

Scott A. Starker

ME 523 Introduction to Christian Missions

Dr. Ed Rommen

December 7, 1989

A Proposal for Promoting Missions in a Local Church

A Proposal for Promoting Missions in a Local Church

“The objective of world missions is to establish a healthy, reproducing, evangelical church [through evangelism **and** discipleship] in every indigenous people group in the world, reducing the number of unreached people groups to zero!”¹

Therefore, world missions must be central to our understanding of the church and to her task (Matt. 24:14) and all her members must be encouraged to complete it as it is nothing less than God’s desire.

The task of promoting world missions in the local church is multi-faceted. I am defining it here as anything and everything (i.e. it is a total program) which seeks to generate interest and involvement in missions through the giving of information, the issuing of challenges, and the providing of opportunities to pray, care, give, and go.

The proposal that follows may or may not be suitable for every church because it has been conceived with the church of about 100 to 120 members in mind. Thus, not only would finances be limited in such a situation but so would other resources including volunteers needed to implement it. For this reason, certain choices have to be made with respect to what projects to attempt and what their priorities should be. Therefore, the proposal that follows contains a collection of ideas that should be reasonable enough to accomplish with the limited resources of just such an “average” church.

The key to promoting missions in the local church is the pastor. He is the spiritual leader of the church in that the members look to him for direction and guidance in terms of what their responsibilities in the world should be. Therefore, his involvement as the “PR” man for missions will be very important if the missions program of the

¹ *Missions Education Handbook*, APMC, p. 9.

church is to survive and grow. He must be fully behind whatever efforts are going to be made on behalf of missions. He must preach about the biblical basis for missions and challenge the members of the congregation to give financially to missions and to consider going themselves. He must remember to pray for specific missionaries and the whole missionary endeavor during his Pastoral Prayer as a **model** for the rest of the congregation. In light of all of these responsibilities, the pastor must be one of the most enlightened people in the church with respect to every aspect of missions. He should be encouraged to actually visit the missions field in order to get a first-hand perspective of the work. He must also be encouraged to interact with the missionaries when they return on furlough. For a more broad and continually current perspective he should be encouraged to read periodicals such as *The Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (even if it means buying the yearly subscription for him which could then also be included in the church's missions lending library when he has read them). He should also be encouraged to use sermon illustrations about past missionaries from what he has gleaned from his regular reading of missionary biographies.

Another aspect of promoting missions in the local church concerns the role of a missions policy. Every church should establish and follow a missions policy. It is important to have a policy because it outlines the church's understanding and commitment to the missionary task. It makes decision making easier because the policy seeks to make routine decisions for you. For example, by including a statement as to how the church is going to define "missions", requests for support of efforts that do not meet the criteria can be rejected without a lose of time discussing it because the decision has already been made by the policy. The policy also establishes priorities for where financial support should go. It also outlines the goals for the members of the church in terms of missions education and mobilization. It will also specify the church's expectations of missionaries and missionary candidates as well as the responsibilities of the church to them. If followed, having such a policy will contribute to the consistency and the growth of missions in the local church.

The obvious question at this point is, “Who sees to it that the missions policy is written, evaluated, and carried out?” The answer is, “The missions committee.” There may actually be a large degree of inter-relationship between the committee and the policy as the policy may describe how the committee should be formed, the qualifications of its members, the length of a term on the committee, the functions of the committee, and how the functions should be carried out.

Suffice it to say that the members of the missions committee are very important people for the promotion of missions in the local church. Along with carrying out the missions policy they will be the ones, along with the pastor, who will oversee all of the missions related efforts of the church. As was mentioned with respect to the pastor, one of the most powerful means of promoting missions will be the effect of the committee members as **models** for the rest of the congregation of missionary concern. The committee members need to be growing as world Christians too. They must be people who put Christ first in their lives. They must spend significant **effort** in prayer. They must be concerned for their non-Christians friends and seek to win them for the Lord. They must maintain personal contact with individual missionaries. They must also give generously and wisely financially to missions and even alter their lifestyles to live more simply in view of God’s global priority.²

One of the major events of the year designed to promote missions and organized by the missions committee is the annual Missions Conference. The conference “should provide inspiration, information, and instruction.”³ It needs to have well defined goals for every age group. It needs to be a first-class program and budget in order to attract the most people. Planning should be coordinated with other church and community events in order to keep time and date conflicts to a minimum. The conference should include top-notch musicians and speakers with enough variety so that there will be something of

² An ACMC handout by David Mays from a seminar where he spoke on *For Missions Committees: How to Model Missions for your Church* (March, 1989).

³ Paul A. Beals, *A People for His Name: A Church-Based Missions Strategy*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan), 1988, p. 105.

interest and benefit to everyone no matter what age. The Association of Church Missions Committees (ACMC) offers a variety of resources that can help a church plan a successful missions conference.⁴

Topics for speakers may include the Biblical basis for missions, current trends and opportunities in missions, and the current status of the missionary task. During the conference it would be appropriate to challenge the congregation to increase their financial and prayer commitments to missions and to become personally involved in caring for missionaries (discussed below) as well as the possibility of actually becoming a missionary and going.

The **caring** of the missionaries that the church supports is frequently overlooked when we simply concentrate our efforts on financial giving. Caring includes “Fervent, persistent, specific prayer [which] is the missionary’s greatest need on the field.”⁵ Specific prayer requests from missionaries should be regularly made known to the congregation either from the pulpit or in a newsletter or the weekly bulletin. Prayer calendars are also available that list daily prayer requests for needs all around the world.⁶

Each family should be encouraged to have something like a “Missionary Hall of Fame” in their home where they can display a map of the world and pictures of their missionaries with string running from the pictures to their locations on the world map. Kids can be assigned research projects on particular countries and their climates, culture, religion, etc. Along with material gleaned from TV news, this information can contribute to better informed prayer on behalf of the missionaries. Letters can be written to the missionaries as a family. Each person could write (or draw!) something.

