STOP IT!

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Agencies and churches are, in general, not very good at stopping things. When they adopt a new initiative, they simply add it to the list of things they are already doing; stretching their people even further.
Category: Observations

Over the last ten or fifteen years, I've worked with many churches and agencies as they think through their approach to mission. In practice, this means that I ask them questions about what they are doing, talk to them about some of the current trends and changes in the world and then ask them some more questions about what they think they should be doing. It's a bit more complex than this, but not much.

I can't tell the groups what they should do; they all have varying concerns and exist in different contexts. What is right for one church may be entirely inappropriate for another. However, by asking the right questions and providing key information, I can help people to come to the right conclusions themselves. I like to think that I'm quite good at this.

However, though the churches and agencies I work with are all very different, they all have one thing in common; they are doing too much.

Many churches and mission agencies seem to be running more programmes than they can realistically support. A few hard working and hassled people are working silly hours to keep things going andÂ various activities are competing for a slice of a very limited budget. There are a number of problems with this situation, here are a couple:

- It is unhealthy for the people involved. Too many church people are burning themselves out helping with groups and church activities while holding down 9-5 jobs. There is little space for rest and spiritual refreshment in their lives - this isn't a good place to be.
- When the organisation does spot new opportunities (perhaps through working with someone like me), they find it difficult to follow them through because they are already overstretched and they can't stop anything they are doing.

Here lies the problem; agencies and churches are, in general, not very good at stopping things. When they adopt a new initiative, they simply add it to the list of things they are already doing; stretching their people even further.

There are understandable reasons why we don't call a halt to some things. People invest time, energy and their hearts into church and agency programmes; it is very difficult to tell them that it is time to draw it to a close. We are very conservative organisations and we don't like too much change; "we've always done it this way". There is also the vexed question of the "call", if someone says they are "called" to do something, it isn't always easy to turn the idea down. The other side of this coin is that when you rely on volunteers to do things, you want to do things that enthuse and motivate them.

It's not so much about programmes as about people.

And here, I must admit aÂ *mea culpa*. I said that I am good at helping people think through their situation and to come up with ways to move forward in the future. However, I've never been very

successful at helping people to stop doing things. I can point out the need to drop activities and I can demonstrate that the brilliant new ideas that they have come up with are impractical if they don't shelve something else, but I struggle to help them identify what it is that they should stop doing. I know a few techniques and exercises that can help, but this is a far more complex question than deciding what they should do and in a volunteer organisation such as a church or mission agency, it can be a minefield.

If anyone has any good ideas or resources they could point me to, in the comments, I'd be very grateful. New suggestions are always welcome; I'm always learning.