

Synod Workshop: Mission

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION IN THE CONTEXT OF QATAR

I stand here representing the Church of Epiphany, Doha, Qatar and its ministry from the perspective of 'Discipleship and Mission' based on the Great Commission of Jesus mentioned in the gospel of Matthew 28:19, 20.

I will read for you,

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

As I begin my talk, let me thank God for enabling me to be here in your midst to share his wonders and his marvelous works in and through us in Qatar. Also, I thank our dear Bishop Sean Semple for giving me the opportunity to share the thoughts on discipleship and mission. Along with me I have my senior priest Rev Mark Derry, and his family Ms. Debbie, people's warden Ms. Jessi and Ms. Christiana – the chairperson for the House of laity presenting the church of the Epiphany, Qatar.

On behalf of them and the entire family of Epiphany, I bring warm greetings to you all, especially to our Archbishop Hosam and Bishop Sean Semple in the name of Jesus Christ.

The talk that I am going to give you somewhat reflects a similar context that was communicated by Fr. Jim in his talk. Though you might find some similarities but still it may not be the same. Since the mission of God and the process of making disciples for Christ is altogether a unique experience.

According to the community, context and culture, the methodological approaches get changes whereas the focal point remains the same.

I feel it may be good to start my talk on the subject of 'discipleship and mission' at Qatar with my call to the ministry. I was 17 when I received God's calling to work in his vineyard. I must confess that I knew nothing about mission, evangelism, discipleship, preaching, and teaching. Not even had an enough biblical knowledge. However, God has his own plan for me like he has on you. I was given an opportunity to join a church planting organization which is affiliated with OMS (that is Oriental Missionary Society which is an international organization) to get training in God's work.

The initial work that I involved was sharing the gospel to other faiths through distributing tracts and selling gospel pockets on streets, marketplaces and villages. Additionally

responsible for an open-air preaching and film ministry (Display film of Jesus' story to remote villages). To reach out the large groups in villages, we adopted a method of echoing the gospel message that was preached by one person standing at the end of the corner of the street. The rest of us who stand in facing the other directions will echo the same message with exact sentences that the other person preaches. (for example, if he says Jesus loves you, we repeat the same sentences and relay the message to the people who listens from another street). We used this method since we did not have microphones, speakers, or any other technical devices to support. To our surprise, many have responded to the gospel and came to the saving knowledge of Christ. We built quite number of churches in rural and urban areas in India.

The point I am trying to make here is, we got freedom to meet people openly at the marketplaces, on the streets, in the villages – going house to house, knocking doors and distributing gospel tracts that are printed with name and address of our ministry for further details.

However, in the case of Qatar it is not the same. Missionary strategies and approaches that are applicable in India or elsewhere may not be appropriate to implement the same in Qatar. Since Qatar is governed by the sharia law (i.e. an Islamic legal system); and we are bound to respect the law of the nation. Religious practices in the open ground are strictly prohibited. In fact, it is severely penalized.

On the other side, we thank God for the Govt. of Qatar for authorizing and allocating the 'Religious Complex' for Christians to worship. Proud to say we have Anglican worship in three languages that is English, Igbo (a Nigerian congregation) and Tamil. Additionally independent congregations make use of the Anglican center to have their fellowship. (You will know more about it when Rev Mark Derry, the Senior Priest of the Church of Epiphany present his report).

Even though we have a separate place to worship yet a non-Christian member is not allowed inside the complex to worship the Lord. No religious materials are allowed to be carried in public. Sometimes bibles are not encouraged.

Under such a challenging state, the church of Epiphany has never stopped to preach Christ, to teach God's word and baptize people for the glory of God.

The church is growing day to day. The work of the Holy Spirit is publicly witnessed among the congregations. I strongly believe that the work of the Holy Spirit is the key driving force in motivating and influencing people. The whole family of Epiphany do involve in God's mission. Contributing greatly for the expansion of God's kingdom through the process of discipleship here in Qatar.

One of the fantastic books that I came across while reading on mission and discipleship is *Disciples Together: Discipleship Formation and the Role of Small Groups*, written by Roger L Walton. He beautifully elaborates that we are all involved in Discipleship Formation. Our worship, our mission, our community, Christian education and even small groups will serve for the expansion of the gospel. Regarding small groups, he says that people join such groups in the church to find hope and to strengthen their faith and to grow as disciples. Majority of churches prefer their members to be part of small groups or house churches with the purpose of being formed as disciples. The church of Epiphany does involve in the process of ‘making disciples of all nations’ using its own methodological approaches and remain faithful to its calling. There are four areas of ministries that we focus to reach out the people with the gospel of Christ.

FIRST LINKED COMMUNITY

As I said earlier, due to religious restrictions, we are not allowed to run house churches. Instead, we formed ‘*Linked community*’ groups in different places of the city where limited family members of those areas join in discovering biblical truth through learning, meditating, sharing their experiences and praying for various needs. Sometimes, a book, or a theme that is set by our senior priest will become the source for our spiritual reflections in the group.

