

Missions and the Local Church

Practical Guidelines



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MISSIONS AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

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Our age seems to be characterized by a "crossroads" philosophy. The media of communication proclaim the democracy is at the crossroads. They say that the free world is at the crossroads, engaged in a fatal combat with Communism. On every hand men are saying that missions are likewise at the crossroads.

Unlike other crises, missions are always at the crossroads. Democracy, totalitarianism, and western culture may come to a crossroad occasionally, but from the very beginning, missions have been in crises--and they shall ever be in crises. Competing forces have always pressed down upon missionary endeavor, yet in every day and age the nature and function of missions is the same. We must admit that never in the history of mankind has the outlook for the furtherance of missions been ideal. Competing forces such as paganism, Romanism, materialism, and Communism have always pressed down and in upon the endeavor of men to carry on mission work. The Church, however, is not troubled by bad circumstances--or at least it should not be--but its hope is derived from the Lord of the Church in whose service it is engaged and for whose glory it labors. One day the Church will no longer be militant but rather triumphant and at rest; missions will no longer be at the crossroads, and its job will be completed.¹

At this point it would be well to raise the elementary, yet all-important question about missions: Why should churches attempt to take the Christian religion to other men and women in

¹Harold Lindsell, Missionary Principles and Practices (New York, 1955), p. 13ff.

the world? Any missionary work which has not faced and answered this question satisfactorily is not properly grounded nor will it endure when shocks and tests come. Because the Bible is our rule of faith and practice, we should be able to prove from the Scriptures that missions are legitimate. That missions should be a vital factor in a church program, that it is a necessity to have missions, is well attested scripturally. The last words which the Lord spoke to His disciples, as recorded by Matthew, are very definite on this point. They are, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. 28:19). Generally we call this the Great Commission, the Church's marching orders. This passage certainly makes it clear that Jesus Himself imposed upon the disciples and His followers the task of missionary work. Then again in the first chapter of Acts, where is recorded the narrative of the Ascension of our Risen Lord, we note the unmistakable utterance, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me...unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8). Thus, without looking at the vast amount of other Scripture that deals with missions, from the emphatic parting messages of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Church's task is clear--its main task--its responsibility and its privilege.²

Too often there has been a tendency to look upon missions as a supplementary matter to be added to other ecclesiastical tasks of the pastor or perhaps a church group; however, the

²Herbert Waldo Hines, Missionary Education in the Local Church (New York, 1925), pp. 2-3.

whole church, every member of it, should be made to see the proper place which missions should have in his life, and every function and activity of the church must of necessity be geared to give an understanding of missions and further the carrying out of the Lord's commission. In all our thinking we should always keep in the foreground these two fundamental facts: (1) The problem of evangelizing the world is God's--not forced upon him but undertaken by Him "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in our Lord Jesus Christ"; and (2) in the solution of this problem of salvation God has limited Himself to human cooperation.³

In God's divine plan, every church must have an overseer, a pastor or shepherd. He is, in a very real sense, a missionary himself, and it falls upon him to instruct the members of his church concerning missions. He is the true and actual leader of the church. The policies and activities of a church are greatly dependent upon the pastor of that church; therefore it is a fact that he holds the key to missionary service. He must be well informed.⁴

First, the pastor must be convinced that missions are scriptural. He should be well acquainted with the history of missions as well as the missionary work that is being carried on. It is essential that he subscribes to several periodicals of mission

³ John F. Goucher, Growth of the Missionary Concept (New York, 1911), p. 12.

⁴ Helen Barrett Montgomery, The Preaching Value of Missions (Philadelphia, 1931), p. 135.

agencies. If the pastor, for example, then calls attention to these periodicals, assigns various members to report in prayer-meetings what they found most interesting in the last number, soon the interest in missions will grow among his people. Also, the pastor needs missionary books, books which he can read, review, and recommend to his people. He should have contact with the missionaries his church supports and also others, and thus understand their needs, which he, in turn, will present before the church. A good knowledge of various mission boards and agencies is also important. The pastor should know their policies, practices, purposes, and much other information, which he would utilize in properly guiding those of his members who seek help along these lines or feel that they are called to mission work. Then also, he should work with missionaries, helping them arrange a schedule in his area and giving them proper time in his program when they come for the presentation of missions.

