

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

~ Part One in the “Window to the World” Resource Series ~



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LAYING THE FOUNDATION

The articles in *Laying the Foundation* are designed for churches wanting to establish a solid basis for a world missions ministry. This is a critical stage in the development of a successful ministry, and one that will determine its direction for years to come. Remember to proceed thoughtfully and avoid the temptation to try to accomplish everything at once. It would be a mistake, for example, to hastily decide to send members on the first available missions project or start supporting the next missionary that approaches the church. Either decision would be like starting to run without knowing which direction to head. Instead, churches should begin with the essentials: developing their missions leadership, determining what they are trying to accomplish, and creating a plan to mobilize their church over time.

GROUNDING IN THE WORD

Laying the Foundation begins with a study on the biblical basis for the Great Commission. The Scriptures are the basis for all we do, and we need to be certain that our missions ministries rest on the authority of Scripture alone. Nothing is more motivating to those who go and to those who send them than knowing they are serving in the center of God's heart. Sadly, though, some missions leaders feel their ministries are relegated to the backwaters of the church, whereas other programs get more attention and resources. A biblical understanding of God's heart for the world will help push missions to the forefront. Look for ways to teach your church leaders and members what the Bible says about missions.

The second Scriptural commitment to emphasize is the centrality of the Church in missions. The Bible is clear that the Church is God's primary means of extending His kingdom. Not only is it His means; the Church is the primary end He's working towards as He prepares the Body and Bride of Christ. God's priority for the Church needs to be our priority too. Thus, the more our energy and resources directly contribute to the growth of the Church, the greater our long-term impact will be. We therefore need to engage our leaders in a biblical study of the importance of church planting and align our ministries as much as possible with God's goals.

ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS

Established on this biblical foundation of the Great Commission and the Church, a church needs to know which building blocks are essential for future growth. Among these are a strong missions committee, a carefully defined vision, and some forum for promoting world missions. Articles relating to each of these are included in *Laying the Foundation*, starting with the committee as the key to an effective ministry.

The overall missions ministry will never rise above the ability of the missions leadership. Therefore, recruiting capable people to serve on the committee should be an on-going priority. Further, it is vital that the committee sees itself as more than a grant-making foundation, i.e. a committee that simply determines how to allocate funding. While financial decisions are an important aspect of the committee and should be carefully made in accordance with the long-range goals of the ministry, the committee primarily exists to help members increasingly become world Christians.

This committee, along with the pastor of the church, is the true “keeper of the vision” of missions for the entire congregation. That assumes, of course, there is a defined vision in the first place. One of the first tasks of any missions committee should be to determine what it is trying to accomplish and why and then begin to develop ministry accordingly. Starting without a vision may generate motion, but not necessarily progress.

Progress includes engaging the entire congregation in missions and not simply a select few. While there are innumerable ways to highlight missions, the most visible typically is the missions conference. It is important to remember, though, that the goal of a missions conference is not the event itself. Rather, it is to help members take one or two more steps towards becoming world Christians. In that respect, churches may develop more effective means to accomplish this goal other than an annual conference. Moreover, the missions ministry should not be perceived as a single event. Faced with a choice, it is far better to have regular opportunities throughout the year to promote missions rather than an annual emphasis. However, churches that are the most mobilized for missions consistently have a major, high profile emphasis every year—and typically offer ways to hear about missions at other times. Churches that decrease the visibility of the missions conference invariably are those with a decreasing commitment to world missions.

At the foundational level of building a missions ministry, it is important to identify what belongs in the first phase of construction. Of course, no ministry begins in a vacuum; there is always a context that affects growth. Such factors include the commitment of the senior pastor, passions of key missions leaders, resources in the congregation, and the history—if any—of missions involvement. But be encouraged that no matter how daunting the task may appear, you have all the resources you need: the Lord Himself. No one is more passionate about the Great Commission than our sovereign Lord, and He desires your congregation to be deeply engaged with Him. Seek His guidance and provision, confident that He “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” (Ephesians 3:20)

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Under the titles of the following articles, the “theme” refers to one of the essential elements of successful missions ministries listed in *Window to the World*. This list is included in the following pages. A fruitful exercise for your missions committee would be to evaluate your ministry according to each of the twenty themes and begin to strengthen undeveloped areas. You may also want to refer to the articles in the rest of the *Window to the World* series:

Setting Your Sights explores the importance of the Church and national church-planting movements as the visible goal of a missions ministry.

Setting the Pace offers practical help on how to mobilize your church for world missions.

Reaching the Summit helps more established ministries integrate their efforts with the entire church and with key principles for maximizing long-term impact.

THE GREAT COMMISSION IN THE SCRIPTURES

Theme: Education

REV. SCOTT SEATON

Successful missions ministries are founded not on an inspiring vision, passionate leaders, or an active program. Rather, our passion and our program must be grounded in the Scriptures. The Word of God is abundantly and overwhelmingly clear that His heart is inclined toward those who do not know the freedom of the gospel. Therefore, our hearts must be similarly impassioned to reach and disciple those without Christ, such that our churches will be marked by our commitment to the Great Commission. The authority in heaven and on earth given to Christ compels the Church to be passionate about the Great Commission, that Christ would be glorified by the expansion of His kingdom to the ends of the earth.

BIBLICAL BASIS

The foundational conviction of our missions emphasis is, perhaps, an unexpected one. Certainly, our hope is that people would find salvation through the gospel, that needy people would be put into a right relationship with God for all eternity. But that is actually not our primary purpose. Instead, the ultimate purpose of our efforts is that by expanding His kingdom to the ends of the earth, Christ would be glorified. As one pastor put it:

All of history is moving toward one great goal, the white-hot worship of God and his Son among all the peoples of the earth. Missions is not that goal. It is the means. And for that reason it is the second greatest human activity in the world.

One of the things God uses to make this truth take hold of a person and a church is the stunning realization that it is also true for God himself. Missions is not *God's* ultimate goal, worship is. And when this sinks into a person's heart everything changes. The world is often turned on its head. And everything looks different—including the missionary enterprise.

The ultimate foundation for our passion to see God glorified is his own passion to be glorified. God is central and supreme in his own affections. There are no rivals for the supremacy of God's glory in his won heart. God is not an idolater. He does not disobey the first and great commandment. With all his heart and soul and strength and mind he delights in the glory of his manifold perfections. The most passionate heart for God in all the universe is God's heart.

This truth, more than any other I know, seals the conviction that worship is the fuel and goal of missions. The deepest reason why our passion for God should *fuel* missions is that God's passion for God fuels missions. Missions is the overflow of our delight in God because missions is the overflow of God's delight in being God. And the deepest reason why worship is the *goal* in missions is that worship is God's goal. We are confirmed in this goal by the Biblical record of God's relentless pursuit of praise among the nations. "Praise the Lord, all

nations! Extol him, all peoples!" (Psalm 117:1). If it is God's goal it must be our goal.¹

GOD SEEKS HIS OWN GLORY

In other words, missions is God-centered, not man-centered. Consider some of the many verses that declare God's relationship to his creation is fixed on His glory:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the *praise of his glorious grace*, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:4-6)

Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. *Declare his glory among the nations*, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. (Psalm 96:2-4)

Therefore say to the house of Israel, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the *sake of my holy name*, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then *the nations will know that I am the Lord*," declares the Sovereign Lord, "when I show myself holy through you before their eyes. I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake," declares the Sovereign Lord. (Ezekiel 36:22-23, 32)

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, *for my own sake*, and remembers your sins no more. (Isaiah 43:25)

Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, *glorify your name!*" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." (John 12:27, 28)

Because the goal of our missions' effort is God's glory, we must conclude that our ministry is not for our honor but for Christ's. This may seem self-evident, but the subtle effects of the very sin conquered through missions can destroy our missions' ministry. We must take care that we do nothing simply for the sake of our own reputation, or to expand the ministry solely to have a larger program. Everything we do must be motivated by a desire to bring glory to Christ.

