

The Use of Research Toward an Increase in Effectiveness of Conferences for the Accomplishment of Shared Goals

Larry & Stephanie Kraft

Lausanne International Researchers' Conference – May 2018

Conferences can be extremely enjoyable and a wonderful time to meet new friends and ministry partners and catch up with old ones. As a member of the Steering Group of the Lausanne International Researcher's Network and thus representing some of your hosts, I sincerely hope that we will all have a lovely and memorable time here together in this beautiful country of Kenya. Conferences, however, can also be very costly. They consume resources in travel, time spent in prayer and planning, and time spent away from normal work. What can be done to make our gatherings more fruitful? How can this ever-more-popular phenomenon of the ministry conference be more effective in accomplishing the shared goals of its participants?

On the 500th anniversary year of the Protestant Reformation, the Lausanne Movement invited ninety global mission leaders to Wittenberg, Germany, to participate in a gathering regarding the first two thrusts of the four-fold Lausanne vision: to promote the gospel for every person and an evangelical church for every people. Nearly a hundred of the arguably most influential men and women in global mission, representing all regions of the world and different age groups, sought to hear from God about what might be done in the next 5 to 10 years to see a significant acceleration toward the spread of the gospel in the light of these two thrusts.

In preparation for the gathering, three rounds of surveys were administered whereby Lausanne leadership arrived at twelve clustered topics. The participants were then subdivided into twelve corresponding working groups based on their individual passions and interests as identified in the survey process. Those working groups were tasked to identify action steps intended to accelerate the realization of these two aspects of the Lausanne vision. In this presentation I will describe the research process used in the Lausanne Wittenberg proceedings, its immediate benefits, its short-term outcomes, and its potential for long-term impact. I will also present a model that proposes additional ways in which ministry conferences can enhance the accomplishment of shared ministry goals. Finally, I will suggest some possible paths forward for the participants of the LIRC8.

The Wittenberg 2017 Pre- Conference Process

As you have seen in all our preparations for these days together, the Lausanne Movement has a vision which actually encompasses four specific thrusts: the gospel for every person, an evangelical church for every people, Christ-like leaders for every church, and the gospel impacting every sphere of society. Since Lausanne has held other recent conferences that focus on the third and fourth areas, it was decided that only the first two thrusts would be studied at the Wittenberg gathering, specifically looking at how the lack of, and gaps in, progress could be addressed. Also, recognizing the caliber of leader invited and the likely complicated schedule each maintained, it was decided to limit the gathering to two days, June 12 and 13, 2017. Those two days needed to be productive to justify the huge investment made.

A pre-conference survey team made up of Phill Buttler of visionSynergy, Michael Kasper of Vision 5:9 (both Lausanne Catalysts for Networks and Partnerships), David Bennett Lausanne's Global Associate Director for Collaboration and Content, and myself as Lausanne co-Catalyst for Church Research, therefore decided to jump-start the conference by engaging and querying the attendees ahead of their arrival. We created an on-line instrument using LimeSurvey hosted on our secure internationalsurveys.info web site which asked for free text responses to this question: "As God's people work together, empowered by His Spirit, what will it take to see real breakthroughs on these two priorities (The Gospel for every person & An evangelical church for every people) over the next 5-10 years? Consider your ministry experience, understanding of the Church, God's wider work in the world, and your vision for the future of Kingdom work. First, pray over the question asked. Then, in the simple format provided below, identify a maximum of 3-4 things that you feel would have the greatest impact on the global Church's ability to realize real, historic advance on the two priorities outlined above." We also asked a demographic question regarding the scope of their ministry to allow cross-tabulation among leaders of similar influence: "To help us better understand your responses, please tell us your level of involvement in Kingdom work (Choose one of the following answers): Local Church; Citywide Ministry Focus; State or Regional (within country) Focus; Nationwide Focus; Global or multi-National Focus".

Lausanne Wittenberg 2017 pre-Conference Survey Exit and clear survey

As God's people work together, empowered by His Spirit, what will it take to see real breakthroughs on these two priorities (The Gospel for every person & An evangelical church for every people) over the next 5-10 years?

Consider your ministry experience, understanding of the Church, God's wider work in the world, and your vision for the future of Kingdom work.

