

WEEK 1: What is Mission?

Getting started

Whatever mission is, we can probably agree it is something that happens between people, something involving God, communication and action. To get us thinking about communication, place your mobile phones in the centre of the room and briefly share your thoughts about the different ways that people communicate – and how this is changing constantly. Are all forms of communication equally effective?

View from Ghana

Since gaining independence from British rule in 1957, Ghana has earned itself a reputation for being one of Africa's most stable countries politically. Indeed, the country is often seen as a model for reform on the continent.

However, the country also faces challenges. The Rt Revd Emmanuel Arongo, Bishop of Tamale, explained: 'Ghana is a developing country and, as such, life is not easy and has been made worse by the global recession. Food can be scarce, especially for those who have no work. Children develop big stomachs and thin legs, and the lack of nutrition affects their school work. Fortunately, we have good drinking water through bore holes, because otherwise things would be worse.'

'We have National Health Insurance, but not many can afford the insurance so they cannot get good quality healthcare even though there are hospitals. In addition, roads and transport are poor. When women are in labour, they are often transported by donkey and cart along rough terrain from the villages to the health facility. So all these things highlight how difficult life can be for many people.'

The Anglican Church in Ghana is attempting to address these issues through a range of practical outreach programmes, and it is having a powerful impact – for example, Bishop Emmanuel himself is personally involved as he accommodates university students who otherwise might not be able to continue their education.

'Wherever the church is, it must have an impact on society – socially, physically and morally.'

The Rt Revd Daniel Sarfo, Bishop of Kumasi, commented: 'The Anglican Church is growing steadily. The worship is dynamic. We have indigenised our worship by using local languages and dialects so the people understand the liturgy and the songs – they understand everything that we do. So the church is growing.'

He added: 'Our mission is broad, but it is the basis of the church. It is the mission of God and we are participating in it so that we live as light and salt. Wherever the church is it must have an impact on society – socially, physically, spiritually and morally – so the church is a transforming agent of society and community. We have a lot to do!'

Discussion

- For many people, the word 'mission' still conjures up images of missionaries in pith helmets hacking their way through the jungle. What is your understanding of mission? Share some of the experiences you have had of 'mission'. What was effective? What was less effective?
- What differences are there, if any, between mission and evangelism?

Using the Bible

John 4:26: 'I am: the one who is speaking to you.'

The group might like to have a brief moment of silence to reflect on these words before continuing. Although the phrase is half-hidden by most English translations, in verse 26 Jesus discloses his divine identity to the woman by saying 'I am: the one who is speaking to you'. This is the first time Jesus says 'I am' in the Gospel of John – words which deliberately remind us of God's self disclosure in Exodus 3:14: 'I am who I am.'

1. Is it significant that the first time Jesus says 'I am' in this Gospel, it is linked to the phrase 'the one who is speaking to you'? What does this suggest to us about the relationship between mission and communication?
2. Look through John 4:5-42. As a whole, what does the passage suggest to you about 'what mission is'? Compile a list of suggestions offered by members of the group.

Closing prayer

Jesus, mysterious 'I am',
Word proceeding from the Father,
Underwriting all Creation,
Stretch our hearts and grant us a generous vision of God's mission,
Enabling all to share in the graciousness of the Holy Trinity.
Amen

For next week

Bring a photograph of your local town or village and somewhere you have visited overseas.