

Raising LOCAL Resources

by Glenn Schwartz

From Paralysis to Proclamation

I have long felt that promoting healthy self-reliance is not an end in itself. The purpose of overcoming unhealthy dependency is to allow churches everywhere to make their own contribution to the global Christian movement. Churches paralyzed by unhealthy dependency not only cannot sustain themselves, they cannot send out their own missionaries to those yet unreached. If you are in a church that knows the joy of missionary sending, imagine what it feels like to be in a church that does not send the Gospel beyond its own community.

Fortunately, in some places when churches were planted, missionary vision was introduced from the beginning. In other places churches learned they could overcome unhealthy dependency and experience the joy of sending out their own people.¹

One Example

About ten years ago in Central Mozambique I had the privilege of leading a two-day seminar encouraging African churches to become missionary-minded. I began by asking how many years the Gospel was preached in that area. The 65 or so pastors chatted among themselves and agreed that the Gospel first came to them about 1915—85 years ago. I then asked how many of their own people went out as missionaries since that time. With some embarrassment they admitted that they had received many missionaries, but they had not sent out any of their own—85 years after having the Gospel.

In the middle of my presentation, the one translating for me asked for permission to address the pastors. He reminded them about their missionary obligation and recommended that, right then and there, they should pray a prayer of confession for being receivers but not senders. Before the two-day meeting ended



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they appointed an interdenominational committee of leaders who would begin to look for ways to send out their own people. Soon thereafter they sent some of their own people to Northern Mozambique and to Brazil and Portugal. They discovered that they could do more than depend on others; they could make a contribution of their own.

Good News on the Horizon

There is a movement that began in Vancouver, British Columbia about 25 years ago that promotes missionary outreach. This is done through an annual Missions Fest (or festival) with other missions-related activities throughout the year. At their Missions Fest event earlier this year they had 35,000 people pass through the doors on one weekend in Vancouver. Festivals are now being held in Portland (Oregon), Seattle (Washington) and various other cities in Canada. In addition, this year in Africa, Missions Fests have been held in Pretoria (South Africa) as well as Lubumbashi and Kinshasa (Congo). This is happening because churches in Africa are discovering that they can become mission mobilizers, not only receivers of mission activity from the outside. There are many sending agencies in Asia, Latin America and Africa that have mobilized tens of thousands of their own missionaries. Missions Fests are helping to get the churches behind such mission effort.²

In one place in Africa church leaders were invited to come together to learn about how a Missions Fest could be held in their city. When church leaders learned that people would be coming from North America, many churches sent representatives to learn what it was about. Unfortunately, some came to the meeting looking for resources they thought might be coming with the North Americans (a classic sign of the dependency syndrome). At the meeting they learned that a Missions Fest should be locally owned, operated and supported within Africa. Some left with disappointment because they anticipated getting, not giving. Thankfully later on, some who left came back to join the movement.

That kind of change occurs when the emphasis shifts from what churches can get to what they can give. Imagine the blessing that is in store for cities all across Africa and elsewhere when they discover that they can overcome unhealthy dependency, lay aside their differences and joyfully participate in making the Great Commission a priority for their churches.

Endnotes

- 1 For stories of churches that overcame unhealthy dependency see *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement* page 17 and following. The book can be ordered on the WMA website at www.wmausa.org.
- 2 For more information on how Missions Fests are conducted, see the following website: www.missionfestinternational.org. Also for articles on local sustainability, see www.wmausa.org.