

Building the Home-Base for Global Outreach

“The kingdom of God is a new order founded on the fatherly love of God, on redemption, justice, and fellowship. It is meant to enter into all of life, all nations, and all policies till the kingdom of this world become the kingdom of our Lord.”

Eric Liddess/World Shapers

by Howard Foltz

The worldwide missions enterprise rests squarely on the shoulders of the hometown missions base we call the local church. The adequacy of the local church is built upon the faith walk of the Christians at home base.

In 1987, a Minneapolis church felt reluctant to “lose” their pastor for three weeks when he had been invited to make an on-site inspection of a Bible translation project that the church had been heavily supporting in Indonesia. Finally, the congregation did take that step of faith, not only allowing the pastor to go, but actually began working hard to raise the funds for the trip as well as provide prayer covering.

The church became much more aware of their ministry to Indonesians and have a growing sense of their ability to work with God to really make a difference in the world. This growing sense of purpose produced tremendous benefits and the whole congregation is now more excited than ever about their growing role in world missions. Today this church is trusting God enough to release their pastor to serve part-time, outside their congregation, as a facilitator of other churches’ mission programs. *Mere intellectual assent to the value of missions has been replaced by a real heartbeat for missions, the distinctive earmark of a world class mission church.*

In this article, I want to outline God’s battle plan for winning men, women and children from all nations—all people groups—for His kingdom. We will examine some of the barriers that exist in today’s world which together form a great wall that blocks our efforts to bring Christ to about half of the peo-

ples of the world. God’s solution to the barriers is not just modern communications or more technology, as some may suppose. The real barrier is more basic and more invisible than modern technology. Key to overcoming the barriers is the work of the Holy Spirit in each church—every community of believers—responding to the biblical battle plan and to the current state of the global village in which we all live. The work of God’s Spirit is the heart of what I call a “missions sending church.” Let us look at a missions church, first of all ruling out what it is not.

From the biblical perspective, the church is not a building, neither does the essence of a church reside in its departments and programs. Secular businesses and social organizations have buildings and have departments and programs, but that does not make them churches. In the same way, the structure of a church does not make it a church. Rather, *a church is a local gathering of God’s people who are “built up” by God’s work in them and among them.* Essentially, a church is not the visible institution or structure, but rather *a living organism that is the result of divinely networked relationships—members together forming God’s family.*

The Living Church

The indispensable elements of a church, then, are the interactions between God and His people, and secondarily, the divine effect that those interactions have upon the people’s relationships with each other and upon the world. These have eternal significance, whereas buildings, organiza-

tional structure and programs do not.

Three dynamics of God’s work in believers super-naturally set the Church apart from all other institutions and organizations. The first is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul said: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God’s grace which He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding” (Eph. 1:7).

Redemption is at once a completed work when we receive Christ, but it also is an ongoing work in believers. To Timothy Paul wrote: “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst” (1 Tim. 1:15). The form of the verb for “to save” in this verse—according to the original Greek—means that salvation is completed and finished. However, there also is the ongoing work of salvation. Paul says: “For if when we were God’s enemies we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more having been reconciled, we shall be saved in His life!” (Romans 5:10). “Shall be saved” in the original language is in a form showing that salvation is continuous ongoing action. We experience this in our lives as He uncovers areas by the work of His Spirit and “redeems” them as we confess these areas to Him. We’re growing and becoming more saved—being “bought back” by Him. The apostle John tells us that when Jesus appears, we will become like him at that time, even our physical bodies will be transformed by the complete

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work of salvation (1 Jn. 2:3). Biblically speaking, we are saved, we are being saved, and we shall be saved!

The second essential dynamic of God's work in a local body of believers in Christ is the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes us witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Being filled with the Spirit needs to be an ongoing process and relationship, not just something we experienced years ago. What's important is our daily empowerment for witness to proclaim Jesus Christ to those who have never heard. The language of Ephesians 5:18 teaches that to "be filled with the Spirit" is something we are to actualize on a daily basis and use, that we are filled now, that we are to continue being filled by the Spirit, as a requirement for witness.

The revelation of God's Word is another ongoing and indispensable dynamic of church life. Paul said, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation..." (Eph. 1:17). This ongoing work of revealing concerns who He is, who we are in Him and how we serve Him.

