TWO MISSIONS?

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A simplified way of classifying mission from the point of view of the local church congregation.
Category: Short-Term Mission

This month marks eleven years since we first launched our blog. To put that in some sort of context, we've been going since before Facebook gained a mass audience and before the launch of Twitter. Though it has to be said that they seem to have done better than we have!

One of the reasons we've managed to keep going for so long is that mission is complicated; thereÂ are all sorts of ways to talk about it, understand it and disagree about it. There is plenty to keep a blog like this going for another few months, at least!

There are lots of different descriptions and classifications of mission. The problem with these is that they tend to be written by missionaries for missionaries and don't necessarily consider the needs or the perspective of the local church. In this post, I'd like to propose a very simple model for describing mission, from the perspective of the congregation.

Essentially there are two types of mission.

Church Mission: this is the ongoing outreach of the local congregation. It involves intentional engagement with the local community, witnessing to Jesus in both words and action and results in people being drawn into the Church and becoming maturing disciples of Jesus. This is the normal, everyday life of the Christian community. Reaching to the local community may involve special programmes or events and should certainly involve the congregation actively witnessing to Christ in their workplace or wherever they spend their time during the day.

Church mission may well be cross-cultural; English language classes and overseas students cafÃ©s are great opportunities to reach beyond the indigenous population and to see them become part of the local church congregation.

Distant Mission: (OK, I'm not happy with this title - can anyone think of a better one?). This is where the church sends people out, away from the Church itself to witness to Christ in another context, perhaps in another country altogether, with the aim of seeing new believers integrated into new church communities in their own context.

Distant mission probably involves learning a new language and culture, but it could involve church planting in another part of the same country. Distant mission has tended to be the domain in which mission agencies and other para-church bodies have been the most involved, though increasingly churches and denominations are working at a distance without the help of an agency.

All churches must have some sort of church mission programme, however (much though it pains me to say it), not all churches are in a position where they can get involved in distant mission. Some churches are too small or too financially stretched to be able to reach beyond their own locality in a meaningful way. That being said, churches should aspire to some sort of distant mission involvement if at all possible.

All mission, whether church mission or distant mission must aim at integrating people into a Christian

community and helping them to grow as disciples of Jesus. This means that all mission, by its nature is long-term. There is a place for short-term interventions, but these must take place within the framework of longer-term involvement.