# GET IN FIRST: THOUGHTS ON PROACTIVITY IN MISSION

*Posted on May 23, 2018 by Eddie*

Some thoughts on being pro-active in equipping people for mission: or get in first before the mission agency does!
**Category:** Observations

In this series of posts I'm looking at how a church can be involved in sending mission partners to work overseas. The first post looked at some of the qualities needed for mission work and the second one considered the question of a "call to mission". Today, I'd like to briefly consider why churches need to be proactive in choosing people for mission work.

Typically, the way that people in the UK get involved in mission work is something along these lines. They feel, for one reason or another, that they have a call to mission; this may just be a vague sense that God wants them to do something or it may be more specific and involve a particular country and a particular agency. They may discuss and pray about this with their friends, but at some point they will go to their church leadership, tell them about their call and ask the church to endorse and support their work. Involvement in mission starts with the individual and then builds up to the church as a whole. While this pattern is not wrong, as such, I don't think it is ideal. A better way forward is for churches to identify potential candidates and then to work with them and with mission agencies to identify where they should go and what they should do. Ideally, mission involvement should start with the church and then work down to the individual. That being said, I think there are two things which mitigate against an approach to mission which starts with the church and which promotes the role of the individual:

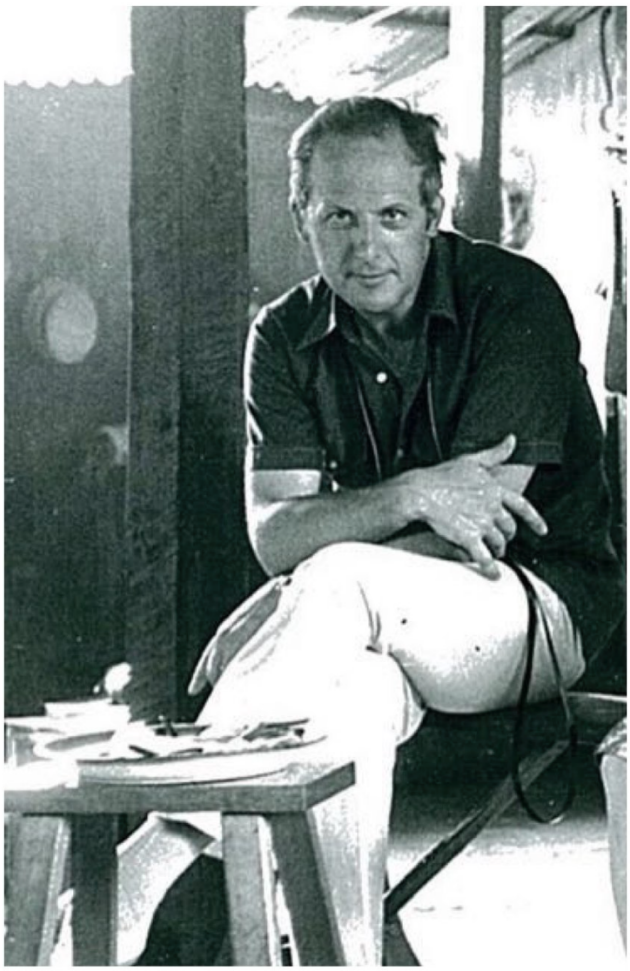
- Firstly, in our individualist society we have over emphasised the role of the individual call and built a mission sub-culture which revolves around stories of maverick and visionaries who struck out against all the advice and did amazing things for God. We need a few more stories about the people who did the same, crashed and burned and never made it into the books.
- Secondly, mission agencies target their advertisements and recruitment literature at individuals and, at least on first contact, more or less ignore the role of the church. Agencies generally say they want good partnerships with churches, but the way in which they present themselves to the public rarely reflects this. Mission agencies fish for individuals and hope to catch churches.

So what should church leadership do? I believe that it is incumbent on church leaders to prayerfully and sensitively identify the members of their fellowship who are possible mission partners and to approach them with the idea (before the member comes to them!). In the short-term, this will involve floating the idea of future service with the member and identifying roles in the church which will help them to grow and develop their gifts. However, I think that the only way to really make this work is to take all members of the church (being realistic, this might mean members between 18-30) through a similar process. It is important to ask young Christians about their hopes for the future, to open up other possibilities to them and to challenge them about settling for a middle-class, materialistic existence. If we are to grow the next generation of leaders, we need to be providing these people with an opportunity to serve and to grow. Giving people roles in church is not just about making sure that the rotas are filled, it should also be about helping them to grow as disciples - which is what the great commission is all about. A couple of thoughts in closing:

- If church leaders are able to spend time talking through the future with young people (once a year would be enough) they will identify some who could go into cross-cultural mission or full-time ministry in the UK; they are the easy ones. The real challenge is helping people who face forty years working in secular Britain, seeking to be a witness to Christ in the workplace in the face of massive social and religious pressures. Helping these people to be disciples who will make disciples is an ongoing task for the church.
- Secondly, it is sometimes suggested that a church should send it's best people for overseas missionary service. A friend posted the following quote on Twitter yesterday, which illustrates this view.

"It cannot escape the attention of a careful reader of the New Testament that those who were sent out as missionaries by those first century congregations were themselves already experienced Christian workers... This would suggest that when we are seeking to discover which persons in our congregations might have the greatest contribution to make overseas, the person concerned is probably not some presently insignificant student attending a Bible College, but rather someone who is already prominent and active as a leader in the work of your congregation. It is someone you would all miss. If they are to make a contribution in another culture, we must be certain first that they are able to make an effective contribution in their own. If you won't miss them, we don't want them! Send us your cream, not your dregs."

Michael Griffiths, *Get your church involved in mission* (OMF Publishing) p. 34.



"Send us your cream, not your dregs". I am old enough to remember a time when a statement like that would be seen as inspiring, today it comes across as elitist and unpleasant. I would say that churches should send people who are growing as disciples as missionaries; they don't have to be

the finished article, but they do need to be growing. However, they should also send growing disciples to be church leaders in the UK and we certainly need growing disciples in our classrooms, offices and factories today. The bottom line is that churches need to be intentionally growing disciples and encouraging them into service - the location is just a matter of geography.

**Posts In This Series**

Whom Shall We Send?

What To Do With A Call

Get in First: Thoughts on Proactivity in Mission

Letâ€™s Talk About Money

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