

Can You Stay Relevant in a Rapidly Changing World? Continuous Reinvention Is the Key, Says HCJB Global

From one powerful broadcast site to hundreds of radio and healthcare partnerships:

Former and current College Church missionaries illustrate the adjustments involved

“You can go faster if you run alone,” says Theo Asare, an HCJB Global partner in Ghana. “But you will go farther if you run with others.” His words sum up how a legacy ministry, instead of living *in* the past, has embraced building *on* it, evolving through lifecycles of ministry:

Stage 1: way out in front, but running alone

Radio broadcasting had just begun in the U.S. at the beginning of the 1920s. Initially many Christians regarded it a “tool of the devil,” but others such as evangelist Paul Rader of Chicago Gospel Tabernacle embraced the new technology to spread the gospel, participating in the first radio broadcasts in Chicago in 1922. Rader tapped Clarence W. Jones, one of his young pastors and the music director, to lead this effort. By 1926, the “Tab” was airing gospel programming 14 hours every Sunday on radio station WBBM, plus morning programs on 26 CBS affiliates nationwide.

It was, however, at the Tab’s campground in Michigan (now Maranatha Bible and Missionary Conference Center) that Clarence and his wife Katherine heard God’s calling in 1927 to take radio into the missionary sphere. At about the same time, Christian and Missionary Alliance missionary Reuben Larson, who was pioneering in Ecuador’s rainforest lowlands, was captivated by the new medium’s evangelistic potential. But his wife, Grace, *according to their daughter Peggy (Carlson, a College Church member)* considered his fascination unrealistic.

The following year, Clarence Jones traveled to Venezuela, Colombia, Panama and Cuba, seeking permission to start an evangelical radio station. None was granted. But in 1929 and '30, when the discouraged Joneses met up with the furloughing Larsons, it all came together. Reuben, whose services in the rainforest had won him government approval, committed to join in Clarence’s endeavor. Back in Ecuador, he helped steer the broadcasting application through government channels. By August 1930 they had a license for the country’s first radio station!

But by then—near the height of the Great Depression—funds were difficult to raise. The radio application had called for a state-of-the-art 5,000-watt commercial transmitter, but Jones settled for what he could afford, a 200-watt transmitter that Eric Williams—who resigned from WBBM to become the mission’s first engineer—designed and built in his garage. In September 1931 Clarence, the Williams family and the radio equipment departed from Chicago for Quito. Radio Station HCJB’s first broadcast was made on Christmas Day 1931 to the six radio receivers known to exist in the country.

Missionary radio was born!

Broadcasts from Quito reached far beyond what radio experts thought possible at that time. RCA medium-wave transmitter was added in 1936 followed by a 1,000-watt unit in 1937, and on Easter Day, 1940, a 10,000-watt transmitter went on the air, enabling the broadcasts to reach around the world. (Unlike other radio waves, certain short- or high-frequency waves bounce between the earth and the ionosphere, allowing them to beam around the earth's curvature.) And Quito's centralized location along the equator proved ideal for reaching the lost worldwide via shortwave.

College Church sent Clayton and Helen Howard as its first HCJB missionaries in 1941. Clayton had been born in China where his biologist father had been hired to combat a silk worm scourge. Clayton's father was next hired onto the Wheaton College faculty to launch its biology major. They moved to Wheaton when Clayton was nine. But the next year his father was killed in an accident, and College Church Pastor Evan Welsh pitched in to serve as Clayton's surrogate father. Howard majored in physics at Wheaton College, and although he became acquainted with fellow student Helen Prestidge, they didn't date. After Clayton took an additional year of physics at the University of Chicago, he applied to HCJB, then just ten years old. Pastor Welsh saw to it that Helen was part of the group that saw Clayton off in 1941. The pastor's matchmaking instincts were sound. One year later, Helen joined the mission and traveled to Quito, where she and Clayton were married.

The engineering staff Howard joined not only kept a rapidly growing Radio Station HCJB on the air but also contributed technically to radio during its early development and "golden age."

To keep missionaries in Ecuador in touch with their kin back home, Howard developed an on-air forum over which they could make contact. It worked much like the party-line telephones once widespread in rural areas. This became a hit with DXers. (DX is the ham radio code for "distance"; DXers are those whose hobby is listening to distant radio stations.) The weekly DX Party Line first aired in 1961. It informed of DX developments, shared frequency listings (called loggings) plus "Tips for Real Living," a gospel-sharing segment. The program became "hugely popular worldwide among radio aficionados." For more than two decades Clayton and Helen hosted this program, which continued until its fiftieth anniversary just two years ago.

