

mission:world

NEWS

WE ARE THE SCAFFOLDING, NOT THE EDIFICE

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One of the potential pitfalls we all deal with is the tendency to judge all things according to MY current reality. This causes us to ignore the lessons of history and the importance of differing cultural contexts to the point where we assume the way we do things is the ONLY way. In missions practice, this can lead to some precarious conclusions such as distorted theological positions and practices.

In missionary ministry, a certain tension has always existed in the instruction and application of biblical truth in local cultural contexts. This process is referred to as indigenization: the attempt to make the gospel belong in a local setting and not be viewed as a foreign idea or expression. Unfortunately, in many places of the world where Western missionaries have pioneered gospel ministry, that ministry has been presented with a significant Western cultural baggage.

Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh, practiced indigenous missions principles during his own personal ministry. He did not walk into a historical/cultural vacuum; he walked into a very specific history and culture in Israel. In Jesus' efforts to convey a message and develop reproducing leaders, he worked in and with cultural norms. He did not view all culture as antagonistic to God's mission.

Jesus used four common metaphors to communicate and illustrate His message: farming, vines, sheep, and fishing. Obviously, these are taken directly from daily life in Israel. Jesus also utilized the synagogue system as long as they would allow Him, and he employed the rabbinical structure of instruction where a rabbi would have a select group of students/followers. Jesus spoke in parables, which was a common teaching method of the local culture. There were many things Jesus did not accept or utilize from the culture, especially the religious system of His day.

Indigenous missions principles are quite evident in the New Testament. Historically, men like Henry Venn and Roland Allen, who both lived and served as missionaries in the early twentieth century, articulated indigenous principles that continue to be a very good resource in the on-going discussion.

For many years, a guiding concept in the indigenization conversation has been the "Three-self" model for churches. In this idea, the goal is for a church to be self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-propagating. This simply means the church makes its own decisions, pays its own way, and is able to multiply . . . ALL without outside interference or help.

This model has been scrutinized for various reasons. One criticism is that it overly emphasizes the "self" part and creates isolation. Another criticism says that it was incomplete, so two more "selves" were added: self-expressing and self-theologizing, which means the local church itself must "look like" an indigenous one in that culture in architecture, worship, communication, and leadership selection styles. Self-theologizing does not mean the creation of some special system of theology. It means missionaries must build and apply biblical theology

to local themes we simply do not see very often in the West such as polygamy and animism.

BMA Global Missions attempts to carry out healthy indigenous principles. Noted missionary Hudson Taylor once said that, "missionaries are the scaffolding, not the edifice." Like Christ, our missionary methods must include local forms allowing the development of local leaders in local systems that carry on after the scaffolding has been removed.

Two primary ways BMA Global Missions attempts to accomplish this goal include our church planting grant program through ChangeMaker missionaries and our practice of the "principle of the thirds." Both efforts have the goal of partnering without creating dependence. Prayerfully, this also does not take us to the extremes where we have no ongoing relationship and do not cultivate the "self" part in isolation but in association.

The grant program through ChangeMaker missionaries is carried out in the lives of non-American church planters who receive a church-planting grant for a limited number of years. In essence the partnership is with both the project and the person. It is not open-ended but intended to help the church plant go to the five-self stage and repeat the process as the church becomes part of our worldwide family.

The principle of the thirds is meant to support those churches in their advancement by not giving them gifts where they are not vetted in the process. If they want to make a major purchase or build a building, etc. they are expected to fund the first third of the total cost, then we help them with a third, and the last third can be an interest-free loan from our international loan fund. In the end, we partner and facilitate, we do not enable and create dependence. Also, the local congregation will have paid two-thirds of the total cost when the project is complete.

Much like our own children, we look forward to the day when they are independent from us in finances, decision-making, and other areas of life. That does not end our relationship but merely changes the dynamics. Overall, we as parents rejoice in seeing our children flourish on their own. BMA Global Missions is thankful for many family members in our association around the world that function on their own and yet are a vital part of the ongoing ministry.

If the edifice is going to shine and the children are going to live in a healthy manner on their own . . . the scaffolding and the unhealthy systems of enabling and dependency must come down.

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BMA BROTHER IN THE BRONX

BY: David Dickson
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The last several years have been characterized by the influx of an increasing number of immigrants to the United States, in large part from Mexico and the countries of Central America. Among those who immigrated from Central America are the Garifuna people group who represent a small percentage of the populations of Honduras, Guatemala and Belize. Garifunas are descendants of Africans forcibly transported to the Americas and the Arawak Indians of St. Vincent.

