

‘Outside the box’ mission engagement

By Allan Harkness

Allan is an OMF member who has been seconded to LeaDev-Langham to work as their Programmes Manager. He has been able to use his skills in theological education to mentor and train leaders in many Asian Bible Colleges.

It is becoming increasingly common for Christian professionals to use their skills in one way or another ‘outside the box’ of typically-perceived mission involvement. Two common expressions of mission are short-term mission teams (sometimes sceptically termed ‘mission tourism’) and long-term cross-cultural living. But is there another way?

Barry McKessar (Christchurch) spent three weeks in January this year teaching aspects of theological/academic study skills to new Master of Theology students at Christian Leaders’ Training College (CLTC) in Papua New Guinea. He will go back for a similar assignment in early 2019.

Warren (Auckland) is a water resources engineer, and is consulting with the same Bible college in Papua New Guinea. Earlier this year he visited them for a week to help conceptualise the re-development and upgrading of their drainage and water supply infrastructure.

Bron and Steve are representative of a number of English as a Second Language teachers, some retired and some taking annual leave, who commit themselves to spending a few weeks each year helping incoming students at seminaries in Asia

improve their English, enabling them to thrive in their English-medium Master of Divinity program.

In my case, my Asian experience in theological education has led me to partner with a seminary in Pakistan to develop its first-in-country Master of Theology and Leadership Certificate program. Students are being equipped to read the Bible, their own lives, and their culture and world well, to enlarge the base of qualified scholar-leaders in that country. [See link in separate box]

Do you see the common thread in these scenarios?

We are people who are committed to seeing God’s mission given oomph, and recognise that the professional abilities we have both come from him and can still be used by him. We have been around missions in one way or other for quite some time – some of us in ‘full time’ mission settings – but are not interested in short term tripping (as valuable and illuminating as it may be). For various reasons (Gold Card included), full-time cross-cultural immersion doesn’t appeal. But we are open to using our specialist experience and wisdom where partnership is invited, and for shortish blocks of time.

For me, the bulk of partnership activity occurs remotely. The largest chunk of my ongoing links with the Pakistan MTh program involves emails and Skype calls from my spare bedroom ‘office’ in South

Auckland. Warren expects to continue consulting with CLTC from his Auckland home. The occasional ‘on site’ visit is useful for building our relationships with the local staff and gives us a hands-on feel for our service activity.

Countries like Pakistan and Papua New Guinea aren’t those in which OMF has traditionally had a presence. But the world of missions has changed dramatically over recent decades, and organisational/geographical lines of demarcation are becoming blurred. So, for example, OMF International is dealing with enquiries from people in India, Nigeria, Brazil, and the Ukraine. It is developing diaspora ministries in locations from Africa to Nova Scotia. With a global perspective, it’s not surprising God delights to use us outside our own historical fields of service.

And as people like us offer our professional skills, it’s both exciting and intriguing to imagine the potential impact of our involvement for the Church in the countries in which we are partnering with seminaries and organisations. It’s all part and parcel of Jesus’ challenge to ‘go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples.’

You may like to listen to a fifteen minute Radio Rhema interview Allan had in October relating to this initiative in Pakistan: <https://bit.ly/2AGogAV>