

My Experience in a Limited Access Country

Both Jesus and Paul provide us with models of fruitful ministry among whatever people God calls us to work. I could tap their examples from many sides, but will do so only from the angle of preparation. Clearly, Paul's life experiences shaped him for his ministry. His background as a Diaspora Jew gave him personal experience with the Gentile world, upon which he could naturally build his ministry. It seems clear that, in some way, each person preparing to enter a country of limited access will have had a period of preparation that will help him to build a ministry. This normally includes a knowledge of the language and culture. The more and the deeper one is aware of the many sides of the country one is entering, the better one is able to navigate in it.

Entry is often a challenge. In my case, I was able to contact someone who was helping a national friend in the target country. This 'foreigner' contacted his national friend who was able to facilitate my entry, providing visa and employment. Such God-given opportunities normally open before us when we are searching for them. They also come to the creative person who, with wisdom and patience, 'sees' solutions to needs and is able to put together the elements that provide entry. The key to entry will vary, but it must be found.

Entry also provided me with the opportunity to assess a broader range of opportunities from inside. I did not think that the job which gave me entry

was necessarily the one and only. Upon inspection, a better opportunity presented itself, and I took advantage of it. Not only did it provide better benefits, but also furnished a more credible image.

For me, one of the most important priorities is to have credibility at the workplace. As I have worked conscientiously, my national superiors have recognized this. Undoubtedly, a good name is worth a lot. Credibility has also meant respecting certain rules of the game. The workplace is not a platform for evangelisation efforts. It seems to me the thrust of one's faith on the job should be similar to the advice Peter gives to wives of unbelieving partners, namely that 'they may be won over without words by the believer's behaviour when they see the purity and reverence of our lives'. I must add that I have taken opportunities for witness and even created them, with the result that my stand is known and attacked by the one with whom I have been most open. In all of this, however, there is an imaginary line beyond which I do not go with some. This is the tentmaker's perennial struggle: how to best reflect the treasure he has received.

Then there is ministry on a deeper spiritual level with those whom God puts in our pathway in the context of generalized suspicion and the likelihood of a multifaceted police surveillance network. The latter should be seen as an obstacle to be avoided, as we pray to be led by the free Spirit of God rather than a block that impedes our

progress. I have found that I have been able to disciple and baptize with some success while seeking to be careful and harmless, but the covert nature of all this leaves a question mark over the depth of impact on the new converts. This, however, is not an issue any human can decide. Ultimately the kingdom of God is like the man who scatters seed that grows though he does not know how.

Limited access countries are challenging. They demand a mix of vision, timing and keeping in step with the

Spirit. The right combination of preparation and qualifications of the one seeking entry and the situation into which he/she will fit is put together by the Lord of the harvest. Although the details involved are normally ordinary and commonplace, they can lead to openings in people's lives that are amazing. Who could have predicted, as happened to me, that one man's request for baptism would lead to two others in his extended family seeking the same? The challenge is there, and so are the rewards.

*'What has been affirmed without proof
can also be denied without proof.' Euclid*

*'Spirituality is a stream, while ministry is merely the bucket
which is used to carry the water.' Sunder Krishnan*

*'Long is the time to learn. Short is the time to do.
Yet it is worth it all, if the work in the end be true.' Lilius Trotter*

*'The Church is not planted. The Word is planted,
and churches are one of the prime products.' Anonymous*