The Howards took their home leaves in Wheaton (with Clayton teaching in the Wheaton College physics lab), and two of their three children became College Church missionaries. Ruth Leaf has completed a missionary career in Japan with her husband Ray, and is currently a member of the Board of Missions. Chuck remains with HCJB in Ecuador. The senior Howards retired in 1984, and went to be with the Lord in 2010 and '11.

Radio Station HCJB began with programming in Spanish and English. In 1941, it added Quichua (the language of the Incas), Russian (produced by Peter Deyneka Sr. and the Slavic Gospel Association), and Swedish-language broadcasts. By 1945, the station was broadcasting in 14 major languages.

In 1955 Mel and Marj Whitaker were added as College Church-supported missionaries of HCJB. Mel served with the Bible Institute of the Air, which offered Bible training in Spanish via radio programs and correspondence courses. Thousands of students throughout Latin America took the courses. The impact of the BIA programs on the growth of the Latin American church was profound. Unknown to HCJB, churches in Cuba were copying and distributing BIA course materials, with students listening, doing their studies and turning in their completed work to their local pastor to be graded. Many prisoners in the region also came to know Christ and were disciplined through course work and correspondence. Many of these changed men have since become leaders in the church. The Whitakers retired in 1986; they have since departed to their heavenly home.

During the era that straddled World War II and the subsequent “cold war,” support was high for beaming the gospel message into “closed” communist-ruled countries. *College Church members Joyce Peterson/Patterson and her former husband Dwight did many volunteer trips for projects, such as building a nurses residence at Shell, and served as mission representatives.*

HCJB began designing, building and adding high-powered transmitters and antenna systems. But powering the transmitters required much electricity. So HCJB engineers built and later expanded hydroelectric generation facilities, allowing the station to broadcast at higher power for longer periods of time, and at greatly reduced cost. HCJB later established an engineering center in Elkhart, Indiana, to design and build a mammoth 500,000-watt transmitter, installed in Ecuador in 1981, which while usually run at lower wattage could override jamming and reach into otherwise unreachable places worldwide.

HCJB also launched into the healthcare sphere in the 1950s, beginning with a hostel and medical clinic in Quito to serve “indigenous Ecuadorians.” In 1955 its Quito hospital was opened and a school of nursing launched. Three years later a branch hospital was dedicated in Shell, on the edge of the Amazon basin. *Mark and Marilyn Papierski served the Shell hospital as administrators from 1991 to 2003, then Mark experimented with the mission in helping Christians start small businesses. HCJB concluded that helping believers launch viable businesses is peripheral to its overall strategy. However, this concern is crucially important for Christians in the former Soviet Union, and Mark shifted smoothly in 2012 to serving in a similar capacity with Russian Ministries.*

HCJB was an international community with program staff from around the world. Still, they continued to be the primary “doers,” with spouses and children joining in performing in vocal and instrumental recording sessions. *H.E. (now our organist) and Noretta Singley were key musicians there during the 1970s and '80s.* But even those who fondly recall thriving in that extended family acknowledge that shifting from being the doers to assuming a support role as enablers was healthy, even essential.

Stage 2: discovering that partnering is the only way to reach the whole world

By the early 1980s HCJB had the largest non-governmental shortwave broadcast site in the world, reaching more than 80 percent of the world’s landmass. But what would HCJB do about those who couldn’t hear the gospel in a language they understood?

HCJB’s president Ron Cline pondered that question. His answer led to a “World by 2000” commitment that every man, woman, and child would be able to turn to radio and hear the gospel in a language they

understood. This ambitious goal could only happen, however, if missionary broadcasters worked together instead of competing with each other.

In 1985 HCJB, Far East Broadcasting Company, Trans World Radio and—a bit later—SIM made that commitment. The group identified some 372 underserved languages with 1 million or more speakers, which they divided among themselves. Their goal was to make Christian radio programming available in each of them by the year 2000. The 15-year timeframe proved to be too tight. It was difficult to even find Christians who spoke many of those languages, let alone people willing and able to produce radio programs. But in the following 20 years other radio broadcasters joined in the effort. Currently, more than 300 of the originally targeted 372 languages are on the air.

Broadcasting was changing, too. HCJB began testing Ecuador's first TV station in 1959, going on the air in the mid-1960s. Transistors began to replace vacuum tubes, facilitating the miniaturization of radios and making them cheap to buy. Around the world, local FM and AM radio stations began filling the airwaves; shortwave radio began to decline.

