

# MY KIND OF MISSION

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What on earth does a church pastor say to directors of a mission when invited to speak on the topic, 'A mission that relates to my church'?

I am the Senior Associate Pastor of Blackburn North Baptist Church, and I have responsibility for the missions portfolio. I was invited recently to speak with some of the national directors and all of the state directors of *Global Interaction*. I was honoured, but a little embarrassed, for I knew I would not be saying much that would be new to the directors. But I appreciated the invitation and their willingness to listen, and hoped I could present some insights from a different angle and, as is my way, to stir the pot a little.

But it didn't end with that meeting. They asked for an article on the same topic. So, here goes. The question is, 'What am I, as a pastor, looking for in a mission agency?'

## Alignment

In the May 2004 issue of *Vision*, Rob Lutton, Global Interaction's Director of Partnership Development, wrote, 'Leaders today value mission. Mission, in local and global forms, is being celebrated as one of the primary core values of the church and a non-negotiable organisational value.'

He's right. Much of my time and effort, as for most pastors, is on re-focussing and re-directing the church toward mission. In other words, I and my colleagues constantly attempt to get the people, ministries and programs in the church to align with our missional goals. At Blackburn North, if new ideas for ministry don't align with our strategic direction and missional goals, we probably won't start or resource them. If we are to resource new ministries, we need considerable evidence that this is what God wants us to do. Personally, I am not interested in clubs or programs if they do not have a missional focus. During recent years we have also been re-evaluating existing ministries and programs and, as a result, some have been re-directed toward a missional focus. An occasional program has been closed down because of lack of alignment with the church's direction.

In relation to mission agencies, we are looking for a similar alignment. It doesn't matter if the words used are different; we want to see the same emphases. We are happy to relate to mission organisations that serve the mission of our church. From our perspective, mission agencies and para-church organisations are extensions of the local church, not ends in themselves. We find it frustrating when such organisations become so institutionalised that they seek to perpetuate their existence by drawing people and energy from the local church, while doing things the church is already doing. Such organisations, rather than enhancing the mission of the church, weaken its missional focus.

Similarity of missional focus and goals is a key part of an alignment between a mission agency and a church. Our church's stated goal is 'Winning people to Jesus; growing people in Jesus'. Most churches have a similar aim. We want evidence from a mission agency that it shares this concern. We want to see doctrinal statements, training opportunities, publications and practical service that highlight this direction. Global Interaction is one agency that I believe shares our emphasis. We see in the way Global Interaction works a style that aligns with our own church's models of relational and incarnational ministry.

## Partnership

Rob Lutton says in his article that Global Interaction is committed to working in partnership with us. Our question is, 'What does this partnership look like? What shape does it take?' We are looking for authentic partnership. Frankly, we are not interested in the rhetoric of partnership; we want the reality of it.

A partnership cannot be totally grounded on denominational loyalties. While it is a good starting point, denominational loyalty is not the key in this day and age to authentic partnership. Denominational loyalties remain strong with the older folk in our churches, but many who are under 40 years of age, including some in leadership, are uninterested in the institution. Some even question the value of such an alignment. Denominational ties will not sustain a partnership. Partnership needs to be built on relationship, and that implies putting in considerable effort to relationship-building. The issue for leaders of a mission agency, is, 'How, with limited resources, can we relate to all of the churches out there?'

I would suggest that mission agencies will relate in different ways and on different levels with different churches, just as the senior pastor of a church relates with people in the church at various levels. There will be a place for strategic alliances with some churches, for example the home churches of members of the mission's staff. Nurturing such relationships means connecting regularly with senior or missions pastors and mission task forces.

The Global Interaction initiative of People Group Adoption is an excellent one. However, both the church and the mission agency need to put effort into making the 'adoption' meaningful in the long term. If not, People Group Adoption proves to be a good marketing strategy, but not a means to a good partnership. Blackburn North has adopted the Thai people. We have had people go on MAYT (Mission Awareness Youth Team) visits, and our senior pastor and I have both visited Thailand. We need to hear regularly from Global Interaction representatives of the challenges and successes of the team working there and projects we, as a church, can work on in partnership with the cross-cultural team.

We value consistency in a partnership. One of the benefits of the People Group Adoption initiative is that it can help churches focus on a certain group and not have a fragmented approach to mission and our partnership. It can be frustrating, then, when the same mission organisation comes to us requesting help for staff who are planning to work with a different people group. If any mission agency wants us to have a focussed approach within the church-mission partnership, then the mission needs to maintain that focus in its relationship with that church. Within the partnership, we want a mission agency that will care for our people and we have found that Global Interaction does this well. We do a lot of work inspiring, training and caring for our people before they decide to begin cross-cultural service overseas. We want to partner agencies

that will have a deep concern for these people, our people, and continue to invest in them. We want evidence of how the agency is doing that.

Further, let us partner with the agency in preparing our people. Does the agency have an information packet that spells out clearly the expectations of candidates in training and the things we as a church can do to help get them ready for service? Is there a way of making the candidates' preparation and church visiting/partnership development program tie in with the program of their home church? For example, at Blackburn North we have an internship program through which people are nurtured and encouraged. Is there a way to link candidates' mission preparation with such a program? We are not keen to put a lot of effort into preparing people for service, and then to just 'hand them over' to a mission agency and have no further input into their preparation and lives.

