

Never too poor to give generously



_ A part of each field is reserved for mission

How poor churches in North India support their missionaries

Patrick Johnstone names it the greatest evangelical missionary movement in our time: The mission efforts of the evangelical churches in Mizoram, a remote mountain region in the Northeast of India. As a result of its isolated location and fragile security situation (hemmed in between Bangladesh and Myanmar) this region was basically excluded from the economic development of India.

Reverend Vanlalhraia, the mission secretary of the Presbyterian churches, says: “Our state is poor. We are not able to export anything from our state. But, nevertheless, we do export one thing for which we are very proud: That is the Gospel.” The Mizo-churches are certainly doing this in an impressive way. The synod of Presbyterian churches has sent out about 1000 missionaries. The local church in Chanmari with its 1855 members has sent out and is supporting 120 missionaries. Some time ago I met the mission secretary Reverend S. Nengyakhup and was able to learn about this impressive missionary movement.

I asked myself how such poor churches can support missionaries so generously. I discovered, it is mainly through their very creative ideas which have grown from their love for Jesus and their burden for the lost. As such they are a great example to us all.

Change the world with a handful of rice:



They give with joy

1. **Church gardens:** Many churches have set up a garden where they plant vegetables, bananas, oranges, grapes, ginger, rice or teak-trees. Church members work there voluntarily and all the profit goes to mission.
2. **Chickens for mission:** Farmers keep a few extra chickens (marked as "missionary chickens") and the money from the sale of their eggs and meat goes to support the missionaries.
3. **A Portion of the field:** Farmers designate a portion of their fields to mission and the profit from it goes to mission.
4. **Collecting firewood:** Women collect firewood in the forests or straw on the fields. They carry the goods to a place at the entrance of the village from where it is sold from time to time.
5. **Collecting crabs and snails:** Women collect crabs and snails at the river banks and sell these at the market as a delicatessen.
6. **Market stalls:** Churches open a shop or a market stall, selling tea or other goods. All the money earned goes to mission.
7. **Wholesale shopping:** Church members buy goods in bulk (e.g. a sack of salt or whole animals to slaughter) and sell them in small portions. The profit in full goes to mission.
8. **Donation of work:** Church members collect stones, work as carpenters, do embroidery etc. and donate this income to mission.
9. **Rent for Missions:** Local churches build a shop or a flat into their church building and the rent income goes into the mission box. Some church members reduce their personal living space so that they can rent out a room in their home and the rent goes to mission.
10. **Part of salary:** Civil servants and employees give the seventh part of their wages because they get paid for Sundays without working.
11. **Small loans:** Church members receive a small amount of money (5-100 rupees) and do business with it. The profit they make goes to mission.

12. **Christmas Feast:** Families do without their Christmas dinner and presents and give the money to the missionaries.
13. **Imaginary visit:** In their imagination Christians visit their missionary in his country of service. They calculate the cost for travel, accommodation and food and give this amount to mission.
14. **Short term mission trip:** Church members visit their missionary and help him with building his house, a school or a church. In this way they can serve with their gifts and abilities while experiencing a deeper personal relationship to the missionary.
15. **Thank-Offering box:** Church members go with collecting boxes from house to house and ask for donations.
16. **Day of fasting:** Many Mizo Christians fast one day per week and give the amount saved to mission.
17. **The tribal chief Portion:** In former times the tribal chief in a village received a quarter of the meat of a hunted animal. Today this portion is given towards the missionaries.
18. **A handful of rice:** When preparing a meal a housewife puts a handful of rice to the side before preparing a meal this amount saved goes for her missionaries.



_ Small Christian church in India

Christian families and churches even compete with each other on how much they can give to mission. This tremendous commitment to mission characterises the Mizo church and it is an example to follow.

Favourable circumstances

This impressive mission movement has certainly been favoured by the example of James Lorrain and Fredrick Savidge, the first missionaries, to the Mizos. They put confidence in the local people, taught self-supporting right from the beginning and handed over leadership of churches, schools and evangelism as early as possible. Already in 1953 an indigenous mission committee was founded and in 1961 this was enlarged to a missionary society (SBM). Mizoram was until recently a military no-go-area preventing foreigners from entering the region so the churches had to work without foreign help. Since 1906 there were several revivals through which a large part of the population became Christians who could encourage and support each other.

The mission movement is built on the traditional values of their culture like helping people in need, doing good things and sharing generously. The high standard of education (school education was introduced by missionaries) also helped as well as good theological training, emphasis on lay preachers, on God's love, on prayer, their own songs, the expectation of Jesus' second coming and thankfulness for their salvation.

Poverty is no obstacle

These factors certainly helped yet it is their passion and love to Jesus that count. Out of their poverty and need has grown an exemplary involvement in world mission. Pastor Nengzakhup writes: "Mizos have never considered poverty an excuse to avoid participation in world evangelization. If the church in Jerusalem had looked at its poverty and concluded that it could not afford to send out missionaries, the Gospel would not have gone out from that city... It is not the affluence but zeal and gratitude to God that drives Mizos to maintain their enthusiasm and active participation in world evangelization." And he concludes: "Any church can be a missionary church irrespective of its economic situation. Poverty need not prohibit a church from participating in world evangelization. This is biblical. Although money plays a vital role in missions, it is not the primary need."



Dr. Detlef Blöcher

If this is true for poor churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America – how much more for Europe and North America. The living God has entrusted us with a wealth of material goods, as well as the imagination and creativity to invest it in the kingdom of God. God has placed us in this world for this very reason. The example of the Christians in North India should not make us complacent, as if our contribution to world mission was not necessary. The needs of this world are so great and missionaries from Europe are sought after as never before. The example of the Christians in India invites us and challenges us to serve God with all our being and all our means - as good stewards of his entrusted talents.

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