WHERE TO NOW?

Posted on March 31, 2020 by Eddie

In which I attempt to identify some of the issues facing mission agencies and their staff.
Category: Observations

Twelve days ago, I gave a presentation to the Global Connections' council on the way that mission agencies struggle in relating to churches. We were at a point where people were starting to think twice about travelling to meetings, so rather than head down to London, I gave my presentation over Zoom.

Though I say it myself, it was a good presentation. Emerging out of my research, it had a combination of data, anecdotal observations and thought-provoking ideas. It is also, less than two weeks later, completely irrelevant. The issues that concerned mission agencies two weeks ago are not the ones that they are having to deal with today and when normality returns (whatever that is), they may have a whole series of other unforeseen issues that they have to grapple with.

Unlike my report to the GC Council, what follows is not based on any research. I'm going to suggest some issues that mission agencies will be dealing with in the short to mid-term. I'd welcome any clarifications or corrections from those leading agencies in the comments (though I suspect you won't have time).

Now

Like every other organisation in the country, mission agencies will be scrabbling around working out how to carry on, while everyone works from home. It will take a while for things to settle down into the new normal.

Events and conferences will be cancelled for the next few months. Perhaps a few churches will invite a missionary to live-stream a talk, but this is unlikely to be a priority in the short-term. Agencies which rely on the income from events, conferences and sponsored-runs will see an immediate hit to their funds, especially if they have already paid for venues and such like. Those agencies who have salaried staff who are involved in speaking at events and conferences may well need to consider furloughing some of their people for a while.

Ensuring good communication and setting up support systems for missionaries who have remained on the field will be a priority at the moment. While some will cope admirably, even thrive, in this situation others will find being in isolation a long way from their families particularly stressful and will be in need of good pastoral support.

Soon

The news media in the UK have already mentioned that some charities have seen a significant drop in their income over the past few weeks. Generally, Christians are very generous and churches and mission agencies tend to do better at times of crisis than some other charities. However, a number of mission agencies are already facing severe financial constraints and any fall in their income could have serious repercussions.

We do not know how the outbreak will progress in different parts of the world, however, it is entirely possible that contact with missionaries overseas and the provision of support may become much more difficult at the very point where the need for that support becomes critical.

Later

As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, we do not know what is going to happen over the next few months. However, it is entirely possible that some communities will face massive social, economic and religious upheaval. Some of the places that agencies serve may look very different in a year's time than they do now and they may have very different needs. The role of mission agencies may need to change and adapt very rapidly. To give the example of my own agency, it is quite possible that Bible translation will not be the priority that it is today in some parts of the world, what implications does this have for Wycliffe in the medium to long term.

More could be said and I'd welcome any thoughts from agency staff in the comments. So why have I written this? Partly it is to help get my own thoughts arranged for some work that I will be involved in over the next few weeks, but also it is to provide some ammunition for prayer for those who support missionaries and mission agencies.

Please pray.