

Amish Mennonite Aid

Amish Mennonite Aid, or AMA, is the NGO of the Beachy Amish-Mennonite fellowship of churches. As were many other NGO organizations, AMA was born out of the need for relief work in Germany after WWII. Generally, AMA is focused on providing physical and spiritual relief and needs. **It's focus is mostly on Modernization Theory as well as Equal Access** and rarely moves into a Dependency or Globalization perspective.

AMA was born out of the vision of Joe and Salome Roth who were serving in Germany under the Conservative Mennonite Mission Board in 1955. Brother Roth wanted to form a Beachy organization that would be able to minister to the needs of others through spiritual and physical substance. On October 6, 1955, fifteen ministers congregated at the Kempsville Amish Mennonite Fellowship in Virginia Beach to discuss tentative formation plans. Four weeks later 31 ministers reported to the Weavertown Amish Mennonite Church in Lancaster, PA to begin formation of the organization. The organization's **objective was decided to be, "dedicated to the rendering of material, moral, and spiritual aid in the name of Christ, to destitute and needy people."**

The first mission work became a continuation of the Roth's labor in Germany. Because of the incredible success of the relief efforts to Germany after WWII, the popular ideology of development was the **Modernization Theory**. The first goal of AMA is to provide for the spiritual needs of the objects of their witnessing. In this sense AMA views them as having a lack of spiritual grounds. They also provide for material needs so that the spiritual aid may be more accepted since the concern of physical needs won't be as nagging.

Once the work in Germany and West Berlin was established, AMA was looking for more opportunities to serve abroad. After Hurricane Hattie in 1961, Belize was left in shambles. AMA responded by sending relief and workers to help rebuild Belize. However, the government would not allow the workers to lead out in any spiritual activity or to try to proselytize the people. The people who were helped by AMA wondered why they didn't evangelize more. Since AMA workers could not, they encouraged the locals to organize and arrange the setting for Bible discussions and spiritual activity. In this way AMA was ahead of its time, **establishing a "Third Generation"** model according to **Korten's** outline. By doing this, AMA prompted the locals to take action themselves to serve their own (spiritual) needs while AMA workers merely facilitated the spiritual discussions.

However, this was short lived as the government eventually became more hospitable to the Beachys and their desire to spread their faith. **They moved back to a "First Generation" model** in which AMA provided for needs, both spiritual and physical. A hospital, clinic, school, and several churches were built to provide for these needs, and American bishops and ministers were installed into the positions at the churches to witness to the Belizean people.

As a generation passed and the workers at the church came into a "Second Generation," training was offered to the Belizeans at the church. The first local to be ordained was Gilbert Stevens as lay-preacher, and he was ordained in 1975. After him Hughdelle Ysaguirre was ordained minister and is currently serving as bishop of Pilgrim Fellowship. Presently the entire leadership in the church is made up of local converts, a church of 64 members mostly of native Belizean descent. Currently this particular church, the earliest of all churches in Belize, is mostly independent from missionary activity and would be considered

by **Korten** to be in the “**Fourth Generation**” because **the role of the change agent is to facilitate social and spiritual connections** between this church and other churches and also between individual church members.

As the Berlin Wall was being built and East Germany began to crack down on escapees, AMA felt that it was no longer needed since there was no longer a demand for aid coming from refugees of East Germany. Work did eventually cease in Germany in 1977. **Because AMA was focused on a Modernization Theory, they could no longer be useful since there weren't any needs for which to provide.** Therefore, they looked elsewhere to fulfill their Modernization Theory perspective. The main focus of what to provide shifted from primarily physical needs to primarily spiritual needs. However, they still held to the latter strongly.

In 1961 AMA moved into El Salvador with the mission of providing agricultural development techniques. It was under the ICR (Instituto de Colonizacion Rural) which did not permit evangelism. Because of this, AMA adopted a **dependency theory** view in which they viewed the limitations of spreading the Gospel as a result of their dependency on the ICR organization. Once they were able to establish themselves free from the ICR and move their work off of ICR property, they were able to accomplish their goals of providing spiritual and skillful training to the locals, a “**Second generation**” standing according to Korten.

Other projects have been started in northern Ontario, Belgium, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Ireland, Kenya, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Romania, Ukraine, and, most recently, Liberia. Generally a Modernization Theory is used in the approach to third world countries. The development work typically emphasizes spiritual awareness and evangelizing. **Many**

churches are in either a first or second generation stage since they are still all relatively new.

There is also a local mission in the U.S. under AMA that provides a different sort of development. Faith Mission Home was established in 1965 in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. The Home provides 24/7 care for mentally handicapped children, and its mission is to develop the children physically, mentally, and spiritually. Because of the nature of the subjects with whom the staff deals, the focus of **the mission is Equal Access** oriented. The children would normally not have access to the care and education that a normal child would receive, so the mission's goal is to provide access to these resources that enhance the child's aforementioned three-fold wellbeing. Since the mission will never be operated by the residents, **there is a need for constant VS workers to provide the "goods" thereby putting the mission into a lingering "First Generation" mold.**

Now the AMA is approaching its 50th year of existence, much reflection is occurring; has it been successful and achieved its original goal? Many would say that, yes, AMA has fulfilled its mission statement: to be "dedicated to the rendering of material, moral, and spiritual aid in the name of Christ, to destitute and needy people." While this goal does reflect a maturing mission where the recipients of the mission work can handle their own and do the missionary's work without AMA's direct assistance, this is the direction many of the churches and missions are headed. AMA has achieved its mission of providing for the needs of others and even more.

Works Cited

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