First, pray over the question asked. Then, in the simple format provided below, identify a maximum of 3-4 things that *you feel would have the greatest impact on the global Church's ability to realize real, historic advance on the two priorities outlined above.*

(Please use the tab key to move between fields; the length of your answer is not constrained by the size of the box.)

Recommended action #1:

Recommended action #2:

Recommended action #3:

Recommended action #4:

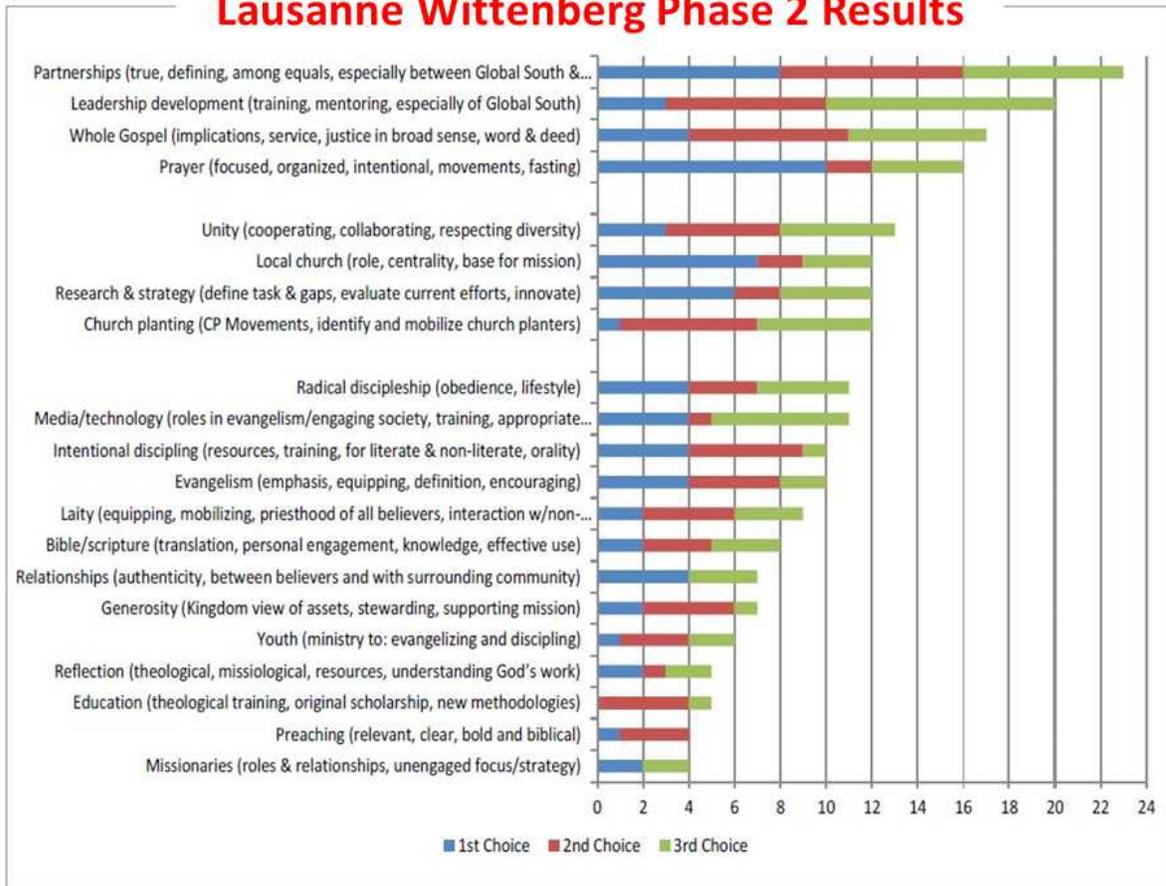
As a suggestion, you may approach the question one of two ways:

- What do you feel are the 3-4 greatest needs or roadblocks to realizing this vision (which, of course, suggests that some type of positive action would be needed to address the roadblocks and achieve real breakthroughs)? Or;
- What do you feel are the 3-4 most strategic action steps the global Church could take to see real breakthroughs on these two objectives?

