MISSION AGENCY FUTURES: THE PRESENT

Posted on May 28, 2019 by Eddie

Mission agencies essentially do three things: this post introduces them. Later posts in the series will suggest ways in which they need to change.

Category: Observations

Over the last few years, I've written a good deal about mission agencies, you can find the majority of those posts here. Over the next few days, I plan to write a few posts which suggest possible ways forward for agencies in a changing world, but before I get to the future, I'd like to lay a foundation by considering what it is that mission agencies actually do. Then tomorrow, I'll consider some of the issues which are driving the need for change.

Broadly speaking, the work that mission agencies do fits into three categories. Each agency will describe things differently and they may lump together functions that I have separated, but as a generalisation what I say below is good enough to work with.

Mission Stuff

This is the work at the coalface of mission; Bible translation, church planting, running schools, hospitals and what-have-you. It's the basic stuff that the agency exists to do. Some agencies do the majority of their mission stuff through financing local initiatives and making grants to other groups. However, for the most part, my focus will be on agencies which do their stuff by sending long term missionaries to plant churches, translate the Bible and so on.

Getting People Involved

For the most part, agencies talk about "mobilisation", but I find the term rather jargonish and, in the current context, I'm uneasy about using military terminology to describe sending westerners into other parts of the world. In broad terms, agencies aim to get people to give, pray or go. They need people to fund their work through (ideally, regular) financial giving, they rely heavily on people praying for their work and they seek to recruit more missionaries to carry out the work. Behind all of this is a publicity/marketing arm of the agency which may be quite large and very sophisticated. Some agencies intentionally include education about broader mission issues as part of their publicity, but most simply focus on their own work.

Logistics

Agencies have to have structures which allow them to get missionaries to the field and to keep them there. This will typically involve a finance function to make sure they can eat while they do their work. There will be an HR function to make sure they are doing the work they are supposed to be doing and surviving in the process. Contingency planning for emergencies is an important part of the logistics operation, especially when the agency has people working in scary or insecure locations. Networking with churches (around the world and in the UK) and other agencies will also be a significant feature.

Undergirding all of this is an administrative infrastructure, which is vitally important to the life of the agency, but not something that I will be looking at during this short series.

The Whole Series

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