

Letting Local Believers Shine

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An alternative mission paradigm

Kirst Rievan | 06 Jul 2021



For missions work today, people are still needed ‘from everywhere’, as long as they come with a deep desire to make our local brothers and sisters shine.

When I think of the kind of people who are most suitable for serving in overseas missions in this day and age, I am not thinking of mission workers with a certain skill set or qualification. Instead I think of people like Marcelle and Daniel*, a couple with whom I had the privilege to work for several years. They had worked in the Americas and other places in the world and then came to Asia to strengthen our team. They had a wealth of experience but they never boasted about it.

On the contrary, they took a learning attitude with an eager interest in getting to know the people, the culture, and the team. Whenever they visited our house, they would play with our boys, repair a dripping faucet, and by the way, share a few resources and thoughts on issues we were dealing with. No lecturing, no profound advice, and no preaching. Just coming alongside. This was particularly noticed by local staff and partners. Marcelle and Daniel somehow managed to let others shine and keep themselves out of the picture. If I were to try to capture what they were like in one sentence, it would be something like: 'Loving to make others successful'.



Today's teaching and preaching about mission often focuses on *impact*. When this is in contrast to *products* and *programs*, I'm all for it. However, particularly for individualistic cultures, there is a danger in this teaching. It might give the mission worker the idea that he or she is the one that has to make that impact, be the shining light that makes the difference. This creates an attitude that fits very well with the 'from the west to the rest' paradigm: assuming that the outsider is the one that has to make the change. This was challenged when the phrase 'from everywhere to everyone' became a common way to describe the desired mission framework. Such an attitude creates a positive sense of togetherness, but the 'from . . . to . . .' paradigm still has the potential danger of continuing the typical mission paternalism.

Recently we have begun talking about an alternative mission paradigm: centring the local. This would assume that local believers are taking the lead in the mission movement within their community or region. Much more needs to be explored about such an approach, particularly on what this would mean for unreached and unengaged people groups. But one thing is clear to me: Marcella and Daniel would fit in very well. For the mission movement anno 2021, people are still needed ‘from everywhere’, as long as they come with a deep desire to make our local brothers and sisters shine.

**Not their real names and description slightly modified*

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