer came: There was no barrier. God reminded Rosser that everything is the Lord’s—including the talents that had made him successful in business.

The only question now was, how could Rosser use his business skills to take the gospel into the developing world—where few knew Jesus?

Rosser had served on the boards of Leighton Ford Ministries and Prison Fellowship and had even been an adviser to the 1974 Lausanne Conference on World Evangelism. These roles gave him a glimpse into a troubling reality: In spite of centuries of foreign missionary evangelism, Christianity was still struggling to flourish in places like China, India and Vietnam. Believers in some of these areas were being persecuted into obscurity, falling into nominalism or being led astray by false teachings. Vital work had been done to make converts in these nations. Now, to sustain their faith, they needed to be molded into disciples.

But how? The obstacles were daunting. Few to no Bible schools

or Bible curricula existed in these countries. Pastors themselves often had the barest theological training. And seminaries were utterly useless in places where people were illiterate and too poor to attend.

Rosser stumbled upon an answer to these challenges when he encountered the biblical teaching of Virginia pastor Dick Woodward at a men's prayer breakfast. Written at a grade-school level, Woodward's teaching—called the Mini Bible College (MBC)—explained every Scripture in the clearest and most applicable terms Rosser had ever heard. Suddenly, Rosser had a vision. He would find a way to translate MBC into various languages, produce it in audio and then broadcast it in areas where devotional Bible study resources did not exist. To do this, Rosser used his own business earnings to start a nonprofit, which he named International Cooperating Ministries (ICM).

In the beginning, Rosser chose to focus his efforts on India, a nation where a reported 600,000 villages were still waiting to hear the gospel. Through an indigenous partnership, MBC was translated into Hindi and began going out over radio. Soon after this, Rosser traveled to India and discovered another troubling reality: many Christians were worshipping in shacks or under trees. Local Hindus openly mocked these believers, claiming that their God was powerless to provide for their needs. Rosser then saw how a permanent church building—coupled with the sound biblical teaching of MBC—could change local views of God's grace and, thus, transform a nation.

"I began to have a vision that freed me from the paralysis that can come in the face of overwhelming need," he wrote. "I saw that, huge as India was, this was how whole nations could be changed—person by person, community by community, state by state."

Rosser returned to the U.S. and began using ICM to fund the construction of churches in India. Employing business concepts

like leverage and ROI, he decided to form a true partnership with in-country church-growth leaders who were already well-established and engaged in evangelism. These leaders would identify believers in need, oversee the construction of churches and the distribution of MBC in the field and report on local impact. The individual congregations would provide the land, labor and building permits for each church—supplying half or more of the project's value. Rosser would then match them with donor funds to complete the construction. Once the church was dedicated, members would commit to planting more congregations.

It sounded like an amazing idea, but would it work? No other Christian charity had successfully formed such a partnership with in-country leaders. There were language barriers. Cultural barriers. And a distance of several thousand miles. Some said outright that Rosser's proposal wouldn't work.

But it did. It worked so well, even Rosser was amazed. Within just a few years, ICM's operations had expanded into Cuba, Colombia, Vietnam, Tanzania, Cambodia and more. While his peers roamed the manicured golf courses he had built as a developer, 65-year-old Rosser traveled the steaming back alleys of the world's poorest neighborhoods—sometimes going by foot, boat, motorcycle, helicopter, elephant and rickshaw—to meet with an increasing number of partners struggling feverishly to bring salvation to their communities.

After centuries of the American church's focus on single-missionary evangelism, the Good News was finally getting into places it had never been before through ICM's strategy of equipping the nationals for local ministry.

Today, Rosser is 96, and ICM is celebrating the start of its 7,000th project this month—rebuilding a church in Laos that was burned to the ground in an act of persecution. The nonprofit now has churches, as well as Christian schools, orphanages and pastoral training centers, in 86 countries. Its

MBC curriculum has been translated into 43 languages. The believers the ministry has aided have gone on to plant another 33,000 congregations around the world.

Yet, historically, ICM has maintained a small, staff of fewer than 50 employees. The ministry's impact is, instead, leveraged through more than 200 indigenous partnerships.

"It truly is a miracle to see what God is doing through this ministry," says Janice Rosser Allen, ICM's Executive Chair & CEO. "When my father first founded ICM over 30 years ago, we were building one or two churches per year. This year alone, we anticipate starting the construction of 800 churches. Today, God is opening up extraordinary opportunities to expand the distribution of MBC into remote corners of the world using cutting-edge technology. God is using ICM to take the Good News of Jesus Christ into places we cannot name publicly because of the persecution risks to our partners in the field. And yet in these same areas, people are coming to Christ in untold numbers, and the church is growing exponentially. The story of ICM is evidence of the powerful way God is at work in the world today."

ICM plans on celebrating more milestones in the future. It is working toward a goal of building 10,000 churches and discipling a million believers by 2020.