In 1991 the Soviet Union was abruptly dismantled, opening the region to missionaries. *College Church rallied to send Peter Jr. and Anita Deyneka to Moscow to help coordinate the inflow.* Suddenly it was possible in many of the former Soviet Republics to have local FM and AM stations, and Christians were eager to reach their own people using radio. By the end of 1993, HCJB had worked with partners to place several studios within the former Soviet Republic and radio stations in Estonia, Latvia and Romania. Since then more than 500 local AM and FM gospel stations or program recording studios have been planted worldwide—many in or near countries where the gospel is restricted.

HCJB had long realized that urban listeners prefer FM radio produced by local people. As the global economy developed, the vast majority of the world's population centered on urban areas. The only real solution to reaching these populations by radio would be planting local Christian radio stations. But that could be accomplished only by partnering with local believers who would own, staff and operate self-sustaining stations. HCJB engineers developed a portable FM radio studio, transmitter and antenna that could easily be carried in several suitcases. The first radio station HCJB planted in this partnership mode was in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo, in 1992.

Then the Ecuadorian government decided to build a new airport near HCJB's shortwave broadcast site, informing it that towers on its antenna farm would need to be dismantled by 2009. After researching other potential broadcast sites in Ecuador, HCJB decided to stop all shortwave broadcasts from Ecuador.

Because of evangelistic efforts in Latin America for over 100 years and rapid church growth in the 1980s and '90s, Latin America was moving into the "reached" category. That led HCJB to embark on more intentionally preparing Latin American Christians to take charge.

Ruth Ann De Flon was first exposed to Christian radio by working in a local station in her native Iowa. She came to Wheaton College to study English, attending College Church as a student. Ruth Ann has been supported by College Church since she became an HCJB missionary in 1967. After Spanish language study in Costa Rica, she served with HCJB's medical work in Quito. After several years she was transferred to the mission's Publicity Department.

During this period, in a program underwritten by College Church member Ken Hansen, the Wheaton College Graduate School invited HCJB to participate in its cross-cultural communications master's degree program. Professors from Wheaton travelled to Quito to teach core courses; other classes were offered only in Wheaton. Ruth Ann devoted her home ministry assignment months to completing her communications course requirements.

Then, as HCJB became convinced that it must do more to prepare Latin Americans to take a leading role in broadcasting on their continent, plans were formed to launch a Christian Center of Communications (CCC), to prepare communicators for leadership roles in radio, TV, and writing, combining theory with biblical knowledge and hands-on experience. The three-year, Quito-based school, conducted in Spanish, was launched in 1984, with HCJB absorbing half the actual cost of each student's training.

Ruth Ann's close friend, Elsi Peñaranda, a Costa Rican native who had been one of her teachers in language school, helped start the CCC. Several years later, Ruth Ann was able to shift to the CCC, heading up its English instruction and publicity.

In 2011, after years of working to find a sustainable model for the CCC, the HCJB leadership team concluded, in light of a deep and growing deficit, that it must close the school once the current student body graduates at the end of 2013. Globally, HCJB is moving its focus to training and empowering local ministries in less formal settings. Over the life-span of the school, it has provided training to some 200 students, with more than 100 graduates now strategically scattered throughout Ecuador and across South and Central America.

Ruth Ann's retirement, in March of this year, was bittersweet. One compensation was making her new home in San José, Costa Rica, with fellow retiree Elsi.

HCJB has long pursued radio opportunities elsewhere. Mexico, a strategic objective in Latin America, doesn't allow Christian radio stations in the country. So in 1978, to reach Spanish speakers along the U.S.-Mexico border, HCJB began operating radio station KVMV in McAllen, Texas. Eventually it established the World Radio Network, then spun it off as an independent entity, while continuing to loan it staff. Recently renamed Inspiracom, the network operates 18 stations and repeater antennas across Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.

While Marcos Romero studied hydro-engineering at Quito's Central University, he doubled as a volunteer with the HCJB broadcast staff. He also met and courted Mariana, doing undergraduate and graduate studies in psychology. Upon graduation in 1982, they were married and joined the HCJB missionary family, serving in Quito for four years.

But instead of taking a home assignment year, they were encouraged by a fellow missionary to earn master's degrees in communications at the Wheaton College Graduate School. The Romeros received full scholarships through the Billy Graham Center (and housing was provided by then-College Church member Henrietta Van Der Molen). Marcos and Mariana attended and became members of College Church.