JESUS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

With this purpose of God in mind, the whole of redemptive history comes into sharper focus. Rather than being a series of unrelated stories, God bringing glory to Himself through missions ties together all of Scripture. Rather than the Great Commission being a New

¹John Piper, *Let The Nations Be Glad*, p. 15

Testament afterthought, we discover that it has always been on the heart of God to bring salvation to all peoples. We can see this truth by eavesdropping on one of the greatest Bible studies ever given.

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

-Luke 24:44-47

In the 24th chapter of Luke, Christ has been raised from the dead and appears to His disciples for 40 days. Shortly before His ascension, Jesus shares a meal with His disciples, and declares "all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (v. 44). Then Luke tells us that "He opened their minds to understand the Scripture." The Scripture at that time, of course, was what we now call the Old Testament. In a new and profound way, the disciples understood how all of the Scriptures pointed towards Christ. *Everything* in the Old Testament is about Jesus—the character of God and His relentless pursuit of His people. Specifically, Jesus confirmed "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day." (v. 46)

The disciples then, and millions of Christians since, have seen that the Old Testament declares the holiness, justice and love of God cannot tolerate sin. It must be punished and removed from His presence. But God has provided a substitutionary sacrifice, foreshadowed by the sacrifices made by the people of Israel. Foretold hundreds of years before His birth and with incredible detail, the Old Testament pointed to the life and death of Jesus, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) When talking with His disciples on this point, Jesus certainly had in mind the explicit promises found in places like Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.

But Jesus didn't stop there in His study. He went on to declare that "repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47) This statement certainly sounds similar to the Great Commission of Acts 1:8 and Matthew 28: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." But Jesus was directing them to the Great Commission found in the *Old* Testament Scriptures.

THE GREAT COMMISSION ESTABLISHED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

This point is critical. If the Great Commission is found only in a few verses in the New Testament, then does it really deserve to be the priority of the Church? If the command to take the gospel into all the world only appears as a hurried afterthought in the mind of Jesus, remembered at the last minute before His ascension, then surely it merits the same treatment in our own priorities—tacked on the end of a long list of tasks.

But that's not what Jesus was saying. By directing them to the Scriptures the Israelites had for their entire existence—the words of God that shaped their whole life and community—Jesus affirms that the Great Commission has always been central in the plan of God. More than even that, the heart of God is filled with His passion that all peoples would know Him and declare His glory. The Great Commission actually *permeates* Scripture, from the opening chapters of Genesis to the close of Revelation. Rather than being a footnote in a few passages, this passion of God underlies every word.

From the first occurrence of Adam's sin, man has turned away and hid from God. Yet even then, God pursued those who were alienated from God and themselves (Genesis 3:8,9). In the first hours of man's sinful state, God pointed to the ultimate victory that would come through Christ (Genesis 3:15). Thus, there was never a moment in the history of mankind that God did not have in mind a plan of salvation. In fact, God had ordained the redemption of His people even before the world was created (Ephesians 1:4).

COVENANTAL PROMISES

From Genesis forward, the biblical story is essentially that of God pursuing His people through various leaders, prophets and circumstances. The commitment throughout has been to fulfill what are called God's *covenantal promises*, explicitly declared in the often-repeated pledge, "I will be your God, and you will be My people" (Leviticus 26:12 et al). Like contracts we enter into today, a covenant is a solemn bond between two parties that includes certain promises and stipulations. Blessings are attached to the promises kept, and penalties for promises broken. While the covenants God established with His people through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and ultimately Jesus all have a special emphasis, they are in essence identical. They re-assure us of God's faithfulness by each re-affirming this same commitment—that God has irrevocably bound Himself to His people.

For example, when God established His covenant with Abraham, the relationship He creates is unshakeable.

Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

-Genesis 12:1-3

Like all covenants, this one includes terms. While the emphasis is on God's blessing the family of Abraham, it is evident there is a purpose in doing so. Remember that God's primary relationship to the world is extending His glory through all the peoples of the earth. God's plan with Abraham is clear—He would pour Himself into Abraham's family, through a special relationship that would cause them to grow in the knowledge, love and worship of their Creator. Then through them, *all peoples on earth will be blessed*. The purpose would be that those outside Abraham's family would receive the same blessings of God, also growing in the knowledge, love and worship of their Creator.

Throughout the history of Israel, this emphasis is clear:

Israel was to be a kingdom of priests (i.e. mediators between God and man) to an unbelieving world:

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. (Exodus 19:5,6)

People throughout the entire world would turn to God:

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the *families of the nations* will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the *nations*. (Psalm 22:27-28)

The prayers of Israel appealed to God to be gracious to all peoples:

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among *all nations*. May the *peoples* praise you, O God; may all the *peoples* praise you. May the *nations* be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the *peoples* justly and guide the *nations* of the earth. May the *peoples* praise you, O God; may all the *peoples* praise you. (Psalm 67:1-5)

A compassionate God sends Jonah to a Gentile city:

But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city? (Jonah 4:11)

The nations are told to draw near to God:

Come near, you *nations*, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it! (Isaiah 34:1)

The restoration of Israel following the exile included their being a blessing to others:

[The Lord] says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a *light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*” (Isaiah 49:6)

THE GREAT COMMISSION CONFIRMED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The same people of God, who in New Testament times have a fuller knowledge of their Messiah, are to continue to be a light to the nations. (In the New Testament, “Gentiles” and “nations” are translations of the Greek, *ethne*, from which we get the word “ethnic” or people.)

Jesus calls the temple a place of prayer for all peoples. When we consider that the temple represents the presence of God among His people, Jesus’ anger at the misuse of the temple is even more powerful: “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for *all nations*?’” (Mark 11:17)

Jesus commands His followers to take the gospel to the whole world:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Jesus repeats this command immediately prior to His ascension:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the *ends of the earth*. (Acts 1:8)

Peter learns that the gospel is for all the nations:

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from *every nation* who fear him and do what is right. (Acts 10:34-35)

The gospel results in faithfulness to God among the nations:

Through [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among *all the nations*. (Romans 1:5)

Paul explicitly connects the gospel to the promise given to Abraham:

Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "*All nations* will be blessed through you." (Galatians 3:6-8)

Heaven will be characterized by the praise of all peoples:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every *nation, tribe, people and language*, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9-10)

Being careful again to emphasize God’s glory and our motivation in missions, it must be clear that the covenant God makes with us is a *gracious* covenant. This point is important, as sometimes the impetus for missions is communicated in a way that suggests the plan of redemption “corrects” a mistake in God’s created order. Having wrongly allowed man to sin in the first place, God keeps trying and failing to woo man back. This error implies that redemptive history is Plan B in God’s eyes, and that He needs man to fix the problem.

But that’s not the biblical story. History has unfolded exactly how our sovereign God has been pleased to orchestrate it. God in no way was obligated to create a way of salvation. We had broken our part of the covenant, and yet God had always designed to bear our responsibility for the fulfillment of the covenant. Though we deserved to be punished for our sins, Jesus bore the penalty Himself. But it does not end there. Even the growth and extension of God’s kingdom depends entirely upon God, for “unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” (Psalm 127:1) Because of God’s covenantal promises to redeem His people, we know that we are part of a plan that cannot fail. The gospel will indeed go forth to all the nations (Matthew 24:14). And in all this—the beginning, the extension, and the fulfillment of God’s kingdom—God alone will receive the glory.

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WHY PLANT CHURCHES

Theme: Church Planting

REV. TIM KELLER

Introduction

The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else—not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes—will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting. This is an eyebrow-raising statement. But to those who have done any study at all, it is not even controversial.

