

Training in Mission (TIM)

A model of short term mission education with a Difference

The Training in Mission programme (TIM) is a flagship programme of The Council for World Mission (CWM). The programme's aim is "to equip young people for a lifetime of service to Christ and his church". TIM was initiated in 1981 in response to a challenge to CWM to create an opportunity for involving young people in mission learning and mission engagement. The stated aim and objectives are:

- Building capacity for interpersonal relationship and community building.
- Challenging the theological and missiological status quo.
- Motivating mission action, and
- Empowering young people to return to their local congregation and continue their journey as mission animators and partners.

In the past 28 years approximately 280 young people aged between 20-30 years old, drawn from CWM member churches and the wider ecumenical community have participated in the programme. Over these years the methodology of engagement and programme delivery has evolved. There have been changes of location and format. Currently the programme is hosted in South Africa and India. Each cycle of the programme runs for 10 months.

The benefit of two locations in each cycle of the programme lies in varied exposure and opportunity for mission reflection and engagement that each location offers. Each context raises a unique religious, political, socio-economic and cultural dimension, which requires distinctive reflection and unique action.

Action reflection the underlying principle

Irrespective of the location or format the TIM experience has been consistent in holding to a model of education based on “action reflection” or “learning by doing”. The intent is “to draw out” of the participant their own evolving perspective of mission. It is acknowledged that each participant has his or her own perspective that can be explored, shared and challenged. Therefore each participant is expected to bring to the programme their own knowledge of the life, witness and history of their church within context.

The “action reflection” model assumes that:

- The experiences of life provide the opportunity for learning. It is the constant of engagement with people that provides the catalyst for insight about life.
- The ideas about life are shaped by context; equally they are challenged and transformed by a changed context.
- Engagement and participation in mission is informed through grappling with issues and not only through quality of knowledge.

(Adapted – Sharing people in Mission – Case studies from the Council For World Mission, Andrew P. Williams; D.Th. thesis submitted to the University Of Birmingham, 2004)

Structure and Methodology

The programme is managed in each location by two coordinators and a support team in each location. The coordinators also function as chaplains to the group. In South Africa two host Churches – The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa and The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa play a key role. In India, the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary and the Church of South India host this training. The Mission Education unit at the Council for World Mission gives overall

support and guidance. The experience is supported with times of worship and study.

There are three dimensions that are critical to the programme. Firstly participants engage in theological reflection, exposing and exploring their perceptions about mission within the context of their location. Secondly in each location they are placed to work for a period of 10 weeks with a Christian mission project belonging to the host church/local congregation and a social action oriented project that may be linked with an NGO or with the church. Lastly participants are engaged in building a community among themselves. They bring into this community, their personal faith history, the heritage of their church and their culture. Additionally they seek to understand the context and culture of the people with whom they work. Tensions do arise and the struggle of defining or redefining an understanding of mission brings its own urgency.

All the dimensions mentioned above i.e. their context, their theological reflection, their community building and mission action challenges encourages a re-reading of the scriptures. Throughout the programme participants are encouraged to diary their thoughts and write a reflection paper at the end of their time in each location.

A Risky Journey

The experiences that a participant in the TIM program encounters bring an element of risk in the journey of discovery. The following extract from the TIM diary of 2008 outlines the nature of risk involved in this model of theological education. “The TIM programme is not just another youth training programme. It seeks to offer a radical alternative to the mission formation of young adults. The following expectations are associated with participating in the programme:

- Participants are to be the visible expression of God's calling of every Christian to be 'sent-out' as witnesses to the risen Christ in the world.
- Participants are to witness to the new humanity in Christ by taking action to break down cultural, racial, linguistic and other barriers. They are called to a lifestyle that is shaped by more than one culture and tradition.
- Participants are to be living examples of partnership in mission, the principle upon which the Council for World Mission is founded, by:
 - challenging and enriching the lives and mission of other partners in mission;
 - being responsible for and accountable to one another.

(TIM Diary 2008)

TIM participants have returned to work with their churches in varied roles and with CWM global at various levels. Additionally persons have brought a new perspective on their faith to their work. One former participant commented on the way in which the TIM experience had enabled him to relate mission to all of life. Other participants have mentioned how cultural barriers were broken, new perspectives on the world and new ways of thinking were gained.

The action reflection model of learning is core to how participants in the TIM programme engage in mission reflection and learning. The practical encounters in the placements and the challenges of building community with the other and amongst others create moments of upheaval. Culture meets culture and a process of formation and reformation begins. Against the background of data suggesting an experience that fuels new perspectives on mission engagement the TIM programme provides a model of theological education for mission that can be developed and or adapted.

Reference:

Sharing people in Mission – Case studies from the Council For World Mission, Andrew P. Williams; D.Th. thesis submitted to the University Of Birmingham, 2004)

TIM diary 2008

TIM archives – evaluation and

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