

WEEK 3: Who does mission?

Getting started

Create a collage of faces using images belonging to the group. You might like to include your own face or perhaps a photo of your family. Invite each member of the group to describe a remarkable person they have met and explain why they were so outstanding or unusual.

View from Ghana

At the age of 61, Lovia Owusu-Asiedu has come late to theological education. Married for 38 years, with three sons and a daughter, she was living a comfortable life, working as a midwife and helping at her church in Obuasi, when she finally felt she could no longer resist a calling to the priesthood. She is now studying at St Nicholas' Seminary, in Cape Coast.

Lovia explained: 'I have always been involved in church. The longer I did it, the keener I became, so I decided to devote the rest of my life to the service of the church.'

Despite a strong sense of calling, Lovia said returning to college was not easy. She said: 'My children are grown up and happy, I have worked all this time, now I should be able to sit at home! So to come to St Nicholas, to a small room with a small bed, and try to get used to seminary life – ah, that is something! But my husband and my family have been very supportive.'

Another challenge is being one of the first two women ever to be trained at the seminary. Lovia said: 'The person I have most bonded with is Hannah. We share a room, attend lectures and eat together. She is from a different part of the country; we speak almost the same language, but our customs are a little different. She is a teacher by profession; I am a nurse. We have so much to talk about. And it was a joy having another woman around because the men never stopped making fun of us, asking why we were there. Teasing and sometimes really arguing with us, saying that St Nicholas was not a place for women. But we coped and, gradually, they are coming to accept us as colleagues.'

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Lovia is looking forward to working as a priest in small village churches, sharing her knowledge of God and making use of her healthcare skills.

Since 1975, St Nicholas has trained over 200 priests who are now serving in parishes throughout Ghana and West Africa. Courses are specially tailored to accommodate African culture.

Discussion

- Share experiences where you felt a strong call from God. Reflect as a group on whether people experience God's call in similar ways.
- Share with the group situations where you felt like an outsider. How did you react and what did you learn from the situation?

Using the Bible

John 4:39: 'Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."'

On the face of it there wasn't a more unlikely 'missionary' than this woman. Indeed the very fact that she was a woman meant that her words counted for far less than would those of a man. The disciples' astonishment when they discovered her alone and talking to Jesus (4:27) emphasises how far she has stepped outside the traditional expectations which constrained the lives of women in biblical times – constraints which, to some extent, still exist in parts of our world today.

1. This week both the bible story and the illustration from Ghana explore the role of women in mission and ministry. Are there particular contributions that women can make, as women, to the mission of God?
2. The woman's testimony led to her fellow townspeople believing in Jesus. How far is it important, when we engage with others in God's mission, to share what God has done for us personally?

Closing prayer

Jesus, challenger and conversation partner,
You empower the unlikely and unloved,
And grant the dignity of service to both women and men.
Make us bold to bear witness to your story,
Telling how your presence gives meaning to our own lives.
Amen

For next week

Bring a cross. Look especially for crosses from around the world.