The normal response to discussions about church planting is something like this:

- A. We already have plenty of churches that have lots and lots of room for all the new people who have come to the area. Let's get *them* filled before we go off building any new ones.
- B. Every church in this community used to be more full than it is now. The churchgoing public is a “shrinking pie.” A new church here will just take people from churches already hurting and weaken everyone.
- C. Help the churches that are struggling first. A new church doesn't help the ones we have that are just keeping their nose above water. We need *better* churches, not more churches.

These statements appear to be common sense to many people, but they rest on several wrong assumptions. The error of this thinking will become clear if we ask, “*Why is church planting so crucially important?*”

Because—

A. We want to be true to THE BIBLICAL MANDATE

1. *Jesus' essential call was to plant churches.* Virtually all the great evangelistic challenges of the New Testament are basically calls to plant churches, not simply to share the faith. The Great Commission (Matt.28: 18-20) is not just a call to *make disciples* but to *baptize*. In Acts and elsewhere, it is clear that baptism means incorporation into a worshipping community with accountability and boundaries (cf. Acts 2:41-47). The only way to be truly sure you are increasing the number of Christians in a town is to increase the number of churches. Why? Much traditional evangelism aims to get a “decision” for Christ. Experience, however, shows us that many of these decisions disappear and never result in changed lives. Why? Many, many decisions are not really conversions, but often only the beginning of a journey of seeking God (other decisions are very definitely the moment of a new birth, but this differs

from person to person). Only a person who is being evangelized in the context of an ongoing worshipping and shepherding community can be sure of finally coming home into vital, saving faith. This is why a leading missiologist like C. Peter Wagner can say, "Planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven."²

2. Paul's whole strategy was to plant urban churches. The greatest missionary in history, St. Paul, had a rather simple, two-fold strategy. First, he went into the largest city of the region (cf. Acts 16:9, 12), and second, he planted churches in each city (cf. Titus 1:5-*appoint elders in every town*). Once Paul had done that, he could say that he had *fully preached* the gospel in a region and that he had *no more work* to do there (cf. Romans 15:19, 23). This means Paul had two controlling assumptions: a) that the way to most permanently influence a country was through its chief cities, and b) the way to most permanently influence a city was to plant churches in it. Once he had accomplished this in a city, he moved on. He knew that the rest that needed to happen would follow.

Response: "But," many people say, "that was in the beginning. Now the country (at least our country) is filled with churches. Why is church planting important now?"

We also plant churches because—

B. We want to be true to THE GREAT COMMISSION. Some facts:

1. New churches best reach a) new generations, b) new residents, and c) new people groups. First (a) younger adults have always been disproportionately found in newer congregations. Long-established congregations develop traditions (such as time of worship, length of service, emotional responsiveness, sermon topics, leadership style, emotional atmosphere, and thousands of other tiny customs and mores) which reflect the sensibilities of long-time leaders from the older generations who have the influence and money to control the church life. This does not reach younger generations. Second, (b) new residents are almost always reached better by new congregations. In older congregations, it may require tenure of 10 years before you are allowed into places of leadership and influence, but in a new church, new residents tend to have equal power with long-time residents.

Last, (c) new socio-cultural groups in a community are always reached better by new congregations. For example, if new white-collar commuters move into an area where the older residents were farmers, it is likely that a new church will be more receptive to the myriad of needs of the new residents, while the older churches will continue to be oriented to the original social group. And new racial groups in a community are best reached by a new church that is intentionally multi-ethnic from the start. For example: if an all-Anglo neighborhood becomes 33% Hispanic, a new, deliberately bi-racial church will be far more likely to create "cultural space" for newcomers than will an older church in town. Finally, brand new immigrant groups nearly always can only be reached by churches ministering in their own language. If we wait until a new group is assimilated into American culture enough to come to our church, we will wait for years without reaching out to them.

² C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Growth* (Glendale: Regal, 1987), p. 168.

[Note: Often, a new congregation for a new people group can be planted *within* the overall structure of an existing church. It may be a new Sunday service at another time, or a new network of house churches that are connected to a larger, already existing congregation. Nevertheless, although it technically may not be a new independent congregation, it serves the same function.]

In summary, new congregations empower new people and new peoples much more quickly and readily than can older churches. Thus they have always reached them with greater facility than long-established bodies, and always will. This means, of course, that church planting is not only for “frontier regions” or “pagan” countries that we want to see *become* Christian. Christian countries will have to maintain vigorous, extensive church planting simply to *stay* Christian!

2. *New churches best reach the unchurched—period.* Dozens of denominational studies have confirmed that the average new church gains most of its new members (60-80%) from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshipping body, while churches over 10-15 years of age gain 80-90% of new members by transfer from other congregations.³ This means that the average new congregation will bring 6-8 times more new people into the life of the Body of Christ than an older congregation of the same size.

So although established congregations provide many things that newer churches often cannot, older churches in general will never be able to match the effectiveness of new bodies in reaching people for the kingdom. Why would this be? As a congregation ages, powerful internal institutional pressures lead it to allocate most of its resources and energy toward the concerns of its members and constituents, rather than toward those outside its walls. This is natural and to a great degree desirable. Older congregations, therefore, have a stability and steadiness that many people thrive on and need. This does not mean that established churches cannot win new people. In fact, many non-Christians will only be reached by churches with long roots in the community and the trappings of stability and respectability.

However, new congregations, in general, are forced to focus on the needs of its *non*-members simply in order to get off the ground. So many of its leaders have come very recently from the ranks of the un-churched that the congregation is far more sensitive to the concerns of the non-believer. Also, in the first two years of our Christian walk, we have far more close, face-to-face relationships with non-Christians than we do later. Thus a congregation filled with people fresh from the ranks of the un-churched will have the power to invite and attract many more non-believers into the events and life of the church than will the members of the typical established body.

What does this mean practically? If we want to reach our city, should we try to renew older congregations to make them more evangelistic, or should we plant lots of new churches? But that question is surely a false either-or dichotomy. We should do both! Nevertheless, all we

³ Lyle Schaller, quoted in D. McGavran and G. Hunter, *Church Growth: Strategies that Work* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), p. 100. See C. Kirk Hadaway, *New Churches and Church Growth in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987).

have been saying proves that, despite the occasional exceptions, the only wide-scale way to bring in lots of new Christians to the Body of Christ in a permanent way is to plant new churches.

To throw this into relief, imagine Town A and Town B and Town C are the same size, and they each have 100 churches of 100 persons each. But in Town A, all the churches are over 15 years old. As a result, the overall number of active Christian churchgoers in that town shrinks, even if four or five of the churches get very “hot” and double in attendance. In Town B, 5 of the churches are under 15 years old, and they, along with several older congregations, are winning new people to Christ, but this only offsets the normal declines of the older churches. Thus the overall number of active Christian churchgoers in that town stays the same. Finally, in Town C, 30 of the churches are under 15 years old. In this town, the overall number of active Christian churchgoers will be on a path to grow 50% in a generation.⁴

Response: “But,” many people say, “what about all the existing churches that need help? You seem to be ignoring them.”

Not at all. We also plant churches because—

C. We want to continually RENEW THE WHOLE BODY OF CHRIST.

It is a great mistake to think that we have to choose between church planting and church renewal. Strange as it may seem, the planting of new churches in a city is one of the very best ways to revitalize many older churches in the vicinity and renew the whole Body of Christ. Why?

1. First, new churches bring new ideas to the whole Body. There is plenty of resistance to the idea that we need to plant new churches to reach the constant stream of new groups, generations, and residents. Many congregations insist that all available resources should be used to find ways of helping existing churches reach them. However, there is no better way to teach older congregations about new skills and methods for reaching new people groups than by planting new churches. New churches have freedom to be innovative, and they become the “research and development” department for the whole Body in the city. Often the older congregations were too timid to try a particular approach or were absolutely sure it would “not work here.” But when the new church in town succeeds wildly with some new method, the other churches eventually take notice and get the courage to try it themselves.

