



“The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers into his fields.”

No more missionaries . . .

In the 1970s, there was a call for a moratorium on the sending of missionaries. A post-colonial reaction, talk was that national churches were better able to carry on what western missionaries had often messed up. Some mission agencies faltered. Some national church leaders experienced a rush of enthusiasm, while others felt a terrible weight of uncertainty about such a proposition.

In evangelical circles all over the world, in so-called sending churches and receiving churches alike, this stirred a re-examine of the question: What do we think we are doing in mission?

It's God's mission

Mission is primarily God's work. The heart of God is for people – he longs for everyone everywhere to come to know him, and to delight in his fatherly presence forever. He wants all people to hear and understand the gospel and be saved.

For this mission, God normally chooses *people* to be his introducers – his ambassadors and witnesses. He calls, equips and sends his people, all of us, into a contrary world, to show and tell the gospel. At the same time, he turns the hearts and minds of people to hear and understand that good news. Our role in this mission

of God is to be living signposts to the glory of God, so that the watching world can respond, and give God the glory that is rightfully his.

In the light of this truth – we the people who make up CMS – have set ourselves the goal of increasing significantly, the number of missionaries we send.

Growing more missionaries

If we are serious about increasing our number of long-term missionaries, our most essential work as a missionary-sending society must be prayer. This is a job for us all. The one gift from God that is common to us all is access to the Father. Within his proviso, we can ask whatever we will, and he will give it to us (John 15:7).

Therefore we must follow God's instruction (Matthew 9:37-38), and implore him to raise up more people who can go to work for him in the fields of the world that are ready for harvest, to use Jesus' words.

In praying like this, we recognise that it is God's Spirit that brings human hearts to the point of 'harvest'. Without God's Spirit preparing hearts, there would be no ripening and no harvest. So we need to pray for labourers who are able to discern the activity of the Spirit in people's lives, and work appropriately. They need to be people who know God, who are skilled in their

work and good with people. We need to pray for labourers who are resilient and tough, yet humble and gentle in God's workforce.

Then, in your local church you could look for someone or some couple who could answer your prayer. These people will show signs of the maturing work of God in their lives and relationships. They will be using and developing their gifts and ministries now, and will have hearts for evangelism and discipling. They will also have manageable responsibilities and encumbrances that would allow them to leave for other harvest fields. When you find them, they will be encouraged to know you are praying for them!

Prayer is the key

While praying for God to raise up more missionaries, we must pray also that the leaders of CMS will have discernment and wisdom. We need to discern whom the Lord is raising up for cross-cultural mission work; and then wisdom to make good and strategic placements of those missionaries, so that their labours will contribute most effectively to build the church, and reflect glory to God.

We are currently running at about 150 missionaries, which is 60% of our highest ever numbers. A significant increase in missionary numbers will require some structural changes, both federally and in the branches, and the



Workers in rice fields, Nepal. Above photos, courtesy of UMN

wit to operate well in an increasingly complex world. There will be plenty of challenges, and plenty of opportunities for mistakes. So we must pray for God's grace and wisdom.

International partners

Also we must earnestly pray for the local national church and organisation leaders with whom we co-work. In almost every case, we send missionaries to partner organisations – churches, ministry groups, companies or Christian service agencies. Our missionary personnel work within the structures of those partner groups, and exercise their ministries in relation to the national body.

Such partnering is often quite complex. We are seeking to mesh not just two organisations and their theologies, visions and strategies, but a whole lot more: cultural and ethical mores, languages, ways of working, personal visions, individual needs, gifts, temperaments, management styles and skills, educational and economic backgrounds, personal and corporate value systems, expectations, fears and joys – to start the list.

Together, we need to know God's mind – his way forward in building churches mature in Christ, and the best use of all the gifts available for that end, including missionaries. We can only imagine the pressures that come on

many of our partner leaders, especially in politically and religiously difficult climates. And so we must pray that our partnerships in mission will always reflect the grace of God and be mutually up-building, as we seek together to bring in the harvest that God has prepared.

What about the money?

Raising up more missionaries may be comparatively cheap, but sending and sustaining them costs serious money. So, if we are seeking to increase significantly our long-term missionary numbers, we will need significantly more money to sustain them.

All support of CMS missionaries comes directly from people like you and me – members and friends of CMS. We have no other sources – no denominational grants, no official sponsors, no endowment funds. So the obvious way to sustain increased missionary numbers is to increase our base of support. That is, to increase the number of CMS members and friends, and the number of link churches, who are personally committed to world mission, and the support of our missionaries.

Broadening the support base

The easiest and most effective way to increase that support base is for each CMS member, that is you and me, to recruit one new long-term, self-

multiplying CMS member each year. That should not be too onerous a task for each of us! Even in one year the result would be a major increase in our membership, our prayer support and our financial base. To continue this manageable growth over a number of years will increase our support base exponentially, and well cover a significant increase in missionary numbers. If we are serious about the greater task, we will certainly do the easier one!

Already expanding

We have already expanded our 'global footprint' in recent years. A decade ago, CMS-Australia worked in 15 countries in the world. We currently have personnel in 30 countries – meaning we are rather thin on the ground in some places. I wonder if this is part of God's preparation for growth, allowing us to more easily consolidate numbers in those places, where the winsome ways and solid work of current missionaries will pave the way for more placements in their locations.

At the same time we need to look prayerfully, seriously and strategically to the areas of the world with the greatest human need and least gospel exposure. These correlate with the major world centres of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism; as well as the centres of greatest population growth, the greatest movement to cities, and the highest rates of illiteracy and poverty.

Going on

How then shall we respond? "The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers into his fields" (Matthew 9: 37-38, New Living Translation).



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