QUESTIONS 5: CHURCH MISSION STRATEGY

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Category: Observations

What should a church world mission strategy look like?

Of course, this begs the question as to why a church should have a mission strategy in the first place, so let me deal with that before I get to the main question.

The world is big; really big and there are lots of different things happening. It is impossible for even the largest congregation to be involved in everything, so churches have to choose what sort of ministries they will support. It is better to make this choice in a prayerful considered manner rather than on a whim or in response to a random visiting missionary. My own observations (call me cynical, if you like) is that many churches make their mission decisions on the basis of which mission agencies have the biggest advertising budget and I'm far from convinced that this is a good thing for anyone (including for the mission agencies). The bottom line is that all churches will have some way of determining how they support (or not) world mission, but it's better that this is done in a thought-through way, rather than by default.

A mission strategy also allows church members to learn and get involved in supporting work in one place, rather than being faced with a constant churn of information that they can never get a hold of.

A church mission strategy should shape the following:

- **Who or what should be the focus of the Church's missionary prayer slots.** For many smaller congregations, this might be all that they can reasonably do, but having a focussed prayer time for mission can help to create engagement and enthusiasm.
- **Which visiting speakers are invited to the church.** Missionaries and agencies are forever looking for opportunities to visit churches and to build there support bases. The sheer volume of requests can put pressure on church leaders who feel that they should allow someone to come and speak. It is also true that it is useful to invite a missionary speaker to come when the pastor is on holiday - someone needs to do the preaching. Having a mission support strategy means that the church is in a place to actually invite people to come and address the issues that the congregation is involved in supporting and random requests for speaking slots can be legitimately refused.
- **The Church's policy for supporting short-term mission trips.Â** They should, in some way, fit the church's broader strategy.
- **The Church's policy for supporting long-term missionaries.Â** Again, this should fit in with the broader strategy of work that the church supports.

Or to put it another way, don't do stuff which isn't in your strategy (but leave a little wiggle room for special cases).

The strategy itself should be relatively brief and easily grasped by the whole congregation, It doesn't need to go into details of how missionary candidates will be selected and levels of financial support. There may be a need for supporting documents to cover this, but keep your main strategy simple.

Basically, it should cover no more than two things; geography and ministry types (and you may want to forget geography).

Geography

Some churches like to focus their efforts on a particular country or part of the world. My onlyÂ *caveat* would be that this often means that people focus on places that they know, rather than on lesser known places of equal or greater need. For instance, many British churches take a deep interest in East Africa, but very few ever consider the Central African Republic.

Ministry Type

I would suggest that this, rather than geography, should be the driving force behind the church's strategy.

- **The Unreached**: all churches which call themselves evangelical should have some sort of focus (regular prayer, supporting mission partners, ...) on those parts of the world where there are no Christians and only limited gospel witness. We can and should, support other sorts of work, but we cannot ignore this one.

- **Bible Ministry**: this should also be a priority, whether it is supporting Bible translation and distribution (which I would strongly encourage) or training Christians around the world to handle and teach the Bible so that they can reach out to others.
- **Social Action**: It is right and proper that Christians should support social action - relief of poverty, medical work, advocacy etc... - but ideally, this should take place within a holistic framework which includes evangelism, Bible ministry and so on. I believe that churches need to think long and hard before supporting social action which is disconnected from a holistic approach to mission.

There are lots of other types of ministry that a church might want to get involved in such as support for persecuted Christians, student ministry worldwide and so on. However, I would suggest that it is wise not to spread yourself too thinly. Two or three areas of focus are probably enough for most congregations and the unreached should always be in there. Of course, it is possible to combine some areas; Bible translation and the unreached are an obvious one, or student ministry and Bible ministry go well together.

Developing a Strategy

If one of the aims is to involve and enthuse the congregation, then they should be involved in helping to develop the strategy. Build on existing commitments and enthusiasms, seeing how they overlap and eventually focus on a limited number of ministries and perhaps a limited number of regions. Developing a mission strategy is not simply a management task, you need to build in times for prayer and listening to what the Spirit is saying to you. By all means use a flipchart and the tools

for strategy development that you find in business, but don't be limited by them. Depending on the size of the church, it may be necessary to delegate the development and implementation of the strategy to a small group - but the minister should always take a public lead in supporting the mission.

There is a lot more that could and should be said, but I want to keep this post to a manageable length. In closing, if any church would like help to develop a mission strategy, or would like someone to review and comment on their current documentation regarding mission support, I would be more than happy to chat to them. I promise not to push any particular mission agency (not even my own) or initiative.

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