

Seminar *Bringing the World to Your Church* led by Joy Piper at WEC Open Day, Bulstrode, May 2002

'Bringing the World to Your Church'

Notes from a seminar led by Joy Piper at WEC Open Day, Bulstrode, May 2002

Message

In many churches mission is left to a few keen people. It's an optional extra. Let's start by trying to define what we want to say about mission to the other people in our church.

For example:

Mission matters.

If a church isn't involved in mission, it isn't a proper church.

Jesus told us to do it so let's do it.

To ignore Christ's commission is a serious matter. It means in effect we're disobeying him. We're also disobeying God. This is sin.

There are several possible motivating factors for being involved in mission.

- We do it because we're told to in Scripture.
- We do it because we want Christ to come again and he won't come until every people group has access to the gospel.
- We do it because the love of Christ compels us to.

What is the message?

- Mission is part of the deal when we become Christians. There's no opt out clause.
- Mission is NOT boring!

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Interest

How many of your church regulars turn out for a missionary meeting?
How many people in your church are involved in a missionary prayer group?
How many regularly read a missionary magazine?
Why so few?

A few suggestions:

- *Boring meetings; tiredness because of demands of family life, work, church responsibilities; lack of teaching on mission ...*

How do we reach the rest?

By binning missionary meetings for starters! It's this approach that has marginalised mission over the years and given people the opportunity to choose not to be interested.

- Force feeding

Incorporate mission into the meetings and activities they do go to.
How? Where?

- *Morning worship, junior church; youth group; house group; prayer meetings ... collage with mission theme; prayer aeroplanes; drama ...*
- Special efforts - *not* just once a year!

The bait has to be enticing. We're up against a lot of competition. It takes something special to tear people away from the many other demands on their time and energy. We also have to overcome deeply rooted prejudiced attitudes. "I don't like it because I've never tried it .."

What did Jesus do when he faced his disciples with the awesome task of sharing the good news with the whole world? He broke it down, started them off on their home patch. Jerusalem first, then farther and farther afield. It's a good example to follow.

Start where people are at. Use methods they feel comfortable with. Be creative. Imaginative. Find out in what ways members of your unique group of Christians already connect with the wider world. It's inevitable they do somewhere, somehow, for example through:

- *Business travel, holidays, news bulletins, TV and radio programmes, surfing the Internet, mixing with friends and colleagues from other ethnic backgrounds, enjoying 'foreign' food as takeaways or at specialist restaurants ...*

How can we exploit these points of connection in the interests of world mission?

Start 'at home' and then gradually extend the view. Structure events around 3 ingredients: Fun, Food and Facts.

Ideas:

- If you have a mixed race congregation, hold an international **Food, Glorious Food** evening.

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Invite members from *all* the different ethnic backgrounds represented to bring and share

- some of their favourite food. Have several offer one-sentence thanksgiving prayers in other languages (with interpretation if you like) *after* the meal. Or ask several people to lead The Lord's Prayer together, each speaking a sentence in turn in their own language. Maybe include some 'ethnic' entertainment after the meal - dance, drama, music ... Involve people in your church family who come from other cultures.
- Centre an all age, event around a specific theme. For a quiz night with a difference, focus the questions on a country or continent. Or hold a holidays evening and ask people to bring (a limited number of) photos and/or share some of their impressions of another country they have visited. Finish the evening with a few facts and figures about countries mentioned, [*Operation World* is a useful source], and a brief prayer. Encourage people to pray for the country they holiday in.

We live in a world dominated by marketing and advertising. We need to market mission imaginatively to get people interested, helping them see in what ways they are already 'world Christians'. If they have been bored by the subject, we're probably at least partly to blame.

We also, more importantly, need to pray. Transforming people's attitudes is as much a work of God by his Holy Spirit as the miracle of the new birth. We are partnering with him.

'Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain that build it.'

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Support

Once the interest has been created, we can start to set up a programme of active participation - 'support'.

Who? What? How?

- *Individuals engaged in mission need support.*
- *Sending organisations need support.*
- *Relief agencies need support.*
- *Countries and people groups need support.*
- *Projects need support.*

Some useful principles:

- Focus on specifics:

Why?

- *It's better to do a little well than a lot badly.*
- *People tend to get overwhelmed by too much information about too much in this information-overload world.*
- *It's more achievable.*

By all means let your information-sharing at times zoom out to a broader view of world mission. But for regular, meaningful, sustainable support zoom in on a small number of individuals, organisations, countries, projects or people groups and concentrate on these as your adopted 'causes'.

How?

Don't form a 'committee'.

Form a **GRAB** [**G**lobal **R**esourcing **A**ction **G**roup] or something similarly 'unmissionary sounding' to which you invite representatives from as many church groups and activities as possible. In consultation with them and the groups they represent, decide who/ what your church would like to focus on. Using your church's procedures, come to a church decision. Then go for it ...

- Demolish that boredom barrier

We need to tackle the anti-mission mindset head-on.

How?

- *Information; teaching; creative thinking.*

Contrary to many church member's understanding, mission support is not just about money.

What else is it about?

- *Prayer.*

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- *Practical help.*

How can we do these more effectively?

