

NETWORKING IN LOVE

*“I thank my God every time I remember you,
constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayer for all of you”.*
Phil 1: 3-4

Collaborators of Paul

No other writing in the New Testament abounds with so many names of concrete persons – friends, supporters and collaborators in the mission – than the Letters of Paul.

They are unique body of writings that break away from contemporary Greco-Roman epistolary conventions by their personal touch and intimate tone, which do not, however, diminish the impact of their writer’s apostolic authority.

Paul’s Letters vividly capture and convey the sentiments of the apostle toward his mission partners and benefactors – his overflowing gratitude, his heartfelt concern for their sanctification and his sincere regard for them.

Collegiality

Collegiality is the mark of Paul’s missionary method. Though he does not hesitate to assume centre stage in any endeavour, Paul does not selfishly lay claim to all he credits for the work accomplished. It is clear to him who is responsible for the growth of the plant and he understands the sense of detachment that is demanded of the one who plants the seed and the one who waters the sprout. For both are servants and only God is the Master and owner of the field.

What is Apollos, after all, and what is Paul? Ministers through whom you became believers, just as the Lord assigned each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth.

Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labour.

For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building. (*1 Cor 3:5-9*)

Paul” Builder of Bridges

In welcoming those who wish to partake of the burdens of the mission, Paul makes no distinction based on race, class and gender. This marks him as a true revolutionary, a breaker of barriers and a builder of bridges.

If the present generation has evolved the concept of “networking” to express the establishment of linkages within and among the various dimensions of life and society, we should be aware that Paul had already been operating along this line even in the first century.

If today we talk of networking, especially on the level of technology, Paul has, in many ways, superseded us, for he was networking on the level of love. His concept of networking in love could not have been expressed more concretely than through his analogy of the body:

For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another.
(*Rom 12:4-45*)

From this should proceed an harmonious working relationship that does not only appreciate differences but sees them as laying the groundwork for complementary action and the pooling of gifts.

Collaborative ministry

Paul's line up of mission partners, collaborators and supporters shows a daring break of existing conventions. He involved in his mission both Jews and Greeks, who were known to be hostile to one another.

He welcomed the contribution of women, who at that time did not assume any active role outside the home. Even slaves, who had no identity of their own apart from that of their masters, were welcomed as co-workers.

In so doing, Paul extended the various crosscurrents of national, social and gender cooperation in his day and opened to all the opportunity to participate in the mission. These participants in the Pauline mission defined Paul's work as a "collaborative ministry."

Degree of Participation

The manner and degree of participation in this ministry, as well as the title or designation given to the co-workers varied. A number of co-workers like Timothy, Titus and Tychicus, accompanied Paul in his journeys and were occasionally sent to teach and minister to his communities in his absence.

Wealthy Christians supported Paul's mission as benefactors, offering their homes for use as house-churches and hosting Paul during his sojourn in the locality.

Paul may have also tapped the help of his own relatives, especially in charting the evangelisation of Thessalonica and Berea. Names of co-senders of letter, such as Silas, Sosthenes and Timothy, mentioned in eight of the thirteen letters attributed to Paul, attest that even his written correspondence was not an individual enterprise. In fact, Paul was always assisted by a secretary whose role varied from taking dictation to being a co-author.

Networking, as a missionary strategy, testifies to the very content of the Good News – that the new life offered in Christ is a corporate existence to be lived in communion with other believers.

From the book by Bernardita Danzon, FSP: Glimpses of Paul and His Message