



By Blake McDaniel

# developing a missions strategy



Imagine a construction crew arriving at a site one morning to start its next project. Each crew member quickly gets to work, beginning his part of the new building. A day into the work, Bob comments to Ted, “You’re building an awfully long driveway, aren’t you?” “This isn’t a driveway, it’s a runway,” says Ted. “We’re building an airport, aren’t we?”

“No, we’re building a four-bedroom Georgian brick house,” says Bob. “That’s why I was building a three-car garage!” “I thought that was the ambulance entrance,” says George. “Aren’t we building a hospital?”

As ridiculous as this story sounds, in some ways it resembles how many local churches are conducting their missions ministries. In any given staff or missions team meeting, there is no master “blueprint” for what the church is seeking to accomplish in missions. Everyone has a different idea of what is to be accomplished. When the Browns’ support decision is discussed, Harry is most concerned about whether or not they will be ministering holistically, while Ellen’s priority is supporting people from within the church. When the team considers the youth pastor’s request to take a short-term team to Costa Rica, Ron’s first thought is whether or not the youth group could accomplish the same results in their own city, because there are plenty of needs here. Jill, however, is most concerned about whether or not the same money could be used instead to support a Costa Rican national church planter.

## A CASE STUDY

A church’s missions strategy provides a much-needed “blueprint” for its missions

spending and activity. It is the sole way to insure that everyone in leadership is “building” the same type of “building”. Our church, Hill Country Bible Church Northwest in Austin, TX, decided nine years ago that we needed to become more strategic, effective stewards of our missions time, money and efforts. We had done missions traditionally since our church’s beginning and as a result had seen relatively little effectiveness or congregational involvement. The church asked me to lead a team through the process of developing a strategy. The process we used is, I believe, transferable to other churches.

First, I should define what I mean by a local church missions strategy: **“an intentional plan developed and implemented by a local church that seeks to maximize its impact on the world as every member of the congregation moves toward becoming world Christians.”** Note that this definition encompasses two key facets: 1) what the church accomplishes in the world (maximum impact on the world) as well as 2) the mobilization of individuals in the church to get the job done (“every member...moves toward becoming world Christians”). In this article, we’ll be discussing only the first facet of strategy, that of determining what a church’s focused and maximum impact in the world will look like by God’s grace.

## SEVEN VALUES

Seven values, or guiding principles, informed the process that we used.

1. **We value a rifle approach to missions** as opposed to a shotgun approach. I use the metaphor of guns not for

aggression, but for precision. Shotguns spray many pellets imprecisely with the hope that one or more will hit the target. This unfortunately is how many churches operate in missions, supporting many randomly chosen missionaries and projects with the hope that a few will be effective. A rifle, on the other hand, is shot with precision, and requires focus.

2. **We value proactivity.** We want to discern what God is calling us to do, and to proactively locate the human, organizational and financial resources with which to obey God’s call. We do not want our missions ministry to be reactively shaped by responding to those who request support from our church.
3. **We value involvement by key church leaders to the fullest extent possible.** We in missions leadership do not want to operate in isolation. We want our church’s leaders to give input and to wholeheartedly support the missions ministry.

I see some churches’ missions leadership teams essentially functioning in isolation. It takes longer to develop a strategy by including leaders from all facets of the church’s life, but will more likely succeed in the long run. I would ask the senior pastor to attend at least the initial session of the team.

Some ask me what they should do if the pastor is indifferent toward the missions strategy process. I encourage them to at least give periodic written

updates to the pastor regarding the development of the strategy. He may choose not to respond, but at least has been given the opportunity. My experience tells me that when an “apathetic” pastor begins to see a strategy develop, often he realizes that he does have helpful opinions that he can contribute.

4. **We value consensus decision making.** A majority of the strategy team should endorse our strategy. While not everyone will support every aspect of our strategy, one person should not dominate in the decision making process.
5. **We value thoroughly researching our strategy.** We will read widely, consult with other churches and mission agencies, attend pertinent networking meetings available in the United States, and, when possible, travel to the field to discern our options.
6. **We value prayerfulness.** We will blanket in prayer the process of developing a strategy.
7. **We value future scrutiny of our strategy.** While we don’t anticipate radically changing our strategy in the near future, we will refine it as circumstances and opportunities evolve.