- *By helping church members to think themselves into that 'other' situation.*

How?

- *Visits to mission partners, organisation headquarters, overseas projects.*
- *Short term experience.*
- *Role play games at fun events with a purpose.*

Summary:

Hands-on experience fuels prayerful, committed, relevant support.

So does stirring people's imaginations: what would *I* want if it was *me* 'out there'.

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Send

This is an important part of our mandate as mission supporters.

Dare we present the challenge of Isaiah chapter 6?

'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'

Creating an effective interest and support-raising programme is a dangerous business. It may result in your church losing some of its best people - to active service overseas. Are you prepared for the cost involved in becoming a sending church?

So how do we present the challenge?

- *Preaching*
- *Teaching*
- *House Groups*
- *Guest Speakers*
- *Prayer*
- *Situations Vacant notices - passing on news of needs and opportunities advertised on missions web sites and in magazines, etc.*

Effective support / sending / even more effective support

Why?

- *Knowledge and understanding, created by imaginative information-sharing, create interest that motivates action and participation, i.e. first hand experience, that creates first hand knowledge, etc ...*

That's the theory anyway! Try it and see.

How?

Some churches operate independently, others in co-operation with sending agencies.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of these different approaches?

- *Former feels more direct but may be inadequately informed or prepared.*
- *Latter means you have the benefit of acquired wisdom and experience concerning what is needed, how to live in another culture and all the many other practical issues involved in serving overseas, or with another ethnic group in this country.*

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Intercession

A large percentage of regular church-goers do not pray meaningfully for mission. Why?

- *Not bothered*
- *Not informed*
- *Overwhelmed by concept - the world's a very big place!*
- *Lazy*
- *Find prayer difficult*
- *Too busy*
- *Unconvinced it makes a difference*
- *Turned off by boring missionary meetings*

How can we help people pray regularly and relevantly for mission?

- *Make connections with their everyday sources of relevant information: news bulletins; newspapers and magazine articles; TV travel programmes, natural history programmes and other documentaries; holiday experiences abroad; travel books.*
- *Be selective. Offer information as prayer fuel in bite-sized, manageable amounts. If you pile too much coal on the beginnings of a fire it goes out very quickly.*
- *Battle to get mission included in the prayers at regular meetings and events, and on the church prayer diary. Don't let it become marginalised. Look for ways to include mission in every aspect of your church's prayer life.*
- *If you must have them, try to be creative and imaginative in how you organise specifically 'missionary' prayer meetings, and in how you refer to them!*
- *Find out about and use some of the many prayer guides and resources available, not just from the organisation with which you are linked.*
- *Exploit repetition. If your mission partners, organisation, project or whatever are mentioned every time (or regularly, at least) in the intercessions at worship services, people will get to know them off by heart.*
- *Keep up to date with information. Don't just use intermittent prayer letters. Information is available from a variety of sources including email, web sites, prayer lines, live phone links with mission partners, magazines, World Service (radio) ...*
- *Above all pray for the missionary prayer life of your church.*

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Owning

It's a trendy term but what does it mean?

- *Helping everyone to think of partnership in mission as 'mine' - something to do with me.*
- *It's not just for a keen, eccentric minority. It's for everyone, hands-on.*

Every person at church, from the youngest to the oldest, can play a part. Mission becomes 'mine' when I get involved:

How?

Idea: *Send everyone a mission birthday card on their birthday, maybe with one prayer point on it. Can design your own or use postcards, e-cards ...*

Individual ownership

- *Encourage individual participation: writing letters to missionaries; sending them gifts; practical help e.g. sending SOON; sponsoring a child, project, missionary; setting up an evangelistic web site; supporting local people from ethnic minorities; visits/ short term experience.*

Corporate ownership

In addition to the suggestions above which are relevant for groups as well as for individuals.

- *Delegate! Involve as many people as possible in any special mission interest-raising events or projects.*
- *Invite different people to be responsible for the various component parts of your church's support programme. Identify their individual potential and use it imaginatively in mission education/ support. Example: computer addicts can help with designing publicity materials/ information gathering from the Internet/ keeping in touch by email.*

Do not despise small beginnings. Recognise the natural point of entry for each individual or group, exploit it in the cause of mission and see what results.

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Never give up

Battling against apathy is very draining.

- Don't give up on the task.
- Don't give up on the people.
- Don't give up on the vision.
- Don't give up on God.

It is Satan who tempts us to despair. It's one of his favourite weapons.

How do we prevent him from getting the upper hand?

When you feel negative, focus on God and pray. Wait on him to renew your strength and your vision.

Meet with other enthusiasts. Don't spend the time together moaning about what *isn't* happening. Use the time for encouragement, sharing ideas, prayer.

If you feel called to envision your church for world mission, concentrate on that. Make it your priority. Give up every other church responsibility you can, preferably those you feel you can't, too! Give mission promotion your all.

To make mission matter, sign a PACT with God to help your church build the world church together by offering:

Prayer

Action

Commitment

Time

to mission matters.

Finally, here is the verse God gave me while I was writing *Bringing the World to Your Church*.

Be strong and courageous and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord, my God is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. 1 Chron. 28:20