

Some Reflections on Pastoral Care in Frontiers

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Overview: Here is another article in which the author, a respected international mission leader, confesses that, "we were driven" in our early years with by the idea of sacrifice. The sending agency now actively pursues "character growth, community life, and pastoral care" along with their passion for the Lord and willingness to sacrifice for His cause.

Frontiers is an apostolic, church planting mission focusing the muslim world, where "Christ has not been named". Governments hostile to Christian work, both in muslim countries and in the heavenlies, create schemes to make the church planting task so full of pressure that missionaries will quickly abandon the effort.

Because missions to muslims has been so tough, the Church has historically seen little reason to send missionaries where there was little promise of success. In response to this practice, Frontiers was born in a sense of "reckless abandonment". "Whatever sacrifice it takes", has been our watchword.

After all, we felt, many segments of the Church had lost their theology of suffering. In contrast, our agency ethos has been shaped by the New Testament examples of suffering, being based more on the "Mecca Blessing" than the "Toronto Blessing". That is to say, being slain in body if necessary, and not only in the Spirit--and going right into the presence of Jesus, an experience that never wears off!

Did not the Lord Jesus say, "Take no thought for tomorrow, what you shall wear, or eat, or where you shall sleep, for your Heavenly Father knows you need all these things"? And so, we initially reasoned, if our Heavenly Father, Wonderful Counselor, Great Physician, and Omnipresent Comforter is right on top of the situation, why design and implement a pastoral care program?

Our zeal to serve Christ in the muslim world had gotten the better of us. In searching for "unstoppables" for example, we became guilty of casting a "blind eye" towards entrepreneurs who were driven more by mixed motives than motives born of the Holy Spirit. We reasoned, "Hey, we're all sinners, why get on a fellow workers' case about the ugliness in their demeanour? The job is tough enough already".

We were not wrong, of course, in embracing our call to break through the impasse among those in bondage to Satan's masterpiece, Islam. However, we had become oblivious to the fact that missiological competence and perseverance were not enough. We began to more deeply understand that we would not establish churches of muslim-background believers who had their own godly elders, unless we ourselves were godly men and women. We also came to recognize the crucial role of being regularly mentored, so that with integrity we would be able to say with that pioneer pace-setting missionary, "what you have seen and heard in me, practice" (Phil. 4:9).

How can we reach such a goal of maturity--to become "clothed with Jesus Christ" (Romans. 13:14)? This too has become our heart's cry. We believe it is primarily by becoming a nurturing community where we covenant with one another to "be our brother's keeper". We endeavor to be "promise keepers" by covenanting on our teams to hold each other accountable to grow towards Christ-like character--"whatever it takes"!

So, how do we develop character that cannot be imitated by those who are not yet redeemed by the Lord's grace (cf. II Peter 1:3-10)? By hungering and thirsting for both *competency and character, in the context of a committed community*. This comes from characteristics like being subject to one another, being eager for coaching and easily entreated, and from learning how to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger" (James 1:9). It also comes from facing up to ourselves, having a "broken, contrite spirit", and from being committed to see one another become the fruit of the Spirit personified.

We have also developed and continue to upgrade our personnel departments, selection procedures, and candidate schools, and increasingly utilize the expertise of Christians with missions experience and an anointing to help with pastoral care issues. We owe much to the various coaches and counselors whom we have come to know and trust, both in-house and from outside Frontiers, who regularly visit our teams on the field and attend our annual and regional conferences.

Thankfully, after nearly 14 years and now numbering close to 500 adults on the field, we have not lost our zeal for the Lord and for pioneer church planting in the muslim world. By God's mercy we are applying valuable lessons about the need for character growth, community life, and pastoral care. We do not want to be the "merry-go-round" mission, with co-workers going home as fast as the new ones come to the field. As Robertson McQuilkin wrote, "Lord, enable us to finish well...and get home before dark."

Questions for Discussion

1. The author summarizes Frontiers' approach to pastoral care as "competence and character in the context of a committed community". How similar is this to your agency's approach?
2. Draw a "time line" to trace the main developments of pastoral care within your own mission or mission setting. Which developments have been the most significant, for better or worse?
3. What are three things your mission could do to improve the pastoral care of its members?
4. How do you encourage and care for others in your mission setting? List three things.
5. How important is it for you to develop mutual supportive relationships with nationals? To what extent is this going on for you and others?

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