2. Second, planting new churches is one of the best ways to surface creative, strong leaders for the whole Body. In older congregations, leaders emphasize tradition, tenure, routine, and kinship ties. New congregations, on the other hand, attract a higher percentage of venturesome people who value creativity, risk, innovation, and future orientation. Many of these men and women would never be attracted or compelled into significant ministry apart

⁴ See Lyle Schaller, *44 Questions for Church Planters* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), p.12. Schaller talks about “The 1% Rule.” Each year, any association of churches should plant new congregations at the rate of 1% of their existing total—otherwise, that association will be in decline. That is just “maintenance.” If an association wants to grow 50%+, it must plant 2-3% per year.

from the appearance of these new bodies. Often older churches “box out” many people with strong leadership skills who cannot work in more traditional settings. New churches thus attract and harness many people in the city whose gifts otherwise would not be utilized in the work of the Body. These new leaders eventually benefit the Body in the city.

3. Third, new churches challenge other churches to self-examination. The success of new churches often challenges older congregations in general to evaluate themselves in substantial ways. Sometimes it is only in contrast with a new church that older churches can finally define their own vision, specialties, and identity. Often the growth of the new congregation gives the older churches hope that “it can be done,” and may even bring about humility and repentance for defeatist and pessimistic attitudes. Sometimes, new congregations can partner with older churches to mount ministries that neither could do by themselves.

4. Fourth, a new church may be an evangelistic feeder for a whole community. The new church often produces many converts who end up in older churches for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the new church is very exciting and outward facing but is also very unstable or immature in its leadership. Thus some converts cannot stand the tumultuous changes that regularly come through the new church and they move to an existing church. Sometimes the new church reaches a person for Christ, but the new convert quickly discovers that he or she does not fit the socio-economic make up of the new congregation, and gravitates to an established congregation where the customs and culture feels more familiar. Ordinarily, the new churches in a city produce new people not only for themselves, but for the older bodies as well.

Summary: Vigorous church planting is one of the best ways to *renew* the existing churches of a city, as well as the best single way to *grow* the whole Body of Christ in a city.

There is one more reason why it is good for the existing churches of the region to initiate or at least support the planting of churches in a given area.

We plant churches—

D. As an exercise in KINGDOM-MINDEDNESS

All in all, church planting helps an existing church the best when the new congregation is voluntarily “birthed” by an older “mother” congregation. Often the excitement, new leaders, ministries, members and income of a new church wash back into the mother church in various ways, strengthening and renewing it. Though there is some pain in seeing good friends and some leaders go away to form a new church, the mother church usually experiences a surge of high self-esteem and an influx of new enthusiastic leaders and members.

However, a new church in the community usually confronts churches with a major issue—the issue of kingdom-mindedness. New churches, as we have seen, draw most of their new members (up to 80%) from the ranks of the unchurched, but they *will* always attract some people out of existing churches. That is inevitable. At this point, the existing churches, in a sense, have a question posed to them: “Are we going to rejoice in the 80%—the new people that the kingdom has gained through this new church, or are we going to bemoan and resent

the three families we lost to it?” In other words, our attitude to new church development is a test of whether our mindset is geared to our own institutional turf, or to the overall health and prosperity of the kingdom of God in the city.

Any church that is more upset by their own small losses rather than the kingdoms large gains is betraying its narrow interests. Yet, as we have seen, the benefits to older congregations of new church planting are very great, even if that may not be obvious initially.

SUMMARY

If we briefly glance at the objections to church planting in the introduction, we can now see the false premises beneath the statements. **A.** Assumes that older congregations can reach newcomers as well as new congregations. But to reach new generations and people groups will require *both* renewed older churches and lots of new churches. **B.** Assumes that new congregations will only reach current active churchgoers. But new churches do far better at reaching the unchurched, and thus they are the only way to *increase* the churchgoing “pie.” **C.** Assumes that new church planting will only discourage older churches. This is a possibility, but a new church, for a variety of reasons, is one of the best ways to renew and revitalize an older church. **D.** Assumes that new churches only work where the population is growing. Actually, they reach people wherever the population is *changing*. If new people are coming in to replace former residents, or new groups of people are coming in—even though the net population figure is stagnant—new churches are needed.

New church planting is the only way that we can be sure we are going to increase the number of believers in a city and one of the best ways to renew the whole Body of Christ. The evidence for this statement is strong—Biblically, sociologically, and historically. In the end, a lack of kingdom-mindedness may simply blind us to all this evidence. We must beware of that.

APPENDIX A: HISTORICAL LESSONS

If all this is true, there should be lots of evidence for these principles in church history—and there is.

In 1820, there was one Christian church for every 875 U.S. residents. But from 1860-1906, U.S. Protestant churches planted one new church for each population increase of 350 people, bringing the ratio by the start of WWI to just one church for every 430 persons. In 1906 over a third of all the congregations in the country were less than 25 years old.⁵ As a result, the percentage of the U.S. population involved in the life of the church rose steadily. For example, in 1776, 17% of the U.S. population described themselves as “religious adherents,” but that rose to 53% by 1916.⁶

However, after WWI, especially among mainline Protestants, church planting plummeted, for a variety of reasons. One of the main reasons was the issue of “turf.” Once the continental

⁵ *Ibid*, pp.14-26.

⁶ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1992) p.16.

U.S. was covered by towns and settlements and churches and church buildings in each one, there was strong resistance from older churches to any new churches being planted in “our neighborhood.” As we have seen above, new churches are commonly very effective at reaching new people and growing for their first couple of decades. But the vast majority of U.S. congregations reach their peak in size during the first two or three decades of their existence and then remain on a plateau or slowly shrink.⁷ This is due to the factors mentioned above. They cannot assimilate new people or groups of people as well as new churches. However, older churches have feared the competition from new churches. Mainline church congregations, with their centralized government, were the most effective in blocking new church development in their towns. As a result, the mainline churches have shrunk remarkably in the last 20-30 years.⁸

What are the historical lessons? Church attendance and adherence overall in the United States is in decline and decreasing. This cannot be reversed in any other way than in the way it originally had been so remarkably *increasing*. We must plant churches at such a rate that the number of churches per 1,000 people begins to grow again, rather than decline, as it has since WWI.

Dr. Timothy Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City, and continues to serve that congregation as senior pastor.

⁷ Schaller, *44 Questions*, p.23.

⁸ See Schaller's case that a lack of church planting is one major cause of the decline of mainline Protestantism. *Ibid*, p.24-26. Finke and Stark show how independent churches, such as the Baptists, who have had freedom to plant churches without interference, have proliferated their numbers. *Churching*, p.248.

AN EYE FOR THE WORLD

Theme: Vision

A common temptation for church leaders wanting to establish a missions ministry is to take action: plan a conference, support some missionaries, send members on a summer project. A bias for action is a good thing. But every action establishes a commitment and a precedent. Whether these commitments strengthen or weaken a ministry depend on one thing: a carefully developed vision. Clearly establishing the purpose and direction for your missions ministry will pay many dividends down the road.

PURPOSE OF A VISION STATEMENT

A good vision statement should do two things: it should inspire and inform.

First, it should inspire. People want to be part of something larger than themselves. They want to be part of something compelling, challenging and significant. What could be more compelling than the Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations.” No loftier vision could ever be imagined, no greater challenge could ever be conceived. Missions leaders are calling their people to be part of this most incredible endeavor. The Great Commission deserves an inspiring vision for the church that will draw their members.