⁴ See pp. 58-59 of *How to Organize a Mission Program in the Local Church*, and contact ACMC, P.O. Box ACMC, Wheaton, IL 60189. (See also *The Big Event: Planning Your Missions Conference* by Dr. Kenneth E. Moon, Minister at large for Greater Europe Mission.)

⁵ Ronald D. McLain, *Keep Missionaries on Your Families Mind* in *Moody Monthly*, April, 1986, p. 78.

⁶ For one such calendar contact: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, Box 1100, Wheaton, IL 60187.

Creativity can also be employed by making a cassette or even a video tape to send. Through these ideas world missions promotion becomes a family activity!⁷

Writing to missionaries is just one way to care for them. If you don't know what to write you can just tell them about yourself. Remember their Birthdays and Anniversaries. These pieces of information should be included in the church directory along with names, addresses, and phone numbers. Phone calls should not be discounted because of the cost anymore. Depending on the missionary's location a short phone call can be quite reasonably priced. For example, a phone call to Bouake, Ivory Coast, West Africa can cost less than \$1 a minute! Calling can be a great way to show love and concern to a missionary.

Another avenue for promoting world missions in the local church is through missions education. Education, of course, is something that takes place throughout the process of promoting missions in the church but it is also something that needs to be integrated into the church's Christian education program. As world missions is so central to the church's task (see page 1), the responsibility to participate in it must be taught in Sunday School classes of **all** ages.⁸

Two problems can thus be overcome: 1) A lack of knowledge about missions, and 2) Apathy because of a lack of vision. Current trends and strategies as well as the history of missions must be taught. Missionary biographies make for good reading and discussions! Also, missions can be rightly emphasized as the issue is stumbled upon (as it frequently is!) during "normal" Bible studies. The goal in all of this is to grow "Christians into 'world Christians.'" David Bryant has defined world Christians as, "day-to-day disciples for whom Christ's global cause has become the integrating, overriding priority for all that He is for them. Like disciples should, they actively

⁷ Ibid., pp. 78-89.

⁸ Again, ACMC is a fantastic source for information about how to implement such an integration. For example, see the *Missions Education Handbook*, and *Education for Mission* both by ACMC.

investigate all that their Master's Great Commission means. Then they act on what they learn.⁹

Thus, a world Christian: 1) Knows that God is concerned about global evangelism, 2) Keeps abreast of world events, 3) Prays for the spread of the gospel, 4) Is aware of the unique strategies needed to reach today's ever-changing world, 5) Recognizes that he/she is part of a world community of believers who are jointly responsible for world evangelization, and 6) Commits him/herself to becoming actively involved in reaching the unreached.¹⁰ Accomplishing these goals will probably require an investment in teacher training as most teachers will not feel qualified to accomplish them. There are, of course, materials and seminars available that have been designed to meet this need in the local church (again, contact APMC). It is also important for Sunday School teachers to be good models in these things just as it is important for the pastor and for the members of the missions committee to be good models.

Missions education can also take place on an informal basis through the use of such things as bulletin inserts and bulletin boards. Tyndale House Publishers makes a monthly bulletin insert available called, *The Church Around the World*, which contains prayer information on Christian developments happening all over the world.¹¹ Also, EMIS publishes *Pulse* which reports on political, economic, and religious news around the world, analyses of the events, and the effects on world missions.¹² Films and, increasingly, video tapes with mission themes are available through International Films.¹³ There are **many** more resources that could be listed but will be discovered by people once they start to look for them!

A world missions lending library located within the church does not have to be large in order to be helpful to the cause of promoting world missions in the local church. I will

⁹ David Bryant, *In the Gap*, (Inter-Varsity Press, Madison, WI), 1979, p. 73.

¹⁰ APMC, *Missions Education Handbook*, 1983, p. 11.

¹¹ Contact: Tyndale House Publishers, 336 Gundersen Drive, Wheaton, IL 60187.

¹² Contact: EMIS, Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60189.

¹³ Contact: International Films, Box 2500, Orange, CA 92669.

not take the space to list any specific titles (a list can be obtained from, guess who?!, APMC) but a few books about missions in general (including the theological basis, history, and strategies used), missions in specific locations, missionary biographies, and information regarding how to obtain additional resources (i.e. information about APMC and any appropriate denominational departments) is all one would need to have a good start. Copies of all missionary letters could also be kept on file here along with copies of past mission committee minutes.

This paper would not be complete if it did not mention the tremendous positive impact that attending an “Urbana” missions conference can have! It is my opinion that **every** Christian should attend at least one of these conferences in order to round out his/her Missions education. These conferences are week long seminars held every third year on the campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana. They are sponsored by Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship for the purposes of educating Christians (particular college age) about world missions, challenging them to go, and providing them the opportunity to meet with representatives from numerous sending agencies. The church should encourage its members to attend at least one Urbana conference. It should also provide scholarships to those who might not be able to attend because of financial reasons. It is particularly suited for students because the dates of the conference are always between Christmas and New Years when students are on vacation from school. The price is also discounted for students. The next one will be held in December of 1990 so it should be noted on next years church calendar and included in the missions budget.

The promotion of missions in the local church is necessarily broad in scope because it is so central to the church’s existence! Because of its fundamental nature, missions touches almost every aspect of church life. It should also touch almost every area of the Christian’s individual life. And that is ultimately the goal of missions promotion that every Christian will be educated and mobilized to make the contribution (through praying, going, giving, and caring) desired of him by God to the cause of world missions.