



MISSIONAL ENCOUNTER AT A NORWEGIAN HOTEL

The pastors of the Norwegian Mission Covenant Church gather once a year for a four day retreat. We have a long history of meeting at Christian resorts, but for the last two years we have for various reasons met at a hotel with no such affiliation. To the contrary, it used to be a place dedicated to the philosophy of Zen-Buddhism. The initial owners went bankrupt however, and the place was sold. Presently the hotel is run by people with no such religious convictions, but the ‘Zen - feeling’ is still lingering there, with statues and decorations depicting Buddha in many places.

The retreat of last year was the first time a group of pastors had stayed at the hotel, and apparently the staff team was taken by surprise at their guests. Maybe the pastors didn’t fit preconceived categories,

and were more 'human' than expected? For whatever reason the hotel director quickly indicated a desire to connect. During worship one morning she made a visit to the room where we were assembled. One of the pastors heard the director whisper to herself: 'I wish I was part of this!' That was definitely not expected! This ignited conversations on spiritual matters, and before we left the hotel that week, the pastor had prayed with her, and blessed her efforts to run the hotel.



This year Alan Roxburgh joined us at the same hotel, as our guest speaker. He shared his message on missional life. 'God is out there in front of us', he said, 'calling His church - not to be so preoccupied with herself - but to join Him in what He is doing in our neighbourhoods and communities.' 'Be willing to enter your communities as strangers', he continued, pointing to Luke 10, 'and sit down at the table of your neighbour. Then you will discover what God is up to in their lives.'

The last night of the retreat we received a very touching illustration - and affirmation - of Alan's message. During supper, out of the blue, the director asked if she could address the group of some 70 pastors, and present her staff. She started out by saying: 'It has been financially challenging to run this place. But last year we, for the first time, made money. I want to thank you for your prayers and your blessing.'

'Now', she continued, 'here we are, the whole staff, and we wonder: will you please pray for us?' Each of the staff-members then gave a little glimpse from their life, sharing some of their joys and some of their pain and sorrows. There were tears and laughter. 'And do you know what,' the director concluded, 'We are all single. Will you please pray for us that we may find partners?'

The pastors were deeply moved - even to tears - by the confidence they were shown. The supper turned into a prayer meeting initiated by the not-yet-Christian hotel employees! Spiritual conversations continued into the night. Friendships were established and strengthened. One received her first Bible, and was taught how to read it. Another said: 'My childhood faith is about to come to life again.'

What happened at the hotel this particular evening, was not foreseen or planned. It just evolved before our eyes. We realised that in this place, with Buddhas on the walls, God was working in the lives of the precious people employed there. What had been our part? Not much. We came as strangers. We sat down at their table. Then, in that setting, our eyes were opened to the fact that God was up to something great in the lives of these people. Our part was to connect with what He was already doing. We prayed, we affirmed what we recognized He was doing in the lives of our new friends, and helped them further along the way.



The pastors returned to their home places with new energy to become 'detectives of divinity' in their neighbourhoods, and to teach their churches likewise.



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I am 57 years of age, married to Bente. We have 4 children and 7 grandchildren :-). I have been a pastor for 30 years, working with the Norwegian Mission Covenant Church (NMCC). I have an MA in evangelism from Trinity International University in Chicago (1991), and a DMin from the same institution (1998). Presently I am on the national staff of NMCC, helping churches embark on a missional journey.