

# why send missionaries to Tanzania?

Hasn't the job been done? After all – we've been sending them there for over 100 years! Colin Reed writes.



Sue Jaggard (left) is developing children's ministry in Tabora, Tanzania.

A visitor asked me the other day, in front of our College Director, how long I expected to stay in Tanzania. The Director spoke for me, and said, 'He'll stay as long as we want him to.' That's part of the answer to the question. We should go on sending missionaries as long as the local church wants them.

## Working ourselves out of a job?

I think one idea behind this question is that missionaries are meant to 'work themselves out of a job'; to train a local person then leave. But it is not the whole story. I suggest that two things lie behind this attitude to mission and missionaries. First is the example of the archetypal missionary – St Paul, an evangelist who founded churches and then moved on. Although in some cases he stayed a couple of years to teach and to engage in dialogue evangelism. Then there are the writings of some of the great missionary theorists, like Henry Venn, Secretary of CMS (England) from 1840-1870. He wrote the often quoted directive that the purpose of missionaries, "ecclesiastically speaking" was to found a Native, ie indigenous church, and train leaders from among the new Christians. When they had done this, they should move on and do

the same elsewhere, leaving the indigenous leadership to run the church. This church should be "self-supporting, self-governing, self-extending". That was an excellent guideline for a new missionary society in a pioneering era, and CMS and other societies did found indigenous churches that are autonomous, independent, self-governing.

In Tanzania we are long past the time when the missionary societies ran the indigenous church or dictated to it. And the church is essentially self-funding too. Local churches usually get no money from outside. External funds are used for specific projects, not for running churches.

So, in God's good plan, CMS did have a part in establishing indigenous churches and they are now independent, separate provinces of the Anglican Communion. However, we have now moved into a new era in mission, where the world-wide church shares together the whole work of mission; following Jesus' command to make disciples in all nations and to teach them his words. We do this as partners, in mutual reliance and trust. Our missionary thinking has to keep in step with this new situation, and we have to understand the work of 'mission partners' in the light of this.

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The church in Tanzania asks us in Australia to be in partnership with them, using CMS as one channel for this. They graciously receive mission co-workers whom they choose to have. So I come back to the point I started with: we should send mission co-workers to Tanzania as long as the church in Tanzania wants them and sees that there is a strategic role they can fill.

One of the main things the Tanzanian leaders ask for is people who can train church workers and teach the word. There are various factors that contribute to this need. One is simply the increase in population. The number of people in the country is four times what it was 40 years ago – so there are lots of people who need to be evangelised and disciplined, and many of them are young. There are new generations who need to know Jesus and grow in him.

Also, the church has grown rapidly, and continues to grow apace, and so there is always a need for more biblically educated Christians to teach others. This is a good problem to have! The church in Tanzania still sees that missionaries can usefully work with Tanzanians to build up the Body, and we as a society accept their judgement and work with them.



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*Michael Palmer (left) served with Tanzanian colleagues in Murgwanza, Tanzania.*

## **We need Africa too**

Let us never forget though, that partnership must work two ways; we in 'the West' also need the insights of the other parts of the Christian Body, and will also benefit from receiving their missionaries to work with us in 'the West'. That deserves an article of its own. We must take seriously the contribution that Africa can make to the rest of the world.

## **The Church in the Community**

The next point is that there is more to the work of mission than the church as an 'ecclesiastical' reality – the gathered congregation (ekklesia). Tanzanian Christians believe that it is important for the church to be involved in all aspects of life, for God is concerned for every part of life. So the church is very involved in the local community in many ways; in health care and education, in providing water, in improving the quality of life. This caring for people is a reflection of God's love and provides the context in which the gospel goes out.

Quite a lot of missionaries nowadays are involved in these kinds of specialised 'caring ministry' roles, in medical work,

development projects, AIDS education and so on. They are always working with local Christians. To some extent they are helping to train Tanzanians, but I believe that the emphasis now is more on working together as sharers in the work of God. Tanzania has qualified people, and the missionaries work with them.

If we look at medical work, most church hospitals started by CMS many years ago are in rural areas. Tanzanian doctors, nurses, and specialists are no different from Australians! Most do not want to work in rural areas away from good facilities for them and their families. So it is very difficult to get staff for church hospitals. Of course there are dedicated Tanzanians who will accept this for Jesus sake – just as missionaries may be called to go and work in out-of-the-way places for the love of God.

As for training others and 'moving on', nowadays it is not so simple to train local health workers on the spot, you need the facilities of a proper training hospital or college. Small rural hospitals are not often able to train nurses and doctors. So to say, 'train local people and then leave', is an oversimplification.

## **A poor man is a shame to us all**

There is an African proverb which says, 'A poor man is a shame to us all'. Which means that a community that does not care for its poor and helpless has failed. We as a world community have failed Africa and continue to do so. It brings shame on us. Yes, Africa has to take responsibility for its own problems, but Africa is still part of a world community that does not care enough to want to help in ways that really make a difference.

Despite assurances from the governments of the USA, Britain and other countries that they are committed to help Africa solve its problems, there is little evidence for this. It would be doubly sad if the Christian community acted in the same way and 'washed its hands' of Africa. The pain caused by AIDS, wars, poverty, climate change and so on should be felt by us all. Sending people willing to go and share in the pain and in the joys of Africa is still a Christian response in love.

My final point is simply that God still urges individuals to go and serve him in Africa, and they respond. So we still need to send them.

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