

Missions

This was my day off, so when I found myself driving for 1 1/2 hours to attend a special missionary luncheon for pastors and leaders, I wasn't exactly thrilled. My wife and the missionary convenor of our church were the motivators behind this. After lunch the speaker, a director of a missionary society gave his address. It went as expected - statistics, interesting stories, and so on. I was attentively listening and yet I was aware that something else was going on.

As we left the meeting and were travelling down an inner city road my wife asked me what I thought of the meeting. I burst into floods of tears much to my surprise and had to pull over to the side of the road for safety's sake. At the time, although I knew that this irrational emotional catharsis related to missions, I could not work out why it had happened. In the ensuing weeks tears were not uncommon whenever I talked about missions.

In reflection, it became obvious that God was sharing with me how He felt about world missions. He weeps over the lost and longs that every local church becomes actively involved in missions apart from their immediate locality. Too many churches take the line that it is missions at home first, then comes the time to reach out beyond ourselves and overseas.

This is quite wrong. We must take the gospel to 'Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth' - all at the same time. Notice also, that the disciples, who were not originally from Jerusalem,

after Pentecost commenced mission there first.

Traditionally, countries have been categorised as first, second and third world countries. This approach is patronising towards people living in third world countries and so developed and undeveloped countries are now often referred to as countries of the north and south. The problem with this terminology however is that Mongolia (undeveloped) is in the north and Australia (developed) is in the south (Higginson:3).

There is growing concern among some mission leaders as to the declining calibre of the character of many people applying for overseas service. Since the "Baby Boom" years (i.e. those born since World War 2) there has been a growing trend for people to insist on their rights, protect their day off jealously, to demand a certain standard of living, a high education for their children and generally today people do not have the stick ability to hang in there when the

going is getting tough. Self denial and the laying down of one's rights are not popular subjects today, but nevertheless need to again be emphasised.

Requirements for overseas service

- *Spiritually mature.*

This is a necessity. Many countries have more of the working of the Spirit than we have in the West, therefore missionaries must not hold back the national church

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because of a narrow vision that they can so easily have.

- *A servant heart.* One intending missionary avoided helping us clean up a building that the church had taken over. Her excuse was that she didn't have time, even though she was unemployed. As was predicted, her term of service did not last long and now she isn't worshipping anywhere. Do not give the impression that missionaries are a cut above other Christian workers so that people are drawn to the prestige element. Also if people are failing on the field let them know it is all right for them to return home and still be valued members of the church.
- *Proven giftings.* People sent out must first of all have proven their ability at home first. For example, if they are going to evangelise overseas, they must first have had experience in evangelism at home. Only the best of our personnel should go overseas. Be unselfish in this.
- *Cultural sensitivity.* The person going out needs a humble open heart to learn from the nationals and of course must not be racially prejudiced. Most missionary societies take several weeks or even months in preparing people to adapt to overseas service, having learnt from the mistakes made in the past.

Personality testings can prove useful to enable a greater understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses, but be aware that a number of people rejected by various missionary societies have actually also proved to be extremely effective missionaries on the mission field. That however, is the exception rather than the rule.

Ways to promote Missions

- Punchy Sunday mission spots, using the overhead projector.
- Leadership seen to be giving strong support to overseas missions.
- Special missionary weekends, with guest missionaries.
- Annual missions convention.
- A daily prayer church calendar.
- Tithing the Sunday offering to missions.
- Faith promise giving.
- Sending out of teams.
- Linking up with a national worker or church and developing a sense of them being part of your church family.

Overseas teams

Over recent years many articles have been written for and against short term teams going overseas. That is, excluding work teams. Both points of view need to be taken into account.

Advantages

1. People may end up by going to the mission field long term.
2. Even if they stay at home they may -
promote missions
pray effectively
become financially involved
3. Trust God for their own expenses and see answers to prayer.
4. Be an encouragement to the missionary overseas.
5. This is now the primary way that young people are becoming involved in and committed to missions. Mission groups that do not cater for missions experience will lose out in the long run.

Disadvantages

1. May cause disruption to the missionary and the work.
2. Their input may not be very effective.
3. The expense involved may seem to be a waste of money.