Although Garifunas speak the language of the country where they live (Spanish or English), their heart language remains their own unique language. Those who have immigrated to the U.S. tend to end up living in larger cities of the country in close proximity to other recent immigrants who share their language and culture.

Bro. Cherry Gamboa, former co-pastor of a BMAA Garifuna language congregation in San Juan, Honduras, recently immigrated with his family to the Bronx, New York. He was immediately able to connect with a number of folks who had attended our churches in Honduras before



moving to the U.S. The problem they all mentioned to him was that there are no Garifuna-language Baptist churches in the area . . . at all. (Actually, none in the U.S.) Although there are a handful of Garifuna congregations in the U.S., none are Baptist.

With the authorization and support of the church in San Juan, Bro. Cherry has begun holding services in the basement of a dwelling in the Bronx and is already packing their small meeting area to its maximum capacity. Bro. Cherry supports himself and his family with a secular job, and receives no salary as a missionary/pastor, but that has not slowed him down. With the participation of his family in leadership roles, services are conducted in Garifuna/Spanish, and the Lord has already blessed with professions of faith.

Several of those who attend are “transplants” from BMAA Garifuna churches in Honduras and were active in their congregation before they immigrated to the U.S. They are overjoyed to find a church that is doctrinally sound and preaches the same doctrine as the churches they left in Honduras.

Of course, the pressing problem is finding a larger building for their meetings. Because most of those attendees work in low-paying jobs, locating a meeting place they can afford is a daunting task. But as you would expect, Brother Cherry is optimistic that God will soon provide for them a new meeting place, adequate for his growing congregation.

Keep this missions effort in your prayers: the first and only Baptist church plant among the Garifuna people in our country.

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INSTEAD OF SHUTTING THE DOOR, OPEN THE BIBLE

BY: Gavin Roberts
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Utah is known for the “Greatest Snow on Earth.” The state is home to some of the greatest skiing in the world. The southern part of the state boasts the “Mighty Five” national parks that attract tourists from around the globe. Within an hour’s drive from where my family and I live you can see snowy mountains or red rock desert. It is a beautiful place!

Depending on where your data comes from, Utah is also the least reached state in the U.S. with the gospel, including a number of areas with significant populations but little to no evangelical presence. This is why my family and I packed up and headed west!

We minister in Morgan, Utah, an incredibly picturesque mountain town. Snowcapped mountains sit above the town on all sides while the Weber River runs through the valley floor and keeps everything green. Morgan is a town of roughly 5,000 residents and the largest city in Morgan County, which has a total population of around 13,000. Geographically, it is the smallest county in the state. My brother, Chase Roberts, and I pastor Morgan Grace Church, the only evangelical church in the city of Morgan and one of only two in the county.

While evangelical churches are few, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints thrives. Utah is the home of the Mormon Church. Many in our BMA family know Mormons from their missionary uniforms. You’ve likely had Mormon missionaries visit your home. Growing up in rural Arkansas this was about the extent of my knowledge of the LDS church. So how does one minister to Mormons? How do we share the gospel with LDS friends?

It is not uncommon for folks in Utah to only know Christians from the South as the people who eat fried food, drink sweet tea, and slam the door in their faces while they’re on their two-year mission with the church. Instead of politely telling missionaries you are a Christian and do not wish

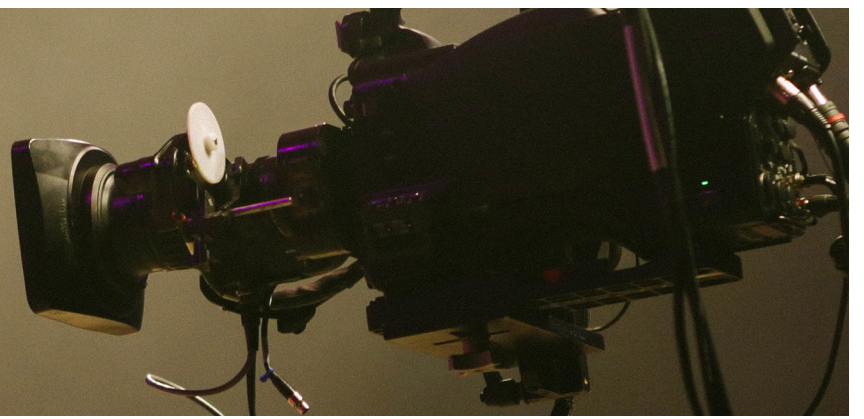
to hear their spiel, I would ask that you prayerfully consider a different approach: Invite them in. Offer them something to drink. Listen to them. Talk with them. Ask them questions. Love them. They are real people just like you.

