MILLENNIALS AND MISSION: THE LECTURER

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I wonder whether there may be some hints in this story of what global mission needs to feel like from a UK perspective as millennials increasingly emerge as leaders in our context: Friendship, mutuality, equality, meaning, participationâ€¦and how can these ideas be adapted to, for example, a church-to-church partnership? Letâ€™s keep thinking and praying, and indeed listening to millennials...
Category: Observations

Eddie recently posed a challenge to millennials to share their experiences of, struggles with, and desires for, the Western missionary movement. Some excellent responses have come. Quite genuinely excellent. As I read them (see e,g, here and here) certain words and themes kept reoccurring: partnership, friendship, mutuality, equality, meaning, participationâ€¦

That prompted me to write something from my own experience as a lecturer in a Bible college here in Kampala, Uganda. Although I *technically* am a millennial, scraping in by a few months, I donâ€™t probably look, feel, or probably think like one. However, we regularly host teams of them through the partnership between our seminary here, Uganda Martyrs Seminary Namugongo (UMSN), and Oak Hill College (OHC) in North London. And itâ€™s that partnership I want to describe here as an imperfect example of *some* of what many millennials might be attracted to as they shape the future of the UKâ€™s role in global mission

The partnership between these two Bible colleges long predates Ros my wife, and I, coming here to Uganda in 2011 (after studying at OHC for 4 years). In fact, it goes back to the 1980s when the principal of UMSN was scandalously shot and killed in 1984 by government soldiers during a time of unrest. Students were also tortured and taken away, and generally-speaking the college, which back then was just a small training centre, was wrecked. Some Oak Hill staff heard about the dreadful incident (the murdered principal had previously been a student there) and started to pray and support the college, and the relationship grew rapidly from there!

The partnership is long-running and extensive. Both colleges regularly pray for each other in times of corporate worship. About 30 students, often from some of the poorest dioceses in the world, are studying here at UMSN because of bursaries we can offer because of money generously raised by Oak Hill students. Our principal and his wife have been to visit and stay at Oak Hill twice in the last 8 years to fellowship with, and learn from, folk there, and weâ€™ve had so far 4 faculty members from Oak Hill come to visit UMSN over recent years.

However, perhaps the richest and most beneficial component of the relationship between the two colleges is the regular â€˜partnership weeksâ€™ we enjoy. These are, basically, visits from teams of OHC staff and students who come and work with our UMSN students on thinking how to preach though a book of the Bible. Weâ€™ve now had 21 of these after our most recent one, involving a total of 172 different Oak Hill students (almost all training for ministry in one form or another) going back to 2009.

Let me tell you a bit about what happened during the most recent partnership week, as an

exampleâ€¦

- A team of 11 came out. 10 students, and a faculty member, Dr Matthew Bingham. They arrived rather tired on Saturday lunchtime, and we took them back here (about 2 hoursâ€™ drive) to Namugongo. When they arrived, we plied them with some caffeine and gave them a briefing about some basic aspects of culture and life here â€“ greetings, dress, public prayer, health, security etc.
- 6.30 am next morning they all left with different UMSN students to go and visit some churches across Kampala. We told our students that the visitors were not to preach under any circumstances but were to sit and listen and learn (and go say hi to the kids in Sunday school!) They were all back by 4 pm, having got to know their host students well, learnt lots about church in Uganda (and Kampala especially). We spent the late afternoon talking through some aspects of their visit with them â€“ what theyâ€™d seen and experienced, why church happens this way etc.
- The bulk of the week, Monday morning until Friday lunchtime, was conference, this time based mostly on Paulâ€™s Epistle to the Ephesians. This involved some sessions from the front by Oak Hill visitors, some personal study time for OHC and UMSN students, and afternoons in small group discussions with OHC and UMSN students working together under Godâ€™s word and the Spiritâ€™s guidance.
- However, there were lots of other activities additional to this day-to-day normal routine for the week. This includedâ€¦
    - Each visitor sat with 8 or 9 UMS students individually for 20 minutes or so each, hearing their testimonies, learning about their lives, families, joys and challenges, and asking how they can pray for them. Those prayer points are taken back to London and prayed through each week during OHC chapel. Contact details were exchanged and many students will continue friendships by phone, email and Whatsapp!
    - Ros and I had time with the team on a couple of evenings, discussing everything from prosperity theology to the ministries of our students, from demonic forces in Uganda to listening to theological voices from outside the Western world.
    - On one evening we invited a current student, and a recently graduated one, to come for a couple of hours to our house and I asked them a few prompt questions about their lives and ministries as church leaders in Uganda. We then prayed for them. This was a very powerful, humbling and moving evening of listening and learning to a brother and sister who minister the same faith but in a radically different context to many of us in the UK.
    - OHC played UMSN at both football and volleyball. Our British visitors valiantly lost at both this time. Again. Of course, most importantly it was about having great fun together, laughing and enjoying life together.
    - On Thursday, a group of 8 UMSN students presented for 2 hours on the topic of mission