Spiritual Aspects of Church Life

There are several dimensions of church life that emerge from the interaction between God and His people. One is *Spirit-filled leadership*. As God works in the midst of His people, He graces the group with different giftings. Among these are the fivefold ministries which lead the Church in the mission of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:11). There are also seven motivational gifts or functions that move the Church forward under the direction of God (Rom. 12:6-8). Also the nine manifestation gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 are available to every member of the Body of Christ to release the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The church must have gifted leaders who will see the vision of God to

complete the Great Commission. A survey conducted at Regent University, where I teach world missions, indicated that the main factor that influences a church's growth in missions is the senior pastor's leadership. Pastors therefore are the key players to world missions and its completion.

The original language term for leadership in Romans 12:8 means "to stand before" (Greek: *proistemei*, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, p. 60, and "be at the head of" BAG Lexicon, p.707) Leadership is therefore standing before God and receiving His vision. It is seeing what God is doing, and then in His wisdom and guidance to impart this vision to His people, helping them to cooperate with what He is doing in the world through the local church. Without the right kind of leadership in local churches, there will be little involvement in local evangelism and less outreach in missions.

The second aspect of church life resulting from the work of the Spirit is *edification* of the church. This means building up and equipping, frequently called discipling, training or nurturing. The New Testament word for this task is the same one used for mending one's fishing nets.

Another (third) feature is *worship*, including *intercession*. As the Spirit of God works among His people, He draws worship out of them. It is well known that we become like that which we worship, and God wants us to become like Him. Psalm 115:8 reveals that if we worship idols, we become like them. If we worship Jesus, we become like Jesus. On the other hand, if we "worship" the American culture, we become like the American culture and turn into cultural Christians. But when we allow God to work in our lives, He draws worship out of us. As we open our lives up to Him, seeing more and more of who He is and what He is doing and wants to do, we become more like

Him. Then we are drawn into intercession and a walk of communion with Him, through a daily life of prayer.

Fourthly, the Spirit of God inspires fellowship and *godly relationships*. The local church is a network of relationships—with God and with each other (Acts 2:42). The doorway to growth in the kingdom of God swings on the hinge of those relationships. The stronger those relationships are, the more we grow individually and corporately.

Do the above mentioned basics cover the total picture? The answer is: No. Even when taken together, the above three dynamics of God's work in a group of believers, including the four aspects of His work among His people do not constitute a church in the full sense of the word. One essential ingredient needs to be added.

The Goal of the Church

Let us take a good look at Christ's mission commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus came to them and said, "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 end of the age." In this passage Christ proclaimed the mission of the Church to go to all peoples ("nations") of the earth, evangelizing, baptizing and teaching them. Obedience to this commission is an essential task of the Church. It's important to see that the church exists for missions. Our mission to reach the world is not to be the goal of one of various legitimate departments or programs of a local church. Rather, all church departments and programs are related to and need to result in advancing the cause of world mission. *The Church is not for the Church itself. The Church is for the world. Missions is the goal of the Church.*

Our churches need discipling, teaching and nurturing so that our people may experience greater wholeness and health. But is that wholeness only for our sakes and personal benefits? The answer is absolutely not! Genesis makes it perfectly clear, as does the rest of the Bible, that our blessings received, like in the case of Abraham and his descendants were given to them then, and are given to us now, so that we might bless others (Genesis 12:1-3). As we experience salvation and healing and grow in wisdom, we are increasingly being equipped to participate in world mission along with the worldwide network of the Body of Christ.

Corporately we are commissioned to go to all the people groups—every tribe, tongue, and people—with the covenant blessings of Christ. In short, we are to complete our task of preaching the Gospel of the kingdom to prepare for the King's return (Mt. 24:14).

Up to this point I have outlined the essential ingredients of a church. We should note that without the essential element of world mission to all the peoples of the earth, a fellowship or local church is not a church in the biblical sense of the word. Without missions, it is merely an ingrown parody of a church, a "hot tub church" where people are just looking at themselves and each other as they enjoy the blessings of the hot tub. It is true that many wonderful things can and do happen in Christian fellowships, but if the people are not outward looking, vitally reaching out to the world in evangelism and missions, they are not a church as God designed

it. Emil Brunner, the great Swiss theologian, said it well: "As fire is to burning, so mission is to Christ's Church."

Of course, there are many groups which lack mission spirit and understanding, and we call them "churches" anyway. These churches may have structures, departments, committees and

to child-care in the nursery—is done with the spirit of outreach and mission to the world. The world class church does not settle for being an institution with a variety of programs. It sees itself, first and foremost, as part of the kingdom movement and its advance.

Every local church should have a church planting/ church growth strategy, a multiplication strategy for starting other congregations in their region—the church's "Judea"—outside of one's immediate "Jerusalem." Such churches start working with other churches to help them grow and/or plant new ones.