However, I firmly believe that if a team receives an invitation by folk overseas and they become culturally sensitive the experience will be of profit all round.

Suggested policy for overseas short term teams

Preparation

1. People need to apply to belong to a team.
2. The team and team leader will be appointed by the Missionary chairperson along with the pastor and elders.
3. Team members must meet regularly, at least two months before they move out overseas for;
 - prayer and fellowship.
 - training in outreach etc.
 - gaining insight into the new culture.

Finances

People short of money can make that need known to the team leader.

Each person is responsible for raising the money for their own airfares and general expenses. People short of money are also encouraged to pray in the extra amount and work for it if necessary. Team members should not borrow money and all outstanding accounts should be cleared before embarking overseas.



If a garage sale is held to raise money, then the proceeds will normally go into a common account to offset expenses for the whole team. Occasionally an individual may receive an extra amount if the leadership and team members agree.

If accommodation and overseas travelling expenses are unknown, then a certain amount of money must be paid into a common fund before leaving the home country.

Someone apart from the team leader should manage the finances and a financial record should be kept at all times. This releases the team leader for other responsibilities.

The team overseas

The team will endeavour to have a daily team meeting for prayer and to discuss the activities coming up for the day.

Where there is a busy ministry scheduled it is imperative that one day a week is taken for relaxation without any ministry responsibilities. Also, when ministering in the tropics it is strongly advisable to have an afternoon siesta. Initially you may feel relaxation is unwarranted, but without it you and the team will probably not last the distance.

Regular communication with the home church is encouraged whether it be by mail or fax.

The home church

Any news received from the team overseas should be communicated to the church. Regular prayer is encouraged in supporting the team overseas.

When the team returns home

Prepare the team for their homecoming. They need a humble grateful attitude for what God has done and they will normally find it hard to settle back into a routine for a while. The downside of trips is that it can spoil a person for the 'ordinary' everyday routines.

Allow them ample time to report back to the church. This may be done during a service or special evening arranged. It is of vital importance that the team does not make fun of the foreign culture. Tell funny stories if you wish, but not at the expense of putting people down. Too many people are insensitive to other cultures.

Missionary support

In sending out missionaries we must support them in every possible way. Some suggestions are mentioned in the Missionary Policy. However, a lot of prayer and wisdom is necessary in understanding how best to *financially support* the candidate. Various Missionary Societies have different policies and the church must work along side these.

Different individuals will be drawn to giving to different needs so provide publicity regarding varying situations needing support -

- starving children
- persecuted Christians
- national workers
- literacy and book distribution
- Bible translation
- teaching/medical/training programs/orphanages, etc.

The church must not hastily commit itself to the financial support of a

missionary candidate, otherwise it may regret it in the long term. Once financial support is given, the church needs to stand by that missionary for a defined period of time. It should be for their whole term of service overseas, unless otherwise stated. There is nothing worse than for missionaries to find themselves financially embarrassed, while in another country.

Bear in mind, that individuals within any congregation will also support that missionary, on top of the church's financial commitment. Unfortunately, there will always be individuals who will redirect their tithe from the church towards the missionary going out, as the latter has more personal appeal, but this will cause a short fall in the general giving of the church. If the short fall is too great, it could strangle the general fund of the church reducing its commitments to other people.

Church leadership needs to know the difference between moving forward in faith on the one hand and irresponsible financial commitments on the other. The dividing line is hard to find at times. It can only come through prayer, time and discussion.

Forward planning

Churches and Missionary Societies must seriously consider the future direction of overseas missions. Not only is there poor stewardship of money in the present system, but there is little vision for fully getting behind national workers. Nationals must be trained to take the lead in all countries and while the need for missionaries will never cease, their role must become more that of servant hood to the National Church.

Local churches need to consider linking up with sister national churches in other countries to exchange and train leadership. This can work in both directions. We should also consider inviting more potential national students to our own country for

training before returning them back home.

These options along with others, must be more aggressively thought through.

Bibliography

Higgins, R. 'A Christian Response to Global Capitalism' Zadok paper S112, 2001.