

Roland Allen, missionary (1868-1947)

Observed 8 June



Roland Allen has had influence well beyond what he might reasonably have expected in his lifetime.

He was an Englishman sent out to do mission work in northern China in the late 19th century. His work was disrupted by the Boxer Rebellion, but he always rose to whatever challenge was before him. After two stints in China, he spent time in the mission field in India, Canada, and East Africa. He observed the colonial tendency to impose all the structure and culture of the home church on the people being evangelized. Allen worked to plant seeds and then leave them to grow as they would naturally, using local leaders and local resources, giving the new churches freedom to grow on their own as the Spirit might lead them. In his scripture study he saw Saint Paul trusting the action of the Holy Spirit in his converts to build the church in each place. What he saw in the modern world was that we find it easier to trust ourselves than anyone else, including people that the Holy Spirit leads to faith. His influential and inspiring book is called *Missionary Methods; Saint Paul's or Ours?*

Allen's work has been at the foundation of the Total Ministry movement, which has been important in Oregon and many parts of the Episcopal Church in the last two decades as we strive to discover ways to be the Church in ever-changing social situations. His principles of church planting and nurture have spurred many creative ideas, as his successors strive to trust in God, rather than their own institutional patterns and prejudices. This work has been particularly beneficial in rural and scattered congregations unable to sustain the heavy load of liturgy and structure developed for 19th century Europe. The greatest gift Allen left us was confidence in the Spirit to guide the church in every circumstance.

Lessons Numbers 11:26-29; Psalm 119:145-152; II Corinthians 9:8-15; Luke 8:4-15

Collect Almighty God, by your Spirit you opened the Scriptures to your servant Roland Allen, so that he might lead many to know, live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ: Give us grace to follow his example, that the variety of those to whom we reach out in love may receive your saving Word and witness in their own languages and cultures to your glorious Name; through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.