

# IMTN *A conversation of trainers that leads to action*

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‘Words and actions’

Some reflections, reading and a round-up from the IMTN network

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A certain Presidential inaugural speech last month has doubtless sparked all kinds of conversations around the world. At the risk of losing your attention to a surplus of other thoughts some words from that speech have kept coming back to me -

*“The time for empty words is over. Now arrives the hour of action.”*

Similar words and sentiment are regularly spoken by incoming politicians and politicians are shouting louder and angrier slogans as they ratchet up the promises of ‘action,’ but such reflections are not my point in quoting this rhetoric here. The point is, these words have provoked me to reflect on my own words-action dilemmas and on the words-action of the IMTN!

Our network slogan is, ‘*A conversation of mission trainers that leads to action*’. The IMTN exists to enable a conversation that is neither empty nor fruitless and yet, I have a restlessness as we enter 2017 and a nagging sense that there is more we can do to make sure that our words are *shared* effectively, *relevant* to the different contexts we represent, *useful* in training, and *equipping* for us as trainers so that the ministry assigned to us can be significantly encouraged, supported and enhanced.

As a member of the IMTN I ask you to reflect this year on how we might ‘*hold resolutely to the hope we confess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds.*’ Hebrews 10:23-24

## **Poly-Centric Mission – reporting a global conversation**

In October 2016 the WEA’s Mission Commission hosted a Global Mission Consultation in Panama and around 300 mission leaders met to discuss the theme of Poly-Centric Mission. From the plethora of words – at plenary sessions, round table and small group discussions Dr. Samuel Escobar led a small group of four – all members of the IMTN - to try and capture something of the ‘essence’ of what was being articulated over those days. This short report is attached here for you at the end of this Bulletin.

## **Facing Danger – a guide through risk**

One thing is certain as we anticipate 2017. God IS active in his world to bring people to himself. The church IS growing. Praise God. But much of this activity is unseen by the global church, unsupported by training resources and is uncomfortable as it carries great risk from opposition.

What are we doing to equip people for these places? In January I read a new book on risk by **Anna Hampton**; *Facing Danger. A guide through risk*. Having lived with her family for a decade in Afghanistan

she writes from both head and heart. As trainers we must be faithful in preparing people for the hard places. Hampton suggests four major trends in cross cultural mission;

- (a) Increasing danger and persecution of cross cultural labourers
- (b) Increasing attrition rates
- (c) Changing sending countries
- (d) Increased brokenness of cross cultural labourers

She states that *'In risk we either grow deeper towards likeness and union with Christ, or we don't.'* (p11) and calls for *'mature courage'* that knows the reality of God's presence in risk situations and is developed from a firm biblical understanding of risk, discernment of the Holy Spirit's leading and spiritual maturity.

### **Developments in the IMTN**

Following the MC's global consultation in October, in Panama City, a group of fifteen IMTN members met over 2 days. We found that there was much encouragement through our fellowship together in Christ, and as we talked and prayed we dreamed of ways (actions) that our network of trainers could help one another to get the work done. Seven actions were raised:

1. Start a Facebook page- a place where people can easily dialogue and post resources (see below)
2. Seek genuine cross-pollination – visiting lecturing staff – giving other perspectives – removes competition and enables exchange of ideas and experiences
3. Explore student exchanges - to strengthen the transcultural part of learning– could we look for sources of funding to enable that?
4. Make student work more accessible – a repository of dissertations – sharing research
5. Encourage cross pollination between mission training in higher learning contexts and the informal context – IMTN is at an intersection – a valuable space that can link both contexts of learning
6. Being a space to hold together practical and academic
7. Ideas for Webinars/Bulletins - tell stories of other parts of the world – share the different models that are being used – enable fellowship as well as learning from one other

### **New Facebook page**

Good news! Thanks to one of our IMTN members we now have our own Facebook page as an easy way to communicate. If you are already on Facebook, you can go to the Missionary Training Facebook group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/imtnetwork/>. If, for security reasons, you cannot participate on Facebook with your own identity, we have set up an anonymous account which we can let you use. For more information on that, please let us know by contacting us at <http://www.missionarytraining.org/mt/index.php/contact-imtn>. The Facebook page is run by the IMTN (International Missionary Training Network of the WEA Mission Commission)

We look forward to implementing some of the other actions we dreamed of in Panama. Are you able to take a lead? Let's build on that conversation in Panama City and with God's enabling see more of these dreams realized in 2017.

