MISSIONARY RECRUITMENT

Posted on September 22, 2016 by Eddie

In my day job, I recently conducted a survey on missionary recruitment in the UK. The results may (or may not) surprise you.
Category: Church: UK

Summary

In the first quarter of 2016, Global Connections ran an online survey of missionary recruitment in both the short and long term. There was only a limited response to the questionnaire, but the results do allow us to draw some tentative conclusions.

Long Term Mission

Methodology

An online poll was set up asking questions about missionary numbers and recruitment. 54 agencies, who are members of Global Connections, were invited to respond to the questionnaire.

The results from the questionnaire were exported into a spread sheet from which the data given below was extracted.

A total of 41 agencies responded to the survey. However, many agencies were unable to answer all of the questions. In order to look at trends over time, we only used data from those agencies which answered all of the relevant questions, which means that the sample size was much reduced. When looking at the trend data below, it is important not to take the numbers as being absolute values; they simply indicate trends.

Results

Total Number of Missionaries

Virtually all of the agencies (2 exceptions) who responded to the survey were able to list the number of long term missionaries currently serving with them. This gives a combined total of 2,820.

Trends in the Number of Long-Term Missionaries

13 agencies answered these questions. The responses were combined to give the following totals:

Year	Total Number of Long Term Missionaries	Long Term Missionaries Serving Outside of the UK	% of Missionaries Serving Outside of the UK
1980	642	473	74

1990	707	497	70
2000	790	542	69
2010	778	530	68
2016	677		

The total number of long-term missionaries sent by these agencies has been in decline since the year 2000. In addition, there is an indication that the percentage of missionaries serving overseas as opposed to in the UK is declining.

While one must be cautious about extrapolating the data from 13 agencies to the whole UK mission movement, there is clearly some cause for concern.

Trends in Recent Recruitment

Again, similar methodology was used with the trends for recruitment in recent years. More agencies responded to these questions (21), presumably because the questions referred to more recent events and were easier to answer.

	Gains	Losses
2011	116	111
2012	153	102
2013	153	126
2014	146	101
2015	111	80

This graph canâ€™t be compared directly to the one on longer-term numbers because it represents a different group of agencies. However, it also shows a fall off in recruitment in recent years. This decrease in recruitment seems to have been offset by a corresponding reduction in missionary losses.

Short-Term Mission

Global Connections has collected data on short-term mission assignments from churches and agencies which are registered with the GC Short-Term Code of Practice since 2007.

A large number of agencies and churches have registered with the scheme. However, there are only 23 organisations for which we have data for the full period since 2007. There combined totals are

presented below:

	Less than a month	1-3 Months	3-11 Months	1-2 Years	Total
2007	1,499	357	236	125	**2217**
2009	1,251	251	313	81	**1896**
2011	1,955	545	340	104	**2944**
2014	1,488	730	375	106	**2699**

This picture shows that the overall number of short-term missionaries has increased over the eight years from 2007-2015, though the rate of increase has not been smooth.

In any given year, over 50% of those going on short-term mission trips go for less than a year. However, the number of people taking trips of 1-3 monthsâ€™ duration has increased steadily over the period for which we have data and the increase in overall numbers can be attributed almost entirely to this group. There has been a slight increase in the number of people taking trips of 3-11 months and virtually no change in the number going for 1-2 years.

This relative lack of growth in â€˜longer-termâ€™ short-term mission is, perhaps, what we would expect given the lack of growth in long-term recruitment.

Conclusions

Perhaps the most solid conclusion that we can draw from this exercise is that it is difficult to get data from mission agencies. There are a number of possible reasons for this, the most obvious being that agency staff are stretched and they do not always have the capacity to deal with random requests of this nature. The other is that many agencies do not have easy access to historic data about missionary numbers.

The response numbers are low and because of this any conclusions that are drawn must be tentative. With that caveat in place, we can suggest the following:

- There does appear to be a decline in long-term missionary recruitment by traditional mission agencies, however, there are some other factors which need to be considered:
    - There are an increasing number of churches and denominations that are sending missionaries overseas without passing through mission agencies. These were not included in the survey and we do not know what impact they would have on overall numbers.

    - We do not know why there is an apparent decline in mission recruitment by the agencies and we cannot extrapolate a cause from the data we have.
- Short-term mission recruitment seems to be growing, though there may be an indication that this growth has levelled off.
- The growth in short-term missions is almost entirely due to those going for a period of 1-3 months.

This post first appeared on the Global Connections blog on September 8 this year.