

REFLECTIONS ON MY INTERNSHIP

A Paper

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Thoughts on Short-Term Mission Trips

One question recently discussed in missiology is “Are short-term mission trips effective?” I spent most of the trip pondering this question. In my opinion, one of the reasons for the lack of long-term missionaries on the field is that short-term mission trips do not give a person an adequate understanding of what life on the mission field is really like. My husband and I believe we were given the best introduction to missionary life that is possible in five weeks, by simply learning how to live and work out of our own apartment.

The average Christian goes on a mission trip for one to two weeks, has some interesting cultural insights, is stirred by ministry to a particular group of people, and feels called of God to be a missionary. However, once he/she gets on the field, the romanticism goes away and the person is left with the difficult task of living in a new culture, often with a new language and after a term or two is ready to go back to the comforts of home. I have not yet discovered a solution to this phenomenon; logistics make it difficult (especially with large groups) to live like a missionary would, combined with a short amount of time in which to accomplish a ministry goal.

Another consideration is short-term missionaries’ effect on the host culture. I witnessed a horrible display of short-term missions at an orphanage in southern Ukraine where I spent a week as part of a Ukrainian/American ministry team conducting a three week camp. Not only were these short-term missionaries ignorant of the culture, they had also neglected to do

their homework, instead barreling in to “do ministry” for an hour, taking lots of pictures of themselves doing “ministry,” and moving on to the next town to do it all over again. Even the Ukrainian Christians, though they gave polite deference to the Americans, were upset at the intrusion.

While I do not pretend to have any definite answers and would like to do further research in the future, I have a few thoughts that will hopefully make for more effective short-term ministry in the future. First, allow your team to get a good grasp of the culture by allowing them to do some sightseeing for an unhurried day or two, perhaps in the middle of the trip. Secondly, work closely with national leadership, doing the kind of ministry they believe would be most helpful to them. Remember they will be the ones doing the follow-up when your team leaves. Thirdly, stay no less than ten days on the ground in order for the team to adequately get over jet-lag and enjoy ministry before returning home. Fourthly, do not hop from town to town every few days. Stay in one place long enough to build good relationships with the people there. If people build good relationships with nationals, the relationships will continue after the trip (because of the internet) and will result in a more positive view of the people and culture. Perhaps it might even lead to a call to career ministry in that same place.

A Heart for the City

I took Evangelism to the City last May with Dr. Lawless and he challenged us to gain a heart for cities. A recent missiological phenomenon, cities are places of strategy in order to reach a culture. We learned that what happens in a city, whether culturally or religiously, will eventually trickle down into the rest of the culture. Kyiv is a city of approximately four million people with many, many high rise apartments. There are so many people that space for building apartments is limited and people resort to adding more floors to the apartment buildings instead

of building new ones. In the metro and on the train, people cram into the cars without complaint as they have learned to live in a city where crowds and personal space are no longer issues of concern. As I reflected on these things, I asked God to give me a heart for the city and my excitement about the city and its possibilities was revived.

I believe that the cities of the world are strategic ways to reach a nation for Christ. This strategy is best illustrated by Kyiv Theological Seminary, the biggest theological training school in Ukraine. A fully accredited school, students come from all over Ukraine and even some from Russia, Belarus, and Azerbaijan to attend. KTS offers bachelor's degrees in church planting, youth ministry, and Christian education. Recently, they have also begun an accredited master's degree program, an extension of Talbot Theological Seminary at Biola University. I believe this seminary is an effective strategy for the growth of indigenous church leadership, both because of the quality of education and non-traditional models of ministry being promoted as well as its central location in Kyiv that is easily accessed by train from anywhere in Ukraine.

Church Planting and Theological Education

I fully support the IMB's strategy of church planting movements believing it to be the best strategy for global church growth and evangelism. However, next to church planting, I believe that formal leadership training is essential for supporting and sustaining church planting movements. While some may see formal theological education as unnecessary or a product of the Western mindset, with the advent of globalization, formal education has quickly become required for legitimacy in any professional field. Theological education gives legitimacy to national church leaders. Those who believe theological education in the majority world is unimportant should question their rationale for the importance of theological education in North America as well.

Formal education is also a means to discipleship. In my own experience, my time at Boyce under the guidance of the most godly, academic-minded men in the world has been the greatest period of discipleship in my life. Formal education is simply a means in which to hold someone accountable to learn as well as for the learner to be influenced by the godliness and thinking of the teacher.