Second, vision should inform. A church’s vision statement is a compass pointing the ministry in a certain direction—and by corollary, away from other directions. A good vision statement will help leaders make decisions, to know to go this way and not another, to say no to certain possibilities because they’ve said yes to others.

COMPONENTS OF A VISION STATEMENT

An excellent example of a strong vision statement is found in Nehemiah 2:17: “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”

1. Clarity

Nehemiah’s vision couldn’t be clearer: rebuild the wall. Ambiguity could have created the possibility of being diverted to build a palace or plan a coronation. Instead, this clear goal enabled the leaders to make decisions whether various tasks helped complete the project. It also enabled the people to know what they were being asked to do. The Apostle Paul echoed this theme when he wrote, “If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?” (I Cor. 14:8.) A clear vision statement is distinct enough to help leaders make decisions and members determine whether they want to be part of the vision. For example, “glorifying God by helping to fulfill the Great Commission” sounds laudable, but this vision could apply to every Christian church or organization. The trumpet is not sounding a clear call. To provide guidance, you must first determine what is most important to your ministry. Establishing your passions and convictions will bring greater clarity to your vision.

2. **Motivating**

To be motivating, a vision must address a need and call for a response. Nehemiah challenged the people of Jerusalem to restore their security as well as their honor. Every citizen could identify with this need, and they own the vision for themselves. Nehemiah also called them to participate in the project. Not only could the project not be accomplished without their help, they needed to feel part of the effort. Likewise, a church's vision should respond to a pressing need and necessitate personal involvement.

3. **Achievable**

The difficulty of rebuilding the walls was compounded by the threat of opposition. Yet in spite of the challenges facing Nehemiah, he knew they could accomplish the task. He wasn't asking them to build walls 100 feet high. A lofty vision that is not realistic is not engaging, as people discard the goal as impossible. For example, "winning the whole world for Christ" is something we all hope to see, but it's not something that God has entrusted to a single church.

4. **Measurable**

Progress in rebuilding the wall was relatively easy to determine; in fact, all could see it for themselves. Nehemiah divided the work into stages and components, and was able to measure the progress for each part. Not only did this enable the leaders to better allocate resources, it motivated the people by letting them accomplish definable elements. Similarly, a church's vision should be crafted in such a way as to help leaders measure progress towards the goal and generate enthusiasm among all the members.

EXAMPLES OF VISION STATEMENTS

Considering the above elements, what makes the following statements weak? What makes them strong?

1. *The goal of the missions ministry of First Church is to support missionaries in cross-cultural settings.*
2. *First Church will help plant 50 indigenous churches in 50 great cities of the world.*
3. *We will glorify God by fulfilling the Great Commission.*
4. *The missions ministry administrates the world missions program for First Church.*
5. *We seek to establish church planting centers with our global partners.*
6. *Our one vision: proclaiming the gospel to all the nations.*
7. *First Church will pray, send, give and go on behalf of the world's neediest people.*

DEVELOPING A VISION STATEMENT

There are many ways to develop a vision statement. The following suggestions will get you started.

1. Determine who should create the vision.

The actual group will depend on the leadership philosophy of your church, i.e. you will need to determine the appropriate combination of church officers, lay leaders, and/or pastor(s). Will the statement be drafted by the entire group or by a few members with input from the others? Will this be done in one meeting, a retreat, or a series of meetings? Will one person 'wordsmith' the draft and report back to the group? Who will give final approval to the statement? Whoever is involved, it is very important that key stakeholders feel they have some part in crafting the vision, as they will be the ones authorizing and implementing it.

2. Establish priorities

It may be helpful to review the Top Twenty priorities in this document. In particular, are you committed to the Church as God's primary means of establishing His kingdom? Consider whether your vision is aimed towards establishing nationally led churches and whether your entire membership is challenged to participate at some level.

3. Envision the future

Next, have the participants take a few minutes to envision the future. One way to do this is to have them write an imaginary article for a newspaper that wants to do a feature on your church's involvement in world missions. Everyone should write a one or two paragraph article about the highlights of the ministry, including its purpose and accomplishments. Include a compelling headline. As part of this exercise, identify 10 key words or phrases. Next, share individual results with the entire group. As the articles are shared, identify patterns. Perhaps God has laid various aspects of the vision on the hearts of the leaders. Determine which priorities are the most biblical. Discuss whether certain elements are traditions that should be retained or discarded. Ask if any elements are missing that should be included.

4. Draft and summarize

Once you have input from all the participants, start drafting a statement of 30 words or less. Do not try to include something for everyone, as you may end up with a vague vision that fails to provide direction. A summary statement will bring greater clarity to the vision, as it forces leaders to determine what is most important. It's also easier to remember and therefore easier to use for guidance. However, an expanded version may be helpful, to add further definition and establish objectives.

5. **Approve and communicate**

A common problem for missions ministries is that they can act like separate departments of the church, or serve on the periphery of the church's emphasis. To avoid this, present the final version to the session for approval. Sessional authorization will help engage key leaders of the church and empower the missions ministry. Once you have their approval, find ways to communicate the vision to the church and repeat the message often. Use all means available to your church to put the vision in front of the members. Newsletters, brochures, the church's web site, a bulletin board and verbal references are some of the many ways to communicate the direction of your missions ministry.

6. **Use the statement to make decisions and evaluate effectiveness.**

Refer to the vision at the beginning of missions meetings, especially those including financial support decisions or event planning. Make decisions with your vision in mind.

LEADERSHIP IS (ALMOST) EVERYTHING

Theme: Church Leadership

A significant factor in determining the success of a missions ministry is the support of church leaders, and in particular the senior pastor. The strongest ministries describe their church leadership as champions of missions, through their personal participation and public commitment. In these churches, leaders speak passionately from their heart about the importance of missions and how lives have been impacted by the power of the gospel. They also speak soundly from their heads about the centrality of missions in Scripture and wise principles for navigating cross-cultural ministry. But if your church still needs to cultivate such champions, you can still have a successful ministry, as long as the leaders of the church support missions and your ministry initiatives. In these cases, the missions team plays a vital role in raising awareness and identifying the best opportunities for your church's participation in the Great Commission.

Clarifying Roles

Regardless of your church leaders' commitment to missions, it is important to clarify roles so that leaders can be engaged without frustrating or duplicating the work of others.

The session should

- Ensure missions is a priority
- Ensure leaders are identified and supported
- Ensure ministry is aligned with a biblical vision
- Empower the missions team to fulfill its ministry goals

The pastor should

- Work with the session in the above roles, plus:
- Encourage missions verbally
- Encourage missions by example

The Missions Team

- *Engages and equips the congregation* according to the church's explicitly defined missions *vision and values*

Cultivating Leadership

Leadership development is never a one-time effort. Instead, it requires the continual cultivation of people at all levels. Without on-going development, the old leaders will eventually burn out or move out, with no one to replace them. The following are some ways to keep your leaders engaged and growing:

Session

- Provide elders with regular verbal and written reports of the ministry
- Provide elders with carefully selected articles and books
- Encourage an elder to join committee, so that they understand the fine points of ministry issues and can represent the ministry at session meetings.

Pastor

- Ask him to pray publicly for missions
- Send him and his wife on strategic missions project
- Provide him with carefully selected missions resources

Missions Team

- Give them opportunities to grow
- Recruit new members to appropriate roles
- Recognize their contributions in tangible ways

MISSIONS COMMITTEES LEAD THE CHURCH

Theme: Missions Committee

THE PURPOSE OF THE MISSIONS TEAM

The main tasks and responsibilities of the missions team are to:

- Establish a thoughtful missions vision and develop the ministry in accordance with that vision
- Serve as the church's experts on missions by studying biblical and missiological issues and learning about particular areas of the world
- Elevate the church's awareness of the biblical basis for missions, the need for world evangelization, and current events in missions
- Increase congregational participation in world missions
- Aid members of the local church in responding to God's call to missions
- Stimulate prayer for missionaries and world missions
- Care for missionaries on home ministry assignment
- Ensure that pastors, staff and officers participate in mission projects
- Recommend missionary candidates according to set guidelines
- Oversee the missions conference(s)
- Prepare the annual missions budget and present it to the elders for approval
- Correspond with missionaries
- Visit areas of priority or focus of the church
- Develop policy and procedures related to the ministry

THE STRUCTURE OF THE COMMITTEE

The missions committee should feel free to develop a structure that best meets their needs. Most committees adopt one of two primary ways to organize the committee, either by geography or function.