Local churches can develop strong disciples

through intermediate spiritual preparation of its members. A key factor is the availability of a biblical discipleship course or training program, such as Master Life from the Southern Baptists or the Navigators "2-7 course." In such study programs, believers' spiritual gifts should be discovered so they can be placed in appropriate ministries.

One main reason why the Holy Spirit renewal movement is not responding faster to world evangelization is because it is not adequately growing spiritual disciples who understand the Lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives for the world. Not everyone who is saved automatically becomes a spiritual disciple. Programs need to exist in the church on the local level that equip people to become the kinds of disciples that grow and disciple others. Spiritual gifts needs to be understood as well because these relate to one's spiritual job description. A person's ministry is determined by one's motivational gifts,

MODEL OF A WORLD CLASS CHURCH

graphic here

programs firmly in place and functioning, but all without the mission of God's kingdom. When the institutional spirit overrides the mission spirit in a church, and departments begin to play the competitive games that are common to worldly institutions—departments vying with one another for funds, for staff, and prominence—the preeminent purpose of the Church is lost and soon forgotten. People of such churches forget and/or are ignorant of the fact that all aspects of church life are to contribute to the coming of God's kingdom and His mission.

We need to distinguish the so-called churches which lack the missions heart from true mission active churches. I call the latter "world class churches." Such churches, connected to the world, as the Lord of the Church ordained it, are truly world class churches. Everything done in such churches—from singing in the choir

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and so Christians need to be placed in the Body according to their gifts.

We are here concerned with the heart of the matter, the vision, and the spirit of a local church. This focus does not mean a “department of missions and evangelism” due to the fact that organizational structures are secondary to the spiritual dynamics of a given church. We are defining and focusing on the essence of Church life, the heartbeat of a given church. The church in a given local expression needs to *be* evangelism and missions because that is the essence of the Church. So everything a local church does must center on, and needs to contribute to, its redemptive worldwide mission. When we hold to a lesser view of the Church, we are not looking correctly at the Church through the interpretive grid of Scripture. Our vision in this case is limited or has been distorted.

As we consider our own congregation we might ask: Are we connected to the world, going to others, especially the unreached, with the Good News? If so, is my church only ministering in “same-culture” evangelism, staying in our own “Jerusalem and Judea”, instead of moving to the fields beyond? Reaching peoples in our day within “Westernized” societies (such as those in the urban centers of Latin America or Europe) is comparable of the early church in Acts going to neighboring Semitic culture of Samaria. The Lord’s mandate for us to go “beyond Samaria”—to the ends of the earth—means crossing greater barriers.

Measuring Mobilization

A world class church, because of its heart, is mobilized to reach the world for Jesus Christ. As church leaders are moved by a vision of God’s eternal purpose and plan and guided by a biblical view of world evangelization, they will see and release the church to be organized as a mission base. Remember how the apostle Paul wrote to the church

in Rome saying he wanted to visit them, serve them, and that they could help him on his way to Spain. (Rom. 15:24) He believed in developing them as a “mission base” in order to send the apostolic team on to totally unevangelized places and nations. Likewise, every local church is to be a sending base for missions!

Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. (2 Cor. 10:15b-16a).

If all of this sounds foreign to you, and to the people of the church, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to generate the growth we need in our lives and in our churches. God wants us to be filled with zeal for His kingdom, and for His eternal handiwork, and He is glad to start with you to do it!

To make it happen, the Holy Spirit works in individual believers to bring us to a point of commitment, and then He spreads the vision through us to others. As our vision and desire grow, groups and people in the church will find ways to mobilize, learn to understand their spiritual gifts, seek and get the needed training, and begin to mobilize others. The Association of International Missions Services (AIMS) has established a set of criteria by which to measure a congregations’ progress in its initial mobilization. A church may be considered mobilized—sufficiently organized to have its missions launched—when it meets the following criteria:

1) A world class church prays for the lost world and adopts at least one unreached people, remaining in dedicated prayer on behalf of this people group.

The unreached peoples of the world will be reached as different groups of Christians take personal responsibility for at least one people group to have access to hear the Gospel. Once meaningful prayer has begun and initial research has been made, creative opportunities begin to appear, including ways

to make financial investments. A good initial goal for most churches would be to invest at least \$100 per month toward the evangelization of a particular unreached people. One church in the Midwest, after adopting a Muslim people group, challenged their people to collect loose change each day for this purpose. By this means, in one year they raised \$100,000! With that same funding plan they sent and supported a new missionary couple as health professionals to live and work among this Muslim people. As a by-product, these same people have become better evangelists in their neighborhoods back home. Through adopting an unreached people group, this church went beyond prayer into mobilizing their own members for outreach. They found they had resources beyond what they ever dreamed possible. The blessings of God were rich and wonderful in this case, as they will in each case when God’s people reach out in His name to the lost unreached of the world.

