

give them the world

Pastoring with Global Vision



By Steve Harling

Plum Community Church (PCC)* had a great reputation as a “missions-minded” church. Its annual Missions Festival was bigger and better than anywhere else. It supported scores of missionaries, and its Faith Promise giving had grown to almost 25% of the church’s yearly income. Everyone seemed proud that their congregation put such a high value on international missions ... everyone, that is, except Pastor Tim.

In spite of the positive indications from offering plates and pews, this veteran pastor struggled with the nagging sense that missions at PCC was more about programming events than producing disciples. The church had just put on its 68th an-

*Church name has been changed.

nual missions conference. It was a pretty big deal with all kinds of attention-grabbing activities. But Pastor Tim secretly wondered if it was worth all the effort. Even with all the creative energy expended on the services, attendance was still lower than a typical Sunday at PCC. And during the week, while lots of old-timers mingled around the missionary displays, the young adults were noticeably absent.

While reading through the Faith Promise pledges, Pastor Tim couldn’t help but note that the vast majority of the commitments were coming from the 60+ crowd. Something had to change. Missions had to become more than just paying and praying for missionaries. It had to become more

than just planning events and managing funds. It had to be about growing disciples with the heart of Jesus for the lost, the poor, and the nations.

Pastor Tim took a risk. He graciously and sensitively shared his concerns with the missions leadership team. Then he raised a few questions: "Would we be better at making disciples of Jesus if we found a way to engage the passions of our members and not just their pocketbooks? What if our church's vision for creating and developing local ministry were extended globally? What if, instead of having a 'they are called' mindset, we had a 'we are called' mindset? What if our church became a missionary?" While raising the questions, Pastor Tim was careful to affirm PCC's heritage of promoting missions.

After each member of the leadership team had weighed in on the discussion, Pastor Tim proposed a vision trip to North Africa. The goal of the trip would be to find out how the church could better care for its missionaries and how PCC could support the persecuted church in addressing the "Big Five" global giants of poverty, ignorance, disease, corruption, and spiritual darkness.

A few months later, Pastor Tim and a carefully selected team of elders and emerging leaders spent 10 days in an Islamic country in North Africa. Every day they visited ministries, surveyed needs, and explored opportunities. Every night, Pastor Tim would ask the team, "Where did you see God at work today? With whom did the Lord cross our paths? And, what could PCC do to help?"

When team members returned from North Africa they were brimming with excitement about their new-found friends and the possibilities for training evangelists, developing health care initiatives, and starting business ventures to support local pastors. Pastor Tim had each member of the team share with the congregation what he had seen and heard. The mood on that Sunday morning was electric. Within a few weeks the missions leadership team had appointed a dynamic team of lay leaders to shape Plum Community's partnerships and strategic initiatives in North Africa. A second missions team was sent a few months later ... and PCC was off on an incredible kingdom adventure!

It has been almost six years since the first trip to North Africa. Plum Community Church has now developed scores of highly effective partnerships and ministry initiatives in North Africa. It has also branched out with another project in Southeast Asia. Every year almost a quarter of the congregation goes on missions trips, and amazingly, 10% of the membership has committed to full-time ministry. Pastor Tim also discovered that when his members caught the heart of Jesus for the nations, they also caught his heart for the poor, the lost, and the ethnic minorities in their own community.

Plum Community Church is a great example of a myriad of ways that the pastor led the church toward more effective missions involvement. A senior or solo pastor cannot devote a large portion of his time to leading a church's missions efforts. Yet he can commit to several principles that will make the difference between missions being a major thrust of the church, as opposed to one of many ministries vying for funds, leaders, and widespread involvement.

| You have got to own it.

The senior pastor doesn't have to develop the church's vision for global outreach, but if the vision will go anywhere, the pastor must be the principle stakeholder and champion. Getting pastoral approval for the missions vision is not enough. There must be pastoral ownership.

The pastor of one California church didn't originate the idea of adopting an unreached people group in Bali. One of his members did. But the pastor caught the vision, shaped it, communicated it, and integrated it into the overall mission of the church. After seeing 10 churches planted through its ministry partners, the church is now preparing to send out three couples from the church to another unreached people group in Bali. Everyone in the church knows that the pastor owns the vision for Bali.

As a missional coach, I am often asked, "What do we do when our pastor doesn't have a vision for missions?" Many pastors I know are so consumed by the demands of church ministry that they have little energy to shape the church's vision for missions. It is easy for a pastor to fall into the trap

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of devoting all his time and energy to the areas where his success will primarily be measured: growth in finances and attendance. A wise missions leadership team will be careful about chiding the pastor for not living up to its expectations. The wise team will send the clear message that it values his wisdom and invites his leadership. One of the most significant things a missions leadership team can do is to send the senior pastor on an all-expenses-paid missions trip ... and join him.

2 Get the right people on the missions leadership team.

Some people are appointed to missions leadership teams simply because they volunteer or because well-intentioned people nominated them. In one church a hard-boiled telecom executive wound up on the missions leadership team of a mid-size suburban church. When a discouraged missionary working with a resistant tribe came home to report to his churches, this missions

team member hammered him for failing to win more converts and demanded that his support be dropped. The missionary was utterly embarrassed and humiliated. Guys like this somehow get on missions leadership teams ... and they are hard to get off. A wise pastor will pay close attention to leadership selection. Great teams are the result of team members who have been selected for their character, competence, chemistry, and coachability.