The New Testament is plain in its teaching that missions is the work of the local church. As Paul and Barnabas were sent out by their church, so should missionaries in our day be send out by the church. There are a number of general things of which the pastor should be careful to instruct his people. First of all, they ought to know the needs of the missionaries; their vision should be broad enough and increase to encompass the whole need of missions, not only that of one particular area. This would also include a knowledge of new missionary candidates and developments on the fields. Each member has the responsibility before the Lord to support missions to the best of his ability; furthermore, there should be provisions for giving and doing other than the monthly

support promised to missionaries and mission agencies. Another important factor is that there should be room for enlargement of the church's budget, to take on the support of other missionaries or mission projects without the dropping of some to take on these. As far as missionary giving and vision is concerned, no church should be stagnant.⁵

Lack of missionary interest and activities on the part of church members is often due to lack of knowledge. They cannot be expected to work, give, or pray for missions if they are not aware of the need, the nature of the programs, of the missionaries' efforts and achievements, and the relationship between missions and world affairs. Moreover, new members are constantly coming into the church, and it is the church's responsibility and privilege to acquaint them with missions and make them co-workers in reaching out to evangelize the world. One author well stated, dealing with the promotion of missions within the church,

Sustained missionary interest and endeavor in a church are not the result of devices, but of a carefully planned and faithfully executed educational program. It is not enough for a church to have a strong missionary history. Education in missions...is part of the total program of Christian education, for it is based on the Bible and is fundamental to the building of complete Christian experience. Enlightenment and enlistment in the field of missions are part of the process of Christian growth. So they have a place in the curriculum of Christian education. Promotion of Christian stewardship should be taught and practiced as part of this same program.⁶

In view of all this, every church needs a well-organized

⁵"A Missionary-Minded Church," Symposium, Edwin Du Bois, p. 4.

⁶Dorothy A. Stevens, Missionary Education in a Baptist Church (Philadelphia, 1953), pp. 20-21.

to promote missions and to bring the need of missions before all the people. To carry out a good missionary program, every church should have a missionary committee. This committee is usually made up of representatives from different groups within the church: the men's class, women's class, young married people's class or group, Junior and Intermediate Young People, and Senior Young People. Young people should be included in the membership of the committee, for it will provide good training for them to share in the development of the plan, but also they will often make valuable suggestions.

Each group selects a representative and the pastor acts as chairman. All of these members should be vitally interested in the missionary work of the church, or at least be willing to become informed and go ahead to produce results. The pastor, or some one else who is appointed as chairman, if the pastor cannot hold this position, must be capable of working harmoniously with the other representatives. He should seek to lead the committee to have a regular time of meeting, preferable once a month.⁷

As soon as the missionary committee has been appointed, he should prepare it for its work by putting in the hands of its members certain materials and information about missions in general and especially G. A. R. B. C. approved missions. The committee then is active in planning missionary programs and conferences for the church. Also it will help in making various contacts with missionaries and mission agencies. An excellent idea along these lines would be that each group or Bible class take

⁷Hines, op. cit., p. 22.

one G. A. R. B. C.-approved mission for a year and promote this. Then each year the group can select a different mission to promote.

The committee has certain responsibilities toward the class or group. It is important that the committee secures time in the monthly meetings of their respective groups to promote missions. In these meetings, offerings should be taken to promote a project for the year. Also, part of the money can be used for speakers who represent a mission, at the group meeting or at special church meetings. Then whatever the balance is at the end of the year can be put into the missionary conference and all groups start fresh with a new mission and a new project. Suggested projects include purchase of such articles as tape recorders, lanterns, record player, P. A. system, washing machine, tool kits, hospital gowns, quilts, bandages, clothing, books, school supplies, medicine, toys, cars, trucks, etc. Likewise, the committee can make lists of addresses of the missionaries and distribute them to the group, one to each member, and the person is asked to write to that missionary and pray for him every day of the month. Letters which are received in return can then be read at the meetings each month.