Option A: Geography

Organizing by geography offers the advantage of allowing people to become experts on a particular area, which is especially helpful if they have an interest in certain people groups. It can also allow them to develop deeper relationships with missionaries, as they handle all the functions related to supporting missionaries within their region. Communication with a particular missionary goes through a single member, which can make it easier for the missionary to know who to communicate with. In some ways, this focus on a region mirrors the missionary's sense of calling to a field.

While a chairperson oversees the entire ministry, as much of the work as possible is delegated to regional teams or committees. Some churches use the following geographical divisions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Muslim World. These are the same divisions used by Mission to the World.

Regional teams take the lead in developing the ministry within their area. Churches will list these functions in various ways, but they may include some or all of the below. It may be helpful to appoint a person to take primary responsibility for each of the following:

1. **Missionary Care**

This responsibility includes encouraging prayer on behalf of missionaries within their region, communicating regularly with missionaries, providing them supplies and resources, and addressing needs upon their return.

2. **Member Education**

This responsibility includes arranging opportunities for members to learn more about the missionaries, the spiritual and physical needs of people living within a region, and how the missionaries are seeking to address those needs.

3. **Research**

Regional team members are encouraged to learn more about cultures within their area, in order to gain a better appreciation of the diversity of God's world and how the gospel can be expressed among different peoples.

4. **Projects**

Organizes and promotes short-term projects to sites within their region, especially to any partner sites.

5. **Partnership**

If the missions team has adopted specific sites for emphasis, the regional team would coordinate opportunities for members to more deeply engage in ministry.

Option B: Function

Organizing by function allows people to work according to roles that suit them best, such as planning events or demonstrating hospitality. It also allows them to have a broad level of contact with all the missionaries. Subcommittees may be organized around many of the following roles:

- **Chairperson** (consider whether this will be an elder)
- **Vice-chairperson** (consider whether this person will succeed chairperson)
- **Secretary**
Keeps minutes of meetings and handles correspondence.
- **Treasurer**
Maintains the budget, produces financial statements and processes disbursements.
- **Prayer Coordinator**
Receives prayer requests from missionaries, coordinates prayer within the church for its missions ministry, missionaries, missions conference, Day of Prayer for Persecuted Church, etc. May organize teams and/or regular prayer meetings.
- **Missions Conference Chairperson**
Oversees all aspects of missions conference, primarily by coordinating subcommittee chairpersons.
- **Hospitality Chairperson**
(for missionaries who are visiting and/or on home assignment) Stays in regular contact with missionaries to know when they are visiting the U.S., coordinates any lodging, transportation, or other needs.

- **Short-term and Missions Project Chairperson**
Drives, plans, promotes short-term trips for the congregation.
- **Assimilation Coordinator**
(into every ministry of the church) Focuses on moving missions and the Great Commission from a program status to the driving force for all the church's ministries.
- **Candidate Coordinator**
Funnels opportunities for supporting new candidates to the missions team and session; is aware of the team's and session's goals for new candidate support.
- **Representative from the session**
Serves as a channel of communication between the session and the missions team, to ensure unity in purpose, plans, and goals.

MISSIONS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Qualifications

The primary qualifications for serving on the missions committee include a heart for world evangelization and faithfulness to follow-through with responsibilities. Knowledge and experience should not be a prerequisite to serve on a subcommittee, but they are vitally important for those in leadership. The missions team will have a wide variety of responsibilities and will therefore require a diverse set of skills, gifts and experience. The criteria listed below describe some of the most necessary prerequisites. Few people will exhibit all of these qualities, so temper idealism with realism.

The individual should

- Practice a faithful, personal relationship with Christ
- Be interested in world missions
- Consider missions as one of the primary roles of the church
- Have a desire to learn more about missions
- Be willing to undergo initial training
- Possess gifts supportive of the missions team's efforts
- Be committed to prayer
- Be willing to serve on a subcommittee
- Be willing to be a project leader
- Understand and support the policies of the church's missions team

Length of service

Determining how long people serve in leadership roles will set proper expectations and avoid a great deal of confusion. Common possibilities include:

- One-year term
- Two-year term
- Three-year terms, with one-third rotating off each year
- Chairperson (or missions pastor or administrator) has longer term or is permanent
- Pastor or church board representative serves indefinitely

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

While no ministry should be overly bureaucratic, thoughtful policies and procedures will help organize the complexities of the missions ministry. It is important to distinguish between the two, as confusing procedure with policy decreases productivity and creativity. Policies provide guidance in decision-making and promote consistency in applications; policies should not be very flexible and generally be as few as possible. Procedures allow you to build a set of best practices to most effectively develop your ministry. These should be considered fairly flexible and open to revision.

Examples of Policies

1. The range of support for non-member missionaries serving in our focus sites will be 1.5 times that of our base range. The range of support for member missionaries serving in our focus sites will be 2 times that of our base range.
2. Missionaries will be expected to provide a yearly report of their ministry roles, accomplishments, challenges, needs and goals for the upcoming year.

Examples of Procedures

1. Missionaries will be contacted prior to their Home Ministry Assignments to determine how our church can best care for them while in the United States.
2. The financial sub-committee will contact missionaries during the conference to process their conference related reimbursements.

As you develop your policies and procedures, consider these questions:

1. What is your relationship to the session? For example, do they require approval of support decisions?
2. How often will the missions team and subcommittees meet?
3. Will you have annual planning sessions?
4. Will there be a larger advisory team or elder that meets to advise the missions team? How often will they meet with the team? What is their level of authority?
5. Will you have an executive team? If so, what will be their responsibilities?
6. How can you be sure to support missionaries most in line with your particular vision?
7. Will there be permanent subcommittees? Will they be organized by function or geography? What are their specific duties?
8. What are your ranges for missionary support? Do members receive more than non-members? Do missionaries going to your focus sites (if any) receive more support?

9. Is there a missions director/pastor? If so, what are the duties and relationship to the team?
10. Is there a missions administrator? If so, what are his/her duties?
11. Will the ministry fund project expenses for certain church leaders (e.g. senior pastor, missions chair person)? If so, which leaders, how much and how many trips per year?
12. Who makes support decisions for missionaries? Is it the entire committee or a certain group?
13. Will the ministry help fund members going on projects? If so, which projects and how much?
14. Can members who are missionaries serve on the committee? If so, are there any restrictions to their responsibilities, such as financial support decisions?
15. What are your expectations from missionaries?
16. What is the application process for missionaries?
17. What are your requirements or expectations for approving missionary support, e.g. experience, preparation, agency affiliation, theological convictions, role, destination?
18. What will be your connection to the presbytery MTW Committee?

THE MISSIONS CONFERENCE

Theme: Education

PURPOSE OF THE MISSIONS CONFERENCE

For the church that has begun to recognize the primacy of missions and evangelism, the missions conference provides an opportunity to fuel that vision in a unique manner. It is an opportunity for a congregation to re-focus on its biblical mandate in ministry and to restore perspective upon its church's mission. In many churches whose vision and involvement in missions has become the focus of a few members of the church, a conference is an opportunity to push that vision outward and to give opportunity for ownership to the congregation. Paradoxically, rather than depleting the local church, a missions conference serves to enhance interest, resources and fruitfulness of the local church.