## Accountability

Communication is important. This occurs in general ways through magazines, prayer notes and information about staff. Global Interaction generally does this well. But the personal touch, often through emails and phone calls, is really important. I value it when representatives of mission agencies make contact simply to nurture the relationship. It is helpful if an invitation to an event or the mailing of information is preceded by or followed up with a phone call. We pastors are inundated with material from agencies and I, for one, am more likely to read something if I have had a phone call about it.

In relation to candidates and serving staff, we want to hear where they are at and what they need to do. Quite often, we receive a plea for support before they go and occasional updates once they are gone. But, we want to travel the others steps of the journey with our people.

Transparency is vital. There needs to be clarity about what is expected from the partnership. We want to know how the mission agency wants us to partner with cross-cultural workers before they begin, during their service and when they get back. We want full details of what finances need to be raised, the training and preparation required and the proposed timetable for preparation and outgoing. There needs to be clarity about who candidates and serving staff are accountable to. On the one hand, we want to support people and to make them an extension of our own staff. At the same time, we recognise that they need to visit other churches. The problem is we end up seeing little of them, and we wonder how real partnership can be developed under those circumstances.

## Ministry

Often when people are preparing for mission service, or ministry in Australia, they check out of ministry. We would prefer that people stay engaged in ministry during their preparation period. Would it be possible for candidates with Global Interaction to be part of our internship program during their preparation, as it offers great supervision and support?

I believe that it is imperative that the local church and mission organisations work hard on developing healthy partnerships as we endeavour to fulfil the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20. The simple fact is we need each other!

## Good question!

By Grace Munro, Global Interaction Publications Manager

The leaders of Blackburn North Baptist Church (BNBC) have drafted questions they might ask of mission agencies and cross-cultural workers. BNBC, as Daniel has shown in the preceding article, has a clear goal for their church: *Winning people to Jesus; growing people in Jesus*. As with all churches, BNBC receives many requests for financial and other support, for individuals and organisations, in Australia and overseas. The leaders are developing a process to help them make appropriate and wise decisions about support. This is still a 'work in progress'.

The issues they raise could be very helpful to other pastors, mission committees and individuals who want to support missions and cross-cultural workers, and want to do so in a God-honouring and effective way. Drawing on material from BNBC and adding to it, here are some significant questions for us to be asking of any agency or individual who requests support:

- What is the core purpose of the agency or cross-cultural worker? Does that purpose align with what we believe is our God-given purpose in mission?
- Do we sense a call of God to help in a specific geographical region, or a particular type of work? (For example, telling the 'unreached' of Jesus, or a 'whole-of-life' ministry, or community care of orphans or institutional care, etc.) Does this agency or person fit within our call?
- Are their beliefs about God, people and mission similar to mine/ours?
- Is the way they fulfil their ministry based on Biblical principles that we believe are important (e.g. Daniel Bullock referred to a contextualised and incarnational approach).
- How do they view the local church's role in sending and sustaining cross-cultural workers?
- What training is provided so that workers can fulfil their calling? Where does the local church fit into that training?
- What pastoral support does the agency provide for its workers, and does our church have a part in it?
  - Do their roles match their sense of God-given call and their gifts, competencies and character?
- Are they clear about what they want to achieve? Are they committed to their purpose and yet also open to the Spirit's further leading?
- What is the anticipated outcome of their ministry, and is it something we want to be part of? Is it likely to result in ongoing, independent growth of the people served, or, rather, to long-term, increasing dependency on foreigners?
- Does it seem that the strategies in place for preparation, language and cultural learning and ministry will actually achieve the desired outcome?
- Does each individual show a willingness to be accountable to the agency and the church, and not to be a lone ranger? Does the agency help workers develop and maintain a clear ministry focus?
- What is the approach to financial support? Does this fit with our approach to the stewardship of finance?

- Does this person or agency want genuine partnership? In what ways do they keep in touch with supporters?
- What is the relationship between the cross-cultural worker and the home church during preparation and ministry?

*There is another key question for individuals or churches to ask about themselves when deciding whether or not to support a particular agency or individual: What is motivating us to support this person, ministry or agency?*

If we assess our responses, we could find that we are being driven by a range of things that may or may not be helpful:

- A strategic, well-considered, God-called focus in mission.
- A clear prompting of the Holy Spirit.
- Urgency (this person won't start in ministry if we don't give).
- Pandering to our own feelings (a 'warm fuzzy' from helping a needy child rather than how that child might best be helped, the desire for a plaque on the wall or similar recognition, or assuaging our guilt about our inaction by handing out gifts).
- A response to superb 'salesmanship', a charismatic personality or a gimmicky promotion rather than substance and call in ministry, or, perhaps, the availability of tax-deductibility.
- Control and communication issues such as: Will I be able to say how my gift is spent? Will the recipient keep in touch? Can I leave the spending of it and the outcome with God?

I hope these questions help you to discern appropriate avenues for your mission support. This list is not a finished product. We would love to hear from individuals and churches who have developed a clear and documented process for responding to requests for support.