### **Shared principles of training**

As a network we want to encourage trainers to understand and apply principles of transformational training. We also want to advocate for training before people are sent out by the church. One IMTN member expresses this importance of training as a question, *'Can you find a passage in the NT where Jesus sent the disciples without giving them instruction before they went?'*

In Panama we took time to go back to the four gospels and reflect on our Great Teacher, Jesus Christ. While we recognize the uniqueness of Christ's life and teaching and the specific cultural aspects of his context we sought to uncover any principles of his teaching and his approach to equipping the disciples that are still relevant and can shape our approach to training today. We saw that Jesus led his disciples through a process of identity transformation, opened their eyes to understand the Scriptures, and gave them firsthand experience of ministry. It would not be possible to work through every issue, circumstance and event they would face in the future but Jesus facilitated a change in their core identity, taught them a deep understanding of Scripture, and led them through experiential learning. These proved to be critical aspects of the preparation they needed.

A few of us are still synthesising the discussion in Panama about Jesus' training principles and will share our digest soon.

During our discussion we referred to **Robert E Coleman's** eight principles in his book *'The Master Plan of Evangelism'*. If you have not read this short book first published in 1963 (!) and republished several times since then, you may find it a useful guide for your practice. Coleman summarises Jesus' training principles as:

1. Selection – Jesus deliberately invested in a few – who he would equip to be trainers of others
2. Association – Jesus devoted himself to them – aside from the crowds - he ate, walked, ministered, listened, taught and even wept with them
3. Consecration – Jesus called them to turn away from sin and follow him in obedience – they were to consecrate themselves to follow Christ (not a programme)
4. Impartation – Jesus gave Himself to them and for them without limit, modelling a commitment to them that would motivate their giving themselves totally for him
5. Demonstration – Jesus taught then by showing them
6. Delegation - Jesus sent them out to minister
7. Supervision - Jesus listened to them and guided them, using their experiences to teach them more
8. Reproduction - Jesus intended them to disciple others.

### **Training for spiritual maturity**

This year we hope that a WEA-MC book titled **'Spirituality and Mission'** will be published. There is a chapter on training for spiritual maturity included. In this chapter I offer five themes as guide lines for fostering spiritual growth. Perhaps these integral themes may contribute to the IMTN developing a *'Five Marks of Mission Training.'* The five themes are;

Training that is -

- **Intentional** – training that is intentional (and explicit) about fostering spiritual maturity
- **Holistic** – training that engages and transforms the whole person (new thinking, renewed attitudes and right relationships)
- **Relational** – training that is embedded in community
- **Integrated**- training that integrates spiritual formation with other aspects of the curriculum and applied to every sphere of life
- **Reproducible**- training for spiritual maturity through demonstration and action

As a network of trainers let's use the opportunities we have – whether through email, Facebook, webinars, faculty exchanges, conversations and sharing - to help one another design and deliver training that -

- intentionally fosters spiritual growth;
- is holistic in challenging the whole person through transforming ideas, attitudes and relationships;
- builds communities of learners who will learn with and from one another;
- teaches the obedience of faith by integrating spiritual understanding with every sphere of life and,
- finally, as trainers of others, let us take hold of every opportunity the Lord gives us this year to grow in our own understanding, trust and obedience so that we can be role models who demonstrate the life in Christ we seek to nurture in others.

#### **Next Bulletin**

In April we look forward to our next Bulletin which will focus on using the Arts in mission training.

If you have read a good book that you would like to recommend to others why not tell us about it on our Facebook page?

Wishing you a very blessed 2017 and look forward to connecting and talking together in the coming months.

## **Report of the WEA-MC GLOBAL CONSULATION, Panama October 2016**

Attached below.

# ‘Mission’ in many voices: polycentric and polyphonic

As members of the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance, we have gathered in Panama City, Panama, 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> October 2016, to hear from God’s Word and from one another, to pray and worship, and to meet together in order to understand and respond to the current obstacles and opportunities for global mission.

With thankful hearts for all that God is doing to further His mission, we celebrate:

- The warm welcome we have received here in Panama from sisters and brothers in the Latin American Evangelical Community.
- With evangelicals in Latin America, the significance of centennial commemorations of the Panama Mission Conference, held here in 1916.
- The contribution to our programme of indigenous Christian leaders and our co-hosts, COMIBAM, in this centennial year.
- In particular, the unprecedented movement of God’s Spirit and of God’s people, often unpredictable and apparently ‘messy’, across this continent over the last one hundred years.
- The ongoing contribution of Latin American missiology to the global conversation, particularly noting the gift of the term ‘misión integral’ to global evangelical missiology and we welcome the potential for further self-theologising from within this context as a way of enriching our understanding of what God is doing in mission in our time.
- The embodiment within the Mission Commission of polycentric connection, movement in mission, and a polyphonic missional conversation that anticipates a greater unity of heart, soul, and purpose.
- The continuity of themes emerging in this consultation with those that were explored at the meetings of the WEA Mission Commission at Iguassu, Brazil, in 1999.
- An emerging self-critical understanding within the evangelical mission movement that demonstrates a renewed hopefulness and which avoids paralysis.