The survey was sent to the 82 people who had confirmed their registration to that point on February 16, 2017 with follow-up requests to those who had not responded on the 20th and 24th. When the survey closed on February 26th, a total of 79 people had responded, 52 complete and 27 partial responses. Ten pages of written text emerged from these questions. We each, Stephanie and Larry, coded that text into themes. Allow us to mention here that, even though we are married, we did our coding independently.

Larry analyzed the text using a simple, qualitative data analysis program called QDA Miner Lite. Stephanie did it the old-fashioned way, with paper and pencil. We like to emphasize to our research students that new technical tools often help research to go faster, but the results are not necessarily any better. In this case, our coding produced two lists of approximately thirty-two themes that were almost identical. They were combined and then reduced to twenty-one which were mentioned by at least 4 people. This is the list of themes we presented:

Lausanne Wittenberg Phase 2 Results



As this graph shows, the results seem to naturally split into 3 groupings: 16 or more, 12 or 13, and 11 or fewer. Several factors were considered by the planning committee in choosing the final 12 themes to be developed at the conference. First, there was a hope that every participant would be able to work on at least one theme that they had listed as priority. Secondly, the physical space of the conference venue limited the number of working groups that could be created. Finally, it was understood that at least 4 people needed to be in each discussion group to allow for a good flow of ideas and creative stimulus. Each theme would have a separate discussion group each day of the conference, thus requiring at least 8 people for each theme. In addition, the 5th most popular theme of “Unity” was removed as a separate item from the list as it seemed support all the others. The conference Planning Committee thus chose to emphasize “Unity” throughout the conference deliberations and encourage each working group leader to draw out the group in this area rather than developing a separate working group on that theme. As a side note, regarding our current conference, you will note that research was collectively identified as seventh most important element needed for real progress toward the realization of the Lausanne vision. The 12 topics chosen for discussion are as follows:

- Research & strategy (define task & gaps, evaluate current efforts, innovate)
- Prayer (focused, organized, intentional, movements, fasting)
- Media/technology (roles in evangelism/engaging society, training, appropriate use)
- Church planting (CP Movements, identify and mobilize church planters)
- Evangelism (emphasis, equipping, definition, encouraging)
- Intentional discipling (resources, training, for literate & non-literate, orality)
- Lait (equipping, mobilizing, priesthood of all believers, interaction w/non-believers)
- Whole Gospel (implications, service, justice in broad sense, word & deed)

- Partnerships (true, defining, among equals, especially between Global South & North)
- Radical discipleship (obedience, lifestyle)
- Local church (role, centrality, base for mission)
- Leadership development (training, mentoring, especially of Global South)

For the third phase, the Lausanne leadership decided that twelve of these most frequently chosen themes would be investigated by separate working groups at the June Wittenberg gathering. The leaders who had confirmed their participation were contacted a final time to choose which two themes they personally wanted to discuss while at the conference. They received a link to a one-question survey which

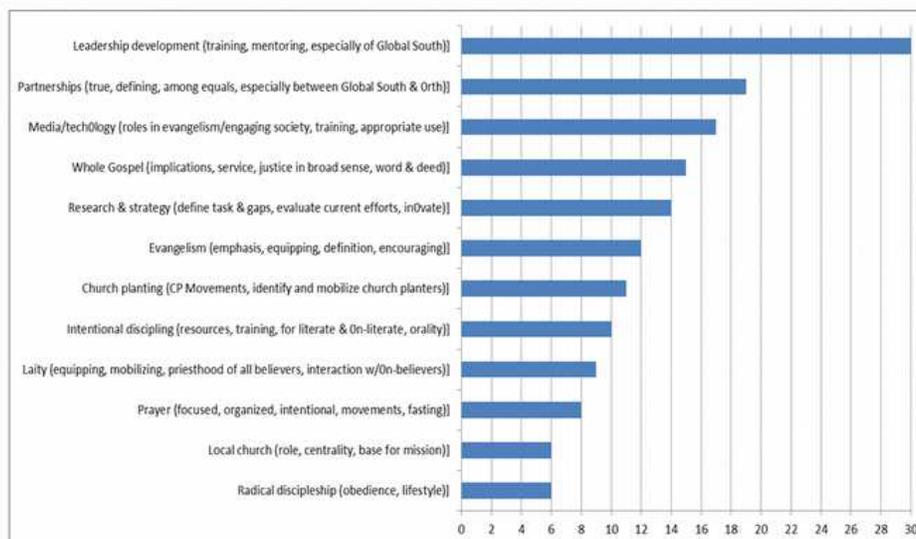
Lausanne Wittenberg 2017 Discussion Group Choice [Load unfinished survey](#) [Exit and clear survey](#)

* Please indicate which two ministry sectors you personally want to discuss. Then, please click "Submit" at the bottom of the page.