As has been mentioned previously, it is important that people have a thorough knowledge of missions to have a zeal to promote them. Thus the missionary committee should take it upon itself to secure information about the mission and report it to the class. This would include

- (1) The full name of the mission.
- (2) The date of the founding.
- (3) The name of the founder.
- (4) The number of major fields--also noting fields in which

- the mission has no work.
- (5) The location of the home office, its director and officers.
 - (6) The policies and practices of the mission.
 - (7) Native customs.
 - (8) The missionaries' problems: spiritual, physical, and material.
 - (9) Publications of the mission. (Perhaps every member could subscribe to the mission magazine and then pass it on.)⁸

After this information has been gathered, posters can be assigned containing the material and may be displayed in a room for the benefit of all. It would be a good idea to have contests between the different groups to see which can make the most interesting poster. Groups also can make missionary prayer notebooks, including small pictures, names and addresses, and the prayer requests on the back side of each page. In this manner, through the combined effort of all the church groups, missions can become a vital part of all the church life and is constantly kept before the eyes of the people.

One of the main functions of the missionary committee is its planning for the annual missionary conference. The committee can write to the different mission boards and ask for the name and schedule of the missionaries who are home on furlough. Then, when word comes, these missionaries which the committee has chosen should be contacted well in advance to determine if they are able to come to the conference. The missionary conference should be the highlight of the church year. It needs to be well advertized in town. It is most profitable if the missionaries are entertained by members of the church, because this will bring

⁸Roland Allen, The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church (London, 1927), p. 3.

church people in close contact with missionaries and a better knowledge of the lives and needs of missionaries, as well as real spiritual blessings. The program of the missionary conference itself will be decided by the committee and should be varied and of interest to everybody.

The class or group which is represented in the committee has also certain responsibilities. The people should pray, give, and cooperate. They should work, making their mission known to the church through posters, displays, and curios. These curios and other displays can be exhibited every time there is a conference or even more frequently than this. Attendance at all meetings is important and mission representatives should get loyal support.

The missionary himself plays an important part in the promotion of missions. The people's attitude toward missions will much depend on how well he will present the field, the way he presents the needs, and the challenging messages he brings. It is a good idea if he suggests projects for the group. Good pictures as a means of presenting the work and the need are very necessary. Perhaps one of the main objects in the missionaries' dealing with people should be--apart from getting support--the obtaining of prayer warriors, people who will faithfully lift him up before the Throne of Grace through the years.⁹

After the missionary is back on the field, it is his responsibility to write letters--usually prayer letters--to those who support him. Also, he should answer all private letters, as

⁹Du Bois, op. cit., p. 4.

far as possible, to keep in touch with the people in the home churches and make missions that much more real to them.

Mission boards play an important part in the relationship of the church to the missionary. Our G. A. R. B. C.-approved mission boards have the policy--and rightly so--to forward any specially designated money or gifts to the missionary for whom it is intended, instead of pooling the money. By "personalizing" missionaries in that way--making it possible for churches to have their "own" missionaries--much interest is gained and the whole missionary cause is helped. The ladies in the churches enjoy preparing bandages, old clothing, Christmas boxes, and other items for missionaries, and this is above the promised support.

Mission boards need to get printed materials distributed to the churches. Posters, brochures, tracts, books, biographies, appeals, and prayer calendars are employed by the boards. Visual aids have done more to impress the people and to acquaint them with missions than all written material put together. By slides, by black and white and color film many mission boards have brought graphically to its people the story of missionary enterprise.¹⁰

Another facet in the relation of mission boards to the churches are finances. May it only be said that the pastor should be well aware of the fact that mission boards too need to be supported. Proper provisions should be made by each church to give a certain amount of money to the mission board too.