in Uganda. Although this was set up to educate and inform our Oak Hill visitors (which it did), it was also fascinating and discussion-provoking for all UMSN students too.
- One evening Ros and I talked to the visiting team about partnership between UK churches and mission partners (remember, most of these teams are future church leaders), helping them to think through how these relationships can be formed, nurtured and enjoyed for the benefit of all.
- Another evening we showed the team some of the most recent and important books being authored by African Christians. We want UK church leaders to realise the depth and extent of African-authored theology that is emanating from the continent in written format, and yes to read it too!
- One evening we sent our team out into Namugongo to get street food â€“ specifically the wonderful Uganda Rolex. They have to navigate this alone which is a great cross-cultural experience and eating it is a wonderful reward for their successful venture!
- A couple of evenings our visitors eat with the principal and his family â€“ an opportunity to get to know them better too and learn more about Canon Henryâ€™s 20-yr experience as UMSN principal.
- One evening a visiting team member presented about his country of origin â€“ the US. He presented about the church there â€“ things to give thanks for, and challenges and weaknesses to pray about. All the students loved it and saw clearly that God is over all the world (this is not really a concept in African traditional religion) and that the huge Ugandan church must have a role to play in praying for, and taking the gospel to, other countries both inside and outside of Africa!
- On the Thursday evening, we celebrate our cultural traditions with a night of singing and dancing. The OHC team also presented a skit about touring London. Such huge fun, and so great to see all the students and visitors celebrate and enjoy their different traditions and cultures in this way.
- On the final morning of the conference, we had a faculty member from UMSN preaching before we â€˜graduatedâ€™ those who have attended (with a certificate and a free Christian book) and the UMSN principal addressed the conference and closed it.

One OHC student, on returning to the UK last week, wrote the following words:

â€œThere was a tangible sense that as colleges we lean in on one another in prayer and in common vision to serve the Lord Jesus. We shared about our different challenges and so were renewed in prayer for one otherâ€¦At the graduation ceremony, we gave each UMSN student a copy of Langham Partnershipâ€™s African-authored short book â€˜Preaching the Scripturesâ€™. In it, Joel Biwul writes, â€œThere is a need to revive biblical Christianity in modern Africa through proper biblical preaching done with zeal, commitment, passion and the dedication that it deserves.â€ â€¦Of course, that need

for revival is for us in the UK just as much as in Uganda. May we students at both Oak Hill and UMSN know this rekindling in the years to come!â€

Do pray for this UMS-OHC partnership. Give thanks to the Lord - it is rare for something like this to span so many years, across so many different leaders on both sides and to be such a mutual blessing to everyone involved. What a gift God has given both colleges! Pray that both colleges would be enriched, encouraged and strengthened through this partnership in the gospel. (By the way, it was made a few years ago, and thereâ€™s a few things I phrased in a way that I wouldnâ€™t now , but this 4-min video gives a good overview of the look and feel of these partnership weeks.)

I wonder whether there may be some hints in this story of what global mission needs to feel like from a UK perspective as millennials increasingly emerge as leaders in our context: Friendship, mutuality, equality, meaning, participationâ€¦and how can these ideas be adapted to, for example, a church-to-church partnership? Letâ€™s keep thinking and praying, and indeed listening to millennials...

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