

# Some Reflections on Pastoral Care in Frontiers

## by Greg Livingstone

Frontiers is a community of over 1000 adults and 1500 kids from over 30 countries. We like to think of ourselves as an apostolic, church planting band determined to be catalytic in seeing God rescue 10s of thousands of Muslims from the Kingdom of Darkness. Our people take up residence mostly where "Christ is not acknowledged as the Saviour". Governments hostile to Christian work, both in Muslim countries and in the Heavenly, create schemes to make the church planting task so exhausting and seemingly impossible that missionaries historically sooner or later abandon the effort to do something more fruitful.

**[note to translator/editors: the editors from this region might want to change or avoid two terms used in this article--Kingdom of Darkness (above) and Satan's masterpiece (used later)??]**

Because "making disciples" among Muslims has been so tough, the Church has historically seen little reason to send missionaries where there was little promise of success. In response to this practice, Frontiers was born in a sense of "reckless abandonment. "Whatever sacrifice it demands" has been our watchword.

After all, we felt, many segments of the Church have ignored the clear teaching of our Lord Jesus. Should not our lifestyles be shaped by the New Testament examples of suffering? Are we not called to be more focused on blessing "Mecca" than the "ME Blessing"? The Rev. 5:9 & 7:9 victory doesn't come without 6:9!

*I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"...they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed. Rev 6:9-11*

Jesus told his first missionaries that He is sending them as lambs among wolves! (that's got a predictable outcome!—Luke 10:3) And what about Christ saying that "Some will kill you thinking they are doing God a service"? It would seem that God is more interested in his messengers being slain in the body, than being "slain in the Spirit"!

Did not the Lord Jesus say, "Take no thought for tomorrow, what you shall wear, or eat, or where you shall sleep, for your Heavenly Father knows you need all these things"? And so, we initially reasoned, if our Heavenly Father, Wonderful Counselor, Great Physician, and Omnipresent Comforter is right on top of the situation, why design and implement a pastoral care program?

Our zeal to serve Christ across the Muslim world had gotten the better of us. In searching for "unstoppables" for example, we in Frontiers became guilty of casting a "blind eye" towards entrepreneurs who were driven more their own fulfillment to a large degree than motives born of the Holy Spirit. Still, we reasoned, "Hey, we're all sinners, why get on a fellow workers' case about the ugliness in their demeanor? The job is tough enough already".

We were not wrong, of course. In embracing our call to break through the impasse among those in bondage to Satan's masterpiece, Islam, we had become oblivious to the fact that missiological competence and perseverance were not enough. We began to more deeply understand that we would not establish churches of Muslim-background believers who had their own godly elders, unless we ourselves were godly men and women. We also came to recognize the crucial role of being regularly mentored, so that with integrity we would be able to say with that pioneer pace-setting missionary, "what you have seen and heard in me, practice" (Phil. 4:9).

How can we reach such a goal of maturity--to become "clothed with Jesus Christ" (Romans. 13:14)? This too has become our heart's cry. We believe it is primarily by becoming a nurturing community where we covenant with one another to "be our brother's keeper". We endeavor to be "promise keepers" by serving on teams that hold each other accountable to grow towards Christ-like character--"whatever it takes"!

So, how do we develop lives both happy in God and a joy to each other—lives that cannot be imitated by those who are not yet redeemed by the Lord's grace? (cf. II Peter 1:3-10) We believe that it is by hungering and thirsting for both *competency and character, in the context of a committed community*. This comes from characteristics like being subject to one another; being eager for coaching; being easily entreated. It is an attainable process to learn how to be "*quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger*" (James 1:9). What God is looking for in us will come when we face up to ourselves, develop a "broken, contrite spirit", and commit ourselves to see one another become the fruit of the Spirit personified!

### **Upgrading Pastoral Care**

We have also developed and continue to upgrade our personnel departments, selection procedures, and candidate schools. Hopefully, not swinging the pendulum too far the other way!

We increasingly utilize the expertise of Christians with missions experience and an anointing to help with pastoral care issues. We owe much to the various coaches and counselors whom we have come to know and trust, both in-house and from outside Frontiers, who regularly visit our teams on the field and attend our annual and regional conferences.

We have also learned the value of debriefing both for critical incidents as well as the ongoing standard debrief during Home Assignment. In the last few years we have provided an "Oasis", a week of debriefing and renewal for returning workers. We have added additional staff at the USA Sending Base with the job title "Pastoral Coach" to do debriefing and make field visits. We have come to grips with the critical need for coaching on the field and are now sending out more pastoral coaches to visit field teams in addition to visits that come from Team Leader Overseers.

Further, we have learned how important it is for us to work in partnership with sending churches when it comes to pastoral care. We are now sponsoring an annual "Member Care Symposium" ([www.mcsymposium.org](http://www.mcsymposium.org)) to develop relationships with church leaders so that we can work together more effectively in a time of crisis or critical need.

We have seen the need for Peacemaking and have developed a model for Peacemaking that is being taught throughout our movement. As we do this we are building a common vocabulary and a structure for resolving conflict that delineates who should be involved and when."

### **Final Thought**

Thankfully, after nearly 25 years, we have not lost our zeal for the Lord and for pioneer church planting among Muslims where few care to reside. By God's mercy, we are applying valuable lessons about the need for character growth, community life, and pastoral care. We do not want to be the "merry-go-round" mission, i.e. having co-workers going home as fast as the new ones come to the field! As Robertson McQuilkin wrote, "*Lord, enable us to finish well...and get home before dark.*"

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. The author summarizes Frontiers' approach to pastoral care as "competence and character in the context of a committed community". How similar is this to your sending group's approach?
2. Draw a "time line" to trace the main developments of pastoral care within your own sending group or setting. Which developments have been the most significant, for better or worse?
3. What are three things your sending group could do to improve the pastoral care of its members?
4. How do you encourage and care for others in your setting? List three things.

5. How important is it for you to develop mutual supportive relationships with locals? To what extent is this going on for you and others?

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