

N A M E
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Network of
Australian
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Enthusiasts

e-zine 2

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TOUCHING ON PRAXIS

In our last e-zine, we touched on the idea of a local church being involved in the selection of individuals for gospel ministry. Let's take a moment to consider this idea of selection and what it might mean for a local church. Some time ago I met a young man in one of the newer missionary sending countries who was preparing to leave for missionary service. Upon inquiring, I found out that he had been called to a meeting of the church elders a few days previously, where he had been told that they had selected him as their missionary to a certain country. He was told his destination, given a ticket and told to get on his way! Not quite what we had in mind, although the enthusiasm of the elders is commendable.

If we look at the account in Acts 13:1-3, there are several things we can note that are relevant to our topic:

1. The church was already culturally well adjusted, with leaders drawn from several different cultural backgrounds - Simeon who is called Niger (Lat. 'black') presumably a black African, Lucius from Cyrene in North Africa, and Manaen, who had grown up in Herod's court, and of course Paul and Barnabas with their different cultural backgrounds. The church leadership reflected the cultural diversity of Antioch, something that is not always true in our churches today. It challenges us to look at the demographics of our locality and to compare that with the cultural make-up of our church. It further challenges us to look at the cultural mix of our congregation and to compare that with the cultural mix of our leadership - it is all too easy for those two to be out of step with each other. That was not the case at Antioch.
2. This particular event was initiated through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and not through some policy decision of the leadership. There is no problem with churches having well structured mission programs - we actually offer assistance to churches in setting these up - but we always need to be reminded that without the presence and activity of the Spirit, nothing of eternal value will be achieved.
3. The context of this event was one of the church at worship. They were in touch with their God and expressing their relationship through worship. John Piper's "Let the Nations Be Glad" would fit in perfectly here. As they were worshipping their God in a right relationship with Him, so they were able to receive His leading concerning their responsibility in the world. Worship is a crucial aspect of mission.
4. They did not hesitate to release their best, to release two gifted and experienced men who could have been described as essential to the life of the local church. Likewise Silas, who went with Paul on his second missionary journey, was a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts

15:22). Are we open to that possibility in our own church? When the need of a Bible teacher somewhere in the world is highlighted, do we immediately think of the pastor or some other effective Bible teacher in the church? Or do we think of someone who could do the task and whose departure would not leave too big a hole in the ministry of the church? We need to be careful we don't put restrictions on the activity of the Spirit, as we consider who in our church the Lord might want in cross cultural ministry.

5. The church identified with Paul and Barnabas in their going, by taking time to pray and to fast, and then by laying their hands on them as they sent them off. They made sure that Paul and Barnabas knew that the church saw themselves as active participants in their going. They were not heading off on some private adventure, but remained a part of the church that had selected and sent them.

6. The church maintained their involvement and interest, as seen in the reporting session in 14:27. This is also seen in the continuity of ministry mentioned in 15:35. (This all has something to say concerning missionary furloughs, to which we will return at a later date.)

This cameo of a sending church raises a number of topics that we could benefit from discussing in relation to our own church. How do we select people for ministry? What are the pre-requisites that must be in place? What ministry training programs are needed? How do we make this a reality?

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

Are you part of a home Bible study or some other small group? Have you got the possibility of having a missionary come to speak to your group? Ask them to speak on communication in their ministry. In order to introduce the subject and make the talk more meaningful, try this game before they speak. Take two small tables - card tables would be fine - and put a screen between them. Perhaps a couple of people could hold up a blanket if you have nothing else suitable. On each table you need some children's building blocks, the old wooden ones of various sizes and colours. You can often find a supply in opportunity shops, or a handy man can make up a few. You need a set of 10-12 for each table and the sets MUST be identical. You sit a person at each table, so they can't see each other. Choose one person to build something with his blocks. When finished, without leaving their seat or looking around the screen they now have to describe to the other person how to build an identical construction. They will, of course, find this very hard. When finished, they look at each other's buildings and will find, not surprisingly, that they are not identical. Now reverse their roles and do it again. Let others in your group try. To make it more interesting, put two people at each table and see if they can agree on how to give the instructions and on how to understand the instructions. Let everyone in your group have at least one try, and then they are ready to listen, with a new level of understanding, to the missionary speak about communication in their ministry. This works just as well with high school or senior primary kids and will make them much more interested in what the missionary is going to say. But remember - tell the missionary before hand what you are going to do, so that you help their talk rather than wrecking it!

If you have a larger group in a larger room, then you can use the same principle, but will need several sets of tables and screens. Use the building blocks for one set of tables. At another, give each person a

drawing pad and an identical set of coloured felt pens. At another, give each person an identical set of 20-25 coloured clothes pegs to build with. At another, give each person an identical size piece of cardboard and pair of scissors to cut out a shape and describe it to the other. The principle is always the same - how well can you communicate and understand ideas and instructions in your own language.

NEWS OF RESOURCES

Most churches have got Bible study groups of one kind or another. Why not suggest to the leaders that once every two years the groups use a study book that deals with global issues. There are several good ones available.

Witnesses To All The World by Jim & Carol Plueddemann is one of the Fishermen Bible Study Guides published by Harold Shaw Publishers. It contains nine studies on various passages from the Old and New Testaments associated with mission. It can be obtained from Christian bookshops, but you will get it at a lower price from the offices of SIM, the mission agency Jim Plueddemann leads. (Locked Bag 2, Taren Point, NSW 2229)

God For All Nations by John Thew is published by Aquila Press in Sydney. There are eight studies that focus on the multicultural context of life in Australia. You can get them from CMS bookstores or from John Thew at the Anglican Department of Cross Cultural Ministries, 74 Church Street, Wollongong, NSW 2500.

Scripture Union and TEAR Australia have a series of four study books, each with six Bible study outlines. They deal with Christian perspectives on global issues under the titles Money and Mercy; God, Justice and Power; God's Economics; and Poverty, War and Peace. They would be perfect to study if your church was going to raise money for an aid or development project somewhere in the world. They are obtainable from SU Bookshops, SU stockists, or TEAR Australia. (PO Box 289, Hawthorn VIC 3122)

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NAME is prepared by Bruce Dipple
Director of the School of Cross Cultural Mission
Sydney Missionary and Bible College
PO Box 83 Croydon NSW 2132 Australia
Tel: 02 9747 4780
Fax: 02 9747 5053
www.ozemail.com.au/~smbc
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