



## 5 Marks of a Missions-Healthy Church

Shaping and Measuring Your Global Impact

**How do you measure the missions health of your church? What benchmarks do you use? Are you celebrating areas where you have made progress? How do you target important areas to improve?**

Some church leaders are happy just to maintain a certain budget level or to keep doing what they have always done in missions. Others write off their missions program as entirely ineffective but feel helpless to even begin improving it. Responses at either end of this spectrum can derail a church's efforts to have the global impact that God wants for them.

Here are five critical marks of a missions-healthy congregation:

### **1. SET PRIORITIES**

Your church has clearly defined strategic, global priorities.

### **2. LIVE INTO THE STORY**

Your people are deeply engaged in one or two powerful missions narratives.

### **3. PRAY BOLDLY**

You are uniting in intercession for God-sized, specific missions goals.

### **4. ENGAGE GIFTS**

Your leaders are opening opportunities and discipling your people to use their time and abilities for increasingly greater global impact.

### **5. GO GLOCAL**

Your church is building integrated local/global involvement.

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**A**re you surprised that these missions-health markers are different than those we would have listed a few years ago? Missing are traditional indicators such as size of budget, missions education, number of workers sent, short-term teams, etc. Aren't these things important anymore?

These activities may be valuable, but a church can rank high on those traditional markers and still have a fading missions vision. How? These elements can be sustained by a small core of dedicated people in the church while the rest of the congregation remains largely unengaged. The missions health of such churches is much poorer than it appears.

Church leaders are beginning to awaken to this danger.

Our markers are also changing because our global opportunities and the people walking through our church doors today are profoundly different from what they were even a few years ago. While our missions message is unchanged, our methods and metrics must reflect new realities.

Let's unpack the five characteristics we are suggesting as more accurate missions indicators. Their order is important.



The responsibility to make sure church resources (people, money, giftings) are most effectively invested for the greatest results is given by God to local church leaders. Therefore they must ask, "What do we believe God is calling us to do?" **If leaders do not set their own priorities, individual church members, outside organizations, and past commitments will dictate what they do.**

What do we mean by "strategic global priorities"? [Here](#) are six that are basic. Very few churches can prioritize all of them. But every church can choose to make a major impact in one or two priority areas.

Churches then need to further refine their priorities by selecting people, places, and/or specific partners. Catalyst's [Your FOCUS on the World](#) helps churches through this process of identifying and pursuing priorities.

These strategic, global priorities should then determine your missions program, leadership structure, budget, short-term ministries, etc. Regardless of how big or small your church is, regardless of whether you have been doing missions for many decades or are just beginning,

clear missions priorities are key. And they should be defined and owned by your pastoral staff, elders, and missions leadership team—and as much as possible by your entire congregation.

**While our missions message is unchanged, our methods and metrics must reflect new realities.**



**1. SET PRIORITIES.**  
**Your church has clearly defined, strategic, global priorities.**

For decades, church missions efforts were measured not by **ends** but by **means**—primarily budget size and number of missionaries supported/sent. Churches were content to delegate to the missionary and the mission agency total responsibility for the end results.

However, church leaders are growing increasingly uncomfortable with forfeiting all accountability for results. Why? (1) They are not always convinced that their missions dollars are generating the greatest impact. (2) They recognize that sending out workers does *not* automatically mean those people are effectively fulfilling the Great Commission. (3) There are now many ways to go and to partner. (4) The overwhelming number of people/projects asking for funding demands that leaders make tough choices.

**Measuring this marker:** Have you identified one or two missions priorities you believe God is calling you to embrace (perhaps a few more if you are a large church)? Do your staff and other leaders believe strongly in those priorities, and can they explain why your church has adopted them? What are the specific goals you are passionate to achieve?



**2. LIVE INTO THE STORY.** **Your people are deeply engaged in one or two powerful missions narratives.**

Traditionally missions health was measured by breadth: Churches were proud of supporting dozens of missionaries; different workers were frequently introduced during worship services; short-term teams targeted as many places as

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possible; and projects blanketed the globe. That amount of diversity overwhelms 21<sup>st</sup> century audiences. As a result, they often mentally disconnect from all missions messages.

Instead, churches must draw their people to “live into” one missions narrative, or one at a time. Younger generations, in particular, want to engage in one compelling, high-impact missions story. This story can have many characters and chapters, but one theme and focus. Think *Downton Abbey*: This historical drama drew millions of fans who devotedly followed the complex storyline. They came to “know” and care about the interwoven lives of a whole cast of characters.

The goal of the single-narrative approach is *not* to divert the attention of people who are already living into other missions stories. But for most churches, this is a relatively small percentage of the congregation. The goal of this single narrative is to engage the large number of attendees who otherwise silently tune out all missions messages.