In the various sessions of this Commission we have noted:

- An ongoing engagement with mission understood as ‘from everywhere to everywhere’ and welcome the momentum imparted by our discussions of ‘polycentric mission’.
- A widely spread sense of insecurity, even fear, among members of our evangelical communities in the face of religious opposition, violence and insecurity.
- The deep concern with many young people who are leaving the churches in unprecedented numbers.
- That the emerging mission movements in some parts of the world appear to have reached a plateau.
- That, in many instances, the default mode for missionary activity is still one in which the powerful direct and control mission to the powerless.
- A renewed emphasis on missionary self-emptying as a more biblical approach over and against a ‘win-win’ mentality.
- The global movement of God and the global movement of people at a time in history which some have described as the ‘age of migration’.
- The limited vision of the evangelical mission movement in adequately understanding and addressing the issues of power and control involved in engaging the indigenous peoples of the world (including those of North America, Latin America, the Sami of northern Europe, the Roma of Central Europe, aboriginal people in Australia and Maori in New Zealand) and in recognising the movement of God’s Spirit among them in many places.
- The need for further reflection on what it means to suffer with others who are persecuted for their faith as they engage in mission in challenging contexts.

The Word of God, through the book of Jonah, has been a mirror for us, reminding us that when the world is crying for help the church is frequently found sleeping, insensitive to the despair and the need of the people. God may use the storms of life to wake up His people and re-sensitize them as they realize that disobedience severs relationship

with God, the depth of which can only be expressed with the poetry of the Psalms. This mirror that makes us aware of our condition as a disobedient people, also proclaims powerfully to us the love, concern, and compassion of our God who can revive and send us again as His messengers to a world in need. It also calls our attention to the love, patience and forgiving disposition of our God, a love so deep that we can only contemplate it, without always understanding it.

In responding to the theme of 'polycentric mission' we encourage:

- Caution in simply replacing 'mission from everywhere to everywhere' with 'polycentric mission'. It is important to continue struggling with the implications of both, acknowledging our inadequate success with the former and avoiding the rush to move on to the latter in the belief that the new and the novel will rescue the missionary enterprise.
- Caution in collapsing 'polycentric mission' into merely organisational, territorial, denominational, or ethnic categories without recognising its limitless potential for calling us to ever deeper unity in Christ.
- Generosity in acknowledging the gift to our evangelical community of connecting with parallel, polyphonic conversations underway in other global gatherings of fellow disciples, including the Lausanne Movement, the Conference for World Mission and Evangelism, and other relevant, mission-focused bodies.
- Further reflection on what each of the local and regional voices in the conversation brings uniquely to the global mission conversation as we explore together a more complete expression of the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17:20-23).
- A recognition that the lived experiences of feeling, or of being treated as, either inferior and superior, are consequences of our human fallen nature which the gospel addresses directly. Andrew Walls describes this as, 'The riches of a hundred places learning from each other'.
- A wide recognition that Christianity is *both* a local and a global faith. There remains the need for the local church to engage its local context in interdependence with polycentric and polyphonic global mission in the service of the greater unity of the Church and its united endeavours in mission.

Above all, in light of the theme of this Mission Commission consultation, we celebrate the potential revealed by attention to the concept of 'polycentric mission'. In welcoming the insights of those who have suggested that this could be extended to incorporate closely related concepts, we encourage deeper and ongoing reflection upon the theme. This would include a polyphonic mission conversation, poly-directional mission, poly-generational, cruci-centric or Christo-centric mission, and unity in mission.

Taken together with the notions of polycentric mission and 'mission from everywhere to everywhere', these closely-related ideas point to the relativising of all centres of influence and power in light of the claims of the cross and of Christ. This extends over all competing loyalties, whether ethnic, cultural, national, political, generational, denominational, or organisational, and offers a re-centring of a united polyphonic missional conversation.

Thankful of all that the Lord of the nations has shown us over these days together, we leave members of the consultation with questions rather than a final summary statement, inviting others to add their voices to an ongoing global conversation.

- How are we to remain faithfully and self-critically open to the transforming influence of the Bible upon our mission practice, as it is read in context?
- How can we encourage patterns of missionary spirituality that equip and enable us to practice the radical love of others so that we can better hear and understand their alternative and diverse voices in a global, united polyphonic chorus of worship and witness?
- In what ways can we ensure that our exploration of polycentric mission in this consultation continues to inform our understanding of contemporary mission practice and theology?
- In what ways might a trinitarian understanding of mission ensure the adequacy of our expressions of the polycentric and polyphonic nature of global mission?

Members of the Editorial Committee (Felipe Byun, Samuel Escobar, Darrell Jackson, Ruth Wall)

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