

People Serving in God's Mission: Value Statements and Related Observations Stemming from a Wycliffe Global Alliance-Sponsored Missiological Consultation

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1. Introduction

Christian mission functions in a different setting today than the environment that birthed the Protestant mission movement. This affects mission agencies worldwide, including the Wycliffe Global Alliance (the Alliance). Recognizing evolving contexts in which mission agencies interact with people serving in God's mission can shed light on shifts of such interaction and perspectives during different eras.

Early Protestant missionaries of the late 18th century were people of their time, and this influenced their theology and practice. This could, for example, be seen in the desire for the Christian West to share the gospel of Christ with non-believers throughout the world through both proclamation and benevolent services. The missions world during this time, and operating largely from this mindset, was clearly divided into sending and receiving contexts.

This mindset also birthed the 20th century Bible translation movement. As part of that movement, both SIL (1934), and Wycliffe Bible Translators (1942, the founding organization of what is now 100+ organizations forming the Alliance), were established in the United States. The operational structures of these agencies in terms of people were based on these sending and receiving contexts developed in earlier decades. In short, home country Wycliffe organizations acted as sender on behalf of the Church in their respective sending contexts, and SIL acted as receiver on behalf of often far away language communities in receiving contexts.

The world in which the Alliance functions today in the early part of the 21st century has changed significantly, and the ways Alliance Organizations (and mission agencies in general) handle people serving in mission has become one of the areas naturally affected by these shifts.

The differentiation between sending and receiving contexts is not so straightforward. Many Alliance Organizations serve as both senders and receivers. Some Alliance Organizations send people only to receiving contexts within national or regional borders, while others may send globally. Some Alliance Organizations must limit sending people to receiving contexts that fulfil those Alliance Organizations' own home country regulatory requirements, or even donor expectations. Other Alliance Organizations may not have these restrictions.

2. Background to the consultation

In light of these shifting realities, the Alliance hosted a missiological consultation with the theme, 'People Serving in God's Mission' in Singapore from 21-24 August 2018. Twenty-six participants representing 22 countries attended, most of whom are responsible for their organization's oversight of personnel in one capacity or another.

Through a reflective and consultative process, the participants discussed ways to do the following:

- clarify and strengthen their understanding of the kind of people God has always desired for his purposes in mission;
- explore the important realities impacting personnel serving in current and future Bible translation movement contexts;
- address challenges faced in the placement of personnel in other agencies—local and abroad—including the expectations and capacity of all agencies involved in such placement processes; and
- gather the insights gained during the consultation, and formulate them in ways that aim to strengthen Alliance Organizations in this area.

The intent of this paper, reflecting outcomes of the consultation, especially in terms of expressing values, and in relation to the spiritual well-being of God's people, is to assist Alliance Organizations in considering their own Human Resources realities as they responsibly care for people serving in God's mission.

The components of this paper are presented as follows:

- a section that speaks to values and spiritual well-being
- short descriptions of ways of demonstrating these values
- observations and recommendations, and
- an Appendix that presents more practical considerations

Bear in mind that the text for this paper is derived from table groups' raw notes, and from participants' discussions and resulting insights.

3. Value statements

Important values that guide Alliance Organizations regarding people serving in mission:

We value God as the owner of his mission. We are on mission because God has called us to join him in his mission. Jesus Christ has set the example of what it means to be sent by God. By following Christ's example, Christians can serve in his mission, wherever their location or whatever their context. 3

We value the Church's role in God's mission. The Church is the body of Christ and Christ is head of the Church. The global Church carries out God's mission in a contextualized manner through its local expressions. Within these local expressions of the Church, God has uniquely gifted people to serve in Bible translation movements as part of his mission.

We value each person serving in God's mission. On a global level, we value our fellow believers in Christ and their unique participation in God's mission. In our Alliance contexts, we equally value each person who participates in Bible translation movements in and through the organizations that are part of the Alliance and through our partners.

