

TRAINING PASTORS IN PNG



Have you ever wondered what type of people are required for effective church planting? What are the priorities for such a goal? As you read the *authorities* you will find that there are as many essentials as there are schools of thought, but if you read the New Testament you may be surprised to find different answers. Those are the right ones.

While Christ did choose some educated and influential people amongst his disciples, the ones who became the key leaders initially were *unschooled, ordinary men* (Acts 4:13). If we are candid in our examination of one in particular we find that at times he was theologically confused (Mt. 16:22f); rather unreliable in his commitment (Lk. 22:54-62) and racially prejudiced in the early days of his ministry (Acts 10; Gal. 2.). For many he would be totally unsuitable to single out for training amongst indigenous people. You have probably already recognized Peter, who was greatly used in the formation of the New Testament Church.

During our time in PNG we have worked with one under-girding principle – what God has done for the Church throughout history he is able to do in and through the Melanesian Christians. In 1991 we joined ECPNG (Evangelical Church of PNG), an established indigenous church celebrating its silver jubilee at the time of our arrival. In Port Moresby, the capital city in which we have lived, they had six local churches, but none had a pastor. Some felt that more churches needed to be planted, but we were convinced that Christ's compassion for his Church remained unchanged. He saw these congregations *harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd* (Mt.

9:36). It seemed that the equipping of men for pastoral ministry had to be the priority.

How could that equipping take place? Our western experience demanded 2/3 years intensive pre-service study. The need was immediate, we could not afford the luxury of even 2 years. In discussion with local church and mission leaders we established an apprenticeship approach to training. Local churches appointed men as trainee-pastors and for a couple of days each week we spent time with them for guided study and reflection. This system was used for 14 years, but was officially disbanded by mutual consent in 2006 when it was recognized that equipped pastors were now responsible *to pass on the things they had heard me say ...to reliable men who would also be qualified to teach others* (2 Tim 2:2 amended).

In our 16 years many things have happened. The six churches have effectively become ten. Two are still seen as fellowships or church plants, under an established church, but for 3 weeks of the month they operate as local churches. Of those 10 churches 9 effectively support their own pastors. During this time there has been no emphasis on church planting. New churches have grown out of the blessing of ministry in the other churches. It is only fair to say that there have been problems and disappointments amongst men trained. ECPNG has also gone through a major split.

What part has the Mission played in the establishment of these churches? Have we tried to control? Have we tried to fund these *poor people*? Have we always agreed with decisions made?

We have tried to do what we were called to do – “Preach the Word,” in a clear, but relevant way. From the start we never told local churches when we would come and preach. We respected the appointed leadership and responded to their invitations. That has developed a spirit of responsibility. While we have not tried to control we have been actively involved in church leadership discussions. Wherever possible we have had an open Bible and while respecting both individuals and culture where possible we have not been afraid to confront issues. We have been misunderstood by many, but have, however, not tried to force our opinions. We have allowed the church to reach decisions in a Melanesian way and in Melanesian time! ■

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