- Research & strategy (define task & gaps, evaluate current efforts, innovate)
- Prayer (focused, organized, intentional, movements, fasting)
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allowed them to choose up to two themes. As before, these options were presented in a random order which changed each time the survey was loaded to reduce bias. This survey was sent on May 3, with reminders on the 5th and 9th to the 91 confirmed participants and resulted in 88 responses (79 complete and 9 partial). This survey tracked the respondents which allowed contact by personal email to clarify the incomplete responses and ask personally for responses from the 3 who did not respond. The result of how many people chose each discussion topic is as follows:

Working Group Choices for Wittenberg 2017



This graph shows that two of the groups were only chosen by 6 people, not allowing for two different discussion groups of 4. These groups only met one day. All other groups were divided

into two sub-groups to meet separately each day.

When the conference began, its proceedings were quite simple. There were moments of worship and a devotional each morning. Other than that, the entirety of time was spent in table group work as the small groups prayed, listened to each other, dialogued, and brainstormed about the topic they had been assigned. There were no plenary speakers. The gathering was designed to promote an ambiance of unity and mutual respect where the leaders could receive and document the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Each table had one or two leaders pre-assigned. These table facilitators were equipped with the information gathered in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 surveys which explained the definition and importance of each theme and the rationales for choosing those as priority. At the end of the second day, they were to meet together with the group they felt they had the most to contribute to in order to agree on the final action steps for that topic. The outcomes requested of each topic group were divided into 3 categories: "We will", "Someone should" and "Strategic insights". This information has been maintained by the Lausanne leadership and there is currently another survey underway to ask the coordinators of each table grouping what progress has been made and how Lausanne can be of assistance.

The immediate benefit of the pre-conference research was the optimization of the investment of time at the conference venue. Leaders are very busy. The pre-conference research enabled the conference objectives to be realized in just two days. Only two days of meals and accommodations needed to be funded. Without the pre-conference research, it conceivably could have taken a day or two just for the leaders to discuss possibilities and arrive at the choice of themes. In addition, it increased participant ownership. The leaders arrived having already been engaged in the process and the subject matter. They were more pondered and prepared to discuss the issues, allowing for deeper collaboration. They were less likely to mentally check-out of the proceedings. Finally, as the group facilitators already possessed a list of the written comments made on an assigned topic, they were able to promote discussions that generally proceeded quickly and smoothly. This allowed the groups to move more readily toward action items.

Short-term outcomes

David Bennett summarized the Wittenberg 2017 gathering in the following way. "As an incredible answer to prayer, all of the twelve table working groups came up with significant initiatives, ideas, and commitments. These plans are more realistic than we first imagined, not pie-in-the-sky dreams, but big enough steps to significantly accelerate the spread of the gospel in five years." Collaborative ideas were affirmed, innovative initiatives were embraced and new partnerships were formed. Speaking for the Lausanne leadership, Bennett said of the Wittenberg gathering, "We were hoping that it would result in action plans that can start to be implemented in the next months and bear fruit in three to five years." As I speak, the group leaders are being followed-up to support and encourage progress on the plans launched at Wittenberg.

Potential for long-term impact

The Wittenberg 2017 gathering has a high potential for impact, as most of the participants were leaders in their organizations and therefore in excellent positions to promote new partnerships and increase collaboration with like-minded groups. Time will tell how effective those leaders will have been in mobilizing those under their influence to embrace the action suggested.

