

Editorial

Migration today, is one of the most pressing realities that challenge also the Christian church, globally. It is therefore not surprising that the theme for the thirteenth quadrennial conference of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS) in 2012, in Toronto Canada, was “Migration. Human Dislocation and the Good News: Margins as the Centre in Christian Mission”. Whilst for some it is a challenge- a matter of life and death; for others, it is an exciting opportunity - a new lease on life. Perhaps it is this ambiguity what excites us most, as we present to you this edition of Missionalia. This reality of being on the road, or at cross-roads, may hold the promise to deepen our ways of doing missiology, but also, of our existence as missional communities. The IAMS call for papers also hinted at these deeper roots and on-going significance of this reality. It states,

“The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, reflecting the lives of God’s people who were uprooted, exiled, and scattered, feature epic experiences of human mobility like the call to a new land, exodus and resettlement, and the scattering of the early Christians. The last half-millennium has seen the Gospel span the globe, often accompanied by the disenfranchisement and sometimes obliteration of other peoples. Dislocation, compelled and voluntary, continues to characterize our contemporary human story as people cross state boundaries or move within their own countries in search of safety or well-being. Christian mission, often a feature of large-scale movements of peoples, must continue to attend responsibly to these historic global realities.”

SAMS, being a community of scholars, participating in this broader discourse, also initiated a research collaboration which addressed these “epic experiences” from a specific Southern African perspective. During June 2012 papers were presented and in this edition we publish a first collection from these contributions. Others will follow.

In this edition, seasoned and respected missiologist Steve Hayes, from the Anglican and Orthodox tradition, takes the first step, as he uses a narrative approach reflecting on the engagement between migration, mission and theological education. He highlights the key lessons to be learnt, over a period of almost fifty years. His reflections also show the role of migrants, some of them mine-workers on the Witwatersrand, as agents of the faith, initiating new communities back home. The contribution of Nelus Niemandt is contemporary. His perspective is consciously what he calls, “an emerging new glocal culture”, a “mass movement” from “the shared space to shared interests.” He refers to a “Google culture” and “postmodern tribalism.” His article aims to take the challenge from Edinburg 2010 serious as he develops the implications of these shifts for faith communities.

For Hannes Knoetze local faith communities impact on migration by building hope through what he calls “missionary diaconate”. He develops this notion through meticulous Biblical exposition and argues on this basis for the church as a “Sphere of Hope”. The article from Christof Sauer addresses pertinently the issue of “fleeing” or relocation because of religious persecution. Through a sensitive dialogue with migrant Christian communities, Sauer not only points to various options from a safe (academic) distance, but more importantly, provide concrete guidelines for communities as well as agencies in solidarity with the persecuted. We also view the role of Missionalia in this light. Lastly, we included an article of a different texture from the aforementioned theme, written by Mika Vähäkangas, the current president of IAMS. This article discusses the ways in which Christian missionaries among the Sonjo ethnic group predominantly in Northern Tanzania, in relation to gender, made use of missionary propaganda, but also popular narratives and myths. Vähäkangas’ article is not simply included here because it was submitted, but it is included because it highlights the complexity of the intercultural and interreligious interplay between the missionaries and communities, which need to be taken into account as we reflect on the margins as the centre in Christian mission. This interplay is multi-layered and in flux- on the move. But then, so is the Spirit of God guiding our reflections.

It is our hope that this epic experience of tracing margins as the centre in Christian mission will also remain the key feature of Missionalia as we hit the road.

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