There are two important factors against which the pastor

¹⁰Lindsell, op. cit., pp. 133-135.

must be on the lookout and about which the people should be instructed. It is quite frequently the case that missionaries, looking for support, will bring a highly-emotional message to the congregation, moving them with pity to tears, and more than that--the real reason for the message--motivating them to shower the missionary with money. This is harmful, and missionaries of this type should be treated with caution. A common error among church people pertains to their credibility and even gullibility as for as their attitude concerning missionaries is concerned. Missionaries are looked upon as super-Christians and ultra-spiritual, people who can do no wrong. Therefore it is the exception rather than the rule that missionaries are asked by the church to give an account of their work on the field. But it is important that they do this. Dedicated missionaries will not mind this type of inquiry in the least; just the opposite, they will gladly relate the nature of their service and the use to which the church money was put. Pastors and churches have this responsibility to see that the Lord's money is properly used.

It need hardly be said that learning about missions should start in a person's life as early as possible. The Bible school is one of the most effective means by which young people, as well as older people, can be made to learn about mission.

Children of Cradle Roll age are too young for direct instruction. The aim in this period should be to control their environment--practically limited to home--to give them ability to develop the right attitude. It is important therefore that the parents have a proper attitude towards missions.

Education of Beginners should be planned in view of the physical and mental characteristics of the child. Their strong and active curiosity makes it possible to interest the child in new and unfamiliar things if they are related to their own experience, and their imagination provides them with a world of make-believe. Missionary stories with pictures, flannelgraph, and objects relating to child life are most helpful in illustrating lessons. Children of that age should be instructed in giving and their pennies should be given for some specific thing with which they are familiar, for example, a dress or some toys for a little boy in Africa.

The aim of missionary education with Primary children is to give them a knowledge of God and His love for all the other people in the world. The needs of these people should be presented, and this should cause the children to show acts of kindness. Their reasoning power is better developed and as they enter school, their contacts and associations multiply. Group activities can be now planned for them, such as making missionary posters and sand-table work of mission places in which they are interested. Missionary stories should have more plot and action. As far as giving is concerned, they should be taught that real giving means the use of money that has been earned or saved from their own funds.

The Junior-age is the time during which habits are formed and attitudes and modes of conduct are being acquired. The Junior begins to form his ideals based upon the conduct of those whom he admires. Missionary stories and biographies are therefore

good material. Scenes and customs of other lands appeal to Juniors. Missionary models of oriental homes, churches, dolls dressed in native costumes, made by the pupils will test whether they have gained clear and definite impressions from reading or study. Specific prayer for missionaries should be encouraged, and the students should be encouraged to form the habit of regular, systematic giving, for definite projects they wish to choose.¹¹

Adolescence is divided into three periods, early, middle, and later adolescence and each period builds upon and develops the capacities and tendencies of the previous stage. One must also keep in mind the differences between boys and girls of these ages. This period is the birth time of personality and "crystallization of character" toward good or evil. The powers of thought and reason is greatly increased and emotions are a strong factor during this early period. Basic for missionary education should be the Biblical teachings concerning missions and their relation to the young person himself. Regular missionary programs, planned by the students themselves, with missionary speakers, mission themes and songs, should be part of the regular training. Reading of missionary books should be greatly encouraged, and each student should be taught his responsibility to missions.

It has been said that the marked difference between maturity and youth is the relative unchangeableness to which we come when we are "grown up." As a result, it is often taken for granted that the only chance for education is in childhood and youth,

¹¹Herbert Wright Gates, Missionary Education in the Church (Chicago, 1928), p. 184ff.

and adults are regarded as hopeless. But, of course, there is a definite need for adult education.

Certain characteristics of adult life, as compared with youth, must be considered to determine the choice of material and methods to educate adults, especially along the lines of mission. Adults have wider experience, their habits are more firmly established, and major interests have become more established. There are many adults in Bible school classes who seldom come to church services and who need the knowledge and vision of missions. It would therefore be very expedient to set aside a Sunday at least every quarter or perhaps even every month on which the whole time will be taken up with teaching and material relative to missions.¹²

An effective way of keeping missions before the Bible school classes would be to set aside a Sunday every month as missionary Sunday, on which all the classes are combined for about twenty minutes during which missionary letters are read and information is given about a certain missionary, to whom then is also designated the combined offering.