We value spiritual well-being. The spiritual well-being of people serving in God's mission is the foundation of their fruitfulness. The focus of this value is not on the task, but on the desired outcome of such service: transformed lives. In order to see transformed individuals and communities, the person serving in mission should be transformed to the likeness of Christ.

- ***Spiritual well-being as core to transformed lives.*** Our own transformation was birthed by the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ. Transforming to the likeness of Christ is an ongoing process. It is through spiritual discipline that our spiritual well-being continues to develop. Our spiritual transformation will impact our relationships. This includes our relationship with God, ourselves, our family, our colleagues, and those we are called to serve.
- ***Cultivating spiritual well-being.*** Spiritual well-being is an Alliance value. Leaders have the responsibility to personally demonstrate the importance of spiritual well-being, and to provide encouragement and space for the development of the spiritual well-being of the individual serving in mission.

4. Short descriptions of ways of demonstrating values regarding people serving in God's mission

Communicating the importance of Bible translation as part of discernment. We communicate the importance of Bible translation to inform all parties involved that making God's Word available in a language that communicates best to communities is fundamental to Christian growth. This knowledge provides people with the opportunity to discern how they can participate in Bible translation movements as an expression of God's mission. Our emphasis is on coming alongside people as they discern God's call.

The assessment of people. When a person indicates their interest to serve in God’s mission in and through the Alliance, the assessment of the person should be approached with love, honesty, grace and professionalism—keeping in mind that God can see potential in a person where it may not be clear to us.

Life in community and ensuring an environment of care. Serving in God’s mission implies that we are in community. We are embedded in numerous communities including home churches, Alliance Organizations, partner organizations in ministry contexts, and the local language communities served, including local churches. Caring for one another, growing in spiritual maturity, and living out one’s calling happens best in community. The way we care for one another helps us to establish trust. To build and maintain trust, we must place intentional focus on healthy relationships—between individuals and God and between one another—always mindful that building trust can happen differently in different cultures.

5. Some observations and recommendations

- Alliance Organizations should embrace opportunities to enhance relationships with the Church and partner organizations, as this can open up innovative ways of approaching Human Resources practices.
- Multiple centres of influence in the domain of Human Resources should be recognized and explored, as doing so could help strengthen the Human Resources practices of Alliance Organizations.
- Alliance Organizations should be aware of the challenges people serving in mission are facing in the midst of the rapid changes and shifts taking place in general on the global scene, and more specifically in the mission context. Alliance personnel should be assisted in understanding these shifts and changes, as these realities influence their lives and that of their immediate and extended families.
- Current realities that Alliance Organizations face have influenced and also complicated the placement of people in different ministry contexts. Different Alliance Organizations use different approaches in the placement of people. For some, it makes sense to rely largely on formal systems and well-established procedures. For others, the placement process works best through relationships and multiple informal discussions. A tension can arise when, for example, an Alliance Organization partners with multiple other organizations that follow different approaches. To address this tension, all concerned partnering organizations need good relationships. However, establishing and maintaining such relationships takes time and resources, which can cause additional strain. Regardless, numerous practical Human Resources issues should be decided upon between the partnering organisations. Relationships enable these kinds of agreements to take place.

Finally, as the Alliance is made up of numerous organizations, each with unique Human Resources needs and management, the naturally occurring lack of uniformity in approach to Human

Resources services can also create various challenges. For example, local government regulations often prescribe Human Resources requirements for their own countries, using terminology and culturally or functionally accepted practices common in their own contexts. But these differing approaches can provide a number of benefits, such as the ability for each Alliance Organization to determine the appropriate Human Resources systems that they can manage, as well as the opportunity to establish direct relationships with other entities (churches, organizations, etc.). In addition, Alliance Organizations can share systems and processes as it suits each organization's capacity and strategies.

