AUSTERITY, CUTS AND JOB LOSSES

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Category: Church: UK

From the title of this post, you might be tempted to think that I'm about to indulge in one of my rather rare political posts, but you would be mistaken. This post is the first in a brief series to look at funding for mission work.

Four years ago, Academic Paul Hildreth was commissioned by Global Connections to a review of world mission structures in the UK. The report is available on the GC website.

I'd like to highlight two points that Paul made with regard to funding missionaries:

> *Direct financial giving to mission agencies has declined considerably, with â€˜pooled fundingâ€™ for mission partners no longer an option for most. BMS and the Presbyterian Church of Ireland are exceptions to the rule. There has been an almost comprehensive switch to an â€˜individual supportâ€™ model, with agencies helping their mission partners to raise funds and taking a proportion (often 10 or 12.5%) towards their own operational costs.*

So churches are tending not to give money directly to mission agencies and so agencies are unable to pay salaries or stipends and have had to switch to a model where the missionary is responsible for raising their own funds. That's clear...

> *Churches were sceptical whether the â€˜personal supportâ€™ model was sustainable in the mid- to longer-term â€“ Whilst they wanted to be encouraging, they could see problems ahead in the sustainability of this model. Issues such as the increasing costs of living in different parts of the world, the growing universality of the model and the financial pressures felt by churches and their congregations were issues.*

But churches are not convinced of the sustainability of the personal support model. What this means is that financial constraints are pushing agencies towards using a funding model which may well not be sustainable. You don't need to be an economic guru to see that there is a significant problem here.

One inevitable result of these pressures is that it has become harder to find salaries/support for missionaries. Some missions which do pay salaries have had to lay staff off and there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that it is becoming significantly more difficult for missionaries, who have to raise their own support, to actually do so.

I realise that in the current climate, a few mission workers losing their jobs is a personal problem, but it's hardly a national calamity. However, if the church takes its call to witness to Christ at home and across the world seriously, we need to think about how we can afford this in a rapidly changing world.