

**I am excited about this new GO magazine! Each article is a tremendous testimony in itself and also a deep reflection on how we believe God has called Interserve into mission.**

‘Serving (with) the local church’ reminds us that we, as expatriate ‘sent-ones’, are not the sum of mission – not even close to it. We have roles to play, yes, and very important ones at that. But as times have changed, so these roles are changing as well.

As Dr Paul Bendor-Samuel, our International Director, reminds us, God, over these past few hundred years of mission effort, has planted a local church in most of the hard and unreached places. If that was not a reality, the past mission of His church would indeed be a dismal failure. But it is not a failure – and from North Africa to North Korea, the church of Jesus is emerging and growing. Buffeted, weak, challenged or hidden away as it at times may be, it is still His church. More often than not it is actually stronger in faith and far more radical than ours in the so-called post-Christian West. And as His church it is called into mission – from its own Jerusalem to all of its own Judea, and on to the ends of the earth. That has indeed shifted some goalposts for mission today.

If we are to participate in this mission we need to grasp what I like to call the Acts 16

principle. Here we see Paul on mission – on the go, ready to conquer the world. Yet God is holding him back, not allowing him to move his own programme forward. But then one night Paul has a vision and hears the ‘Macedonian Call’: “Come over here and help us!” The coming alongside and helping where God already is, and has long been, at work must accompany and temper our “going into all the world to make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28).

So what could these new roles look like, and how might these shifted goalposts affect us?

As the articles for this edition came in and I read the reflections of our Partners, I had to think about ‘true conversation’. We cannot really engage in meaningful conversation with another without being changed in the process. As we go on mission we need to be open, willing to converse deeply, willing to let others change and shape us. These ‘others’ include the local brothers and sisters our Lord places us with. That contrasts with a paternalistic, or neo-colonial, attitude where we expats hold all the power, make all the decisions, and impose our solutions.

Like Jesus, we need to divest ourselves of our power and go as fellow sojourners on the road of discipleship. The people in what we love to call ‘the hard places’ need us and our with-ness much more than any solutions and resources we might also bring.

Where we as Christ-followers are willing, at times sacrificially, to go and genuinely journey and converse deeply with those we are sent to, there we will find invitations to come alongside, befriend, support and, eventually, mentor.

There may still be a need to co-pioneer in areas where the light of Jesus has not quite penetrated or taken hold. As we do so we may also discover that leadership is often the least required of the assistance we can offer; God may have already blessed His church with wonderfully gifted leaders. Supporting and befriending them is a tremendous gift that becomes mutual; it opens the door wide for us to ask advice, seek input and direction, and submit ourselves and our strategies to each other. Thus mission becomes what we do together. Now that is where I am convinced the Lord will truly send His blessing!

*Paul*

