

Three Steps to Rethinking Missions in Your Church

By Bob Young

[This article is edited and expanded from David Chrzan]

Do you know that your church can be a difference-maker in the transformation of your community? Do you know that your church can make a difference around the world?

Your church was made for a mission. That mission is described biblically as bringing everything and everyone within the lordship of Jesus (Eph. 1:9-10). The power for transforming lives flows from Jesus' disciples into the world.

Here are three ideas to help your church rethink missions in your local community and in communities around the world.

Critically EVALUATE your church's missional emphasis, role and involvement.

Step One: analyze the "local mission" of the church as you seek to reach out to your neighbors.

Rethink where you will find "your neighbor." Jesus told his followers, *"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). For those first disciples, Jerusalem represented their immediate neighbors, Judea represented their community, and Samaria represented those living nearby who were of a different culture. When we think of mission in our churches, it is easy to focus on one area at a time but that is not what Jesus told his followers to do! He told them to reach out in Jerusalem AND in Judea AND in Samaria AND unto the ends of the earth.

A strong mission program begins with a strong missional emphasis on the home front. The church that is not reaching the unchurched and the lost in its own community is not likely to be reaching the unchurched and lost around the world. An amazing observation is this: most churches do foreign mission work in the same way they do evangelism locally. If the local work of the church is focused internally, with ministries that are only minimally evangelistic, the mission work of the church will usually be focused on benevolence and works that are minimally evangelistically.

In foreign missions, I am convinced that the best, most sustainable way to empower our churches to reach *"to the ends of the earth"* is to partner with local churches. Instead of trying to solve problems around the globe *for* people, it is much more effective to work *with* and *through* local Christians in partnerships. For over ten years, I have come alongside national churches and native Christians with education and training. I am always blessed and challenged when I see their zeal, commitment, and tenacity. When we in the US focus on doing missions *with* local churches in other parts of the world, our impact will live on long after we leave. The local church is encouraged and empowered to continue the work.

EVALUATE your church's mission work through a biblical lens, asking hard questions about effectiveness and results.

Step Two: Ask whether the mission work of the local church is fulfilling God's eternal purpose.

This step is essential to reclaiming your church's role in God's mission. God designed the local church to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Jesus showed us his ministry priorities by teaching, preaching, and healing (Matthew 4). In Matthew 9, the repetition of these three verbs shows that he came primarily to share truth – a process that involved sowing seed and reaping a harvest. Alongside the teaching and preaching, he also healed, cared for the sick, assisted the poor, and loved people. We are called to follow his example. When we see people who are hopeless, hapless and homeless, we preach hope, purpose, and belonging in the context of God's spiritual family.

In recent years, various organizations and government agencies have taken on some of the mission work of the church — caring for the poor, sheltering orphans, providing medical care. The part of the church's mission that organizations and governments will never assume is preaching and

teaching. Secular organizations and governments will never try to solve the world's problems by getting to the core problem – the world needs Jesus! God commissioned the church to be the hope of the world—we can, should, must proclaim eternal hope that goes beyond physical needs-meeting!

The preaching mission of the church for the salvation of souls must be continually proclaimed and reinforced. Members must know and understand that the call of mission is first and foremost eternal. Simply having a ministry in a foreign location is not necessarily mission. Ministry may open doors for mission, but simply doing ministry does not fulfill the mission. Those sent on a mission must pay first attention to the purpose of the mission. The primary purpose of God's mission is to bring souls to Jesus. Of course, we will also live out the heart of Jesus in our interactions with the lost!

Help your people IDENTIFY the lost who are within their passion set.

The local church must unleash its members to live out their passions. God has placed many people in the church, each with a unique set of skills, experiences, and passions. God designed each of us with a purpose! People are looking for ways to have significance in their lives. Part of church leadership is to help members discover the way God has prepared them to participate in his mission — then church leaders are called to equip the members for maximum impact. Part of the responsibility of church leaders is to help members see how their passion correlates with God's passion for souls. It is a huge relief to know that church leaders do not have to manufacture passion in the hearts of God's people. The task is to help them discover what God already created them to do.

After church members identify the lost – the hopeless, the overlooked, the impoverished, someone must inspire them to take action. Almost every church has members who are already passionate about people and their needs. They only need training and encouragement to engage in God's mission in the world – to bring people to Jesus. When ordinary Christians live out the calling God has placed within them, God's love changes lives in the community and around the globe.

There are so many needs, it can be tough to know where to put resources. “God wants his lost children found. Nothing matters more than that.” God is calling his people to do what only the church can do: spread the hope of Jesus.

Latin American Leadership Development (LALD) is part of a movement of helping ordinary church members transform their communities, with a vision of unified, healthy churches serving their communities. Leaders from many countries are seeking resources for similar efforts in their own countries. In networks of local churches, lessons in one church become the building blocks for other churches locally and globally, empowering average members to change their world by unleashing the unique ways they have been prepared by God to make a difference.