

# **I. Using Nationals in Missionary Work: Or, What is the Role of National Church Leadership in Indigenous Local Church Ministry**

## **A. Introduction**

The world is changing at an unprecedented rate. Traditional geographic and economic boundaries are either being moved or radically changed. Many people are now working in companies and corporations which are directly involved with a global economy and international contacts and working partnerships are beginning to be the norm. The world is getting smaller, more complex and seemingly, more violent. The church in America is facing a populace which has been termed 'post-modern.' A rapidly increasing percentage of America does not know even the most basic facts concerning Christianity and when these new believers come into the church they are asking questions concerning the traditional ways we conduct church and all the ministries connected with the church. They have grown up in a world that has forced them to become global in their thinking and they assume the church is ready to accept their worldview and become an integral part of a global economy and working partnerships.

These factors have allowed the church to begin the process of evaluating many aspects of ministry and missions in particular, as this is the global aspect of local church ministry. The business world has come to the realization of the need of global partnerships where companies and corporations must acknowledge their need for each other and the necessity of developing working partnerships where both sides treat the other with mutual respect and acceptance. The lay leadership in local churches are asking how this model is being implemented in the missions program of their local church. They see the need from a business perspective, and the imperative from a biblical model and are seeking to understand how it is being developed in specific situations around the world.

The focus of this article is to present some significant factors which form the foundation of a global working relationship between local churches and then to suggest some ways in which these ideas can be incorporated into the missions program of a local church.

## **B. Definitions**

The sub title to the article is, What is the Role of National Church Leadership in Indigenous Local Church Ministry? An accurate biblical and missiological response to this question is essential for the continued development of local churches both here in the United States and around the world. Mission agencies are being faced with this question from their constituencies as an increasing number of books and articles dealing with “Indigenous Missions” are being published and distributed to believers. Local church leaders and church members are becoming more aware of the issues which surround the development of local churches on a global scale and are beginning to question how to determine the allotment of missionary funds between missionaries and “national missionaries.” Individual missionaries are being called on by both their sending churches and the churches with which they work to establish clear boundaries for a working relationship between themselves and the local church leaders in the area. The time has come for the church to establish a model for a working relationship between what has been traditionally called the sending church, as exemplified by the mission agency and individual missionaries and the receiving church, characterized by “national” leaders.

One of the first issues which must be established is the development of clear and concise definitions of the critical terms germane to the discussion. The first term we will deal with is “national.” What is a national? or rather, Who is a national? In very simple terms a national is a person who lives in a particular country. An example of this usage is seen in the following illustration. A church in the United States is looking to call a national pastor. This would mean they are seeking to call a man who is an American citizen and, it is assumed, one who understands the American culture. However, it must be noted, this term is not normally used as a reference to an American living in America. Most believers do not think of the fact that they have a national as a pastor of their church. The more common usage of this term in Christian circles is a reference to a person who lives in a country, or even sometimes, a culture different from the United States. The term

is used in this manner in the question which forms the title of this article. It is implied from the question that the local church leader in question is a person to whom or with whom an American missionary works.

The second term which is important to the discussion is “role.” Webster defines the term in the following way; (2) a socially expected behavior pattern usually determined by an individual’s status in a particular society.”<sup>[i]</sup> This definition gives us a basic foundation from which we can build a more complete definition as it relates to the usage of this term in Christian ministry. We will first begin with a slightly modified version of the question “What is the Role of National Church Leadership [an American pastor in an American church] in Global Ministry. Another way of stating the question is to ask what are the areas of responsibility and authority of a pastor in a local church to be involved in evangelism, teaching believers, ministering to the saints, and developing a strategy and vision for the church? While Webster built his definition of “role” around the ‘socially expected behavior pattern, the church would add that is both a socially expected behavior pattern, but more importantly, a biblically expected behavior pattern. Thus we can say that ‘role’ is used to refer to both the biblically and socially expected behavior patterns of a local church leader.

The third term we will examine is ‘indigenous.’ Webster defines this as, “having originated in and being produced, growing, or living naturally in a particular region or environment.”<sup>[ii]</sup> It is evident that this word is closely tied to the first term, ‘national,’ as both refer to a person which is a natural part of a particular place. For instance, I am indigenous to the State of Pennsylvania. I originated in Pennsylvania, I was grown in Pennsylvania, and I live naturally in Pennsylvania today. Thus I am indigenous to Pennsylvania. In Christian terminology, as related to missions, the term ‘indigenous’ normally refers to a church or ministry which not only meets these standards, but also is self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating, the three-self principle.

A major weakness with the three-self principle concept is the requirement for a ministry to meet these requirements prior to being considered indigenous. And the specific area which comes to the forefront is that of finances. What does it mean for a ministry to be self-supporting? Does this mean the pastor must be paid as a 'full-time' employee of the ministry? Is a new church plant ministry still indigenous? What if someone outside of the ministry is offering some financial assistance to the local church? These and other questions must be answered in the analysis of the role of national local church leadership in indigenous local church leadership.

### **C. Supporting Nationals**

The most common aspect of the discussion of the Role of National Church Leadership in Indigenous Local Church Ministry centers around the policy of directly supporting national leaders for ministry. The discussion of this policy immediately puts in contrast the American pastor or missionary and local church leaders living and ministering in other countries. It is imperative at this point to establish a single

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<sup>[i]</sup> Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.

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