THREE STEPS TO DEVELOPING A CHURCH MISSION STRATEGY

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Category: Observations

Many churches don't have any strategy or organised approach to supporting world mission. I'm not saying this as a criticism, if you don't actually have a live link to a mission partner or some other direct contact to global mission work, it's pretty hard to be disciplined about this and most church leaders are so busy with the things happening right in front of them, that they don't have the space to think about the rest of the world.

So, here are three steps that a church could take in order to develop a sustainable approach to involvement in world mission. Before going any further, read my short post from yesterday that contains some important background information.

Pray. This might sound obvious, but the first thing to do is pray. Firstly, there is a need for corporate prayer for God to help the church get involved in what he is doing around the world. This may involve a slice of repentance and it could be tied to a sermon series on mission in the Bible. It does a church good to admit that they haven't got things right and to acknowledge that they need God's help to move forwards. Secondly, there needs to be some sort of regular prayer for God's work in the world. I'd strongly encourage avoiding the sort of prayer list where you pray for a different country or situation every Sunday. This is just confusing for the congregation. Give them something to get their teeth into. Adopt an unreached people group and pray for them for a few months, using videos and other resources to inform your prayers. Or perhaps take a country and make that a prayer focus for a number of weeks. There are all sorts of things online that can help you pray; but go deep rather than broad.

Delegate. In my experience the biggest blockage in churches developing an interest in world mission is the minister. This isn't because ministers are opposed to world mission (well, some of them are), but because they are too busy to take a lead on this question given all of the other calls on their time.

Delegate!!!

Depending on your churchmanship, some ministers will believe that they need to take a lead in anything like this, but this doesn't mean that they can't get support from other church members. Find a way to make it work.

The advantage of delegating is that there may well be people in the congregation who have a connection to countries or situations that could provide the basis for the sort of in depth prayer that I

suggested under point one. Of course, I realise that there may well be members who are so fixated on one situation that they wouldn't actually be helpful to a church which is finding its way in mission.

Avoid. Traditionally, we think of mission as involving missionaries and mission agencies. However, while there is huge value in both missionaries and mission agencies (I would say that), I'm not convinced that this is where churches should start. There are many ways which churches can be involved in God's mission; through prayer, supporting national Christian workers, receiving missionaries from other countries, working with overseas students or asylum seekers, and so the list goes on. If we fixate on sending our own missionaries or working with an agency, that can easily end up limiting what it is that we do. Of course, it is great if a church can send its own mission partners, but that probably isn't the place that they are going to start. Keep your options open and don't make any commitments too early on.

So why bother? I will assume that I don't need to say why some sort of involvement in God's mission is important to a church. The question is why have some sort of organised strategy? Two reasons, an organised approach which goes for depth more than breadth helps church members get involved and to grow their commitment. The other thing is that I've never seen a church with a good local outreach program that didn't also have a serious approach to international mission in one way or another.