

New Roots Review

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NEW ROOTS MINISTRY

Isn't "EMPOWER" a Great Word!?

by Fred Wilgenburg

To empower is "to equip", "to allow", and "to give the power to." Spiritually, empowerment may be to tell a new believer, or a person considering faith, that by God's grace, "if anyone is in Christ, the new has come: the old has gone, the new is here" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In our church, graduating high school seniors are asked to share their favorite Bible verse. Philippians 4:13 is often shared because it's spiritually empowering: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Good choice. Of course, there are many other good Bible passages, and which are most empowering for people depends on their situations.

We at New Roots Ministry put much effort into empowering, including sometimes for selfishly good(?) reasons. Driver training for new American adults is one of our most popular programs, and it is empowering when a person gets their driver license, and the freedoms that come with that. It's empowering to the volunteer trainers as well as they learn about other cultures and possibly other religions, as they grow in their ability to teach somebody, and as they practice spiritual fruits like kindness and patience.

Everyday-Ambassadors Practicum, a one-afternoon-workshop, is our newest program. It is to empower people of God to communicate on a spiritual-level with those who are struggling or who do not know God. From the low sign-up rate so far, this is clearly an intimidating venture for many, though we are experiencing that the large majority of people with whom we interact on the streets quite warmly welcome the care, the engagement, and hearing Good News. (*Consider reading about it here: www.sfnnewroots.com/our-ministries/*)

I love having new Americans join me when I do pulpit supply. They are empowered as, during our 10-minute interview, they describe to us other Americans what their home country was like, what it is like to live in a refugee camp and then in a country like the US, and what their goals are now. The congregation is empowered as well, as they learn. Okay, this one carries over to the selfishly-good side, or maybe just selfish—my new American guests, especially someone like the musically talented Faith Ezekiel (*in the pictures*), make me look good.

For many new Americans who have had limited opportunities for receiving education, offering



to them Timothy Leadership Training (TLT) equips them as Christian leaders. As well, for them to receive the Advanced Trainer certificate upon their completion after about 14 months of classes is very meaningful, as displayed by Chadrack (*in the picture*) who acquired a cap and gown upon his completion. Recently, we connected my friends, Maria and her brother, Waqas, in Faisalabad, Pakistan, with TLT staff. Maria and Waqas' church needs help developing leaders as they seek to grow their church within their largely closed, Islamic country. TLT wants their curriculum to be available in Pakistan's Urdu language. On a Zoom call it was so fun to introduce these different parties to each other and to work out a deal hiring Maria to translate the TLT curriculum into Urdu.

For many years, we have offered workplace chaplaincy at businesses which employ many new Americans. Zerhun, who is originally from Ethiopia, was hired about 18 months ago to do our 2nd-shift chaplaincy at Smithfield Foods. —>

Continued...

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ing as well. Though they just serve 2-4 hours/week, they enjoy encouraging in the Lord and helping the employees at these farms. They are empowered, and admittedly, New Roots Ministry is empowered as well, as we appreciate the financial support often offered by these Christian businesses which are interested in their employees' well-being, including spiritual.

As we all know, offering empowerment is sometimes difficult, and seemingly unfruitful. I experience this especially in discipleship relationships, for various reasons. In our work, as we minister mainly to new Americans, plenty of whom are of religions other than Christianity, I get to know them well, but due to age- and cultural differences, I sometimes seek to introduce a more "fitting" person to develop a friendship with that person. I think it's a good plan, but it seems like just 40% or less of those introductions, whether it be through our Strategic Planning for Meeting Goals, or otherwise, work out well. Usually the issue is a lack of follow-through and responsiveness from either or both sides. That's unfortunate, and I end up personally having too many weak-to-moderate discipleship relationships. However, discipleship remains probably the most important act of empowerment that we can offer, so let's keep it up; Jesus knew what he was talking about in Matthew 28—"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations..."

Thankfully, plenty of times God blesses our humble efforts at empowering, for His glory, as described directly above. I look back, sometimes years later, and think, "Wow, I was discouraged, feeling that didn't work at all, but God actually did some cool things with it. Thank-you, Lord!" Have you been there before?

As Zerhun speaks four languages, and he can relate to being a new American, he's a good chaplain, and he likes it, in part because it supplements his income, as well as allowing him to do more ministry to which he feels called. For my part, hmmm....selfish, I don't miss leaving Smithfield at 11PM several days each month, especially during cold winter nights. But hey, if Zerhun is empowered!?

Regarding chaplaincy, we have also placed bi-lingual Hispanic people on three commercial dairy farms, with hopes of placing more. These chaplains have each gone through Timothy Leadership Training, and some of them have had other train-

What is New Roots Ministry?

It's "a springboard for new Americans & their churches."
This is done through workplace chaplaincy (we provide chaplaincy at Smithfield Foods & we train & place bi-lingual chaplains on commercial farms), through Timothy Leadership Training, through hosting special educational events, through empowering new American pastors, leaders, and their churches, through offering unique Service Opportunities—serve in, or visit, stores owned by new Americans, then hear their stories, through helping people navigate the American system and achieve their goals, like education, through driver training for new Americans, and through Everyday-Ambassador Practicum.



On March 25, we hosted an event which included hearing testimonies of people who were of other religions before embracing Jesus. Dil and Vien (*left two pictures*) left Buddhism simply after being invited to go to church and learning about faith. For Vien, who was a young exchange student from Laos, a kind woman invited her and gave her a ride to church. Santosh (*right*) left Hinduism when his brother was cured miraculously of epilepsy as he attended church with friends who fervently prayed for his healing. Abdela (*third from left*) left Islam because, even as a child, he didn't want to follow religious rules and memorize much just because it was his family's religion and tradition. The faith in God/Jesus that some of his friends had, made more sense.