## GETTING STARTED

Is your church ready to develop a strategy? Your first step will be to assemble a strategy team. It should not be the entire missions team. Rather, it should be comprised of some on the missions team and other church leaders (from the pastoral staff, elders, other key ministries,

etc.). Ideal strategy team members have the time available to do the work, have the ability to think strategically, and are as objective as possible (i.e., will be as free from bias as possible).

Next, begin to pray, as a group and individually. Spend plenty of time asking the Lord to give you wisdom and discernment.

## EIGHT FACTORS

The next step in the process is for the team to consider eight important factors that shape a church’s missions ministry (listed below in no particular order). I encourage the team to approach these issues as philosophically as possible, at this point without reference to whom the church currently supports or where it sends short term teams every year.

1. **Your global/local balance.** How will the church appropriately address all of our Acts 1:8 responsibilities—Jerusalem (the natural spheres of influence of the church), Judea (geographically near, culturally similar people), Samaria (geographically near, culturally different people), and the ends of the earth (geographically distant, culturally different people)? If your church is not engaged in all four spheres, how will you seek to remedy this? What priority will you assign to each of the four spheres?
2. **Your history and values.** What is the church’s “DNA”—its strengths in ministry, values, passions? What have you done well in the past—and what do you not want to repeat? Who is your congregation today, and how might that affect what you do in the future? (For example, if you have many in the medical profession in your church, you should consider doing medical work on the field.) With

what individuals and mission agencies have you fruitfully worked in the past? Don’t divorce yourself from your past, but don’t be bound by it either. Sort through what you need to hang on to and what you need to let go.

At this point your church should consider how your new strategy—whatever it may be—will affect the missionaries and ministries you currently support. The following are two options:

- **We will “grandfather” them into our new strategy and budget.** We will continue to support them at our current rates. As projects end and missionaries naturally leave the field, we will re-direct freed up funds toward projects and missionaries that conform to our strategy.
  - **We will phase out our relationship with currently-supported projects and missionaries that do not conform to our new strategy.** Some churches choose this option and wrongly decide to cut off support immediately. This is not appropriate. Missionaries in particular should be given 12-24 months to raise support elsewhere before losing the support that your church gives them.
3. **Geographical possibilities.** Will your church choose its strategy based on geography—certain continents, countries or cities?

Inevitably churches ask me, “How many geographical regions should we choose for our strategy?” The answer to this question depends on the church’s resources and capacity. How “deep” does your church want to go in its influence? Obviously, the fewer places your church is involved, the deeper its impact will be. Remember also that as your church’s resources

increase over time, you can add regions to your strategy.

4. **Religious Megasphears.** Will your church choose to focus its energies on a particular religious megasphere, such as Tribals, Hindus, Unreligious, Muslims or Buddhists? In modern missiological thinking these have been the major religious megasphears. Today with the secularization and nominalization of Christianity in some regions of the world, we might also add as a religious megasphere nominal Christians, such as many Catholic and Orthodox adherents.

5. **The least reached.** What priority will your church place on reaching least reached people groups? Let's remember the US Center for World Mission's definition of unreached people groups: "a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize their people without outside / cross-cultural assistance." In recent years many churches have chosen to make least reached peoples their missions priority, particularly in the "10/40 Window", that region stretching from North Africa to East Asia, where the vast majority of the world's least reached peoples live.

This region includes the world's two largest countries, China and India. 65% of the world's population lives here; 95% of the world's least reached peoples claim this as home. 90% of the world's poor live here as well.

6. **Ministry types.** Is your church most attracted to and effective in a particular type or types of ministry, such as:

- pre-evangelism (including Bible translation)
- evangelism
- discipleship
- leadership development
- church planting
- service / mercy / community development
- support (such as teaching children of missionaries, working as an accountant in an agency's home office, flying missionaries and supplies, etc.)

7. **Missionary Candidates.** From where do you anticipate most of the missionaries coming with whom you will work? Will you seek to train and send out folks from your church? Will you partner with nationals from other nations? Will you support missionaries from other churches? Will they come primarily from your denomination?

Some churches have a policy of supporting only missionaries from their church. If you choose to embrace this strategy, this decision should be well considered. Will you provide 100% of your missionaries' funding? If not, from where will you encourage them to seek additional funding? Wouldn't it be inappropriate to point them to other churches when you refuse to consider funding their missionaries?

8. **Partnerships.** Consider how partnerships will figure into your strategy. You will need to answer questions such as:

If you are a denominational church, what priority will you give to projects and missionaries from your denomination?

