About the Conference Theme

Healthy Humility: Learning to Learn

In *Whose Reality Counts?: Putting the Last First*, participatory development guru Robert Chambers writes that when development professionals leave school and begin to work they need to learn to learn again. They are officially educated, but must be re-educated by the poor and marginalized who know more about poverty and oppression than can be conveyed through books and professors.

For Christians this makes perfect sense. In Philippians 2, Paul writes a wonderful poem about Christ’s humility. Christ, in his equality to God, humbled himself to become a lowly, obedient servant. And he asks the same of us. Too often, however, because we read books, come from developed countries, study in prestigious schools, and therefore hold power, we think of ourselves as problem-solvers. But as Chambers and the Apostle Paul tell us, we must lower ourselves, listen first, and be ready and willing to learn. This doesn’t mean all our assets are worthless, but we need to know how to use them. Jesus, who had all the power and wisdom and problem-solving-capability of God, does not force us into his kingdom. Instead, he came down among us, lived with us, and ultimately suffered for us.

We might wonder, why didn’t Jesus turn all the stones into bread and feed everyone instead of just 5,000? Why didn’t he create an earthly empire and rule everyone with justice and equity and order? He could have, but because God created us as image-bearers, maybe that would not have worked out very well. Maybe Jesus knew that we also need to respond in humility and obedience, that as professional development workers it won’t work for us to use our power to take control and do it all ourselves. We must humble ourselves, remembering to listen and learn in fear of God and respect of our neighbors. Then we can make a more significant contribution than when we try to do too much and, in the process, deny the very image-bearing humanity of the people we hope to help and forget the sovereignty of the God we hope to serve.