A great strength of this group is – it helps the congregation members to come forward to share their own experiences and start learning from each other’s. As Roger Walton identifies, that in small groups hope get strengthened. Certainly, it becomes a channel to preach Christ, teach God’s word and encourage members to respond to the gospel. It serves as a center for learning together, nurturing spiritual gifts and developing leadership qualities in them. In the long run, we make disciples to witness Christ. Similarly, we approach prisoners with the gospel message using with different strategies.

SECOND PRISON MINISTRY

The prison ministry is another key area of preaching point. It is quite difficult and more challenging. We cannot gather people like we do at linked community for discussion and reflection upon the scripture. And we are not allowed to meet the prisoners freely without having prior permission from the government. But we know the souls that are imprisoned long for love and care. Their wounds could be healed only with the word of God. It here the church plays a vital role reaching the prisoners with the gospel. We encourage the congregation members to donate bibles along with some basic personal stuff according to the needs of the people at prison. *As you know we cannot go every place with the gospel. At the same time, the gospel goes to every place (Amen).*

It is apt to quote the comment of Warren W Wiersbe in his commentary on Great Commission. He says that the word 'go' is not a command. But the only command in the entire Great Commission is "making disciples" (teach all nations)." If it is so the church of Epiphany at Qatar is known as center for contributing to the expansion of the gospel to everyone and to every nation. Each member in the congregation not only donates bibles but also contributes food materials like rice, wheat flour, cooking oil and so forth to meet the needs of the poor. Almost every Friday they bring such offerings and places at the Altar. By doing that, the church indirectly but greatly involved in the process of making disciples of all nations.

Excess food materials that are shared will be given to the labor camp ministry. In doing that church involves in the global mission.

THIRD LABOUR CAMP MINISTRY:

The Labor camp is another key area for preaching the gospel, and the reflecting love of Christ. People from almost every nation and ethnic groups can be seen over here.

The labor camp is visited by our Anglican priest Rev. Samuel and Deacon Douglas along with one of our members almost every month. Since we are not allowed to carry bibles or conduct worship and convert people. Yet through sharing our joy with them through gifts and food materials have not stopped. Indeed, it developed their faith to get rooted in Christ. Having seen the heart of Christ through the church of Epiphany they used to come to church whenever it is possible for them (I am talking about only the Christians) but for other faiths, the love of Christ inspired them to accept the gospel that we preach. The great commission of Jesus Christ is carried forward successfully in the midst of hurdles and challenges like this.

'Go or *send*' is a motto for one of the missionary organizations in India. The idea of this organization is – If one cannot 'go' to the mission field as a missionary, he must 'send' his donations and contributions to the missionaries at the mission field.

It is the same here, we cannot go but we 'send' donations and contributions like imperishable food items to help them. The church carries the responsibility of sharing Christ's love through the social gospel which becomes a touching phenomenon for hundreds and thousands – Irrespective of creed, community and currency. The teaching of Christ is preached to all nations to make them disciples. One day or the other, we will hear them witnessing about the touching hand of Christ.

FOURTH THRIFT STORE:

Another key area of ministry is “Thrift Store:”

We preach, teach and encourage the congregation members to be part of this work. Even though they fail to ‘go ‘or ‘send.’ The opportunity to be part of the mission is still available at their door foot. The idea here is not just to encourage them to bring clothes, utensils, books and household goods in good condition. It is more than that. It is having deeper theological insights. **Giving a second chance to the used goods reflects the following three things:**

First, it develops a sense of giving to the LORD’s ministry according to their strength.

Second, it is teaching them to feel the importance of love and care for others.

Third, giving a second chance to their used clothes, goods and materials indicates the idea of God still able to write their stories even though they feel that they are unworthy, and have no meaning in life.

Therefore, the Church of Epiphany at Qatar never deviated from the great commission of Christ. It reaches unreached, it nourishes weak and feeble and enriches others with the gospel for his glory amid of obstacles, struggles and challenges.

Allow me to say this. No church can make disciples unless it is committed to the great commission of Christ. The church must be seen as the family of Christ in which, everyone is warmly received, cared and connected with each other to Christ through moral supports, prayer supports and theological insights. The way we see things will motivate us accordingly. If you see obstacles as challenges, it will remain as stumbling block. But if you see obstacles as opportunities, we will create ways and formulate approaches to reach the people with good news.

It reminds me of the story of starting a shoe factory in a new place. The story goes like this: One of the shoe companies wanted to start their business newly in one of the cities. To conduct the survey the company sent two of their executives. Each returned with two different reports. One guy said there is no hope of succeeding in the business because he noticed that people walk bare feet. So, they don’t have the habit of wearing sandals. The other guy reported. I have seen an ample opportunity to succeed the business because he noticed them not wearing sandals. So, they need sandals to wear. We need to teach them the importance of wearing sandals.

Relating this with the words of Jesus mentioned in the gospel of Matthew 9:36. We could see entirely a different perspective and approaches of Jesus to the crowd.

It says,

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

For others they are considered as a mob/crowd, or even just a wandering sheep. But for Jesus they are sheep without shepherd. The perspective matters a lot.

Let me conclude with the following applications for the discussion:

What are the best methodological approaches that you find effective in your mission field?

Do you see challenges as obstacles or opportunities for sharing love of Christ with other faiths?

Thank you!