RECRUITMENT: WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

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The language of "sending" doesn't really capture the breadth and complexity of travel, migration and diaspora life in our world. So what language should we use?
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Today it was announced that a Nobel prize winning scientist had resigned from his university post in the wake of some ill judged remarks about men and women working together in the same laboratory. One of the interesting features about this case is that thirty or forty years ago, his remarks would have seemed perfectly normal; certainly not a resigning matter.

Over time, views on what constitutes acceptable or appropriate language change. This is true for the mission world as much as anywhere else.

If you go back a few decades, there were a number of mission agencies who called themselves "Crusades". Those names have quietly been replaced with something that is less offensive to a large slice of humanity. In general, we have stepped back from some of the aggressive, over militaristic language which seemed appropriate to our forefathers, but which rings rather hollow in a post-colonial world.

Even the venerable term missionary is increasingly being replaced by mission partner because of negative connotations.

However, the question of language use is still an issue. At a recent cross-agency meeting (which I mentioned in my last post) we found ourselves wondering what the word "sent" implies outside of the missionÂ bubble.

OK, sending is a biblical concept, we can't escape that. The Father sent the Son sends the Church (Jn 20:21). But it is a big step from saying that the Church is sent out into the world, to saying that a particular individual is sent to Burkina Faso.

If X is sent out to Burkina, who does the sending? Who gave them the authority to do this and what role do people in Burkina have to play in all this? When we talk of sending in this way, it seems to imply that the sending countries call the shots and the receiving countries have to accept what happens to them. This is better than the militaristic language, but not much.

In truth, there is usually a complex series of negotiations involved in missionary "sending", even if our language doesn't quite capture it.

the truth is that the Church is continually in motion. People move between cities and countries in search of work, to be with family, to study and for the sake of Christian ministry. All of these people have the capacity toÂ stand with the Church in their new situations and to bring the message of Christ where it hasn't been heard. The language of "sending" doesn't really capture the breadth and complexity of travel, migration and diaspora life in our world. So what language should we use?