Taking a break from their formal courses, the Romeros relocated to Brownsville, Texas, for a year to explore serving with Inspiracom. They were challenged by abrupt exposure to both Mexican and gringo cultures and the full Catholic-to-Pentecostal religious spectrum. Returning to Wheaton, they graduated in 1996, were added to the College Church missionary roster, and obtained HCJB Global agreement to being loaned to Inspiracom. They were assigned to open and administer KNOG-Manantial (the Spanish word conveys the "living water" concept). This Nogales, Arizona-based station could also be heard by audiences in Tucson and across the border in Nogales, Mexico.

Between them, Marcos and Mariana have been responsible for the station's engineering, production, administration, training, development and listener counseling! In 2001, the station extended its programming to a Phoenix-area audience by installing a repeater there. (Recently the antenna was relocated to keep its signal from being overwhelmed by the NPR station beside it on the radio dial.)

Also in 2001, Milton de Los Santos, a CCC graduate and HCJB announcer for 11 years, joined the KNOG staff. He teams up with Marcos and Mariana to host the popular "Three M's" daily morning show. Nine other announcers are Mexican volunteers.

In 2011, the FCC approved KNOG's petition to increase the power of its transmitter from 32,000 to 50,000 watts. The equipment was installed and the conversion set for March 2012. But instead of the expected more powerful signal, listeners encountered—silence! It took two months to straighten out problems with the Federal Communication Commission and to reconfigure the Phoenix-area repeater antenna. But the silver lining to this debacle was that hundreds of regular listeners sorely missed "their" station, called in record numbers and began contributing to its support. And now the powerful transmitter penetrates much farther into Mexico's Sonora state.

To better achieve the mission's global strategy and more rapidly respond to requests of partners for help, HCJB leadership had long wanted to place its staff and regional offices closer to target countries. So in the mid-1990s it began splitting the ministry into regions.

In Latin America, since 2009, a key emphasis has been *Corrientes* (or “Currents”), a partnership with other agencies and denominations to mobilize the Latino church to minister cross-culturally in countries traditionally closed to Westerners. Some 12,000 Latin American missionaries already serving worldwide have been characterized as long on enthusiasm but short on staying power. HCJB Global is devoting its Quito facilities to providing three- to six-month courses tailored to fill gaps in training and to mentor in specific skills.

Chuck Howard, starting out as the MK son of Clayton and Helen, has bridged his parents’ stage with the two to follow.

He came to Ecuador in 1969 to teach science, math and Bible at the Alliance Academy International in Quito. After five-and-a-half years there, he was assigned to administer the hospital extension in Shell. His wife Anita, an MK raised in Venezuela, served as a scrub and circulating nurse in surgery. After six years in Shell, they were called back to Quito for Chuck to manage the Ecuador field business office for two years—until a trained CPA arrived—and for Anita to continue nursing at the main hospital. Chuck returned to teaching at the Alliance Academy for four years. But his fluency in Spanish equipped him to represent the agency well to government authorities. He served as the Ecuador field associate director for a year, then as its director from 1989 to 1997, when the position was eliminated as part of the restructuring process. Chuck returned for the last 11 years to what he likes to do best, teaching middle school students at the Alliance Academy.

Chuck and Anita have been heavily involved in Iglesia Luz del Valle (the Light of the Valley Church), which is currently completing a building program. They have consistently embraced the adjustments they’ve been part of for 44 years. Their prayer letters typically have been devoted equally to family matters, Ecuadorian ministry developments, and HCJB partnership ventures worldwide. Chuck has served on the HCJB Global Board of Trustees for 18 years.

September 1 marked Chuck and Anita’s official retirement from HCJB. But they are retiring in place in Quito, with their daughter Melanie not far away in Shell (where her husband, Randy Umble, teaches at the Nate Saint School). Anita will continue to volunteer in the library and early childhood departments at the Alliance Academy. And Chuck, without a pause, assumed the role of assistant to the regional director for Latin America.

Stage 3: multiplying outreach effectiveness by assuming a lower profile

In its latest lifecycle stage, the 82-year-old ministry is ending some long-term ministries in order to focus on reaching those with little to no access to the gospel. Rapid technological advances are radically changing the way it operates, utilizing social media, including YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Skype, and the virtual mobile technology of smart phones, tablets, internet and satellite.

“We must recognize,” says HCJB Global president Wayne Pederson (who previously served at KTIS [Minneapolis] and as Moody Radio’s vice president of broadcasting), “that [achieving] some goals means less demand or loss of momentum for those services and being willing to embrace strategic change as new opportunities present themselves. It requires perpetual reinvention.”

