

The Laborers are Plentiful

Breathing. Inhaling and exhaling. Both are necessary for life.

What is inhaled must be exhaled. Exhaling in turn prompts inhaling.

Lately I have been wondering whether joining God in His mission is like breathing. We often think of mission as "sending," or, we might say "exhaling." And there is good reason for that. After all, in the Great Commission Jesus tells his disciples to **go** into all the world (Matthew 28:19). In John 20:21 Jesus says, "As the Father sent me I am **sending you.**"

But if "exhaling" must be paired with "inhaling," I have been wondering lately if "sending" needs to be complemented by "receiving" or, we might say, "inhaling."

Let me give an example. I have known congregations that were very involved in declaring and demonstrating the Gospel in their communities, and even sent missionaries that literally went to the ends of the earth. People received the life of Christ through the witness of believers. And that was a good thing. It was a very good thing.

But rarely did new believers join the church that was doing the "sending." The church was good at "sending" but not so much at "receiving." It "exhaled" but did not "inhale." Something is missing from the fullness of life in Christ when our faith communities do not both exhale and inhale.

Grace-filled communities of belonging

Paul was the greatest apostle ("sent one") of all time. Yet in his letters to the churches he seems to focus more on "receiving" than "sending." About half of each of his letters are devoted to the church gathered being a grace-filled community of belonging where "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)



Andy and Jackie Sytsma

In other words, at the forefront of Paul's mind as he thought of the missionary calling of the church was not just sending but also receiving. Paul envisioned local communities of faith that would receive, welcome and embrace the diversity of people that the Lord was calling to himself as he and others were "sent."

The missional challenge of "sending" and "receiving" is the same. Both require that we cross barriers to form Gospel-shaped friendships with people different from us – people that may not be of our tribe, culture, perspective, or even taste.

Yet this is the heart of mission because that is exactly what the Father did when he sent his only Son to become "flesh" and dwell among us (John 1:14). When we are "sent" to people different than us and "receive" them in our faith communities, we are joining the mission the Father has already initiated to redeem his beloved, but broken, creation.

Receiving Gospel Workers

This past month I had a wonderful opportunity to join a prayer meeting of CRC hispanic church planters in Houston. There are already five hispanic church plants in Texas. At the prayer meeting we were introduced to three other couples that are preparing to plant churches.

The Resonate local mission leader in Texas, Pastor Andy Systma, has done an excellent job of "receiving" these new Gospel workers and building bridges between them and existing CRC churches in the city and in the region. Two of the church planters will be planting spanish-speaking congregations out of existing English-speaking churches. Careful work has been done to build friendships between the congregations and the church planters they will be hosting.

In Matthew 9: 37 Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." The harvest is also plentiful today. But I am increasingly convinced that the Gospel workers are not few, they are also plentiful. Jesus' prayer is being

answered!

The challenge is that many of the Gospel workers that God is putting at our doorsteps are different from us and bring the riches of their own culture and experience. How might the Spirit be inviting us to welcome and embrace them with Gospel-shaped, barrier-crossing friendship?

P.S. One powerful way to grow in your capacity to 'receive' others who different culturally and ethnically is by participating in a Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations immersive event. This is where you can learn more: [Healing Hearts Transforming Nations Event](#)

A Personal Note

Jeannie and I are so grateful for your faithful prayer and support over the years since we first joined Christian Reformed World Missions (now Resonate Global Mission) in 1995. You were our partners in the Gospel as we moved to Costa Rica, then Nicaragua, and finally to Dallas, Texas, where we now live.

You accompanied us as we founded the Nehemiah Center in Nicaragua and Jeannie worked at Nicaragua Christian Academy and God's Treasures. You followed my (Joel's) journey into leading transformation networks worldwide and most recently into being one of the global area leaders for Resonate as well as leading our guiding team for diaspora and ethnic ministry.

Now there is another change. The executive director of Resonate, Dr. Zachary King, has been nominated as general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church, subject to confirmation by Synod in June. I have been asked as of April 1 to assume many of his duties as he prepares for the transition. Subject to his confirmation, I will serve as the Interim Director of Resonate until a new director is confirmed by Resonate, hopefully at the Synod of 2023.

I covet your prayers for myself and for Jeannie, who will bear the burden of my business and the delay in my retirement. We would ask two other things of you during the transition of the next three months.

The first is that you continue your support of us through this June as we have budgeted based on Jeannie and I meeting our support goals for this fiscal year (July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022).

The second is that you continue to support the work of Resonate even after June 30. I hope in the near future to be offering opportunities for you to continue support of projects in which we have been intimately involved (and you through us!) or to other Resonate missionaries.

Joel

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