Although proper missionary education of young people will produce desired results as far as a vision and understanding of missions is concerned, yet the summer camp is one place where they learn more about missions as far as a challenge is concerned than perhaps anywhere else. There they are continually in close contact with the missionaries, and the challenging messages and camp fire services move many of the young people to dedicate their

¹²Ibid., p. 175ff.

lives to Christ and even obey the Lord's call to go to the mission field. This is one of the reasons why a church should make provisions to send young people to good Bible camps each summer. It can be assured that this will pay rich dividends.

In promoting missions within a local church it is essential to have effective methods and materials. Every church should have a library with many missionary books of interest for the young and old. This can include books and magazines on travel, types of work, biographies and autobiographies of missionaries, discussions of the aims and motives of missions, and missionary fiction.

Posters are always effective if they meet some simple standards such as unity, clarity, brevity, accuracy, appeal, and attractiveness. They may be used to promote missions and even the church library itself, for a library is of value only when it is used.

Exhibits and museum collections may include almost anything from a collection of curios to a display of work done by pupils as demonstrations of what they have done. There maybe the permanent exhibit or museum, including curios, costumes, works of art, household implements, weapons, and other objects illustrating the life of the people. Then there may be also exhibitions of the work of a class or young people's group.¹³

This is a map-minded age and everywhere men make large use of maps. Yet the church, that has had a world-wide mission through

¹³Ibid., pp. 125-127.

the centuries, is still poorly supplied with maps. A church should have many good maps. A map may show where missionaries are and keep missionary prayer partners before the eyes. Also, to interpret mission studies, maps are absolutely necessary. A large, mounted world map, contrastingly colored is the map for a church. A well-lettered missionary quotation along the top will help give missionary meaning to the church.¹⁴

Now that we have somewhat discussed the means and methods of promoting missions in the local church, there remains one more part of the promoting which should be discussed in more detail--giving. It is the pastor's holy duty to teach his people the scriptural principles of stewardship.

Many of our Lord's parables and other teachings were relative to giving. His disciples were taught that their money was not their own to spend as they liked. The New Testament gives the testimony that the teachers of the early Church understood and incalculated this. We are told that "not one of them considered anything his personal property" (Acts 4:32). They held their property ready for disposal in God's service and parted with it when need became apparent (Phil. 4:16). Also relief was sent to needy Christians at home and abroad. But Christian stewardship implies also the giving of ourselves to God. We are His by creation and redemption. "Ye are not your own," said Paul to the Corinthnians, "ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God with your bodies and spirits which are his." (I. Cor. 6:20). Because we are His we must realize that God has also

¹⁴Stevens, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

a plan for each one of us. Thus it must be a part of the missionary program to point out to men that it is their responsibility to do that to which God has called them--whether it is laboring on the mission field or working at home. In either case the efforts should be directed in reaching men and women with the message of salvation.¹⁵

In view of all the methods and systems of promotion of missions, let none of us suppose that missionary passion comes of knowing intimately the foreign fields. It comes of knowing God, who "so loved the world"--not only a part of it--"that he gave his only begotten Son," who "is the propitiation for our sins, and not ours only, but also the sins of the whole world." And it is up to the shepherd of the flock, the pastor, to bring the people to a better knowledge of their God and Savior Jesus Christ. The pastor is the key to missionary success, and every administrator should understand that the success or failure of the missionary program of the local church depends on the minister of the church. He can be a strong advocate for missions, and by the stress he places on it and the methods he employs he can either build or break a missionary church.¹⁶ The only way he will combat materialism and all the satanic forces that would hinder the development and progress of missions is through the impassionate preaching of the whole Word. No essays about birds and trees and the big out-of-doors will meet the situation. No book reviews of great novels or recent poetry will do. No eloquent essays

¹⁵Montgomery, op. cit., pp. 152-154.

¹⁶Lindsell, op. cit., p. 135.

about the secondary concerns of Christianity will turn the tide of men's hearts to their redeemer and the call of missions. Only one thing will do and that is the holding up of a Savior who is able to save unto the uttermost all that come to Him through faith. The old gospel needs to be shown as still the wonder-working gospel of the Grace of God. Men still need to be seen in all their sin and weakness crying out for the Living God, whom they shall permit to lead their lives.

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