



Center for United States Missions

Mission Moments



Sending Out Workers, Not Professionals

By Mike Ruhl

There are times when I am struck by simplicity. Such a moment came while reflecting on a familiar mission text in Luke 10:1-3, "After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. And he said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'"



The word laborers (or *ergatai* in the Greek text) refer to people who are actively engaged in labor and work.

It is significant to me that so few people in our culture want to do *actual labor*. We hire immigrant workers with strong work ethic to do much of the actual laboring for us. The cultural transition from the agricultural age to the industrial age to the information age may have contributed to this de-emphasis of labor and hard work. We call it 'working smarter instead of harder' ... but for some that mantra has become doing less and expecting more. And even in our churches, too many saints see their discipleship as being a 'consumer of religious goods and services', not working at transforming lives.

I am blessed to spend a lot of time with church planters. And I have yet to meet a successful church planter who is not a true laborer, working hard and investing long hours in the mission field. They push doorbells. They hustle to initiate relationships with the unchurched in order to have opportunity to share the Gospel. They create missional web sites. They train and equip the saints for *Missio Dei* (not only congregation maintenance). They create 'net fishing events' at their churches in order to reach out to their communities. They live on the edge in terms of commitment and work ethic. People see them hard working as they labor in both the vineyard of the Church and the mission field of the marketplace. In fact, many of them are marginal workaholics by some standards. But they do not sit and wait for the telephone to ring or the inbox to swell before working up a spiritual sweat.

A wide-ranging study on American religious life finds that the Roman Catholic population is shifting out of the Northeast to the Southwest, that the percentage of Christians in the United States has declined from 86% in 1990 to 76% in 2008, and that mainline Protestants (Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians) have dropped over 17% over the last seven years from just over 17% down to 12.9% of the US population.*

Now, granted, being 'struck by simplicity' is not the same thing as oversimplification. Perhaps the time has come for the church to send *laborers* instead of *professionals with theological degrees*.

The arm-chair attraction model of missions is not Kingdom-effective. Missions is hard work and hard labor - balanced by the joyous fulfillment of seeing men, women, and children brought into the arms of Jesus Christ for time and eternity - all in response to the active, intentional witness of the Word.

Such work is the ultimate 'work stimulus package' of the Holy Spirit. Our gracious God has already made provision for igniting, supporting, and expanding this all important *labor*.

So, let us get to work in Jesus' name.

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*Zoll, Rachel; "More in U.S. say they have no religion"; Orange County Register; March 9, 2009.

Questions for Reflection

1. What's your church's work ethic in relationship to the harvest?
2. What is your church's strategy for reaching new people with the gospel?
3. How much of your church's time, energy, resources, and money are being invested in the harvest?
4. How much of your church's pastor's time is spent amongst the unchurched?
5. What "net fishing" events does your church do to engage its community?
6. How does your church measure its effectiveness in the harvest?
7. What one thing will you do to help your church be more effective in the harvest?

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