

Why Not Just Send National Workers? by Richard Malm

Tomas is a respected leader among his Mayan people. A former mayor and now converted Christian, his people trust him, and he understands the culture and speaks several Mayan languages as well as Spanish. Though only 4 foot 10 inches tall he is a spiritual giant. He fearlessly and repeatedly risked his life and led his people during the brutal civil war that devastated his land. He and his family live simply and for just a few dollars of support a month we can send him to minister full time to the Ixil people in the mountains of Northern Guatemala.

Examples like this lead some to ask, "Why send North American missionaries when the nationals can do it?" It is a logical question, especially when resources for missions seem so limited and the need so unlimited. It is cheaper. They already speak the language. There are no cultural barriers. They cannot be deported if the political tide turns against Christian missionaries. Perhaps the day of sending North American missionaries is over and we should just support national workers.

I am totally in favor of helping men such as my friend Tomas but I am also concerned that a narrow "either/or attitude" is more a plot than a plan - a plot to undermine and slow the work of world evangelism. It is not either support nationals **or** send missionaries. The task is so big we must do both. Here are some reasons why.

Isn't it cheaper?

Often, but not always, it is cheaper to support national workers. They require less preparation because it is their own language and culture and they usually can live more simply in their home country. Let's face it, Christians love bargains. Sending money instead of sending people is easier. It requires little sacrifice. It does not mess with my comfort zone.

Like a country that hires mercenaries to battle for them we can stay home, enjoy our comfy couches and the luxuries of life while paying others to shed the tears, to spill their sweat and blood. I will send \$20 or \$200 or \$2000. I will send whatever it costs as long as I don't have to send my own sons and daughters, my own flesh and blood - as long as I don't have to sacrifice self or lose my lifestyle.

But God Himself set the example. The Greatest Missionary of all, Jesus, left the comforts of Heaven to come to us, to walk among the filth and mire of humanity. He did not send angels to do His bidding. He came in flesh to reveal the message of God's tender mercy. We dare not simply send others. Because He came for all, we must go to all.

Cheaper is not always better

"If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." "You get what you pay for." These maxims are often true in missions as well. Cheaper does not always mean better. Like North American workers there are good and there are not-so-good, there are effective and there are not-so-effective national workers and it is very easy to create reports, videos and even onsite visits that make "not-so-good" appear awesome. It is impossible to accurately evaluate what is really happening if you do not have people onsite with insight. Cheaper is not always better.

Other problems with either/or

In some nations there are not enough national workers to accomplish the task without outside help. Imagine a country where there are only 5 Christians for every 10,000 people and those five might live scattered across the map. Without outside reinforcements a handful of believers cannot reach their nation regardless of the amount of financial resources we might pump into their coffers.

Foreigners often have a "platform" locals do not. My Spanish teacher lamented how he repeatedly had shared the gospel with people he knew and they would not listen. Then a "gringo", with horrid Spanish, would stumble through a

gospel presentation and his friends would accept Jesus. A Kachiquel Indian I met told me he came to the Lord because a group of white people visited his remote village. Even as a boy he thought, "Why would these rich, white people come to my poor village? What they have must be very important for them to come all this way to give it us." He listened and believed.

An influx of foreign money to support some national workers can create jealousy and undermine volunteerism in the local church. It can imply you should be paid (and paid well) to do ministry. You are right, "Christians should not feel this way" but people are people. Imagine if you are teaching Sunday School and discover that 10 other teachers are getting paid 5400 a week for teaching but the pastor makes you buy your own chalk. Most of us would have a problem with that and wonder, "Maybe I am not good enough to be paid", "Maybe I'm not really wanted", "That just isn't fair", Why should I continue to sacrifice time with my family and a better secular income when I'm not appreciated or wanted anyway?"

Finally on Finances

Have you noticed God frequently doesn't do what seems logical to us? In Scripture He often calls the most unlikely candidates and seems unconcerned with the cost or efficiency of His chosen methods. Jesus allowed Judas to remain as treasurer even though He certainly knew Judas was stealing from the group. Saul was chastised for not destroying all the livestock of the Amalekites. He was simply being a "good steward", doing what seemed logical instead of following God directives.

The Lord has not revised or revoked His command to "Go into all the world". We dare not follow the example of Saul and try to improve on God's plan because it makes better financial sense to us. Money is not a problem for God - but disobedience is. Obviously I am not saying we are to be wasteful or squander **His** resources but we must never forget they are His resources, not ours. Because they are His we need to follow His directives on how they are spent even if His plan does not seem the most efficient or cost effective to us.

Conclusion

Obedience is still God's measure for success and the great commission command to "Go" is still in His Word. The task is so big we need "all hands on deck". We must continue to send foreign workers, national workers and all who will respond to His call. While the harvest is still white and the laborers still few I cannot say to one who senses God's call to go, "Sorry, I can't help you because you are not from there."

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