For instance, as the Ecuadorian government has begun providing more stable, free-of-charge healthcare, HCJB Global is selling its hospital in Quito to a skilled and responsible Ecuadorian Christian entity now able to minister without outside help. It is also closing down its hospital in Shell. Steps such as these, though difficult, are helping HCJB become more nimble, taking mobile clinics with Christ-centered healthcare to rural, remote, and poverty-stricken areas—particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the “Stan” nations, Haiti, Eastern Europe, Indonesia, Thailand, and Nepal—where people have yet to hear the gospel.

HCJB Global’s long-standing radio ministry in Ecuador and Latin America is now at the point of thriving under Latin leadership able to operate in a self-sustaining way.

As for the Technology Center in Elkhart, Indiana, it is retrofitting and reassembling a transmitter from Quito for northern Australia, putting together a digital upgrade kit for a Trans World Radio transmitter on Guam and developing a new generation of solar-powered radios for distribution to partner stations around the world. It is also providing them technical support. *College Church member John Rozema, a retired electrical engineer, puts in one volunteer week in Elkhart per month.*

“By owning less ‘stuff’ and reducing infrastructure, we are more flexible, and ready on short notice, as opportunities present themselves, to walk through opening doors,” said Pederson. “We no longer need the encumbrance of transmitters, towers, and large staffs. We are rethinking everything we do and discovering we can do more with less.”

Curt Cole grew up in a missionary family in Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Africa. (His parents, Cecil and Joan Cole, are now doing a retirement-age stint in Indonesia with College Church support, as is also Curt’s brother, Chris, serving in a school in Southeast Asia). Listening to SIM International’s Monrovia, Liberia-based ELWA, Curt was drawn to radio. Curt’s wife Karen is also an Africa MK. In their junior year at a boarding high school, both of them made commitments to missionary service.

After U.S. schooling in communications and business, Curt and Karen married and settled down in Boulder, Colorado. Curt worked for a credit management firm there. At age 30, Curt realized that if they were to carry through on missions, it was “now or never.” They first approached SIM, but with civil war beginning in Liberia, SIM was unwilling to commit new staff to ELWA. So he approached the other missionary broadcasters. The promptest response came from HCJB. “Come to Quito,” they said, “and we’ll train you.”

When the Coles arrived in Quito in 1993, their daughter Carissa was 9 and their twin sons Bryan and Brandon were 6. For the first three or four years Curt worked into producing the English-language programs. Then in 1997 he was named director of the international radio services—adding oversight of producing Spanish, Portuguese, German and Japanese programming.

In 2003, Curt was named senior vice president of global ministries. He commenced this position working from Quito, but was shifted to the U.S. in 2006, after the twins graduated from high school. (Bryan has just become a mid-term missionary in Ecuador with College Church support. He is directing a Semester Abroad program with International Teams, mentoring college students and teaching several courses.) Curt worked out of Florida for two years, while Karen provided care for her dad, battling Parkinson's disease. Then, after his home-going, they shifted to the HCJB headquarters in Colorado Springs.

Curt is a key member of the mission's leadership team, shaping and implementing ministry vision and strategy. College Church member Phil Passon—and before him, Alex Balc—have helped the HCJB Global Board of Trustees actively guide the mission through its ongoing transitions. (Former pastor Kent Hughes also served briefly on the Board.)

As HCJB Global reinvents itself, God continues to open opportunities to use new media, radio and healthcare to spread the gospel. Some examples:

- The Sub-Saharan Africa team has recently planted new radio stations in Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic and Niger, to name a few.
- For the Europe-Eurasia region, plans to get a new internet station online in Croatia while our partner there waits for a broadcast license. A new station is just about to go on the air in Romania as well.
- In the North Africa and Middle East region, more than 1.75 million households listen to the weekly programs in Arabic, and social media is the fastest growing media ministry segment.
- In the Latin America region, a website, Controlz.fm, which targets youth aged 13 to 18 years, was launched last February.
- In Asia, HCJB Global is helping Christian leaders in Thailand who have the opportunity to open 100 new radio stations by 2020. During 2012, the Asia Pacific team trained 20 partners and helped them begin new local FM station in places like Indonesia, Nepal and Thailand. By the end of 2013 they should have planted 25 new stations in the region.
- An agreement was signed last year with One Sheep, an international media ministry, to provide resources, tools and consultation to partner ministries in difficult countries for using new media to reach a younger audience. Partners have been trained in Central Asia, Russia and Poland.
- The Spotlight radio program, originally targeting listeners who wanted to learn English, has been put on Facebook and gone global, with more than 105,000 Spotlight Facebook fans! A Skype component was also recently added.