

AFFINITY CHURCHES AND WORLD MISSION

In 2010 ReachAcross commissioned research to help formulate strategy for mobilisation of UK churches in the area of world mission. Questionnaires went to over 3000 evangelical churches of all sizes and denominations, including a thousand within Affinity. The findings, from over 560 usable replies, were documented in a 34,000 word report. Some of the findings are published in the booklet 'Mission Workers in the 21st Century' a copy of which is available from ReachAcross at a cost of £2.60 inclusive of postage, or £2 per copy plus postage for multiple copies (www.reachacross.net).

This is just a brief summary of the findings, mainly related to Affinity churches.

How many?

Table 1: Number of Affinity mission workers supported by size of church

Size of church	Number supported												Support mission generally	Total no of Affinity churches	Average number supported (Affinity)	Average number supported (All churches)
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	>10				
<100	24	28	13	13	13	14	6	1	1	1	0	4 ¹	7	125	2.8	2.5
100-200	2	4	4	3	6	3	4	3	0	1	1	~	0	31	3.8	2.4
201-350	1	0	0	1	1	4	2	0	0	0	0	1 ²	0	10	5.3	3.8
>350	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	3 ³	0	6	10	7.1
TOTAL	27	32	17	17	20	21	14	4	1	2	2	8	7	172	3.4	3.4

¹ One with each of 11, 16, 17 and 19 workers ² With 16 workers ³ One each with 11, 13 and 17 workers

Affinity churches are generally more mission-minded than other evangelical churches of the same size; one congregation with under 100 on a Sunday was supporting 19 (all long-term) mission workers! This determination and commitment is not matched by any churches from other denominations in the survey. Small Affinity congregations (under 100 people) were, on average, supporting three times as many mission workers as one other major denomination's churches of the same size.

There are exceptions, but generally each denomination has, as it were, its own special group of agencies with which it is primarily associated, and while there are interdenominational agencies, few appear across all the denominations/groups in this survey. The only ones appearing in all the denominations/groups surveyed were – AIM, AWM, MAF, OM, OMF, WBT/SIL, WEC and YWAM.

Where?

Table 2: Location of mission workers in Affinity churches

Continent	Affinity %	All Churches %
Africa	22	27
UK	21	17
Asia	17	17
Europe excluding the UK	21	16
Latin America	9	9
Indian sub-continent	5	6
Middle East	2	4
North America	2	2
Oceania	0	1
Other: Unstated, Ships	0	1
Base (= 100%)	572	

Africa is thus the primary location of UK mission workers, where over a quarter (27%) serve (22% for Affinity). It may be a surprise that the UK is the second highest location, where one mission worker in 6 (17%) is located (Affinity 21%). The UK is seen as a mission field by many churches – and if the UK was combined with the rest of Europe, then Europe would be the location of 33% of all mission workers (42% for Affinity). Asia is also important with a further sixth (17%) of workers. Outside Africa, Europe and Asia are the remaining 23%, of which the largest contingent is in Latin America.

Short or long-term?

The large majority of supported mission workers were long-term (more than two years); only 13% were short-term (Affinity just 9%). However, not all churches included short-termers in their return. 79% of short-termers were supported by prayer and partial finance, 14% were fully-financed, and 7% received no finance.

How old?

Table 3: Age of all short-termers

Age Range	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s+
% of all short-termers	68	12	7	2	11

The average age of a short-termer is 33; the average age of a long-termer is 46. Nearly three-fifths (58%) of long-termers are in their 30s and 40s. With the average length of service under 10 years, this means that the majority of those retiring or leaving the mission field will be in their 40s and 50s.

Table 4: Age of Affinity churches' long-term mission workers

20s %	30s %	40s %	50s %	60s %	70s %	Base (=100%)	Average age
4	28	26	23	17	2	528	48

Affinity have the oldest mission workers on average; 42% of their workers are 50 or over, against 36% overall. Mission workers are 11 years younger than ministers on average, and much younger than their supporting congregations. As a consequence there may be differences in understanding of 'mission' as well as differences in ways of communicating and expectations.

What does 'mission' mean?

Table 5: What mission includes

	Disciple- ship %	Community development %	Youth work %	Church planting %	Relief work %	Medical work %
Affinity	22	12	17	22	14	13
Overall	19	17	17	17	16	14

Affinity churches were much stronger on mission being equated to discipleship and church planting than other denominations. More Affinity churches ticked just one box than others, invariably 'Church planting'.

How much money?

78% of Affinity churches had a mission budget (compared to an average of 83% of all churches surveyed). Affinity mission budgets averaged 14% of total income (compared to an average of 13% of all churches surveyed). Only 35% of Affinity churches had a Mission Committee, well below the average of 52%.

Mission focus?

When asked about the focus of their mission support, only 5% of churches responded they would like to focus on Muslim areas. 3% said they would focus on the Middle East. Few churches put their mission work into a global, strategic, big-picture context. When asked if their church would benefit from external consultation, Affinity churches were the least receptive to this – only 14% (18% average). Of the 80% of Affinity churches that indicated they have 'Mission Sundays' – the average was to have four per year (second highest of groups surveyed). Smaller churches had more than larger churches. Affinity churches were more likely to pray *weekly* for mission work than any of the other groups surveyed.

Table 6: Purpose for serving overseas, by young and older adults

	Abbreviated purpose statement	Affinity %	Overall %
Young	Sharing the gospel	62	49
	Relief and development	45	69
Older	Sharing the gospel	83	64
	Relief and development	18	42

While some young adults see the prime purpose of going overseas as sharing the Gospel, in denominations other than Affinity the proportion wanting to do relief and development work is much greater, usually double. *Even in Affinity churches the percentages are much closer together than they are for older adults. In other words, the perceived need of today's mission efforts is for the alleviation of poverty and suffering, and while such must always be important, it perhaps reflects a weakness in the desire to proclaim the gospel in today's church.*

The above findings are quite serious. Tom Houston, one-time International Director of both World Vision and the Lausanne Committee, recently said, 'The greatest idol we have today is putting our neighbour above God.' In short, not just ReachAcross, but mission agencies generally face an uphill task to keep true to the fundamental core of the Scriptures in proclaiming forgiveness of sins and making disciples, especially among the younger generation growing into leadership of today's UK churches.

What are the biggest challenges today?

The key factors mentioned were lack of finance, understanding the gospel imperative, lack of people, apathy, and home needs, in that order. These did not vary significantly by denomination or size of church.

There is not time to give conclusions to the challenges shared here. However, the building of personal relationships between churches and mission agencies was seen as essential for progress.

Glenn Tainio is the UK National Director of ReachAcross (formerly the Red Sea Mission Team).

He is very happy to come to Affinity churches to speak about the results of the survey and the work of ReachAcross in reaching Muslims with the Gospel.

Mission Matters is a series of occasional papers on contemporary issues in World Mission. It is published on line by the Affinity World Focus Team. Its purpose is to stimulate thinking on significant issues in World Mission. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by the Affinity Theological Team.

Other Online Resources from Affinity

Table Talk is a series of occasional papers published on line by the Affinity Theological Team. Its purpose is to stimulate theological thinking on significant issues. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by the Affinity Theological Team.

Foundations is an online journal published twice a year by the Affinity Theological Team. Its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, including in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics and indicating their relevance to pastoral ministry.



The Old Bank House, 17 Malpas Road, Newport, South Wales. NP20 5PA

Telephone: 01633 893925

Email: office@affinity.org.uk

Website: www.affinity.org.uk