Our Mormon friends are professional evangelists. We have found that they are generally open to religious conversations. However, debating is often not the best approach. Instead of attacking the LDS faith, ask questions that cause both parties in the conversation to think critically about their faith. When people have only known one faith from birth, they may never have looked at God in a different light.

So ask good questions like, “Who do you think the Bible tells us that Jesus is?” or “What is the authority for how we are to live our lives and receive forgiveness of our sins?” Questions like these allow them to share their beliefs and allow you to share your own. Encourage your Mormon friends to read the Bible. Let God do what God does. He speaks through His Word. He brings life through His Word. God saves sinful people in need of his grace! Just like those of you reading this article.

Ministering to Mormons is about listening and loving. It is something that happens via relationships that take time. We are all broken people, so instead of shutting them out, open the door and open your ears. Win a hearing. Love them. Jesus says in John 6:63, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” Listen intently. Show grace. God’s Word brings life. Trust God to do what He has promised to do: build His church.

Pray for Utah! Pray for us. Listen to the next Mormon missionaries you meet. Love them. Maybe God will call some of you reading this to be a part of what He is doing in Utah.



THE FORGOTTEN AND ABANDONED

BY: Holly Meriweather
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From Bolivia to Paraguay and Back

“When I was seventeen years old and in high school a friend told me about Jesus. He shared the gospel and I trusted Jesus as my Savior. Like any young person, I was very excited about my new life and very happy to know Jesus. Soon, however, problems arose that drew me away from a deep relationship with Him. I went through some very bitter times before I learned that the love of Christ has no limits.”

Bolivian Ivan Filippini loves to share his salvation story. A church planter in both Paraguay and Bolivia, he is also a Lifeword global partner and shares the gospel to the Americas through media.

Brother Ivan continues his story, explaining that, “As I reached rock bottom I found the sweet grace that transformed my life. I begged God to forgive me and I rejoice that His perfect peace became mine. After this, I had only one desire, to serve Christ with all my being! I began trying to tell everybody about Christ and His forgiveness of sin.”

His enthusiasm for God’s mission led to his ministry calling, and In 2015 Brother Ivan met Regino Acuña, who disciplined him, teaching him biblical principles and other aspects of ministry that, as Ivan puts it, “have been a true blessing to me and drastically changed my life forever.”

Brother Acuña continued to be a great influence on Brother Ivan’s life and introduced him to the BMA (Baptist Missionary Association). The two men began working together pastoring and planting churches in both Bolivia and Paraguay, and in 2019 Brother Ivan planted the first BMA church in Paraguay and now visits churches there to sure make sure they are thriving and multiplying.

Unfortunately, during the pandemic, church members in one area fell victim to people with ulterior motives.

Fighting Back For Lost Souls

It’s called “the forgotten, or abandoned, place.” Tapuinkue is an indigenous community in Paraguay where the Guarani language is spoken. Completely cut off from access to the Internet, the Guarani live far from civilization but not far enough away from groups who preach false doctrine and take advantage of them.

Before Covid hit, there were 45 candidates for baptism among the Guarani, but Brothers Acuña and Philippini were not allowed to travel for five months, so they could not stay in touch with believers there. During that time a group of charismatics entered the community, telling the Guarani their beliefs were the same doctrinally. Unfortunately, much of the work there was destroyed.

When Director of Operations Luis Ortega heard what happened in Tapuinkue, he asked Pastor Ivan Philippini, Lifeword’s Guarani-language speaker, if there was any way the Lifeword team could help. Efforts

were already underway to build back the churches’ pre-pandemic numbers, and the result of that conversation led to a technology solution: Brother Ivan would record Bible, discipleship, and teaching content in the Guarani language, then load it onto memory cards for people’s phones so new believers could hear and understand truths from Scripture in an area with limited internet access.

Once a month, Brother Ivan and Brother Regino conduct house-to-house evangelism, preaching, and worship services in Tapuinkue and 60 people recently accepted Christ. The Lifeword team is honored to be part of this initiative.

Please pray that the lives of Guarani in this forgotten and abandoned area will be transformed in the same way as Brother Ivan’s life was long ago.

