

# MENTORING FOR MISSION

**New Zealand used to be the number-one mission-sending nation, per capita, in the world. While that is no longer the case, statistics like this aren't what it's about.**

There are still many Christ-followers from these shores who are deeply concerned about the social, economic, environmental, and spiritual issues faced by the peoples of the majority world. They are troubled by injustice, poverty and exploitation, and that the message of Jesus Christ is not available for far too many. And some of them will begin to explore where the journey of 'Missio Dei' – God's mission – may take them by contacting

an organisation such as Interserve.

Our traditional mission-agency response to such enquirers has been fairly linear. By this I mean that there was (and still is) a reasonably standard, clear, step-by-step pathway for any enquiry regarding service opportunities. An interested party would be requested to fill in a set of forms and supply a CV; we would then contact their supporting community of faith for endorsement, obtain a number of references and a police check, and send the enquirer off for medical and psychological assessments. Providing all of the above stacked up, and the person had a positive outlook, the right skill mix, an adequate biblical foundation, and a demonstrated attitude of service and humility, we then would approve them as a mission Partner. Once their financial support was raised from amongst family, friends and their wider donor community, we would secure a placement for them. This would take, generally, three to twelve months.

Much of this process – which philosophically stemmed from a modern, scientific worldview – is still in use (and valuable). Nonetheless, there has been a marked shift with the arrival of post modernism and its emphasis on individual story – the varied, manifold and equally important journeys each single person is travelling. God's big, overarching story of how He revealed Himself through a chosen people, which we all used to understand, has been challenged and dismantled, or at least pushed much more



into the background, while individual stories are celebrated, within a construct of relationships and community or social networks. This, inevitably, leads enquirers today to evaluate processes quite differently. The emphasis now is much more on the relating, the response to their personal story, the human content. The resultant journey is no longer linear but meanders between the connection points with people – often for years – before it reaches, possibly, a conclusion. Integrating sound process with genuine and trusted relationship over cups of coffee, meals, via Facebook, tweets and Skype calls, and particularly through personal visits and mentoring in a broad range of life areas has, I believe, become one of the big challenges in seeing mission Partners recruited and sent.

Feeding into this new paradigm is the recognition that discipleship itself has become something of a lost art, and that many from the boomer generation down are challenged in their understanding and application of core biblical truths and resultant disciplines. We seem to think that attendance at a weekly or fortnightly church service – and maybe being part of the church's Facebook group and going to a few extra-curricular events such as church camps and Christian music festivals – will, by osmosis, create disciples of Jesus Christ. While exceptions exist, the stark reality is a loss of dedicated and focused, intentional discipleship in the churches of New Zealand.

That, right there, is a huge challenge to sending people out on mission!

The reality is that our organisational structures of recruiting, preparing and sending were set up to serve the earlier paradigm. But to create the relational environment in which today's enquirers can thrive and develop means we need to see real change and a wider community engagement. We need to renew intentional discipleship as a foundation for a lifetime of fruitful mission – and we need it to happen in a much more relational, individualised (yet also communal) framework than a linear application process can ever provide on its own.

The task of walking alongside and mentoring the next generation of mission Partners, however, cannot (and should not) be left to a couple of already overworked staff members in an Interserve office. Rather, we are looking towards a missional community that seeks to multiply itself along the lines of biblical discipleship. For this we have begun to develop a NZ-wide network of experienced, prepared and sensitive mentors, who will journey alongside our budding new mission



Partners, investing themselves into these folk so they can become all that mission, today and into the future, requires of them. We are developing and gathering material, as well as connecting into existing resources that will help and equip these mentors in their task, and creating a minimum policy framework to ensure safety and clarity, and standards that can be expected and tracked. We have already started to match some potential Partners with these mentors... a small beginning, yes, but a start nevertheless, with more to follow.

If we can disciple and mentor the next generation of Kiwis in mission in the same manner that Jesus employed with His disciples, New Zealand's mission-sending future will look very bright indeed. ☞

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