

ABSTRACT

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2004 **“THE ROLE OF MISSIONARY PARTNERSHIP AND CLOSURE IN INDIGENOUS CHURCH DEVELOPMENT: A MALAYSIAN CASE STUDY.”** Asia Graduate School of Theology, Manila, Philippines. Doctor of Missiology. 273 pp.

This dissertation considers the concept of the indigenous church as an appropriate goal for missionary endeavour, and examines the importance of developing mission-church partnerships and effective ways of preparing the church for smooth transition to national leadership and for continuing growth after missionary withdrawal. It includes a case study of the process by which missionaries of the Borneo Evangelical Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (BEM/OMF) in partnership with leaders of the Sidang Injil Borneo/Borneo Evangelical Church (SIB) prepared this indigenous church for full autonomy after closure of the missionary phase of church establishment.

Relevant theological and historical literature, mission policy statements and mission and church records are reviewed and my personal experience as the last Area Director of OMF Malaysia incorporated. Two survey questionnaires were prepared and administered. One elicits from a representative group of former missionaries what they did to prepare the SIB for missionary withdrawal. The other asks key past and present SIB leaders to evaluate how appropriate and effective they consider such activities to have been. The development of the SIB in the post-closure decade is

reviewed to trace significant trends and determine how suitable and adequate missionary preparation of the church was for its ongoing independent life.

Based on this East Malaysian experience, some conclusions are drawn which are relevant to missionaries engaged in church planting concerning how best to prepare an emerging indigenous church for full autonomous operation after missionary departure. Commitment to a closure process in which missionaries progressively phase themselves out of roles and tasks and work towards nationals replacing them is demonstrated to be enabling, liberating and a positive stimulus to the church's continued maturing expansion.

Elements which emerge as significantly important include: sustained, modelled evangelism and church nurture; planned development of ministries essential to the church's growth; training leaders at all levels of responsibility; adequate organisational structures; theological contextualisation of the gospel; and encouraging the church to assume full financial responsibility.

Intentional preparation and closure produce a vigorous, maturing, independent church and lay a foundation for productive future partnerships with suitable missionaries and fellow national and international churches and agencies after the closure phase has concluded.

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356 words