Will you partner with sending agencies

## Eight factors that shape a local church missions strategy

1. **Your global/local balance.** If your church is not engaged in all four spheres, how will you seek to remedy this? What priority will you assign to each of the four spheres?

2. **Your history and values.** What is the church's "DNA"—its strengths in ministry, values, passions? What have you done well in the past—and what do you not want to repeat?

3. **Geographical possibilities.** Will your church choose its strategy based on geography—certain continents, countries or cities?

4. **Religious Megasphears.** Will your church choose to focus its energies on a particular religious megasphere, such as Tribals, Hindus, Unreligious, Muslims or Buddhists?

5. **The least reached.** What priority will your church place on reaching least reached people groups?

6. **Ministry types.** Is your church most attracted to and effective in a particular type or types of ministry?

7. **Missionary Candidates.** From where do you anticipate most of the missionaries coming with whom you will work?

8. **Partnerships.** Consider how partnerships will figure into your strategy.



or send your own missionaries? Do you have the capacity to send your own missionaries apart from sending agencies?

What kind of relationship will you seek with the sending agencies with which you work?

What priority will you place on partnering with national sending agencies, churches, and workers?

## WRAPPING UP THE PROCESS

It will take more than one meeting to sift through all of these issues. As you document your decisions, circulate the paper to key leaders in the church to keep them informed and involved in the process.

After you have come to conclusions, choose potential focuses. At this point your team should generate a number of possible focuses that interest your church, such as “translating the Bible for the Madawa people in Cameroon”, or “partnering with ABC agency to set up an evangelistic website for North Africa”.

Next, evaluate your list of options. As a team, whittle down your list of possible focuses, eliminating those least compatible with what you decided would be your guiding principles. How many should you choose? I encourage your church to select at least two: one that is local and one that is global.

Seek to avoid a strategy that is too narrow. For example, someone on the strategy development team will have just taken the Perspectives course and will be zealous for channeling all resources toward least reached peoples. (This is not to downplay either taking the Perspectives course, or reaching least reached peoples. I’m a big fan of both.) But seek to embrace the strategy God is calling your church toward.

Define what successful involvement will look like with each of your options. With what agencies will you work? What projects and missionaries will help accomplish the goal?

Get formal approval of your strategy from the missions team and church leadership. The channels for doing so will vary from church to church. And finally, publicize and begin to implement your new strategy.

## ON SHORT-TERM MISSIONS

One mistake that churches make even when a strategy is in place relates to short-term teams. I know of several churches that have sophisticated strategies which they are pursuing well. Yet their short-term missions ministry often bears no relationship to the strategy. I suggest that churches first develop their long term missions strategy, and then examine what they will do in short-term missions. The church should align its short-term missions ministry as fully as possible with its long term strategy.

Ideally, a short-term missions trip sent by any church should accomplish one or both of two things. 1) It facilitates and advances the church’s long-term missions strategy. In some cases, your long-term missions focus will be in restricted access countries where short-term options are limited or non-existent. So this recommendation cannot always be followed. 2) It should contribute to the discipling of the individuals going and the congregation as a whole as world Christians.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

We noted earlier that a missions strategy is intended to help a church “maximize its impact on the world.” How does a church know when it is making such a “maximum impact”? Obviously, the accomplishment of goals on the field is one way to measure

your impact. When the Jesus film is translated into the language of a least reached people group you’ve adopted, or when a house church is planted in a Chinese village, you are making progress.

But what about back at home? Some good indicators that a strategy is helping to maximize your church’s potential would be an increased percentage of the church’s giving going to missions, new missionaries leaving from your church, higher quality of missionary care being delivered to your missionaries, and sending more effective short-term teams.

Developing a missions strategy is painstaking work. But I’ve seen it pay off for many churches! Seek the Lord’s vision for your church, trust Him for the ability to pursue it, and watch your church become more effective in missions!

*Blake McDaniel is APMC’s Texas and Oklahoma Area Director and is based in Austin, TX. Contact Blake at [BlakeMcDaniel@APMC.org](mailto:BlakeMcDaniel@APMC.org), or at 512-506-9266.*

### Seven Suggested Core Values in Developing a Church Missions Strategy

## SEVEN VALUES

1. We value a rifle approach to missions as opposed to a shotgun approach.
2. We value proactivity.
3. We value involvement by key church leaders to the fullest extent possible.
4. We value consensus decision making.
5. We value thoroughly researching our strategy.
6. We value prayerfulness.
7. We value future scrutiny of our strategy.