

How Elders Can Lead In Missions

Dr. Glover Shipp
Dr. Bob Waldron

The apostle Peter tells us that the Lord's church, as God's holy nation, is to declare the virtues of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 3:9). Thus, one of the primary purposes of the church is to tell others about our wonderful Lord and the salvation He extends. It is therefore the responsibility of elders to guide churches in such a way that this becomes its major priority. How can elders make evangelistic outreach to a lost world the priority of their congregation? How can elders lead out in missions? Perhaps a good place to begin is by taking these practical steps: Become Personally Involved in Missions

1. Take missions seriously. A good leader must first be what he wants others to be. If elders want the church to win souls to Christ, they must be winning souls. If they want the church to be missions-minded, they must be missions-minded.
2. Study missions. A vision for the mission of the church can be increased by studying missions history, methods, strategies and needs. This can be accomplished by reading, attending the annual Summer Seminar in Missions at Abilene Christian University and by scheduling the Missions Resource Network seminar on "Missions Power for Your Local Church."
3. Visit fields and missionaries. This is one of the best ways in which to develop a vision for missions. It is especially important to make regular visits to those supported by the congregation. To really understand missions, elders and their wives should make an extended visit to a mission field.
4. Pray for fields and those on the field. Hearing elders diligently pray for a lost world may cause the congregation also to become concerned for the lost. One good source of prayer topics for missions is the book *Operation World*, by Patrick Johnstone. Develop an Active Missions Committee
5. Create and nourish a dedicated missions committee. Place in this group only those who have a keen interest in world evangelism. Look especially for those with some prior experience in missions. More is needed than mere willingness to serve.
6. Require the members of this committee to give its work top priority. This means that they meet regularly and pray diligently for missions. It also means that they limit their other involvements in the church to give their best attention to this demanding service.
7. Make it possible for at least the chairperson of this committee to visit different fields. This will serve to deepen his experience and expand his horizons.
8. Honor and encourage this group, both publicly and privately. Make serving in the missions ministry a real privilege.

Enlist the Preacher in Missions

1. Insist that the preacher have a concern for world outreach. Evangelism is crucial to the church, so it is unthinkable that the preacher would neglect this important subject.
2. Encourage the preacher and ministerial staff to study world evangelism and speak on missions. Several world outreach sermons should be preached each year. Key missions books should be assigned to the preaching staff. They should be expected to attend missions seminars, forums and lectureships.
3. Schedule visits to the field for the ministerial staff. This is an especially important

experience for the pulpit minister. He and others on the staff could conduct seminars, speak at retreats overseas, and otherwise get their feet wet in missions. This has been known to set preachers' hearts on fire for God's mission.

4. If, even after the elders' encouragement, the pulpit minister does not blossom in missions awareness, find someone who will. Good men with a burden for world evangelism are out there and can rejuvenate the congregation spiritually.

Work Closely with Missionaries

1. Consider your missionaries as authentic members of the preaching staff. Keep them before the church and in its prayers. Provide them salaries and benefits compatible with those of the home staff, plus a cost-of-living adjustment if needed. Remember that wives and children generally cannot work overseas.

2. Shepherd the missionary families supported by the congregation. They are in special need of prayer, guidance, and encouragement.

3. Keep in close communication with those on the field. This can be accomplished by telephone, letters, videotapes, fax, email, and other means.

4. Bring your missionary families home for leaves, reentry or retirement with honor and dignity. This requires careful attention to the many details involved in the various stages of their missionary career. Two helpful books in this area are *Cross-Cultural Reentry: A Book of Readings*, by Dr. Clyde Austin, and *Helping Missionaries Grow*, by O'Donnell and O'Donnell. Both are available from Missions Resource Network.

Involve the Congregation in Missions

1. Teach the congregation about missions. This means incorporating world evangelism into the entire educational program of the church. Dr. Joyce Hardin's 13-lesson series for 4th-6th graders, entitled *Passport to Adventure* (Sweet Publishing), would be an excellent addition to your curriculum.

2. Expose the church to legitimate missions opportunities. This includes informing the church about what is going on worldwide, permitting missionaries to present their stories to the congregation and taking up special offerings for missions. Mission Resource Network's church bulletin insert, *World Digest*, is one way of keeping the church abreast of great things God is accomplishing around the world.

3. Encourage the members' participation in campaigns and other special missions opportunities. This includes events both in the United States and overseas. Financial as well as moral encouragement is implied in this.

4. Shoulder-tap members with a potential for international service. Then help these recruits go through the necessary preparation, with the understanding that the congregation will support them on the field once their preparation is complete.

Seek Brotherhood-Wide Exposure to Missions

1. Be active participants in regional meetings of elders and preachers. This will provide a platform for encouraging active missions commitment on the part of other church leaders.

2. Arrange to speak on lectureships and other programs dealing with worldwide church planting. Share your expanding commitment to missions with other church leaders.

3. Let your commitment to world evangelism be seen through articles, bulletins and other means. This will encourage other congregations to become more committed to missions and will greatly expand your influence for good.

4. Look for ways to enter joint mission efforts with other congregations. The pooling of resources in finances, people and expertise can have a positive impact on world evangelism. In these and similar ways elders can lead local churches to greater commitment to global evangelism. Active rather than passive leadership by elders is essential to the mission enterprise. We encourage elders, therefore, to make world outreach a top priority in their lives and in that of the church. We beseech preachers and others in the congregation to encourage the elders to take the lead in this regard, as good pastors of the flock. Consequently, you will see a vibrant new era dawning in the life of the congregation, as well as among the lost peoples of the world.