

# Missions Basics for the Local Church

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Every church will profit from establishing foundations, boundaries, priorities and procedures for the church's missions ministry. The following questions will help you get started.

## I. Why do we do it? (purpose or mission)

It has been said that the hardest question to ask and answer is "Why?" This is the question of purpose. The missions team answers this question in two ways:

1. **"Why do we exist?"** That is, "Why does this missions team exist?"

In its essence, the missions team exists to help church leaders carry out the missions aspect of the church's purpose. Thus the answer to this question is built on the church's stated purpose or constitution. If the church purpose statement does not clearly suggest that missions is part of purpose, then missions is a program which is justified in-so-far as it supports purposes which are clearly stated.

Examples:

*Purpose of Our Missions Program: To serve Christ we motivate, equip and involve the congregation in building God's Kingdom worldwide. Cherry Hills Community Church, Littleton, CO.*

*The International Outreach Committee is committed to sending personnel or partnering with churches and agencies to reach the unreached, minister to human needs, disciple believers into churches, equipping them to fulfill the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20 Highlands Community Church, Renton, WA*

*It is our goal to stimulate our Northwest family to a greater personal involvement in world missions. ...we desire to participate in the winning, equipping and sending of people to all inhabitants of the earth in fulfillment of Christ's commission. Northwest Church, Fresno, CA*

2. **"Why do we do missions?"** That is, "Why does our church do missions?"

This question is answered biblically and the answer may develop or spell out what is suggested in the church constitution or purpose statement. This often constitutes the first section of the missions policy.

For assistance in developing a missions purpose statement, refer to the APMC Church Missions Policy Handbook.

## II. What is missions? (definition or boundaries)

The definition establishes the boundaries. Too many missions committees find themselves dealing with too many issues of too broad a scope. Further the missions fund becomes the target for every ministry that doesn't fall logically somewhere else. The missions fund may become the "miscellaneous fund." I've heard (this is true!) of churches that have funded their new organ and paved their parking lot with missions funds because they judged these were aids to reaching unchurched people and therefore missions.

In order to clarify what qualifies for missions funding and in order to limit the workload to what is most important and manageable, it is valuable to draw boundaries. Where are the edges? What kinds of ministries, projects, and Christian workers, do not qualify for missions consideration? Your Scriptural basis for missions and your church philosophy of ministry will provide input for your definition.

Following are some questions, which may help, determine what's "in" and what's "out." After answering these questions, it may be possible to write a simple definition of missions for your church. If later on, you want to change it, you may, but in the interim you avoid having missions stretched beyond recognition by the precedent of individual decisions.

For your church, does missions include?

Ministry outside the U.S. only	or	some ministries inside the U.S. as well e.g. ministry to ethnic communities in your city
Cross-cultural ministry only	or	some same culture ministry as well e.g. ministry to college students, seminaries, retirement
Evangelism & church planting only	or	relief, development, & support ministries, as well e.g. emergency disaster relief or missionary aviation
Field ministry only	or	administration and support as well e.g. home office staff, secretaries
Spiritual ministry only	or	some social ministry as well e.g. medical or hospital or education
Social ministry with clear spiritual aims only	or	social ministry on its own as well e.g. Habitat, food pantries, crisis pregnancy center
Missionary support only	or	projects and organizations as well
Missionaries from your church or denomination only	or	other missionaries as well
Vocational ministry only	or	short term and mission trips as well
Work done only by those sent	or	work done by the congregation as well
American missionaries only	or	partnership with national Christians, national churches and organizations as well
Work done only outside the church or		work done by your church on your premises as well, e.g. community outreach events, benevolence

If the church is already well established in missions, answers to these questions can be deduced from a list of missionaries and mission work already supported by the church. A church just getting started in missions may prefer to answer these questions based on the Bible Study carried out for preparing the missions purpose statement.

You might develop a definition such as one of the following:

*"Missions at Foothills Fellowship will be defined as the responsibility of the local church to take the gospel to culturally/linguistically – distinct groups where it is not present today; making disciples, planting indigenous churches, and meeting human needs, in dependence on the spirit of God." (Foothills Fellowship, Albuquerque, NM)*

*Missions is defined as ministry undertaken outside the United States for the establishment, development and support of local congregations and the support of such ministries.*

*Missions is defined as ministry among internationals within or outside the United States for the purposes of evangelism and developing local churches.*

*Missions is disciplemaking beyond Grace Church's immediate sphere of influence for the purpose of establishing and strengthening local churches throughout the world. (Grace Church of Edina)*

*Missions is that endeavor of the local church to carry the gospel across cultural and/or geographical boundaries in order to make disciples for Christ from every group of people.” (Ward Church, Livonia, MI)*

*Missions may be defined as the sending out of specially equipped disciple-makers who cross barriers of distance, culture, or language in order to establish and strengthen the church in places beyond the normal sphere of influence of our members. Missions, then, is specially cross-cultural outreach, whereas evangelism includes sharing the gospel in one’s own culture. Missions is defined primarily by culture, rather than by geography.” (Northwest Church, Fresno, CA)*

*Missions is any endeavor aimed toward the goal of reaching beyond the needs of the local congregation for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission – by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ making disciples and relating to the whole need of mankind, both spiritual and physical. (“How Missions Minded is Your Church?” ACMC)*

*WBC Missions will include:*

*Jerusalem/Judea: ministries outside of our church facilities or programs in our community and region which focus on evangelism or discipleship*

*Samaria: ministries outside of our church facilities or programs to other cultures within our community and region which include evangelism or discipleship possibly with other services.*

*Ends of the earth: evangelism/discipling/planting churches and services to support these ministries in foreign countries. (Wheaton Bible Church, Wheaton, IL)*

*We define missions as reaching people with the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, whether locally or overseas. (New Life in Christ Church, Fredericksburg, VA)*

### **III. Where are we headed? (vision or strategy)**

Vision and strategy are two quite different things but they both give direction and focus to the missions ministry. They help you decide what to give preference and priority.

Vision is a clear, detailed mental picture of a future you hope to achieve. It is narrow, specific, and focused. When God shows church leaders what He wants the church to accomplish in missions, it can be a clear trumpet call to the congregation to devote themselves wholeheartedly to that goal. A missions effort propelled by vision most frequently occurs in a purpose-driven church led by a strong leader. For assistance in developing a missions vision, refer to the ACMC handbook, *Building Global Vision*.

Strategy is a general direction to pursue. Many churches have been doing missions a long time and have many interests, projects and missionaries working in various ministries and locations. Church leaders often desire that future missionary efforts they undertake will address clear needs with effective methods by capable personnel in cooperation with approved partners. They want to focus the direction of new missionary efforts according to guidelines developed in advance. These ministry objectives are their strategies. For assistance in developing missions strategies and goals, refer to the ACMC *Global Access Planner*.

### **IV. How do we do it? (policies and procedures)**

Policies and procedures help us organize ourselves and conduct our business in an orderly and systematic manner. The “missions policy” is an overall document that includes the above philosophical

issues as well as the structure, operation, and job descriptions of the missions leadership team as well as guidelines for how missions is conducted and missions income is generated, budgeted and spent. The policy may also include principles regarding relationships and responsibilities with supported missionaries and mission organizations; missions education and promotion, congregational involvement, conducting short term missions trips; engaging in local missions ministries, and mobilization efforts to help other churches in missions. For assistance in developing a missions policy, see the *ACMC Church Missions Policy Handbook*.