

IMAGINE FUTURE MINISTRY

You and the other four have been together now for over a year in your new community. When you first arrived, the people were curious about the newcomers, but trusted their chief who had invited you. You were equally curious about them, but over the course of the year curiosity has given way to a growing trust on both sides. The open area in the front of your house soon became a place where people could sit and chat with you.

You had all managed to pick up the basics of the local language during the Orientation Program, but didn't feel very confident about actually using it with the people. So you invited in two locals who had some English and they ran language sessions several times a week. In turn, you tutored them in English.

You wondered from day one what "community engagement" might mean in this place. You held a series of meetings among yourselves, which were facilitated by a member of the Hub Community. You drew from the community engagement plan drawn up at the Orientation Program and your own experience of engaging with marginalized communities. You knew that somehow you had to get immersed in the life of the people so you brainstormed on the possible "entry points" into the local community.

Each evening you would walk round and chat with the people. It didn't take too long before people start inviting you into their houses. Here you met for the first time some of the elderly and sick, including some with disabilities. It was not long before you were being invited to join their celebrations and funerals. In no time you were known all over the area, especially by the youth because of the regular soccer and volleyball games in the afternoons, initiated by the younger members of your community.

After the first few months the time was right to start a "needs and rights survey". Earlier workshops had given you all some practical guidelines to work from and each of you set about conversations and observations. By now the chief and the people trusted you enough that your questions were not seen as intrusive. Indeed several adults were keen to help you with the survey. You soon discovered not only plenty of needs but also some of the injustices happening in the area, especially about how the people were being exploited by employers and landlords. You had started to find ways of raising awareness about these issues.

Two of you were skilled at writing up the reports, which all of you had a hand in compiling. As this work proceeded some clear needs started to emerge. But as a community you did not jump into seeking funds to build an institution or rush in to start a project. You decided to make contact with Religious sisters working nearby. They shared valuable information with you about the social, educational and health situation in this part of the country. This gave a context for the data which you had gathered. You invited others, expert in your possible fields of intervention, to help you 'look again' at the data and your preferences.

The next phase of your discernment turned to yourselves. With the help of facilitation from a member of the Hub community, you could now name what your combined skills could offer the people. You kept reminding each other that you could not answer every need. You were looking for an intervention in the life of the people, which would operate during the ten or so years the Brothers community would be there and continue afterwards, making a real improvement in the lives of the people, especially for those most in need and those being denied their human rights.

It took quite some time to agree on that communal intervention. In order to make sure that the project chosen was a “common enterprise” from the start, you had agreed to weekly ‘project team meetings’. At these meetings information was exchanged about not only situations observed and conversations held, but also about how each of you experienced the encounters and what each of you was learning. This ensured that you worked together, along with the locals and other colleagues.

Members of the Hub community and of TST had set in motion a process of “project management” in order that the common enterprise you had arrived at, would be well organized and sustainable and that the skills of leadership were being transferred to the locals from the start. You were all trained in the basics of accounting systems, grant-writing for funds and reporting processes. Towards the end of the year plans were being drawn up for the new Edmund Rice Centre and several donors were very interested in financing it. Several locals became members of the Project Team. They always managed to give honest feedback as to how things were being taken by other locals and make suggestions as to the best way of proceeding with the project.

Once every three months, the communities of your cluster met to refresh themselves spiritually, share experiences, receive further skills training and do some planning. You found great support by sharing common struggles and hopes. This happened in spite of the fact that some of the communities were working in rural areas whereas others were working in city slums. There was no doubt that the skills of the hub community members helped your community enormously in creating a climate of trust and honesty.

Having spent a year now working in that local community, some of you are keen to acquire more skills, especially in the area of “community education”, so as to make an even greater contribution to the lives of the people. You also know that you need to keep working at your local language skills.

The locals are people of faith and some choose to join you in your simple evening prayer. They could see that you too were people of faith. You attended the weekly prayer service in the local chapel and joined in enthusiastically in the singing. You found the strong faith of the people most inspiring. You wondered about who was being evangelized the most.

You hoped that the second year would be as exciting and challenging as the first and you knew that somehow the spirit of Edmund was alive and well in this small corner of the Earth community.