

How Churches Can Recruit and Prepare World Evangelists

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As our earth shudders under the tread of billions of feet and as huge urban centers grow even larger, there is an increasingly urgent need everywhere for evangelists and church planters. The basic pool for such personnel is the local church.

For the most part volunteers for world outreach have arisen more by individuals deciding to go and then approaching churches for support than by recruiting efforts on the part of these congregations. Local churches, then, have generally been passive rather than active in missions recruitment, abandoning this noble task largely to Christian schools.

Even in the matter of recruiting stateside evangelists, we have left most of the selection and training process to schools. It is the local church that, more than any other entity, should be the spawning ground for world evangelists. It alone has been entrusted with the primary responsibility for equipping and sending its workers into the international arena. The time is long past due for a return to missions recruitment and initial preparation of workers within the framework of our congregations.

Your church can have a worldwide ministry by sending out some of its own members to do in other cultures what your congregation is doing at home. The impact for the sending church will be enriching and dynamic and, as interest in missions increases in your congregation, you will be surprised at how many of your members will begin to hear God's voice urging them into short-term or lifetime missionary service.

To succeed in this service, however, those who enter a missionary field need spiritual maturity, biblical knowledge, and specialized training and practical experience before going. Their training will call for careful shepherding to keep them on the missionary career path. No other organization is as well suited as the local church to assist people along this path.

The question is how can we go about the task, since we have had so little experience at it? Following are six ways to prepare missionaries in your congregation.

First, discover potential missionaries in your church by creating a climate that fosters a vision for world outreach

- Inform your congregation about the needs and opportunities for evangelism in today's world.
- Build missions emphasis days, weeks, and months into the church's calendar.
- Include world evangelism in the curriculum of the Bible School program.
- Get missions into the homes of the members, around their dinner tables and in their devotional lives. Foster at the family levels a new awareness of world outreach.
- Make missions films, seminars and similar experiences available to the members and their families.

Second, provide your church's potential missionaries with stateside and international short-term experiences.

- Send members on campaigns and Vacation Bible Schools at stateside locations.

- Expose your people to cross-cultural ministry by sending them on international campaigns and work projects.
- Make certain your church leaders also participate. This will both give them vision and enable them to lead by example.
- Provide international internships for the more promising campaigners.
- Seek out families in the church that have shown a pronounced interest in world evangelism, placing such people in active roles of the church's ministry.

Third, Shepherd your potential workers along the missionary career path.

- Shoulder-tap for worldwide ministry capable, visionary people in the congregation.
- Provide aptitude testing and career counseling for your prospective missionaries, to match their skills and gifts to the needs of modern missions.
- Express your confidence in qualified potential workers who believe the Lord is leading them into overseas service.

Fourth, initiate basic training for your prospective missionaries.

- Encourage handpicked young people to learn another language in school and to study other cultures.
- Help prepare all workers whom you are planning to send to the field, whether these are from your own flock or from other congregations.
- After consultation with specialists in missionary training, develop a list of study and experience requirements for those whom you will prepare.
- Establish a curriculum for missionary training for those whom you are encouraging in this direction. Make use of Wednesday evenings, other nights of the week, or Sunday afternoons for this purpose.
- Insist that all who go to the field, even on campaigns, receive orientation before departure. Those who depart for longer stays need to have prior church work experience, including Bible teaching and soul-winning.
- Provide the tools for a solid doctrinal base and a practical devotional life for the trainees.
- Give them at least an introduction to cultural anthropology, missions methods and the cultural and historical setting of their proposed field. Also insist they have at least a year's language study prior to their departure, if English is not the primary language of their target people.

Fifth, send your prospective missionaries to a Christian school or university for further preparation.

- If possible, give financial help to such potential world evangelists to complete their advanced preparation, with a view to eventually sending them to the field.
- Insist on professional psychological assessment and counseling, which is often available at these institutions to screen your potential missionaries.
- Check on the progress of these students periodically and encourage them in their plans and preparation.

Sixth, with God's power and your loving concern, send out your missionaries.

- Encourage short-term, career and vocational missionaries from within the congregation. If they can be helpful on some field, send bricklayers, schoolteachers, accountants, printers, and other professionals who can earn at least part of their living from "tent-making." Supplement their field income as necessary.
- Be on the lookout for retired members who can largely or fully support themselves on some field. Help them prepare and then support them in every way possible.

- Send out at least one of your own families, either partially or fully supported by your congregation.
- Since it is better not to send one individual or family to serve alone, prepare and send an entire team from your congregation to a carefully chosen field.
- Be on the alert, always, for likely missions candidates from other congregations. There may be a specialist elsewhere who can help enhance the work you are doing on the field. In other words, plan your long-term outreach program and aggressively pursue the personnel to make it work.