2) A world class church budgets at least 10% of its total funds received for use in cross-cultural missions, and one-fourth of that missions budget should be directed toward ministry to the truly unreached frontiers of missions. Cross-cultural missions can be local in cases where the church is targeting a different social/people group in their community. For example, churches may have a mission to local Vietnamese refugees, a mission that demands a special and very specific strategy to reach them due to culture and language barriers.

Giving ten percent of the congregation’s offerings to missions is an entry-level goal. From there, the church can aim at giving one third or more of their funds to missions. A church in Hampton Roads, Virginia, actually gives 60% to missions. A church in Toronto, Canada, also gives over 60% of their church budget to missions. When, in their history, it came time for them to purchase land for a new church, an unexpected

buyer purchased the old property for 5.5 million dollars, enabling them to build a new church plant, debt free, at a better location. God truly blesses mission churches!

When a church says it cannot give to missions because of expenses, debt, or due to whatever reason, it is hindering the blessings of God to flow to the world. It is withholding the seeds that are to be cultivated to grow into productivity for God for His glory. Such a church will rob itself of church growth in their own “Jerusalem” because of their lack of applying the revelation of God to what He wants them to be and do. Designating a significant amount to be specifically targeted for the unreached frontiers is a recognition of and commitment to the strategic need to reach the unreached peoples—those which have been neglected until now. The unreached peoples of the world have been overlooked even until now in spite of the fact that the Lord’s commission has always had them as its prime target—to disciple “all peoples.”

3) A world class church asks God for 10% or more of all its adult members to personally participate in a cross-cultural ministry, at least once in their Christian experience. There is no substitute for a “first-hand taste” of missions. All the reading and learning you can experience at home, or in a classroom, cannot compare to first-hand—face-to-face, cross-cultural ministry. This can happen through a short-term mission trip. One partner church of AIMS aspires to have all of its members go on a mission trip—at least once. Imagine, what an incredibly meaningful way to invest your vacation time and money! If even one of every ten believers were to participate in short-term missions, it would revolutionize the Church and Christians’ appreciation for local “Jerusa-

lem and Judea” evangelism would follow, as well as cross-cultural missions in our “Samaritans” as well as to the ends of the earth.

4) A world class church also asks God for 1-2% of its adult members to emerge as career missionaries or tentmakers. The local church must be the seedbed for missions. Congregations should be gathering before the Lord in worship, listening for God to tell them which of their members He is calling and would want to send out. The pattern is Acts 13. As we pray, we need to recall that the Moravians send out one missionary for every 67 members.

By “tentmakers” we mean those missionaries who use their skills in a trade or profession in order to support themselves in another country, usually gaining access to restricted areas or countries. Another ministry option is that of the “nonresidential missionary” or the “strategic coordinator.” These are missionaries who coordinate outreach to a restricted access area or country without actually taking up residence there themselves. For instance, from southern France a nonresidential missionary team (or couple) could effectively coordinate mission outreach to Muslims in northern Africa.

5) Every world class church also helps other churches become mobilized according to the previous four criteria. Churches help other churches by sharing the vision they have gained, as well as the difficulties they have overcome. We need a movement, a Great Commission movement, in which the people of God become alive to the biblical mission mandate in new ways—praying, giving, sending and going. Each world class church should cooperate with the broader body of Christ, tearing down walls and working in harmony with other brother and sisters.

Conclusion

In Christ, mobilization of congregations for global missions is very possible—if we proceed with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and do it one step at a time. It is clear that our mission mandate, as God’s redeemed people, is to bless all the peoples of the earth, a task which is becoming more clearly defined by increased information on the cultures and peoples that still need to be reached.

As God’s people, living where we do, we have been blessed with many resources. Above all, in Christ we are heirs to every spiritual blessing. Inherent within each of these blessings is the seed of mission to the world and its realization. The Church needs to challenge the forces of darkness, to claim the promised triumph of the Bride of Christ, and prevail against the gates of hell that resist our progress.

What are the actual steps to building our home world missions bases? It is my conviction that God, in His infinite creativity, has a unique custom made plan for each local church. Nevertheless, we can observe general guidelines and specific resources from the experiences of others that I have shared in this article, while at the same time drawing conclusions and applications for our specific situations.

Dr. Howard Foltz teaches world missions at Regent University and is president of the Association of International Mission Services (AIMS). This article is a reprint and revision of Chapter 5 of his book Triumph—Missions Renewal for the Local Church, Messenger Publishing House, Joplin, MO.

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