Your missions conference will be a time for explanation, illustration and personalization of world evangelism. It is also a prime opportunity to convey your particular vision and how members can get involved. In order to accomplish this, you must plan your conference as thoughtfully as possible.

KEY PLANNING DECISIONS

- What are you hoping to accomplish?
Consider how the conference can help move your missions vision forward. It is easy enough to plan a busy program. The challenge is to plan a schedule where events meaningfully contribute to your overall purpose.
- What is the best schedule for your conference?
Common options include a weekend event or a 10-day conference that includes two Sundays. Determine the schedule that best fits your church and will generate the most enthusiasm.
- How can you involve the most members?
Missions is for everybody. While not everyone will serve in the missions ministry year round, the conference is a time for maximum exposure and participation. Schedule prime-time events that will appeal to many people and/or will best promote your missions vision.
- Which missionaries will you invite?
Do you want to open the conference to all missionaries, in order to increase the contact of your members to missionaries? Or will you be more selective, in order to encourage members to support missionaries who align with your vision?
- What outcomes do you want from your members?
Consider distributing some kind of response card for members to complete. Be sure to follow-up on these commitments.

COMMON COMPONENTS OF THE CONFERENCE

- Sunday worship services should include songs, prayers, Scripture and announcements related to missions. Flags from around the world could be carried and/or displayed.
- Missionaries and nationals from the church's areas of focus should be given broad exposure during the conference. Carefully select the missionaries you want to highlight during worship services,
- Introduce response card at beginning of conference, which should be turned in at the end. This card could include responses for prayer, giving, learning and going.
- Include prayer in all events, but also plan special opportunities dedicated to prayer.
- Missionaries can be briefly introduced to the congregation in a service, with more opportunities for them to give presentations at other times.
- Sunday school classes can host missionary speakers and/or programs related to missions.
- Schedule the main speaker for weekday morning meetings. These may have a special focus for missionaries or specific groups of members.
- Plan special events such as a men's breakfast, a women's luncheon and/or concert for teenagers.
- Schedule special events for the children.
- Set up displays for missionaries the church supports, including prayer cards, photos, informational brochures, videos, maps, flags, and other such resources.
- Plan home meetings in which missionaries share pictures, videos, and speak informally in a question and answer time.
- Consider calling missionaries in other countries during worship, Sunday school classes, or homes.
- Plan events related to local, cross-cultural missions opportunities. This promotes awareness of the world in your community, gives people first hand experience, and encourages "here/there" connections to your missions ministry.
- Schedule half-day seminars about other cultures, religions and/or biblical basis for missions.
- Promote pre-selected two-week projects.

THEMES FOR MISSIONS CONFERENCES

Consider these possibilities as you create your own theme:

A Light to All Nations
A Needy World, A Saving Message
As the Father Has Sent Me, So I Send You
Compelled by His Love
Expect Great Things from God, Attempt
Great Things for God
Extending Christ's Kingdom to All Peoples
For God So Loved the World

From Every Tribe, Nation and Tongue
Here Am I, Send Me
The Light of the World
Lord of the Harvest
One Message for Many Nations
Reaching the Unreached
The Unfinished Task
White to the Harvest

TWO ALTERNATIVE SCHEDULES

10-Day Format

FRIDAY

- Appreciation Dinner for Missions Committee
- Orientation Meeting for missionaries

SATURDAY

- Men's breakfast: a missionary shares (20 min)
- Women's luncheon: a missionary shares (20 min)
- Youth event, e.g. concert, movie

SUNDAY

- Sunday School: missionaries share in all classes
- Morning worship: missionary shares (3-5 min), message by main speaker, introduce response card and challenge
- Evening: a missionary shares (3-5 min), message by main speaker

MONDAY

- Seniors' luncheon
- Evening: a missionary shares (3-5 min), message by main speaker

TUESDAY

- Evening: a missionary shares (3-5 min), message by main speaker
- Dinner with officers and wives

WEDNESDAY

- Men's prayer breakfast; a missionary shares
- Evening home groups

THURSDAY

- Women's prayer luncheon; a missionary shares
- Evening home groups

FRIDAY

- Off day

SATURDAY

- Half-day educational seminar

SUNDAY

- Missions message by pastor
- Turn in response cards

Weekend Format

FRIDAY

- Orientation Meeting
- Covered dish supper
- Introduce missionaries (2-5 min. each)
- Kick-off message from main speaker
- Display area for missionaries

SATURDAY

- Men's breakfast: a missionary shares (20 min)
- Women's luncheon: a missionary shares (20 min)
- Youth supper: a missionary shares (20 min), discussion follows
- Dessert in homes: missionaries share slides, videos and a Q&A time

SUNDAY

- Sunday School: missionaries share in all classes
- Morning worship: missionary shares (3-5 min), message by main speaker; distribute response cards
- Covered dish lunch at church
- Evening: a missionary shares (3-5 min), message by main speaker

SUBCOMMITTEES

Dividing the responsibilities for the missions conference and appointing leaders of the various activities can greatly ease the organizational challenges of the conference. Depending on the size of the conference, one person could undertake more than one responsibility. Subcommittees also provide an excellent means for increasing participation. Encourage church members to volunteer for different responsibilities and involve them as much as possible in the planning of the conference. Mission to the World can be a resource for your conference by recommending speakers and missionaries, providing displays, and supplying you with other materials to help you communicate about world missions.

Choose a leader for each subcommittee. The conference chairperson will lead the subcommittees.

Program:

- Determine theme
- Determine overall schedule
- Plan events in accordance with theme
- Recruit coordinators for each event
- Arrange for speakers during worship, classes, etc.

Publicity:

- Make posters and banners
- Design and produce a conference brochure
- Coordinate publicity with other church workers to promote the conference among their groups
- See that the announcements are made from the pulpit as appropriate
- Include conference information in the church paper or newsletter
- Send press releases or set up interviews with local newspapers and radio or TV stations
- Produce and place posters in local public buildings
- Promote conference in Sunday school classes
- Ensure church follows security guidelines for missionaries working in sensitive contexts
- Produce response cards that ask for commitments on such things as praying for missions, giving to missionaries, learning about missions, serving on the ministry committee, going on a specific two-week project, or expressing interest in becoming a missionary.

Finances:

- Determine the costs of the conference
- Establish a detailed budget (income and expense)
- Arrange for tickets where needed
- Collect funds for events where needed
- Make sure bills, honorariums and other charges are paid
- Keep good records
- Design and produce response cards; final totals may be presented at the closing meeting

Hospitality:

- Arrange housing and meals for incoming speakers
- Work out transportation for speakers
- Arrange housing and meals for missionaries
- Buy or make name tags for all speakers and missionaries
- Coordinate coffee breaks and fellowship times
- Send information packets to all program participants (conference brochures, schedules, maps, housing arrangements, etc.)
- Provide encouraging seminar just for missionaries

Facilities:

- Plan, produce and put up decorations for all sessions
- Arrange for facilities as needed for special events
- Provide signs for clear direction to and in facilities
- Reserve or arrange for necessary equipment
- Reserve and decorate display tables
- Coordinate set-up of facilities as needed for each event

Missions Displays:

- List organizations which should be contacted
- Write a letter inviting the organizations
- Arrange for display area, table, etc.
- Arrange for a book table with missions books and periodicals
- Arrange for workers to staff the book table

Follow-up:

- Keep attendance records of all events
- Record conference evaluations (you may design and distribute evaluation forms to your congregation)
- Provide for response cards if there is a call for commitment to missionary service
- See that financial commitments are acknowledged when appropriate
- Inform the church as to the results of the missions conference
- Send thank-you notes to all volunteers and missionaries

PLANNING THE CONFERENCE

An effective conference requires significant preparation. Planning should begin as early as possible, with foundational decisions made even a year or more in advance.

