

## **The missionary's timeless role**

From the earliest days of our Movement, our AG forefathers placed great emphasis upon world evangelism. Since then this emphasis has been evidenced by two fundamental subthemes: the pioneer missionary and the perpetuation of ministry.

Among those attending the first gathering of the Assemblies of God were several missionaries who had been serving independently and wanted to join the fledgling Fellowship. Others were soon commissioned and sent out by the new General Council. Documents from those early years show evidence of the value our forefathers placed on missions. Churches were willing to sacrificially support missionaries and missions endeavors, offering a powerful demonstration of the priority missionaries had in our understanding of our role and responsibility before God.

But AG missions goes beyond the missionary to include ministry partners on-site. Missions also involves local people, because the recognized goal of the missionary is to train national leaders to build churches around the world. Our missions endeavors are not about expanding our own influence. Instead, missions is about raising up brothers and sisters around the world to further the cause of Christ.

Training national leaders was the priority of our missionary pioneers. Those on new fields focused on training, even while doing the initial work of evangelism and discipleship. The ultimate goal was to train national leaders so that the spread of the gospel could continue long after the missionary's departure.

Our greatest examples for both our pioneer efforts and our teaching ministry are found in the discourses of Jesus and the New Testament pattern given to us by Paul and others in the Book of Acts. As churches have matured into different phases around the world, the missionaries' responsibility has changed. Where they were once pioneers sowing the seed and proclaiming the message of the gospel, the primary function of missionaries in many countries now focuses on training.

For example, several missionary families have served in Brazil for generations and are effectively involved in various forms of training. The same phenomenon is taking place among the longer-established churches in Africa and areas of Asia. Much of the responsibility of our current missionary personnel is to train those who can carry the message of the gospel and continue widening the missions vision of the mature local church.

Yet even as our missionaries transition from the role of pioneers to partners, their value remains immeasurable. In recent years some in our constituency have begun to

underestimate that value, assuming that long-established and diverse church fellowships around the world no longer need or benefit from our partnership. Nothing could be further from the truth. The missionary is the essential link to our Fellowship's God-given function of serving His church worldwide.

While many projects are worthy and important, they cannot be realized to their fullest potential without missionaries. The missionary is essential in every phase of ministry development, whether in church planting or compassion ministries or Bible training or the ever-growing avenues of media outreach. Missionaries are involved not only in linkage, but also in training people who can perpetuate the missions process. This process, we believe, is God-given. Missionaries have no substitute and are as essential today as in the beginning. We continue to support the role of the missionary wholeheartedly, and we continue to pray that God will raise up more laborers to go into His fields of harvest.

---

L. JOHN BUENO is executive director of AG World Missions.

Article published by Today's Pentecostal Evangel