

Mission giving in the church

There are many churches that are very generous in their mission giving. The Mizoram Presbyterian Church Presbyterian Church in India raises vast amounts for mission despite being in one of the poorest parts of India (www.generositymovement.org). A church in South Korea gives 78% of its income to international mission outside South Korea. However, too often I hear that churches are not really interested in giving to mission but rather spend resources on themselves. This trend is reflected in 'The State of Church Giving through 2009' report on church giving in the US:

- Church member giving to their congregations in 2009 was 2.38% of income (3.11% in 1968).
- Of every dollar donated in 2009 to a congregation, an average of 14¢ went beyond local operations for the larger mission of the church (21¢ in 1968).
- Of each dollar donated to a congregation in 2009, an average of 2¢ was spent on overseas missions (7.9¢ between 1916 and 1927). And that includes giving to areas that are well evangelised!
- If church members in the US tithed there would have been an additional \$174 billion available for the work of the church in 2009.

No wonder that that one Christian news agency remarks 'The church in the U.S. appears to be AWOL on its call of duty.'

The reluctance of churches to give to global mission is a global challenge that the mission community need to address. Patrick Johnson mentions seven attributes of a generous church (www.generouschurch.com) that could provide solutions:

- 1) Generous churches are led by generous leaders.
- 2) Generous churches have a strong vision of why their church exists and communicate that to their members.
- 3) Generous churches have a strong external focus to make a difference in their community and the world that is reflected in their budget
- 4) Generous churches teach people a holistic theology of stewardship, generosity, and the Kingdom.
- 5) Generous churches provide discipleship environments for people to live out stewardship and generosity.
- 6) Generous churches develop an organizational culture that supports the priesthood of the believers
- 7) Generous churches steward the church finances effectively.

What could be done to encourage mission giving in churches? I want to suggest the following:

- 1) **Facilitate generosity awareness and commitment in churches** – church leaders should understand the Biblical perspective on generosity and giving. Christians need to make generosity and giving an integrated part of their discipleship. When a church realises that they and the people in the church do not own anything but that all belongs to God, they start getting a different perspective on giving in general. They are only stewards of the resources that God entrusted to them. God should direct the way they use their resources. Pastors should therefore unapologetically preach and teach that being a disciple means being a good steward of all that God has entrusted of His to us.
- 2) **Embrace God's heart and His mission in the world** – mission awareness should be based on an understanding of God's mission in the world. Better mission education in churches is therefore essential. Mission should become part of a church's DNA and daily life and not just an addendum for which funds are raised once a year. This external focus then naturally demonstrates itself in the percentage of the budget that goes to local and global outreach.

- 3) **Encourage a mission vision** – understanding God’s heart for the world has to result in a strong vision and ministry plan that looks outside the four walls of the church. People naturally give prayer, time, talent, and finances to make it happen. If church members catch that vision, they will WANT to give.
- 4) **Engage church members in practical mission** – mission is often presented as distant. If churches see themselves as missional by nature, then they will encourage members to get practically involved in mission whether it is through their daily life and work, in their local communities or in other parts of the world. People give generously of their time, talent, and treasure when they feel God’s calling on their lives to make an impact in the world.
- 5) **Distribute mission information more effectively** – too often I hear from pastors that they do not know where to give to. They do not know what God is doing in the world and can therefore not encourage people in the church to give to mission needs. Joshua Project has excellent information resources (www.joshuaproject.net/equip.php) but the mission community needs to find ways to better distribute mission information to churches to encourage giving.
- 6) **Motivate church members to give to mission and give them the opportunity to do so** – people should not only be made aware of mission needs and opportunities but they should be specifically motivated to give financially. This is very Biblical (for example Acts 11:29).

Unless something drastically is being done mission giving in churches will not increase. As somebody said ‘we cannot simply rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic in the hope that all will be well’. To increase mission giving in local churches I suggest we need:

- A more integrated approach towards Biblical generosity and stewardship, church life, mission awareness, mission education and mission giving;
- Better collaboration between church leaders, Christian generosity leaders, mission educators, mission leaders and mission mobilizers.

The Global Generosity Network (<http://generositymovement.org/about/>) as joint initiative of the Lausanne Movement and World Evangelical Alliance is already spearheading such an approach. It is launching a global generosity campaign in 2012 to encourage generosity as life-style and mission giving in and through local churches. For more information contact sas.conradie@cms-uk.org.

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