

AVM Bulletin. March 2009

This bulletin seems to be incredibly long! This is good news – and a reflection of the amount of material becoming available that is closely related to vulnerable mission concerns. Note the opportunity below to JOIN a vulnerable mission live email discussion! See ‘pearl’ below! For facebook enthusiasts – there is also now a vulnerable mission facebook page, managed by Lisa Oneil from Los Angeles. Please join. (We are having some problems with the vulnerable mission website. Some information may not be available to users of internet explorer.)

- “A powerboat captures the essence of the Western paradigm. Power is inside the boat, in the hands of the human operator. The powerboat metaphor represents “taking control.”” The image of the powerboat here represents controlling western mission. Is it time to have less control – to be in a sail-boat? Read more here: <http://www.catalystservices.org/bm~doc/wind.pdf>
- An article written by Catherine Deans Smith (<http://www.vulnerablemission.com/articles/western-solutions-to-poverty-fail/>) entitled ‘Why have so many western solutions to world poverty failed so miserably?’ shows how incongruity in people’s cognitive systems can not only handicap but even totally invalidate intercultural communication. That is – how the non-West cannot successfully implement Western development projects because Third World people’s own worldview does not have the capacity for understanding the foundations on which such projects rely. Instead of leaving non-Westerners to deal with all this ‘incongruity’, the AVM suggests that ‘development experts’ would do well to develop their projects in African languages, learned as they are used by the people.
- An attempt by an African person to challenge Western theology using English, by focusing on the book of Proverbs. If interested, have a look at this book review: http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/6641_7197.pdf
- ‘Pearl’ is the new discussion list-serve initiated by AVM (the alliance for vulnerable mission). This is to discuss issues pertaining to VM – i.e. the proposal that some western missionaries engage in their ministry to non-westerners using the languages and resources of the latter. To join this discussion go to this link, and then follow the instructions: <http://lists.vulnerablemission.com/listinfo.cgi/pearl-vulnerablemission.com> (Contact me for information on *perle* – the German discussion group.)
- Reports on Conferences.
Please see <http://www.vulnerablemission.com/reports-of-conferences-2009/seattle/> for a report on the Seattle conference by Christopher Hurst. Others – please write and submit your conference reports! (This report may not be available to people using internet explorer. Please use firefox.)

- The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission is now on facebook! Go to this url to explore and become a friend of the AVM via facebook! "<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/pages/Alliance-for-Vulnerable-Mission/61030657153?ref=ts>"
- Another article that sees the importance of giving ‘mission’ priority over ‘aid and development’. Have a look at this, produced by a an American missions scholar whose writing is of much interest to AVM! The article is called: ‘Christian Mission Today, Are We on a Slippery Slope? What Makes Mission Christian?’
<http://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.php?loc=kb&view=v&id=20598>
- This posting – that seems to be anonymous – tells us how many people in Swaziland put ‘getting some money from somewhere’ as a prerequisite to doing any ‘good’ in their community. Unnecessary, says this author! Read on:
<http://missionissues.wordpress.com/2009/02/16/compassion-needs-no-money/>
- This article by Dr. Richard Briggs was published in the idea magazine, and went to about 30,000 people in the UK. This is your chance to have a look at a soft version! It is about digging up pearls in gardens ... <http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/Kingdom-of-God.html>

(The reports below by Jim Harries are very subjective. Other conference delegates are encouraged to submit their own reports!)

Report on Indiana Conference

Indianapolis resembled Colorado Springs, in that there was a lot of local interest before the conference. Many of our conference delegates travelled some hours to get to us. They’re going back was through the snow – I trust they got home well.

Our attendance was eleven – although not all stayed all day. Those eleven included a lot of people who are taking mission issues very seriously – senior pastor of the host church (Steve Rennick once my Principal at Kima), retired professor, missions pastors, missionaries on furlough, missionary candidate and so on. The presentations given were of excellent quality, and I think the discussion also was challenging and penetrating. We received comments to the effect that vulnerable mission was not going far enough! The testimony and response to the keynote were from Dan Petersen – an experienced missionary to Burkina Faso.

The group of people that we had came out, overall, strongly in favour of ‘vulnerable mission’. We seemed to be laying a foundation on which to build further vulnerable mission initiatives in the future.

Report on Lancaster Conference

Total attendance for the Lancaster conference was about 11, which was a bit disappointing as had everyone arrived who had either registered or committed themselves to coming, we would have had 15+.

Those present were a mixture of people including professionals in the missions' field, some medical doctors, and a variety of others. Discussion tended to be dominated by perspectives on preventing dependency. This is a vital part of the vulnerable mission message, and arose largely because our hosts (WMA - World Mission Associates with their director Glenn Schwartz) concentrate much on that issue. We were told that unhealthy 'dependency' on foreign missions money and personnel is a serious problem in many parts of the world, and that Glenn is much in demand around the world to help people to deal with it.

The vulnerable mission approach to dependency is a little different. I believe that should people take what we say seriously in their relations with the non-Western world, then they would not generate dependency in the first place. That is, whereas WMA tries to resolve dependency issues, AVM tries to help people prevent them – by encouraging missionaries to use the language and resources of the people being reached in ministry.

As in many of our conferences, there was a strong over-all feeling in favour of vulnerable mission as against 'default mission'. The time was too short to communicate all the important issues involved. Our group was lively and encouraging!

Report on Andover Conference

About 40 people spent the day at the Bridge facility of the Valley Church in Andover, loaned to Andover Baptist Church, on 13th February 2009 from 9.00am to 4.40pm at this the 6th of the conferences arranged this year by the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission. Included were a few academics and mission professionals, many people who sit on the missions committees of their various UK churches, and others.

After a time of worship Julia Pring presented the keynote address. We were grateful to Julia for being honest about her experiences in mission in Kenya. She helped us to realise that mission isn't as easy as just 'giving the money and then people become nice honest Christians ...'. Louis Krog's response (read by Colin Morgan) reflected that appreciation for Julia, and encouraged all present to give serious consideration to promoting mission in a vulnerable way.

The day's programme included a lot of serious discussion that came out strongly in favour of vulnerable mission (Western missionaries to carry out their ministry using the languages and resources of the people being reached). Rev. Clive Burnard chaired the event. David Judkins led us in the initial worship. Dr. John Easterling had shared a brief testimony of VM during the initial worship.

There was almost universal agreement on the need for VM. The pressing question at the end – was how to implement. We needed to speak out more, to pray, to take this message to Bible colleges, and especially missionary training colleges, and to promote pearl (the VM web discussion group), it was felt.

Report on Germany (Stuttgart) Conference

Ten of us in total gathered half way up a low hill on the edge of the Black Forest amongst a snow-covered landscape, at -8C. Our keynote speaker Frank Paul presented the first paper. I identified greatly with what he said. The conference delegates included many with experience in South America, especially Argentina, plus some from Zambia and one Micronesia. Sabina has agreed to do some translation into German of some of the papers on vulnerable mission that are currently only available in English.

Delegates preferred to discuss the contents of the keynote and then my paper, causing us to set aside the point-counter-point session. This proved a valuable time for addressing different concerns. The final session of suggestions regarding 'where to go from here' indicated a strong interest in trying to get discussions on vulnerable mission included as a part of other major missions conferences. Following the conference, we received many more papers that promote vulnerable mission, especially in Spanish, now to be posted on the web.

Jim Harries

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