

## Is Our “Mission” Work Helping the Gospel Go? -- Five Evaluation Questions

By Bob Young

At the 2008 Pan-American Lectureship in Quito, Ecuador, Phil Slate suggested that church leaders and missions committees should ask those requesting funds for mission trips about the activities planned and what they would be doing. Slate observed that we are spending a lot of mission money on activities that do not do much to advance the gospel.

I have the opportunity to talk to elders, mission committees, and Christians interested in mission work from a lot of different congregations. Our churches are spending a lot of money on “mission work”—perhaps more money than we have ever spent before. But sadly, the money spent is not translating into corresponding results in the mission field. The money being spent is, in many cases, not helping the gospel go.

The question raised in the title of this article is a good one: “Is our mission work helping the gospel go?”

How effectively are we advancing the gospel? What is the result of the money invested and the work done? Here are five questions to help us evaluate mission efforts.

**Does the effort produce more Christians?** The number of baptisms is not the only measure of successful mission work, but it is a primary one. If short-term or long-term mission funding is not producing more Christians, it should be reevaluated. On a recent trip to Colombia, the preacher apologized for the diminished number of baptisms in the first 8 months of the year—only 28 this year! Every soul is important and valuable, worth whatever monetary investment is required. But good stewardship demands also that one consider the number of souls that can be touched, and that money be invested where there is the greatest return.

**Does the effort produce more churches?** Are healthy churches being established? The strength of the gospel in a given region is ultimately related to the number of healthy, vibrant churches that exist in that area. Some mission efforts have existed for years with little impact on the number of churches or the health of the local churches.

**Does the effort produce mature Christians?** The process of maturing Christians into patterns of biblical discipleship and committed Christian lives is difficult to measure. One can evaluate, however, whether congregations are becoming stronger in commitment, involvement, and every-member evangelism, with the development of effective teachers and leaders. When the church has a 50-year history of mission endeavors in a country, and the number of churches with biblical leaders can be counted on one hand, something is wrong. One measure of the development of mature Christians is the ability of the church to become self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-duplicating.

**Does the effort produce mature congregations?** Is the local congregation associated with the work growing? Such growth should be numerical, but the church should also be growing functionally, organically, relationally, and evangelistically. A healthy, growing church will become heterogeneous and will naturally develop biblical leadership. The result of investment

in long-term mission work should be growing churches. Such growth must measure the number of committed Christians and not only attendance. Something is wrong when a missionary (U.S. or national) has been working for 25 years and the result is a small, struggling congregation of 20 or 30 people. We must develop a model of mission focused on evangelism and not mere pastoral care. Again, mature churches become self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-duplicating.

**Is the focus evangelistic?** Certainly benevolent activities can and should be done in the mission field, and often the needs are overwhelming. The question is not whether benevolence is good or bad. The question is whether benevolence is accompanied by an evangelistic focus. Without evangelism, benevolence helps people physically without making much eternal difference. When thousands of dollars are invested in benevolence with little eternal impact, it may be time for a reevaluation of the work.

Each supporting congregation will have to determine acceptable guidelines for balancing evangelism and benevolence, and how evangelism and benevolence should be integrated. In a world where various mission efforts and numerous mission churches are baptizing dozens each year and are developing healthy churches that are growing numerically, one should seek answers to the above questions when a supported work does not result in more Christians, mature Christians, more churches, mature churches, and focused evangelistic efforts.