



Take Two: Feedback on “Churches and Agencies – Learning Together”

Greg H. Parsons



After reading this column in the last issue of *MF*, several people wrote back with their reflections on the issues I raised for churches and agencies. Below you'll see a few of the questions one field leader with a U.S. agency (working in Africa) asked, as well as my replies. (See our previous issue for background.)

Agency leader: ...we need to be careful not to take the attitude, “We’re the professionals here; why are churches trying to get into our business?”

Greg: Yes, but we should also be able to say, with humility, “We’re good at this”, without being unwilling to say, “We are servants, and are still learning and growing and are open to new ideas or methods.”

Agency leader: Missions has always been the business of local churches. The local church has strong biblical precedent and warrant for sending missionaries directly to the field: Antioch and Philippi and Jerusalem did it. Agencies are not found in the NT...

Greg: Though the apostle Paul might not recognize much of what we do today in either church or mission, are you sure that “agencies” are not in the NT? While “organizations” or structures as we know them today are not in the NT (even the church looks different!), there *was* a structure that Paul utilized (in Acts 13 and elsewhere) to do his mission work.

Agency leader: Para-church organizations (like mission agencies) should come along side of, support, and serve local churches – not the other way around. We exist to serve churches in their responsibility to send workers into the harvest. Churches don’t exist to send staff to agencies so that we can carry out the Great Commission for them.

Greg: Agencies exist to serve God, to be apostolic, and take the gospel to places it has not gone, with churches that share or generate that vision. Many agencies have moved away from that. Many churches are gifted in other ways. Paul was clearly sent out *from* the church to do something *in* a different location, which others in the church couldn’t practically do.

Agency leader: Parsons asks how accountability can be managed by churches that send workers directly. I believe this is a significant issue for both churches and agencies,... but I don’t think that it’s more significant than [our agency] faces with its team leaders or many missionaries working alone in their various fields.

Greg: The problem is that the churches don’t have experience working in the region, country, or area mission agencies serve. Furthermore, churches often try to do overseas ministry in the way they have excelled at home – but the models usually don’t transfer. As noted in the July-August *Mission Frontiers*, the “DNA” many churches are duplicating is not conducive to establishing the church in pioneer areas.

Agency leader: Parsons asks why churches might be reluctant to send workers through agencies. One [reason] has to do with whether the agency is really “value-added.” If we think of the missions process as a chain, with the local church, the mission agency, and the field leadership being links to the missionary, we could ask what the “value” of each link in the chain adds.

Greg: I like the “link” idea. And, certainly the dollar cost of agencies prompts churches to think they could do it cheaper. Perhaps agencies can flex a little more for certain situations, but most of these situations are logistical or tactical, not strategic, and issues get much more complicated in pioneering areas. So while a given church can do more than it did in the past, agency experience is a great help. Perhaps churches should focus on their strengths: instilling and maintaining vision in the whole church (with the help of the missionaries), member care (with help from agencies as necessary), and raising up the next generation of missionaries. Let’s keep working at improved relationship and understanding between agencies and local churches. 



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