This, then, is how my team and I have conceptualized the place of research in a conference like Wittenberg 2017. We have performed this service for a number of our ministry partners, and we have employed it ourselves each time we do an in-house training event. I am calling this “Outcome-based Conferencing” and this is how my teammate Russ Mitchell and I envision it:

Outcome-based Conferencing

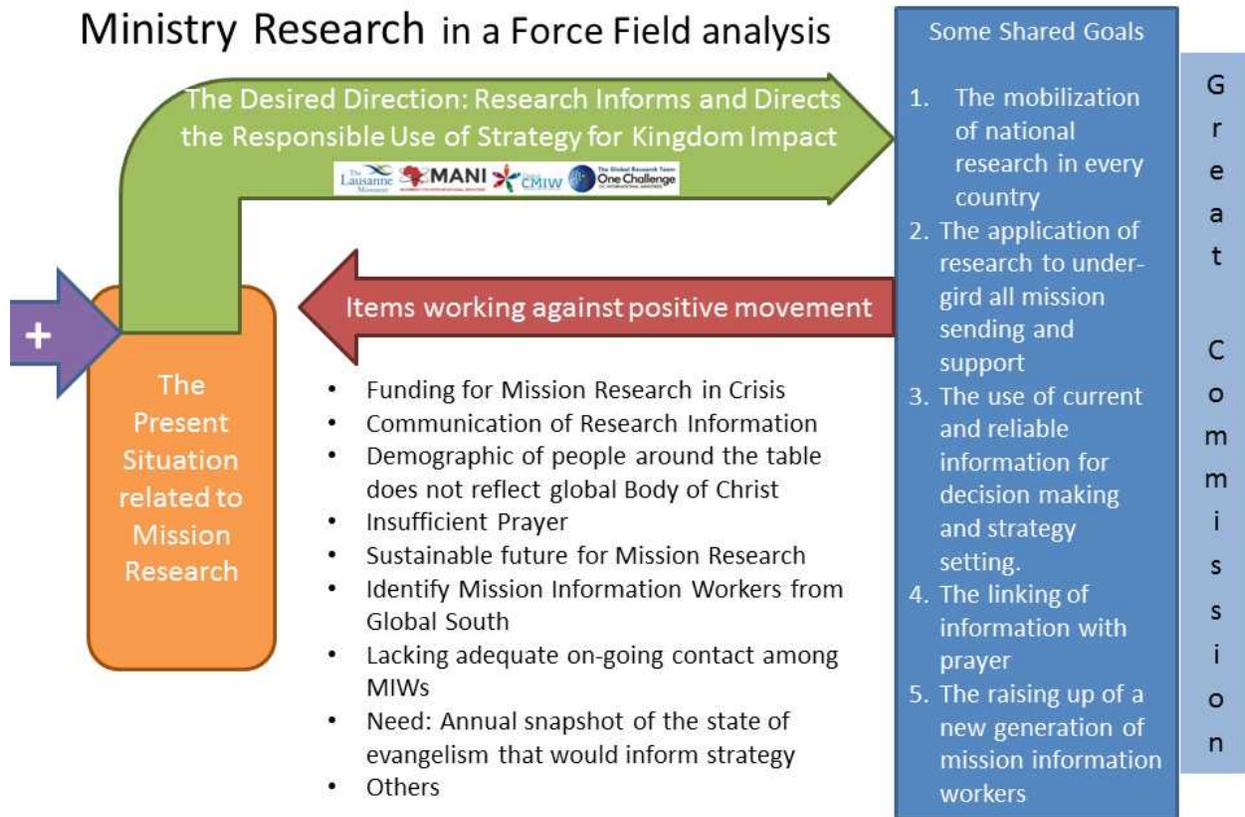
Prior to Conference	At Conference	Shortly After	X Months After
Research to Identify Issues	Collect relevant presentations and papers	Conference evaluation	Evaluation of progress on “will do’s”
Research to Prioritize Issues	Document the proceedings	Prayer support for implementation	On-going prayer
Call for Papers [optional]	Give opportunity for each to articulate “Will do’s” within the larger shared goals	Links to current and past papers and proceedings	Assistance as requested
Pre conference reading [optional]	Prayer for following through on “Will do’s”	Reminder of participant “Will do’s”	
Establish participation in Focus Groups [optional]	 Cloud links for Papers and presentations		

Russ Mitchell & Larry Kraft, 2018

If you would allow me, I would now like to take this discussion in the direction of our own gathering here, the Eighth Lausanne International Researchers' Conference. Four organizations serve as our hosts: The Movement of African National Initiatives, or MANI, the Community of Mission Information Workers, or the CMIW, the Lausanne Movement which promotes church research through two of its focus areas, Church Research and The Study of Global Christianity, and OC International, my own mission agency which has research as an integral part of its basic strategy statement. Among the shared goals of these four distinct organizations, I would identify, among others, the following:

- **The mobilization of national research in every country** such that the national Church sets it agenda, or agendas, for ministry within its borders
- **The application of research to under-gird all mission** sending and support
- The use of current and reliable **information for decision making and strategy setting.**
- **The linking of information with prayer**
- **The raising up of a new generation of mission information workers,** capable of using the latest theories and technologies to assist the church in making disciples of all nations.

