

Organizing Your Church's Missions Committee

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Introduction

- A. Oh, no! Not another committee! Organizations of all kinds have a proliferation of committees and sub-committees. Sometimes I think we drown in them. However, some committees are essential, in order to break the work down into manageable units for review and planning. One such vital committee is a church's missions committee or ministry. In the past, if a church had missionaries, their work was directed by the elders as a body or by a person selected by the elders. If there were no elders, a preacher often coordinated the mission program. In some cases there was no coordinating structure at all.
- B. Today, on the whole, we are better organized. We are committee-committed. In fact, we cannot do anything around the church anymore without a committee to plan and implement it. Larger churches, at least, have a missions committee or ministry. Some have a minister who serves exclusively as missions coordinator, his assignment including international campaigns, medical missions and other specialized areas of missions. Experience teaches us that the churches with the greatest impact on the world's lost are those that appoint a qualified group of people to coordinate their missions outreach.
- C. In the process of organizing a missions committee, we have sometimes erred. Let us take as an example our own Edmond missions committee. We have countless ministries, missions being just one of them. It has a deacon, appointed by the elders, serving as chairman. He answers directly to the elders. This seems to be a workable arrangement. However, the system has some weaknesses in it:
 1. The committee is made up of any member, male or female, who has an interest in missions. Sounds reasonable, doesn't it? But there is a problem here. Some of the committee members have international and/or missions experience, while others know little or nothing about missions. Yet they are making decisions about the work and fate of several families on the field as well as the churches they have brought into being. This committee is charged with administering perhaps a six-figure missions budget.
 2. This has proved to be problematic. We had one missionary who had served in a domestic field for 25 years and his congregation had grown to the point at which it should have been self-supporting. It was the thing to do to visit him during hunting season. He had no guidelines or cut-off date. It appeared he was in with our congregation for life. We decided, after much soul-searching, to turn his support over to his congregation, which was already providing much of it.
 3. Our problem was that we had no missions policy, plans or goals. This has since been corrected, perhaps overly-so. Now all of our missionaries are expected to bring their work to maturity in seven years, 10 if the circumstances indicate an extension. Their progress will be reviewed annually. They are expected to have a plan and work the plan. They are expected to encourage their mission church to become self-sustaining and self-propagating.
 4. We are finding, however, that this cookie-cutter approach doesn't work for some of our missionaries. Those who serve a broader field in church planting, publishing, radio and TV, leadership training and the like must be given more latitude. Now we're taking a second look at our plan, for at least three of our missionaries are in this category.



5. We're a work in progress, but what we have learned perhaps can be of help to your mission program and committee. Here are some suggestions:

How to Organize a Missions Committee in Our Church

- A. Secure the blessings of the elders and preacher or ministerial staff.
 1. Share your concern for the lost with the elders and communicate to them your vision of a functioning missions committee, preferably in a brief written proposal.
 2. Offer your services to help set up the committee. Be one who is ready to serve, rather than one who only offers suggestions.
 3. Make sure the preacher or ministerial staff is on board with you. They can play an important role in making this ministry succeed.
 4. Communicate regularly with the elders and staff on your progress.
- B. Determine if your mission work is to be a ministry in its own right or an adjunct of an outreach ministry.
- C. Decide if missions are to be coordinated by a missions minister, an elder or deacon.
- D. Screen the congregation for those with missions or at least overseas experience. They are more likely to have a feel for different world views, cultures, religions, missions challenges and church situation in other countries than those who have never been abroad.
- E. Select the committee with care, balancing it by age, gender and leadership capacity. Yes, there should be some women on the committee. Only they can identify with the specific problems faced by women on the field. Choose committee members who are willing to limit their involvement in other areas of church life in order to dedicate themselves to the rigorous demands of this ministry.
- F. Encourage these members to take missions courses, attend missions seminars or conferences, such as this one, study missions philosophy and strategy, and learn about diverse world views and cross-cultural tensions. Abilene Christian University has an annual Summer Missions Seminar that is well worth attending. It is designed for both missionaries and those working with them.
- G. With the help of the elders, choose a missions chairman who is a proven servant and administrator and who has a growing understanding of and burden for missions.
- H. Develop a missions policy and guidelines. This document should include goals, timelines and projected stay on the field for each missionary supported. It should consider the type or types of mission work to be done by the congregation. It should include methods of communication with the missionaries and schedules for visiting them, as well as for their visiting their sponsoring and supporting churches. It should include procedures to follow in case of serious illness, death, epidemic, drought, flood, earthquake, fire, insurrection, war, or even a hostage situation involving the missionary family. It should make provision to aid the family in the education of its children. These guidelines should be approved by the committee, submitted to the elders for their approval and then shared both with the congregation and the missionaries. Assistance in preparing your missions policy can be provided by the Missions Policy Handbook available from the Missions Resource Network.
- I. Meet monthly and even more often in a time of crisis on the field. Schedule the regular meetings for a year ahead. Plan the meetings well, making them as informative and inspiring as possible. Allow time for a high level of prayer on behalf of this ministry, which reaches far beyond the local church. Expect all of the members to be present for the meetings.