3 Keep on asking 'why?'

When asked why they exist, many missions leadership teams stumble for a response. After the blank stares, someone will timidly volunteer: "We plan the annual missions festival" or "We allocate the missions spending of our church." Good stuff, but those activities are more about program management than people development. The default focus of most committees is to preserve and enhance programs and traditions of the past. It's not about asking "why" and re-thinking



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strategies. A wise pastor will lead the leadership team in reflecting on its role of nurturing Christ followers who love the poor, the lost, and the nations. He will prompt the leadership team to ask, "Why are we doing this? What are we hoping to accomplish? Is this the best way to produce Christ-like disciples?" It can be unsettling to ask questions like that ... but like Pastor Tim, that is what a leader does.

4 Engage your best leaders in strategically meaningful ways.

Entrepreneurial leaders aren't interested in perpetuating programs, or preserving or enhancing traditions. They are eager to be part of a cause that they perceive as significant and dynamic. The "Pay, Pray, and Get Out of the Way" model for missions has little appeal to most genuine leaders. Wise pastors will engage their leaders in strategizing and creating vision. For example, they won't send business executives on a trip to paint a fence or do VBS puppet shows. Instead they will invite them to bring the best of their skills, passions, and experience to the task of kingdom building. As a senior pastor, I made it a goal to take at least one missions trip a year with the specific objective of instilling within my leaders a global conscience. When these leaders returned and shared their stories they infused the congregation with their excitement and energy.

5 Aim for people's passions.

Historically, most North American churches couldn't present very many ways for people to get involved in missions. In the old days, if you weren't "called" to go, all you could do was give and pray. Today, the world is a different place. It's gone flat. Global communications, the ease of travel, and the mass migrations of people have opened windows of opportunity that were completely unimagined just a few years ago.

We need to get over this mindset that God has "called" only a select few professionals (labeled missionaries) into his harvest. In a very real sense we are all called. We all have skills, creativity, experience, energy, and passions to contribute to the kingdom. A wise pastor will inspire his mem-

bers to consider how they can become personally engaged in the world of missions. He will aim at passions rather than pocketbooks. Experience shows that if we aim for money, we might get it. If we aim for passions, the money will surely follow.

6 Get a rifle (figuratively speaking!).

For many years most churches practiced the "shotgun" approach to missions, which could be summarized in this way: support a diverse group of missionaries representing every continent. This approach allowed us to spread ourselves throughout the globe, but it didn't allow for a strategic and focused investment. Many churches today are augmenting their missionary support with a strategic focus.

As examples: One church in suburban Dallas has a 10-year vision for planting a thousand daughter churches in one state of India. A newly-formed church plant outside of Phoenix is developing strategies for reaching the Brahmin class in Andre Pradesh, India. A congregation of 500 in rural Indiana has facilitated the formation of a network of churches that have adopted the Kyrgyz. These kinds of strategic focuses allow for sending repeat short-term teams and making a significant investment in a particular location. As with Pastor Tim and PCC, these kinds of initiatives provide a powerful opportunity for the senior pastor to get out in front and lead the way. But a word of caution: augment - don't amputate - your already-existing missions ministry.

7 Cast vision in terms of the mission, not the missionary.

The typical missions program of the typical church is all about the missionary, what he is doing, and where he is going. The focus is on the missionary, not the mission. This approach fosters a "they are called" mindset and frequently causes the missions program to drift to the periphery of the church's vision. Churches that are successfully instilling within their members the heart of Jesus for the nations focus on the mission rather than the missionary. A wise pastor will help his leaders integrate global outreach into the mission of the church.

One San Diego pastor facilitated his church's leadership in wrestling with the global implications of its purpose as a church. In the end, leaders adopted this mission statement: "Transforming nations and generations for Christ ... one life at a time." In that church, addressing the problem of AIDS in a central African country has become viewed as "something we do" rather than "something they (professional missionaries) do." The church has since developed many exciting ministry partnerships and initiatives that have leveraged the gifts, skills, and experience of its members.

8 Become intentional in raising up missionaries.

"Random" and "reactive" are the adjectives that best describe how many of our churches have done missions. We wait for someone to "feel the call" and then come to us for support. What would happen if we followed the model of Acts 13? What if our leaders got together to worship and pray and the Spirit spoke, "Set apart for me Tom and Linda for the work to which I have called them"?

The pastor of All Nations Church in Seoul, South Korea takes the role of mobilizing his members for missions very seriously. Started in 1985, this congregation has already sent out 900 of its own as missionaries. All Nations has a goal of planting 2,000 daughter churches and mobilizing 10,000 tentmakers. When asked for his strategy, the pastor replied, "Our leaders get together to fast and pray. When God impresses us with the name of someone he has called, we go to him, tell him what God said, and send him to Bible School." A

wise pastor will be intentional about helping his members identify their kingdom role.

9 Empower rather than control.

Many missions leadership teams seek to run a tight ship, especially where it involves church finances. Many a young student has gone to the team with a request for support, only to be told, "It doesn't fit our priorities," or "We think you should do something else instead." When God lays a burden on someone, missions leadership teams can be notorious for squelching initiative rather than rewarding it. When the youth pastor wants to lead a missions trip to Mexico, the missions team will often bury him with endless accountability and micromanagement. A wise pastor will recognize the need for structures, boundaries, and priorities, but he will guide the team toward creating an atmosphere of empowerment that rewards initiative.

10 Pump the vision.

There is no such thing as "overcommunication" in church ministry. Preach it. Promote it. Get your best graphics designers on it. The senior pastor is best positioned to champion the vision, but a wise pastor knows that a vision is best owned when it's communicated with many voices. Get as many people involved in the development of the vision as you can. When people begin to own the vision, use them to promote it. Like Pastor Tim, get your elders and lay leaders up front. Let them join you in trumpeting the vision. ■

Leave a legacy ... give your people the world!



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