How could your church implement this narrative approach? Select one top priority and over a number of months, unpack the powerful story of what God is doing there. Introduce every age group and all parts of the congregation to this story. Highlight over and over how your people are and can be participating. Keep repeating and building on the story line until the whole congregation is drawn into what God is doing through you in this place. When you become tired of the repetition, your congregation is just beginning to understand and get interested in the story.

Anticipate resistance from those who prefer the “missionary of the month” approach. Prove the impact of one narrative by trying it for six months. At the end, evaluate whether you have engaged a significant portion of attendees who had previously been apathetic.

**Measuring this marker:** Can the average attendee in your church explain the key aspects of your missions narrative? How many people in your congregation can describe one powerful event that your church has been involved in during the last six months in this unfolding drama?



### 3. PRAY BOLDLY. You are uniting in intercession for God-sized, specific missions goals.

Prayer can become a powerful focus of your church’s missions involvement when the work is obviously strategic (mark #1), the narrative is compelling (mark #2), and people hear regularly about the results that demonstrate how God answered their prayers. Want to develop intercessors? Begin by identifying big-vision goals that are concrete and measur-

able, and then report on the specifics of God’s answers. Prayer never becomes easy, but churches can light the fire of intercessory ministry.

## Questions to Initiate a 5-Marks Self-Analysis Process with Your Team

1. Is the rationale sound for shifting from means-focused measures (budget, event attendance, pins on the map) to results-focused measures (priorities with specific ministry goals)? Are there reasons for us to measure goals and means?
2. Have we already identified our church’s first and second global priorities? Are there specific people/place/partners targeting those areas who should be our focus priorities? What input have our pastor and other church leaders had in determining God’s calling for our congregation? Should we start a focus-determination process or review?
3. If we already have priority focuses, which one would most easily lend itself to an ongoing narrative presentation? Could we recruit younger people, who are naturally oriented toward narrative learning, to develop and communicate these stories?
4. How could an unfolding missions narrative communicate an urgency to pray for specific breakthroughs? Can we list some bold requests we are asking God to fulfill related to one or more of our strategic priorities?
5. In the past, missions mobilization featured a choice between going and sending. Today everyone can do some of both. How could we develop an extensive list of ways that our people could use their gifts, expertise, and passion to further our strategic priorities?
6. How informed about local, cross-cultural ministry are we? Do we know how many of our congregation are involved in some way with people who not born in our country? What would be one next step to learn about or increase our global involvement?

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At times answers will come slowly. During such seasons, church leaders can honestly report on the obstacles and remind people of the reality of spiritual warfare. If the church is weaving various related storylines into their narrative, answers will often come in one aspect of the ministry, even if delayed in another.

**Measuring this marker:** Do prayers during worship services include asking God for a specific breakthrough related to your missions narrative? How recently have you reported a specific prayer answer to your people? In the last month, how many people asked God for a specific request related to your missions narrative (1) in personal prayer, (2) in family prayer, (3) in their class or small group.



**4. ENGAGE GIFTS. Your leaders are opening missions opportunities and discipling your people to use their time and abilities for increasingly greater global impact.**

In the past, many churches measured sending success solely by the number of long-term workers they supported or sent. More recently they also began to count short-term trips. But today, there are many more ways and varying lengths of time to get involved. Instead of mobilizing just a few go-ers, church leaders are now tasked with getting everyone involved in multiple ways. Mobilization includes guiding and discipling people into greater and deeper involvement, beginning with the children and continuing

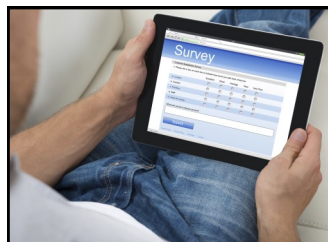
through those in their senior years. This will involve missions education, but always with a focus on action.

**Measuring this marker:** How many of your people are using at least one gift/passion to further global missions? Can each person name one additional way they could get involved, if they chose to? Do you have a clear process for walking alongside and guiding those interested in longer-term missions service?



**5. GO GLOCAL. Your church is building integrated local/global involvement.**

The last mark of a 21<sup>st</sup> century, missions-healthy church is their marriage of local and global involvement. As never before, the world has come to our doorstep, and God provides every believer with opportunities to impact the nations. Churches can initiate ministries and internships locally that expand vision, build cross-cultural skills, and reach peoples from around the globe.



**Measuring this marker:** How many of your people are engaged with their immigrant neighbors, with an outreach to refugees, or with international students? How are those who engage globally challenged to serve cross-culturally here at home, and vice versa?

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