- J. Build a mission program to submit to the elders for approval. This means screening all requests and researching likely people and fields. When we decided to go to Brazil, we had no support and not even a lead for support. A large church heard of our intention and contacted us. It was searching for a specialist in publications to send with a team to a receptive field. We filled the bill and were fully supported for 20 years. If the committee has a policy, guidelines and goals, it can then seek the personnel it needs to meet the parameters described in the policy statement. Some opportunity that appears to be God-given may come along and should be given the most serious attention. We don't want to be guilty of being left behind when a real door of opportunity opens before us. This means flexibility to allow for special opportunities. Occasionally a worthy appeal is presented and should be considered, but appeals should not be the tail wagging the dog of missions.
- K. Develop a missions budget to present to the elders. This budget should include essential cost-of-living adjustments for those on the field, along with salary, working fund and other expenses. It should provide money for leaves, health insurance, the children's schooling and retirement. It may need to include a vehicle and updated computer. It should also include a contingency fund for emergencies and special opportunities. The missions budget is a major item and should be developed with the utmost diligence. In addition to this budget, some churches take up an annual missions contribution, raising in some cases a six-figure gift or even more. Some churches also encourage the members to include missions in their estates.
- L. Assign a coordinator for each missionary on the field. This person will maintain continued communication with the missionary and report on his and the field's situation monthly at the committee meetings. In this way a strong link with the field can be maintained and shared. The coordinator helps the missionary plan his or her furloughs, takes an active part in helping to resolve problems or crises on the field and arranges for someone from the eldership or committee or both to visit the field at regular intervals. This person is the missionary's lifeline, in a sense, with the sponsoring and supporting church.
- M. Schedule missionary campaigns to the field at the discretion of the missionary involved. Recruit members of the committee and church to go on the campaign. Help the campaigners prepare for the trip and see that daily prayer goes up for them while they are gone.
- N. Plan an annual missions banquet or fair. It could be held after services on a Sunday night or at some other appropriate time. This event, again, should be carefully planned for maximum impact on the members. It must be inspirational. If a missionary family can be present, that is all to the good. At Edmond we emphasize one field a year at our annual banquet and try to work it around a missionary family's leave.
- O. Keep the missionaries before the congregation. Each Sunday we picture all of our missionaries on the overhead screens in the auditorium. We also publish a general missions newsletter at intervals for the congregation and include in the church bulletin special news from the field.
- P. Educate the local church about God's mission to the world. Bring a missions seminar to the church building for general congregational participation. Find creative ways to encourage teachers and preachers to emphasize missions.
- Q. Prepare an orientation notebook for the missions ministry. It should consist of your policy statement, definition of terms, a review of the mission work and goals of the church, and a list of basic readings on missions. Require new members to read and digest this information before they begin voting on vital missions issues.

Conclusion

George Will was once asked on a talk show, "Mr. Will, what do you think about football?" Will responded, "Football is a mistake. It combines the two worst elements of American life: violence and committee meetings."

We may recoil at the idea of committees, but a missions committee should be far more than just long discussion and little action. It should be an essential and vital ministry that performs important service for the congregation and its Lord. It should be a blue-ribbon ministry.

According to David Mays, in his book, *How to Operate an Effective Missions Leadership Team in Your Church*, the successful missions ministry understands and takes very seriously its task. It recruits the right people for the ministry and for mission. It creates a learning environment. It becomes a team that enjoys being together. It forms work groups. It prepares a thorough missions policy. It sets measurable, accountable, reachable and timed goals. It makes the elders and ministers (and the whole church), along with the missionaries, look and act like heroes. It aims for excellence. Missions have had a reputation for mediocrity. The blue-ribbon missions committee makes missions visible and of top quality and importance. Its story is told often and is personalized. Finally, the blue-ribbon missions committee does not give up.

This is a laudable description of the successful missions committee. Please take these suggestions to heart. Don't just sit on them or set them in a file somewhere. One time while on the field, some of my sponsoring elders complained that I wasn't sending reports to them. One spoke up and said, "Yes, he does. They are in a file on the office!" Don't let this happen. Do something with them. Make your missions ministry a team of people with a passion for the lost worldwide. Anything less than this is not worthy of our calling.

Class Handout:

Organizing Your Church Missions Committee

Some errors in setting up a committee

- Made up of anyone who has an interest in missions.
- No missions policy, plans or goals.
- If a plan is in place, it is often cookie-cutter, making all missions efforts fit it.

How to better organize a missions committee

- Secure the blessings of the elders, preacher, ministerial staff.
- Offer to help set up the committee.
- Communicate with elders and staff on your progress.
- Determine if your mission work is to be a ministry or an adjunct to an existing ministry.
- Screen the congregation for those with missions and/or overseas experience.
- Select the committee with care.
- Encourage committee members to take missions courses, sit in on seminars.
- Choose a missions chairman who is a proven servant and administrator.
- Develop a missions policy and guidelines.
- Meet monthly and even more often in a time of crisis on the field.
- Build a mission program to submit to the elders for approval.
- Develop a missions budget to present to the elders.
- Assign a coordinator for each missionary on the field.
- Schedule missionary campaigns to the field.
- Plan an annual missions banquet or fair.
- Keep the missionaries before the congregation.
- Educate the church about God's mission to the world.
- Prepare an orientation notebook for the missions ministry.

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