Appendix: **Statements on Various Issues and Practical Considerations Recognized by Consultation Participants**

Given the length of the consultation and limited number of participants, the issues, suggestions, challenges and other Human Resources dynamics described in the Appendix are not comprehensive in scope. They are presented here to encourage Alliance Organizations and Human Resources staff to continue discussing these matters in their contexts and regionally.

General consideration

When confronted with numerous challenges and tensions, our default approach should always be to align our practices with our values. Alliance Organizations should intentionally work towards addressing their Human Resources policies, structures and procedures for relevancy and to ensure healthy practices.

Preparation

The responsibility for each individual's preparation for ministry service should be a collaborative effort. Collectively, all role-players should ensure that the necessary training and orientation is received by those serving in and through Alliance Organizations and partners. Similarly, communicating the nature of assignments for personnel to undertake should be promoted and shared accurately. The local context where ministry takes place should be involved in the determination of such assignments.

Care for individuals

Care for the person serving in mission is more than an activity or a service from the organization to the individual. It is a collaborative process where each person in the relationship has a responsibility. This includes the responsibility of the individual for self-care.

Numerous practical steps can be implemented in relation to the spiritual well-being of individuals serving in mission. While recognizing that certain steps may look different in different contexts and cultures, these could include:

- appointing dedicated staff to assist in spiritual development (e.g. a chaplain)
- generous sharing (e.g. meals, surplus, etc.)
- making it possible for personnel to use Sundays for weekly sabbath rest

Change factors and terminology

In an era of global shifts and redefined community identities, values and norms, the mission context and mission organizations are also experiencing change in many ways. These changes happen at a different pace for each organization, and critical issues are not always the same for each organization. Given the fact that unique variances are influencing these changes, we in the Alliance can see the development of multiple Human Resources approaches that are reflected in systems, processes and even vocabulary. For example, some Alliance Organizations may have a certain understanding of the meaning of the term 'member care', where other Alliance Organizations may even abandon the term altogether. The same is true for terms such as 'recruiting', 'secondment', 'field assignment' 'furlough', etc.

The purpose of Human Resources management systems and processes

In terms of a Human Resources perspective, the person serving in mission is especially important. Even though various Human Resources systems are helpful, they only serve to support the process. Because the Alliance is a global community, it should be recognized that not all systems and processes will be uniform. They should all be open to evaluation and adjustments to ensure that they assist us to serve each other well. Systems should ideally be minimal and be structured to ensure the well-functioning of essential processes.

Differing Human Resources management systems and processes

One Alliance Organization's Human Resources management system and processes may seem too complex, whereas another's may seem too simplistic. However, for each, their own system and processes work well for them. Each organization perceives their processes as sufficient for their needs and requirements. One method is not superior to the other, but each provides acceptable results for its context. We should respect and make space for each other's realities across the Alliance in this area.

Challenges and questions in assessing God's calling on people

Is there a tension in the balance between God's calling of the individual, and the need to fill organization-determined staff positions? Do we on the one hand have an emphasis on having as many people as possible join our organization, and on the other hand, focus on managing what we determine to be the strategically defined 'work force' need? Would we, for example, create 'job positions' just because we have people willing to serve? And would we, out of a perceived sense of urgency, apply pressure to people to serve because we have open positions to fill?

There is no set way, fixed method or formula in which the calling of a person into mission can be determined. Such a determination is best done in relationship between that person, the church community the person belongs to, and the Alliance Organization.

Thus, we need to work closely with an individual's church in the confirmation of a person's calling to serve in the Bible translation movement. Assessment of individuals should preferably be based more on face-to-face interactions with them, and less on what is reflected in application papers. Discernment in interviewing practices requires a great awareness of developing a relationship.

Too little or too much information

Alliance Organizations should determine what kind of information regarding individuals being placed in ministry service should be conveyed between the relevant organizations. The format in which the information is shared should be worked out ahead of time. The method in which the information will be retained should be agreed upon, as well as how the information will be used.