12 Months in Advance

1. Choose optimum conference dates considering
 - a. Church calendar
 - b. Social calendar
 - c. Community calendar
2. Determine length of conference
3. Begin consideration of conference purpose and theme
4. Plan to use conference as a time to target any new focus areas
5. Invite main speaker(s)
6. Invite church-supported missionaries (usually those on HMA)
7. Invite special musician(s)
8. Work on conference budget

9 Months in Advance

1. Invite missionaries/nationals from focus areas
2. Invite other missionaries
3. Invite mission board representatives
4. Invite nationals
5. Select theme
6. Select subcommittee chairpersons
7. Determine special events

6 Months in Advance

1. Develop subcommittee heads, personnel, responsibilities and six-month assignments
2. Begin work on publicity
3. Research missionary candidates' applications
4. Arrange for speaker and special events
5. Plan "Theme Display" for sanctuary and other decorations

3 Months in Advance

1. Arrange for hospitality
2. Distribute hospitality cards to potential hosts
3. Develop master chart of visitors and potential hosts
4. Mail letters to hosts
5. Choose candidates and notify them of support policy
6. Review conference budget
7. Confirm candidates' conference participation and interviewing process
8. Discuss veteran missionary support and interviewing process
9. Develop sign-up board for prayer commitments

2 Months in Advance

1. Prepare pastoral letter to be mailed to congregation with Faith Promise devotional
2. Secure Faith Promise devotionals
3. Evaluate committee functions and conference preparation progress
4. Set Faith Promise goal
5. Plan contents of guest packet (include information about your geographical area, your church, etc.)
6. Send final confirmation letter to conference guests
7. Finalize speakers for special events
8. Develop a spreadsheet or database of all events and missionary schedules

1 Month in Advance

1. Evaluate progress
2. Finalize hospitality procedure
3. Master chart
4. Send out meal letters
5. Send out lodging letters
6. Establish schedule of conference assignments
7. Review conference schedule, programming and personnel with the pastor
8. Prepare conference guest packets (include information about your geographical area, your church, etc.)
9. Mail pastoral letter with Faith Promise devotional
10. Finalize theme display for sanctuary
11. Finalize sign-up board for prayer commitments

3 Weeks in Advance

1. Begin distribution of conference publicity brochures to congregation on Sunday to advertise the missions conference
2. Encourage church leaders to participate in the conference

2 Weeks in Advance

1. Check with subcommittees on progress
2. Assemble conference guest packets

1 Week in Advance

1. Set order of services
2. Check with subcommittees on final details

Conference Week

1. Orientation meeting for missions conference personnel prior to launching the conference

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL MISSIONS MINISTRIES

1. **Missions Committee:** An active, organized committee that coordinates the missions ministry is absolutely essential. The committee should not see themselves as the ministry, but rather as a leader that involves the entire congregation and all its ministries.

2. **Ecclesiology:** The Bible teaches us that God loves His Church, and has commissioned it to be His primary means and end for advancing the kingdom. Missions leaders need to develop a biblical understanding of the Church and emphasize efforts that help establish churches around the world. In so doing, it is important to discern the difference between a lasting church and a temporary gathering of believers, as many ministries claim to be committed to church planting.

3. **Short Term:** One of the most effective ways of mobilizing members for missions is to send them on local and global missions projects. All participants will return with a greater heart for God's world, and some will begin to pursue missionary service. Select projects that best fit with your church's long-term vision.

4. **Prayer:** The need for more laborers was Christ's only prayer request. Churches should reflect our Lord's heart for a needy world by meaningfully and regularly including prayer throughout the ministries of the church.

5. **Sustainability:** While churches in the West should give generously to missions, they should consider how to avoid national churches' becoming overly dependent on outside resources. Dependency can stifle growth and innovation.

6. **Theology:** It is both stimulating and challenging to engage godly Christians who have developed different convictions or expressions. While encouraging the interdependence of the global body of Christ, missions ministries can also affirm a natural emphasis on planting churches that share their theological convictions.

7. **Vision:** A seemingly limitless number of opportunities will come before the missions committee. Determining which ones to pursue requires a clear sense of direction. The vision of the ministry should be carefully developed, written, and embraced by church leaders.

8. **Contextualization:** No church ministry will be more exposed to the diversity of the larger body of Christ than the missions ministry. This is cause for celebration of God's love for all peoples and affirmation that the ministry of churches in other cultures can be expressed in biblically valid and culturally indigenous forms. Missions leaders need wisdom and experience as they encounter these different expressions.

9. **Giving:** Compared to the rest of the world, churches in the West have been blessed with tremendous resources. The message of Genesis 12:3 and elsewhere is that God blesses His people *so that* they will be a blessing to others. To that end, churches should be sacrificial in their support of world missions.

10. **Partnership:** When churches collaborate with other sending churches towards shared ministry goals, far more can be accomplished. More importantly, such partnership expresses the interconnectedness that Christ desires for His body. Churches should consider how they can contribute their experience and resources to other churches, as well as grow from the relationship.

11. **Word and Deed:** As missions ministries determine which efforts to support, they should have in mind the kind of churches that are being developed. A biblical church necessarily requires a commitment to both ministries of the Word (e.g. evangelism, preaching, teaching) and deed (e.g. mercy and justice).

12. **Multiplication:** Churches should actively be involved in planting new churches. Multiplication refers to the process of beginning new churches not simply by the occasional addition of a church, but through a movement of churches planting churches, that in turn reproduce. Effective missions ministries should look to support ministries in other cultures that share this commitment.

13. **Participation:** Christ has laid the task of world evangelization in front of every believer. Thus, missions ministries should not be seen as a separate department but as leaders of the entire congregation. Church members should see the Great Commission as their personal responsibility and have some relationship with someone serving in cross-cultural missions. Mobilized churches will be identifying members to consider missionary service, who would be sent out and supported in prayer and finances by the congregation.

14. **Emphasis:** In order to maximize the impact of the missions ministry, churches should identify special areas of emphasis for long-term participation and concentrated support. Churches with such focus sites typically continue to support other missionaries. However, a higher level of promotion, recruiting and funding will go toward these emphases, as well as repeat site visits and short-term projects.

15. **Church Planting:** If the Church is God's Plan A for establishing His kingdom—and there is no Plan B—then church planting is the means of expanding that kingdom. Moreover, studies have shown that church planting is by far the most effective method of evangelism. Therefore, a majority of missions resources should be directed towards church-planting efforts.

16. **Facilitation:** Increasingly, missionaries are being sent not as primary evangelists and pastors but as facilitators to indigenous leaders. Many such leaders are looking for a peer to come alongside them for counsel, resources and connection to the global Church. Although their ministry may not be as visible as other missionaries or the nationals they serve, these new missionaries can have enormous impact and deserve to be strongly supported.

17. **Church Leadership:** A significant factor in determining the success of a missions ministry is the support of church leaders, and in particular the senior pastor. The strongest ministries describe their church leadership as champions of missions, through their personal participation and public commitment.

18. **National Leadership:** No matter how long missionaries live in another culture, they will never understand the context as well as a national. Practically, church multiplication requires the development of indigenous leaders and their primary role in the local church. Missions ministries should look to support efforts that emphasize national leadership.

19. **Education:** While an annual missions conference may be the most visible event to promote missions, churches that are the most mobilized create opportunities to educate their members about missions throughout the year. The congregation should be regularly learning about missions through such means as sermons, presentations and missions courses.

20. **Commission of Church:** God has called the Church to be His primary instrument to evangelize people, extend mercy, and transform the culture around it. Missions ministries should consider whether the efforts they support are primarily based in the local church or are separate ministries.