SENDING WORKERS TO MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

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Category: Observations

Yesterday, I picked up on a post from Stephen Kneale which suggested that churches should spend a portion of their mission budget on reaching people in areas of the UK where there are very few Christians. Today, I'd like to push things a bit further and talk about what needs to be done in order to make this happen. Again, I'm following up on a post from Stephen - a different one this time (please go away and read it).

Stephen's solution is essentially two fold, we need to teach people and we need to do some things logistically and administratively to make it possible for people to move. I'll do more or less the same thing.

Stephen kicks of by saying:

> *First and foremost, even before we begin discussing the sending of workers, we need to give our people a gospel vision.*

He then goes on to expand what he means by a gospel vision, all of which I agree with, but, I think we need to go further. Stephen hints at the reasons for this when he says:

> *We need to be clear with people that we recognise we are asking something significant from them, that is not easy and yet would serve the church and glorify the Lord if they were to sacrificially move.*

He's dead right, being a missionary, be it in Oldham or Omdurman is not an easy option. However, being a Christian anywhere in the UK is likely to become increasingly difficult in the future. We need to teach and model a lifestyle that is appropriate for our current situation. I would suggest that the modelling is probably the most important. Without wishing to downplay the value of a preaching ministry and group Bible studies, some things are only taught by example and observation. We are fighting a massive machine that is constantly telling us that you need to have stuff in order to be happy, that the path to happiness is getting a good job, a good looking wife/husband and living an ideal life in the suburbs. At every level, our culture is pulling people into an expectation that those who do well will follow a certain sort of career path - which incidentally will pull them towards the bits of the country where there are the most Christians.

We need to confront this lie at every level, teaching and demonstrating that there is an alternative way to live. We need people who have achieved successful, high-flying careers who can demonstrate by their lifestyle that they are not consumed by their jobs. We also need for others who have stepped off the career ladder altogether and who can model an alternative lifestyle, that might be money poor, but time rich. We are used to suggesting that missionaries should live by faith, or should be tentmakers (have a job that allows them to minister to a particular community). We need to be thinking in terms of these categories in the UK, too. However, it will be far easier for someone

to take a job in some far-flung outpost of the North, rather than a glittering post at head-office if they have seen a sacrificial lifestyle already modelled in the life of their church. Teaching a gospel vision must be accompanied by living a gospel life.

Stephen then went on to look at various ways in which it might be possible to support people who wanted to work in areas where there are few Christians. Many of them are similar to the methods already in place to support missionaries working in other parts of the world. However, these methods can serve to marginalise the church in the whole process and I think that this new situation may allow us to redress the balance a little.

> *We already offer grants for training and the like, it would be wonderful if FIEC or other such bodies could consider helping potential workers (especially those who arenâ€™t due to do further training or wonâ€™t be coming in for a formal staff role) with the costs of moving to a new area.*

I'd like to make an alternative suggestion, that the FIEC (the group that Stephen and I both belong to) should not offer grants itself, but should offer a service whereby churches who need support for potential workers could be paired up with congregations who would like to help. Churches with a particular project, which might be a one off, or multi-year, could write up a proposal which would be made available on a database of some sort. Churches looking to support mission in the UK could consult the database and pick up on projects that they are able to support. There would need to be various safeguards in place, but the central system could be fairly low maintenance. The key would be the partnership between the two churches - and the Global Connections guidelines (though developed for another situation) would be a great help here. With the right publicity and encouragement, this sort of system could be very effective - it wouldn't meet every need, but it would promote real fellowship. I love the idea of a church being both a supporter and a receiver in this sort of system.

Of course, the FIEC might have been running something like this for years, and I'm completely ignorant of it.