
Breaking the Comfort Zone

Amita Sidh

Which is the better or correct approach to sharing the love of Jesus Christ with this world? Evangelism or social action? Saving souls from hell or taking care of the marginalized?

We often lean toward the latter, attributing hardly any importance to evangelism and discipleship. Thus, we have not equipped believers to witness about Christ through sharing the good news.

Mennonites are known for charitable work, for being in-step with Ephesians 2:10 (ASV): “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” The Mennonite Church in India has contributed significantly to society in the fields of education and medicine by running schools and hospitals as well as nursing and paramedical training centers. Recently the church has come forward to also help and support persecuted believers and evangelists nearby as well as in remote areas. Thinking we have now engaged in evangelism, we’ve tended to pat ourselves on the back and remain silent as before.

We should not limit ourselves, however, only to good works, helping and supporting others. It is not enough. Almost all of the congregations of the Mennonite Church in India are seeing a decline in membership. The only churches that have not been affected much are those situated in locations where education and medical boards are still running their institutions or where there are opportunities for employment. The churches established by pioneer missionaries in rural areas are struggling to stay alive, both because the boards are not active there now and because members are migrating because of lack of education, health, and employment.

The existence of the Mennonite Church in India up to this point has depended on biological growth. A majority of young people are being baptized only for the sake of church membership so that they may enjoy all the rights and privileges of a bonafide member. This is affecting the spiritual growth of the church. Young people are failing to identify and respond to God’s call, which has led to a leadership crisis in the church. With the number of full-time

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ministers now on the decline, the church is often unable to tend the flock or serve society.

Those of us who have heard and welcomed the good news are saved—but what about those who are still unaware of this good news? Before leaving this earth, Jesus Christ delegated to us the responsibility of extending his kingdom (Matt 28:19). He not only commanded us to do so but he also did this himself while he was on the earth (Matt 9:35; Luke 8:1; Mark 1:38).

As Christians, we are to follow the footsteps of our master and to obey the Great Commission. Evangelism—proclaiming the good news—should be the mission of every believer. Unless we tell people about the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how will they be saved?

Evangelism and other activities should go side by side. That’s what Jesus modeled during his earthly ministry; he healed the sick, fed the hungry, and helped the downtrodden. There are many verses in the Bible that tell us about Jesus’s ministry—how he preached about the kingdom of God and at the same time took care of the needs of the people. We can clearly see how he balanced both of these primary aspects of the ministry.

A positive change seen in India now regarding evangelism is that churches, including the Mennonites, are concerned about outreach programs. Mennonite Church in India has recently organized an evangelism training program to encourage members to share the gospel with others and to establish new communities and churches. It is teaching us to create an opportunity to share the gospel with those whom we meet and talk with every day and to pray for them.

This program has succeeded in bringing together some of our members who were already individually engaged in evangelism and is equipping them to share the gospel in a more practical and systematic way. Previously the church was not serious about evangelizing, but now it is recognizing and supporting individuals to “officially” evangelize on behalf of the church for its growth.

Most members, however, are still hesitant or not committed enough to join this training program; they feel more comfortable extending financial support for evangelism. One of the reasons for this is that in the context of persecution, consumerism, and self-centeredness, evangelism is much more difficult to engage in than charity because it carries risk and requires courage.

The church needs to encourage church members to become more intimately involved with evangelism, by teaching and arranging mission trips to help people understand the importance and urgency of proclaiming the good news. Cross-cultural evangelism may force us to come out of our comfort zones. It might separate us from our dear ones and deprive us of our luxury as well as our needs. But our God is with us, standing with us in all circumstances. And it is good for us to stand together with people who are being persecuted or are affected by natural calamities or going through difficult situations. At

the same time, sharing the good news by tongue is equally important for the extension of the kingdom.

Let's hold the hands of the needy; let's support others with all our resources; let's stand with the poor, downtrodden, and brokenhearted; let's feel the pain of others. But let's not neglect evangelism.