

N A M E
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Network of
Australian
Mission
Enthusiasts

e-zine 3

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TOUCHING ON PRAXIS

Partnership is a real buzz-word in mission today. Or if you are really up with the jargon, you can try 'strategic alliance'. Whatever you call it, however, we have to recognise that it is a concept founded on a biblical principle and therefore needs to be taken seriously. Many conferences have been held and much has been written on the topic of partnership, but most of it has dealt with the subject at the ministry or organisation level. [For a good summary, read "The Power of Partnership". From INTERDEV, <interdev-us@xc.org> or <interdev-uk@xc.org>] Following on from the themes of our last two e-zines, however, we need to look at it from the perspective of a sending church and its missionary.

In doing this, we are helped by what Paul records in the letter to the Philippians concerning his relationship with the church at Philippi. The NIV makes the subject even clearer in Phil 1:5 by actually translating the word koinonia by 'partnership' - ". . . because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now . . ." What did Paul have in mind when he spoke of this partnership or fellowship that he and the Philippians enjoyed? We find a few clues elsewhere in the book. The first is found in 1:19, where he testifies that "I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance." Here Paul links himself with the church and the Spirit in partnership, as the church prays and the Spirit acts. Their prayer support is an integral part of what Paul sees taking place. Prayer for the sent missionary is not an optional extra for the sending church. It is a demonstration of the partnership they have entered into by sending the member of their church out as a missionary. If the church discovered that their missionary was spending his or her time relaxing on the beach or sitting sipping cool drinks all day instead of carrying out their ministry, they would justifiably be upset. But what is the situation when the church does not fulfill its part of the partnership through prayer? Who complains then?

We find a second clue in 1:24-26, where Paul speaks of being with the church again "for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me." This was a partnership where each was to contribute to the other, and so Paul speaks of how he is going to contribute to their progress in the faith. This was not just a missionary coming on furlough to say thanks for your gifts. This was not to be a dash around the churches to show the slides/video and press on. There was mutual ministry in the partnership and it was accepted by both partners, which is why the sending church was going to be so joyful at his return. The sending church had given to the missionary through prayer and now they were going to grow as they received the missionary's ministry. Such a situation presumes that the returning missionary will spend TIME with his sending

church, which isn't always the situation today. Perhaps we are missing out on something.

The third clue is found in 2:25 where he refers to Epaphroditus as the one "you sent to take care of my needs." Here is the church taking its responsibility for pastoral care and practical encouragement. There is no 'out of sight and out of mind' syndrome operating here. They heard of his situation and took steps to respond to it in as practical and appropriate a way as possible.

The fourth clue is in 4:14-19, where he speaks of their financial support. But even this he describes in terms of partnership, for in 4:15 he speaks of it as "giving and receiving". This was not the notional missions budget, the 10% that a 'good' church sets aside for missions. Here we have partnership in action, a mutual ministry through which each partner grew and became strong in the Lord.

How's your church going? Built any good partnerships lately?

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENT

In an earlier e-zine we spoke of the interview as a good way of getting a missionary involved in a Sunday service without having to ask the pastor to give up the pulpit. In response to some expressions of interest in doing this, here are a list of questions from which you can choose the most appropriate ones for the particular missionary, remembering our previous advice to talk to the missionary before they come for the interview.

1. At what age did you become a Christian? Did you have a church background? Was there a particular means that God used to bring you to Himself?
2. When was the first time you ever thought of possibly being a missionary? Were you active in your own church at that time? How did you first learn about mission work?
3. What were the first steps you took towards becoming a missionary? How were you sure that was what God wanted you to do? Did you have to do any extra training? How long was it from your first step to your departure? What did your family think about it all?
4. Which mission did you join? How many missionaries does it have in total? How many from Australia? Where does it work in the world? Does it have an emphasis on any particular type of ministry?
5. Where did you go? Was there a language to learn? What tasks did you have during the first couple of years? Did your work relate directly to what you had been trained for in Australia?
6. Who are the people you are working amongst? Can you tell us some of the important aspects of the group's culture? When did they first receive the gospel? Are there churches amongst them? Do they have their own leaders and pastors? Where does your ministry fit into the growth of the church?
7. What are the typical activities of your day? Are you part of a team? How does the team fit together? Do you work closely with any nationals? What particular things have you learnt from them?

8. What barriers have you faced in your ministry? What were some of the personal struggles in overcoming these barriers? Is there something in this area that we can join you in praying about?

9. How did your children cope with the new culture? What about language? What schooling arrangements do you have? Is there adequate medical care for the family? What do you think the children have gained most from being in another culture?

10. Which is your home church? Do you have a larger team of people involved in keeping you on the field? How are they involved? How do you nurture such a relationship? How important is this team of people to you?

11. How are you financially supported? What about the costs involved in your ministry? Do you have a particular financial need right at this time?

12. How could we become more involved with you personally? How should we pray for you after you return? How will your prayer letters help us in this? How could we become more aware of and involved with the group you are working amongst?

13. What are the current personnel needs in your area at present? Do you have opportunities for short-term service? Is there some way a group from our church could come over and make a useful contribution? What steps could we take to make that a reality?

14. Would you describe yourself as a World Christian? What can an individual Christian do to increase their world vision? What can a local church do to fulfil its role in the world? What would you pray for us?

NEWS OF RESOURCES

It has been reported often over the past year that, on a percentage basis, Buddhism is the fastest growing religion in Australia. Yet it is probably true to say that Buddhism is probably one of the least understood religions amongst Christians, in spite of the large number that go to Thailand and similar locations for their holidays. If you are involved in a small group or home Bible study group in your church, why not arrange to look at a new video from OMF called 'One Billion Wait - The Challenge of Buddhism'. It only lasts approximately 10 minutes, but gives a great introduction and will encourage the members to get a better understanding of Buddhism. [PO Box 849, Epping NSW 1710, <au-nd@omf.net>]

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Back issues available on request from Bruce at <smbc@ozemail.com.au>:

- #1 Sending role of the local church
The missionary interview
- #2 Selecting role of the local church
Using communication games

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