

Making good use of interviews

In one year, a pastor in Victoria received 90 requests from organisations that wanted an opportunity to speak at a Sunday service. Even though the total number might be different, every pastor is confronted with a multitude of demands that he give up his pulpit on a Sunday. As a result, they are very hesitant when the mission committee or mission secretary asks if a visiting missionary can speak at a service. Their hesitancy is quite understandable, so why not make it easier for them. Instead of asking if the missionary can take the sermon slot, ask if you can have five minutes in the service to interview the missionary.

The interview is a form of communication that could be used a lot more widely and a lot more effectively. How many times have you heard someone (or yourself!!) conduct an interview without preparing the questions and without any obvious purpose to the interview. But it does not have to be that way. Here are seven suggestions for making five minute missionary interviews a profitable exercise.

1. Have a discussion with the missionary, in person or over the phone, to discover some key aspect of their ministry or life that it would be good for the congregation to understand. Make sure it is something that will be of interest and help to the congregation and not just something that you happen to find interesting.
2. Write down the topic, expressing it as an outcome that you would like to see following the interview. E.g. "Following the interview, each member of the congregation will be able to explain how . . ." or, "Following the interview, each member of the congregation will understand and feel the emotional pressure that comes from . . ."
3. In order for this outcome to eventuate, what pieces of information are going to have to be shared during the interview? Make a list of them.
4. Try and write out three or four questions that will draw out from the missionary the necessary pieces of information. If it is impossible to do it in three or four questions, then the list of items is too long, which means your outcome is probably too broad. Try making the outcome more specific, so that the list of needed pieces of information is shorter.
5. Don't waste time on trivia questions. You already know the missionary's name, mission agency, place and type of ministry, length of service, etc., so include them in your introduction. A map of the location with key names can be put up on the overhead as you begin the introduction.
6. Talk with the missionary again about what you have planned and send them a written copy of the desired outcome and the key questions.
7. Support the interview with a bulletin insert or a flyer to be given out after the service. It could include more details of the ministry; other opportunities to hear the missionary speak during the week; and a response slip for the missionary's newsletter, mission magazine, etc. This demands that you have organised or found out about some other meeting to which people can come. Refer to this material as you close the interview.

Sounds like a lot of work? Of course it does. But that is why it will be effective. If you don't put the work in to it, then don't be surprised if there is no outcome.