

PRESENTING THE CHALLENGE OF OVERSEAS MISSION

Baptist Times 12 August 2004

The editor has given me yet another ‘toughie’. As one who in his younger years spent two periods of his life engaged in ‘overseas’ mission – first as a Time for God volunteer in Southern Germany, and then later as a BMS missionary in Congo/Zaire – I am fully committed to the desirability of young people serving God ‘overseas’. However, in the over 11 years in my present church we have not had one young person go out with the BMS for more than a one month period. Having said that, we have had a couple take early retirement and serve as volunteers with the BMS in Cyprus, working for a Christian satellite company based in Cyprus, beaming programmes to North Africa & the Middle East. We have a gifted middle-aged Ugandan member on a three-year contract in Nigeria, seconded by the BBC World Service to help tackle the Aids problem there by running a radio soap with information about Aids – although not a missionary in a technical sense, he is certainly there as a Christian. This summer one of our younger members leaves for a six month stint with FEBA in Uganda, where she will be working for a Christian radio station; while another of our younger members will be going to Greece for a month under the auspices of OM to share her faith with athletes & others. And at this very moment a group of around 20 of our young people are saving hard to go on a mission trip to Ghana, where they will helping to construct a school for a large village with which some of our African members have links. So in one sense we are facing up to the challenge of overseas mission. And yet it is with difficulty. It would no doubt be easier if as a church we were to have regular exposure to ‘real live’ missionaries – but the supply from our BMS seems to be limited with the result that, apart from our own volunteer couple, we have only had two such visits in 11 eleven years – instead we have been sent ‘home’ representatives of one kind or another. We have worked hard to develop relationships with BMS Link missionaries assigned to us, but for the most part this has been abortive – for up until recently those with whom we have been linked have returned to the UK disillusioned. Our experience too of BMS Action Teams has been mixed – we have just had a super group from Brazil, but a previous group was an utter disaster. But we are not giving up. Our latest initiative is, with the help of the BMS, to invite a young Brazilian to come to Britain and serve with us as an ‘evangelistic intern’ – his brief “To inspire young people to grow in their faith and to reach out to their friends with the good news of Jesus”; hopefully he will also whet the appetite of some for overseas mission themselves. To conclude: I’m not sure that we have cracked the nut of presenting the challenge of overseas mission to our people – but at least we are trying. I look forward to learning from other churches as to how they have enabled their people to face up to this challenge.

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