

# 7.5 Effective Missionary Communication

## Aim

- To discuss the basic ingredients of effective missionary and pastoral communication.
- To help students identify and develop the required proficiency in communication for pastoral ministry in the African context

## Procedure

• Divide the participants into four groups. Assign the following activities to the groups:

• Group A: Give them the words of the song ‘God forgave my sins in Jesus’ name’. Let them single out and analyse the types of words that denote communication and the communication attitude they emphasise.

• Group B: Give this definition of culture and let them brainstorm on the terms that denote missionary openness to communication:

• *Culture is a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols by means of which men and women communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about, and attitude to life (Geertz).*

• Group C: Let them read the account of St. Paul in Athens Acts 17, 16-34. What factors led to Paul being or not being effective?

• Group D: Let them discuss the following story: Brian, a Senegalese joined the Congregation for the Missions in his country and was sent to South Africa after ordination as a missionary. At the airport, the custom officer asked what he was coming to South Africa to do, and he said, he is coming as a missionary. Then the officer asked, “What are you, a Senegalese coming to do that a South African cannot do? What about the low Christian (catholic) population in your own country?” What type of mission mentality does the custom officer have? What will be Brian’s response or reflection about these two questions?

## Input

• What is Mission? Instead of giving a definition which will not give a comprehensive idea of what mission is, we are going to give the broad spectrum. From this perspective, Mission is a multifaceted *ministry*, in respect of *witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting and contextualization* (Bosch).

• (Let the participants discuss each of the aspects classified as mission in this working definition).

• In this sense, it is *Misio Dei* translated practically as *mission ecclesiae*, the missionary programme of the Church. The various aspects of this programme are those already mentioned in the working definition above. However, these need constant review and renewal.

• How then can missionary carry out this *Misio Dei* translated as *mission ecclesae*?  
• How can missionaries communicate effectively with and to the cultures in which the Gospel is to be enfolded?

• Let us first take a look at a model of effective missionary communication.

## Materials Required

- Pen and Paper



S O U R C E	E N C O D E D	M E S S A G E	<b>FACTORS</b>	M E S S A G E	R E S P O N D E N T
			Worldviews – ways of perceiving the world		
			Cognitive Processes – ways of thinking		
			Linguistic Forms – ways of expressing ideas		
			Behavioural Patterns – way of acting		
			Social Structures – ways of interacting		
			Media Influence – ways of channelling the message		
		Motivational Resource – ways of deciding			

When the missionary’s communication (message) takes into consideration the items under the section (factors), then it will have a definite purpose and clear goals. Each of the factors affecting the message can be taken in a deeper way, contextualized in various African cultures. (The class can be divided into groups to take one factor each).

In this way, the receptors will come to a greater understanding of the message, because it is tailored to suit them. It is contextual and relevant to their experience. On the part of the missionary, more effort should be made, with all these factors to derive a message that attains their set goals. The purpose of mission is *missio Dei – missio ecclesiae* so all goals should gear towards achieving this purpose.

Another important factor in effective communication, especially in the area of framing the message, is a distinction between basic and felt needs. In most African cultures, basic needs have to do with the external: food, clothing and shelter. Spiritual and social needs can also be classified as basic needs, because according to John S. Mbiti, the African is notoriously religious and notoriously social: ‘I am because we are’. Felt needs might be for relationships, intimacy, peace, happiness and intellectual activity. Attempts should be made, as best as possible and as a sort of priority to see to the basic needs in proclamation of the Gospel message.

A sincere compassion and love for the receptors should be a strong motivating concern for the communicator. It is only in this way that the receptors can identify with the message and programme of the missionary.

A concern of receptor understanding should precede that of correctness or accuracy of message or programme. Without watering down the truthfulness of the message, the emphasis here is on visual support and emotional appeal that have cultural correspondence and relevance. This is what is implied by the message fitting into the worldviews, or the ways of perceiving the world of receptors. This is where the cultural forms especially signs and symbols that stimulate the receptors have a role to play.

A communication that seeks to create a communion with the receptors in terms of accepted behaviour patterns. In a way, the words should correspond to the behaviour of the missionary. Their message would not be effective if they preach for example, love and practically but show hatred or dislike to the people. This is where the actions of the missionary should fit into the social structures of the people, in their accepted conventional way of behaving.

Effectiveness of missionary communication also entails use of the cognitive, affective and evaluative aspects of communication. The first calls for communicating truth and knowledge in the form of information through the accepted medium. Next is the emotional appeal of the message, where the message touches the receptors, emanating emotions such as joy, comfort, gratitude, sorrow, repentance, challenge and conversion. Lastly, it should lead the people, both as a community and individuals to evaluate their lives according to the message. The decision for the direction of their lives and their daily choice should be motivated by the message they hear.

**Conclusion:**

Primarily and basically, the missionary communicator should bear in mind that they are proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and the most effective and efficient partner in this is the Holy Spirit. Many a communicator have relied on their own prowess and oration, to the neglect of the Holy Spirit (prayer) and have met with sheer failure. However, history shows many who were not eloquent in speech, but relied on the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit, succeeded in making great and lasting impact in the lives of many people. Missionaries should also be aware that it is the same Holy Spirit that creates a response in favour of decision for Christ, so they should not dare to attempt to reach within the wills of people and manipulate their response.

## Review

1. Mission is a multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting and contextualization (Bosch).
2. When the missionary's communication (message) takes into consideration the main factors, then it will have a definite purpose and clear goals. Each of the factors affecting the message can be taken in a deeper way and contextualized in various African cultures. (The class can be divided into groups to take one factor each).
3. Attempts should be made, as best as possible and as a sort of priority to see to the basic needs in proclamation of the Gospel message.
4. A concern of receptor understanding should precede that of correctness or accuracy of the Gospel message or programme.
5. Effectiveness of missionary communication also entails use of the cognitive, affective and evaluative aspects of communication.

## Reflection

Mission is a multi-faceted ministry

## Relevant Skills

List the spiritual, mental, social and cultural qualities required to be a good missionary

## Reference

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