A New Model

One critique of the IMB's church planting strategy is that they do not allow enough time or resources for adequate discipleship, especially in formal training. In the 1990's the IMB withdrew the majority of their support from seminaries worldwide in order to focus more fully on church planting. However, the one exception I know of to this rule has proved to be a very successful model for the furtherance of church planting in Ukraine and would do well to be used in other areas of the world. Joel and Mary Ellen Raeggin are IMB missionaries that have been assigned to minister at KTS. Joel is the head church planting professor at KTS. Part of his curriculum is that KTS Church Planting students must plant a church during their four years at the seminary. This strategy for multiplying church plants has been very effective. Essentially, Joel Raeggin is discipling the leaders of the Ukrainian churches.

At KTS, Church Planting students receive contextualized training in church planting as well as a mentor, friend, and resource in their professor. Joel makes it his goal to visit his student's ministries as often as possible, even if they are seventeen hours of travel away. His effort encourages the students that their ministry is legitimate and that someone cares enough to support them in ministry. In addition to mentoring, Church Planting students are also able to network with other church planters (their classmates) throughout Ukraine. These networks build awareness of ministry outside the student's particular region and results in the students of KTS

being on the cutting edge of ministry models and resources. My prayer is that the success of Joel Raeggin and his model of theological/church planting education would be recognized by the IMB and duplicated in other parts of the world.

Another landmark in ministry is the wedding of the Church Planting and Youth Ministry majors at KTS. Mike Manna is the Youth Ministry International missionary who is the head of the Youth Ministry major at KTS. A recent development among KTS students has been the development of church planting teams in which both a Church Planting major and a Youth Ministry Major work together to plant a church. In Rivne, Western Ukraine, I witnessed Grace Church sending out a team to plant a new church which included a new pastor who had graduated from KTS, and a youth pastor named Vasya, who is currently a youth ministry student there. It was a triumphant moment for ministry in Ukraine. The sending pastor remarked that he was excited because he sees lots of Americans doing ministry in Ukraine, but now Ukrainians are beginning to do ministry in Ukraine. In some ways, this new church plant is the inauguration of nationals' initiative to grow the indigenous church. Incidentally, Vasya is also the new director for the Center for Youth Ministry at Rivne Bible College, a program which will begin this fall. With the advent of these teams, plans are already being laid by Joel Raeggin (IMB) and Mike Manna (YMI) to combine the Church Planting and Youth Ministry majors so that one or two courses from these majors will be taught to both sets of students.

Challenges to Indigenous Church Health in Ukraine

In five weeks, while talking with multiple American missionaries and Ukrainian church leaders, I began to understand the bigger picture and some of the challenges facing the Church in Ukraine. Early missions efforts in the 1990's hindered the Church by creating dependence on the West and then withdrawing too quickly. Russian-speaking countries are a

pioneer field again for Christianity that has been neglected after the initial rush.

Social changes must take place to help churches grow. Because of the abuse of the former Soviet Union, Ukrainians have a great mistrust of institutions. This mistrust results in Christians who do not trust the churches with their money (therefore they do not tithe) and causes the churches to rely heavily on Western resources. Also, the economy must improve to allow churches to pay full-time ministers and support seminaries with Ukrainian professors. Ukrainians must be taught that they can accomplish great things for God without Western money. There is an unhealthy attitude of expectancy that if they are to do something, Western money must pay for it.

On a positive note, there is a movement that has developed within the Baptist Union churches called, the Healthy Church Movement. Those supporting this movement, which includes most of KTS affiliates, are committed to outreach and non-traditional (for Ukraine) methods of evangelism. There is even talk of breaking away from the Baptist Union to start another Baptist denomination. While there would be both good and bad repercussions if this happened, the exciting part is that Ukrainians are beginning to minister to their own people and begin to contextualize their ministry and outreach for their culture. In my observation, so much of Ukrainians' Christian expression was simply translated and attempted contextualization from English, especially songs sung in church and many textbooks used in the seminary. Ukrainians do not have the rich Christian tradition that America has, but could use our encouragement and prayers for God to raise up song-writers and authors who will create the Christian resources for the next generation.

In addition, mobilization of Ukrainian missionaries is the key to reaching post-Soviet Russia – a country where they are going back to square one with having to do pre-evangelism.

Many missionaries are leaving Russia because of hardness and lack of receptivity amongst the Russian people. Ukrainians are the prime people to go to Russia as missionaries because of their closeness to the culture and geographical closeness and the spirit of outreach that is beginning to bud unlike other Russian-speaking countries.

As we traveled to Ukraine to fulfill this internship, my husband and I were also on a vision trip to see if Ukraine is where God is calling us to go after we graduate. From what we saw, Ukraine is on the edge of a knife (i.e. on the advent of a big change). Based on the information above, God has given us a vision to encourage, train, and mentor those who would push Ukraine over the edge politically, socially, and religiously. We believe that the KTS students are the ones who will bring about this change, especially in the Baptist denomination, and God has given us a desire to partner with them in their journey.