

CHURCH AND AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS

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If agencies are serious about partnerships with churches, they need to rethink the way in which they relate to them.

Category: [Observations](#)

In the next couple of posts, I will be returning to a theme that I've touched on before and will undoubtedly touch on again; the partnership between churches and mission agencies. To let you know where I am going, the basic thesis of these two posts is that the way that mission agencies are set up makes it difficult for them to partner seriously with churches in their home countries. I'll touch on a different aspect of this in each of the posts.

However, before going too far, I'd like to make a couple of statements.

- I know that many agencies have some good partnerships with churches in the UK.
- I believe that for the most part, mission agencies and their leaders take the role of the church and partnership with churches seriously.

In other words, I am making generalisations here and there will always be some counter examples. Equally, the fact that I believe that agencies are not well set up to partner is more to do with structure and history than current intention.

A good illustration of the problem is illustrated in this quote from a church leader during a twitter conversation about churches and agencies:

Absolutely right. I'm continuously turned off by so many of my interactions with mission agencies (esp. the letters they send). It's usually a demand for our church to serve them (with cash/prayer/people) rather than enabling our church to be involved in world mission.

To give an example, two weeks ago, we received a letter at our church from a UK agency asking us to hold a special Sunday dedicated to their mission and holding a collection for it. The aim is to fundraise/advocate for the mission, not partner with and serve our local church.

I regularly hear comments of this sort from church leaders. They are bombarded with publicity from mission agencies (almost all of them asking for something) and the overall impact is not a positive one. Hopefully, one of the positive impacts of GDPR will be to cut down on mission spam! If agencies are serious about partnering with churches they will not start by asking the church to do something for them. The starting point should always be to discover what the church is doing and to see what sort of overlap and cooperation is possible and serious partnership starts with a face to face conversation, not with a marketing email or a mail shot.

A related problem is the sheer number of agencies touting for business with churches. It is impossible (and would be unwise) for churches to respond to every request for involvement. Equally, there is nothing more damaging to the image of the mission movement than an agency pushing its own agenda on a church which already has a deep commitment to world mission through another channel.

However, at least these issues recognise and respect the leadership of the church. To my mind, the

biggest problem in church agency relationships comes when agencies fail to respect the lines of authority and accountability which exist in church life. Agency recruitment, online and in print, almost always targets individuals, asking them to consider joining the mission for a holiday, a short-term trip or a life-long ministry. However, the church leadership (who will be expected to encourage and, probably, pay for the trip) are not brought into the equation till the agency and the individual have had a number of initial conversations. The impact of this is that the church leaders are effectively disenfranchised from early discussions about the church's mission strategy. I reflected on how church leaders should be involved in commissioning people for mission [here](#).

The problem from the agency's point of view is that they require a flow of candidates and short-term workers in order to keep their doors open. They need to attract as many people as possible if the agency is not to close. For the most part, the desire to recruit workers and supporters is deep in the DNA of the agencies and they don't consider its impact on churches. However, if agencies are serious about partnerships with churches, they need to rethink the way in which they relate to them and this touches on just about every aspect of the agencies recruitment, fund-raising and publicity.

[The desire to recruit workers and supporters is deep in the DNA of the agencies and they don't consider how this effects churches. Click To Tweet](#)

