WHOM SHALL WE SEND?

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What churches should be looking for in potential mission-partners.
Category: Observations

The next few posts are going to look at various things that are involved when churches send missionaries to work outside of the UK. Much of this could also apply to choosing people for pastoral and other roles at home, but that isn't my focus. The first two posts look at the question of selection, tomorrow I'll look (yet again) at the question of calling, but today I'd like to look at a few broader issues.

I'd like to suggest that there are three things you need to look for in a potential missionary candidate.

Firstly, **are they growing and maturing spiritually?** They don't have to be the finished article, but they do need to be on the right track. This is the most important quality of all and also the most self explanatory. I won't go into any more details, but if you potential candidate isn't a growing Christian, don't send them as missionaries.

Do they show any aptitude?Â There is no point in sending someone as a missionary to do something which they don't do at home. Airport arrivals halls are not magical places and someone who isn't a natural evangelist won't become one just because they've gone through arrivals in Tashkent. Once again, your candidate doesn't need to be the finished article, but they do need to show some evidence of gifting in whatever it is that they are going to do.

Let me just say a little bit about equipping for missionary work here. There is a tendency to imply that missionaries don't need to be as qualified for their work as pastors and teachers in the UK do for theirs. Frankly, this is rubbish (sorry, if that's too subtle). A missionary church-planter has to do everything that a pastor in the UK does, except they have to do it in a different language and in a culture where everything from their teaching style and the illustrations they use have to be adapted to the local culture. I would never suggest that church ministry in the UK is easy; it isn't, but there is another level of complexity involved when you do similar work in a different culture and often with minimal support. People have to be gifted and they have to be equipped.

Do they make you feel uncomfortable?Â People who are likely to thrive and make an impact in a different language and culture are likely to be the sort of people who ask awkward questions and who continually challenge the status quo. They may find some of your church activities stifling - but they may also have lots of non-Christian friends that they bring along to things. Whether we mean to or not, churches tend to develop an internal culture (which often looks very similar to British middle class values) and we tend to select our leaders from amongst the people who fit in with that culture. However, for cross-cultural mission (and, I would argue, pastoral leadership), we need people who will break the mould. I think it is telling that the important mission advances in the book of Acts did not come from the central, respectable church in Jerusalem but came from outliers like Philip, some un-named Cypriots and the church in Antioch. Who are the edgy people, who don't quite fit into church culture, but who have a wide network of friends and a passion for sharing the Gospel? Those are the ones you need to be looking at for mission service.

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