How might this gathering, this Eighth Lausanne International Research Conference (LIRC8), be used by God to accelerate progress toward the accomplishment of these mutually-shared goals? Let me present here a Force Field Analysis created by my teammate Russ and adapted for our conference:



Russ Mitchell & Stephanie Kraft, 2018

Here we are. Beginning from the right, we have the beautiful and inspiring Commission from our Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. And He has clustered us into a host of organizations to address various aspects of that Commission. Four of those are your hosts here: The Lausanne Movement, MANI, CMIW and OC International. Of the breadth of our organizational objectives, there are a number of goals that we share. Five, among others, are the mobilization of national research in every country, the application of research to under-gird all mission sending and support, the use of current and reliable information for decision making and strategy setting, the linking of information with prayer, and the raising up of a new generation of mission information workers. On the left is the Present Situation Related to Mission Research. We will be learning a lot about this from each other during our days together – what is being done, and where, by whom. We will come to discover things about each other and our work that will inspire and inform us, and we will wish to see more and better research happen. But there are barriers and forces that might impede our progress. Among them are the fact that funding for mission research is in crisis, the communication of research information is uneven, the demographic of people around the table does not reflect the global Body of Christ, we don't pray enough, the sustainability of the future for mission research is questionable, we have difficulty identifying mission information workers from the Global South, we lack adequate on-going contact among ourselves, and we currently have no annual snapshot of the state of evangelism in the world that can adequately inform our strategy. These are just a few. There are others.

How might we make the LIRC8 into a gathering that increases our effectiveness in accomplishing our shared goals? Let's look back at the model of Outcome-based Conferencing on page 7. The Planning Committee has done a splendid job of bringing some of these first column items to pass, but it will depend upon us all to realize the items in columns 2, 3 and 4. We want much more impact than simply the decision to hold another conference in three years.

I suggest we actively listen to learn what national research is being done in every one of the twenty-nine nations represented by the participants here. Let's keep an ear open for how the research that has been done can sharpen the Church in its domestic and cross-cultural outreach. Let's be thinking about how what we are hearing can serve our organizational efforts to make wise and strategic decisions. Let's fuel our prayers with good understanding. Let's look for opportunities to build relationships here that will encourage the development of the younger and less experienced researchers.

I feel honored to have given leadership to a number research efforts over the past forty years, through OC International, CMIW, Lausanne and others. Perhaps I will have the joy of participating in yet another Lausanne International Researchers' Conference in three years time. I have no idea where I will be then, but I do hope and pray that the Present Situation related to Mission Research will be different then than it is today. In the words of Marshall Shelley, I pray that my efforts will have helped "plant a tree under whose shade I will not expect to sit."

Thank you for planting with me.

About the Authors:

Larry and Stephanie Kraft, dual citizens of Brazil and the USA, have served as co-workers in research with OC International for over 30 years, graduating together from the Johns Hopkins University and both receiving an MA from the Fuller School of Intercultural Studies. Larry served as Director of Research for Sepal, Brasil, and as Senior Research Consultant for OC International for the North Africa/Middle East/Central Asia region. He currently serves as Global Director of Research for OC. Stephanie serves as a research consultant on the team.



They have been involved in the Lausanne International Researchers Network since 2005 and Larry has served on the Steering Group since 2008. They also lead the WEA-MC Task Force, the Global Community of Mission Information Workers, which produces the quarterly research e-newsletter, "Correct Me If I'm Wrong." They have a passion for raising up national research teams, and are currently mentoring national researchers in several countries. They have published several articles on research and several books in Brazilian Portuguese, including: "Spying out the Land: How to Understand Your City."