

WEEK 4: Why do we do mission?

Getting started

This week's object for reflection is a cross – or, if you have them, a selection of different crosses. Mission, if it is to be Christian mission, must at some point present both the story of the cross and explore its meaning for our world today. If you have a number of crosses, ask people to notice what is distinctive about each of them.

View from Ghana

Ghana is a peaceful country, despite a 23-million population that comprises over 60 different language and ethnic groups.

Christianity, Islam and traditional beliefs are the main religions, with Christians making up more than two-thirds of the population. Despite this rich mixture, the country has been remarkably trouble-free.

According to the website of the Anglican Communion's Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON): 'At all levels, Christians and Muslims mix and do things in common, right from the family to national levels. Christians and Muslims attend each other's religious festivals and services. Muslims ask for and appreciate Christian prayers offered in the name of Jesus! Similarly, Muslims offer prayers for political leaders irrespective of their religious affiliation.'

One reason why Ghana has avoided major conflicts, such as those faced by some of its neighbours, could be due to how Ghana came to independence in 1957, with the country's leaders endeavouring to unite all tribes and religions under one banner. The national football team, the Black Stars, became a highly visible symbol of this goal of unity, with players not being discriminated against on tribal or religious grounds.

'The message given by Christian leaders has consistently been one of reconciliation.'

Where conflict has occurred, religion was rarely the major factor – but rather ethnic and cultural issues were the main consideration. For example, British colonialism brought Christianity and a better standard of education to the south, but it neglected the north; and a British policy of indirect rule in the north placed Muslim leaders over non-Muslim groups, generating resentment.

The Revd John Azumah, a Presbyterian minister who worked with the Christian Council of Ghana as an expert on Christian-Muslim relations, said: 'Generally there have been very good relations between Christians and Muslims.'

Mr Azumah recalled a series of incidents before and after the turn of the century, but he said these pockets of violence 'had more to do with money, power and personality' than with religious differences.

He added: 'The message given by Christian leaders has consistently been one of reconciliation. Our message is the Good News – something that brings people into relationship with each other and with God.'

Discussion

- Try describing to the group any incidents in which you feel you were able to learn from an encounter with people of another group or faith. How did this encounter change your perspective of this other group?
- What do you think is the aim of mission – what is the end result you would like to see?

Using the Bible

John 4:9: 'The Samaritan woman said to Jesus, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"'

In New Testament times the barrier between Jews and Samaritans was unyielding. Both regarded the other as fundamentally unclean, despite the fact that their religious beliefs were similar. So Jesus' engagement with a woman from a rival group is an example of the gospel of reconciliation (see 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

1. Why do you think hostility exists between people of different religious traditions? How can these hostilities be resolved?
2. In mission today, what barriers or walls do you think it is especially important to try and break down?

Closing prayer

Jesus, Jewish stranger,
Reconciling this world to God,
Building bridges to span our abysses of human hatred,
Help us to hold out our hands in greeting and welcome,
To reach across the boundaries imposed by culture or convention.
Amen

For next week

A member of the group is invited to bring a globe or map of the world.