



Stuck?

How to Overcome Five Church Missions Impasses

Do you or your missions team sometimes feel stuck? You're not alone! Many churches wrestle with similar feelings. The enemy would like you to believe that you can't do more in global outreach. Refuse to accept the status quo! Here are five common places churches bog down and some ideas to get moving again.

Apathy

Most of the people in our church [or even on our missions team] are satisfied with what we are currently doing in missions. We're stuck because there's no bigger vision pushing us to increased global impact.

Lack of leadership

Missions in our church is led by a small team of long-time missions enthusiasts. We are stuck because we don't have enough leaders to drive greater efforts.

Maxed out budget

Our missions giving is stagnant, and our all of our budget is already designated. We're stuck because we don't have the financial capacity to expand our global engagement.

No one to send

We can't name one person in our church who is interested in becoming a missionary. We are stuck because we have no one to send.

Conflicting priorities

Our church's major focus is something other than missions (local ministry, building project, youth work, etc.). Or we have conflicting priorities within our missions team (short-term teams vs. long-term workers; unreached peoples vs. poverty, etc.). We are stuck because we can't agree on our priorities.

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Here are some suggestions to get you, your leadership team, and your church out of the quagmire of the status quo.

Regardless of your impasse, begin here:

✓ **Clearly define where you are stuck.** Sit down with at least one other leader and clarify the key issue. Write it down as clearly as you can. Avoid identifying the problem as a person or as a fact you can't change ("Our pastor isn't interested in missions" or "Our community is economically depressed").

✓ **Make solving the issue a matter of believing prayer.** God is bigger and more powerful than the problem that has you stymied. He is able to do immeasurable more than all we ask or think (Eph. 3:20). *He wants you to get moving again!*

Recruit at least three or four other people to pray with you about a solution. Ask your pastor to pray with you about it. Dedicate time to fasting and prayer. Spend time listening for the voice of the Spirit, and asking for His discernment. Share with your prayer team and pastor what you believe He is saying to you. Can you find consensus around how God wants you to move forward?

✓ **Implement change.** Engage your faith in action by trying something bold and innovative. Whoever heard of marching around a city for seven days? But that's how the Israelites took Jericho. Their marching didn't topple the walls; God did. But He acted as Israel moved out in faith.

If you aren't sure what to do, talk to the missions leader in a nearby church that is implementing creative, effective efforts. Your denomination or a trusted mission agency may have ideas to help you. [Catalyst](#) is available for Skype or in-person consultation, and we can point you to other mobilization people and resources.

Refuse to be discouraged. If your initial changes don't work or don't totally solve the problem, define what you learned through the process. Then move on to try another innovation.

✓ **Celebrate progress.** One of the most motivational things church missions leaders can do is celebrate what God has accomplished through your people. When we fail to celebrate, we miss the opportunity to turn gospel progress into worship. Celebration will motivate your people and will give God glory He deserves for His work among the nations through you!

Here are more detailed suggestions for overcoming the missions obstacles listed on page 1:

Apathy

1. What's assumed to be apathy is too often just boredom, especially on the part of high-capacity people in your church. [People with high leadership potential](#) will resist pleas to serve on committees that appear to be merely sustaining the status quo. But they are attracted to challenges where they can make a major difference by using their abilities to ignite transformation. Give them a challenge, resource them as well as you can, but make sure they have freedom to innovate. If you aren't sure what that would look like, take a business person out for breakfast and ask them what gets them up in the morning. How could you engage that passion in missions?

Getting Unstuck...

How the Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton (CA) increased missions interest

We've just completed "Love Europe," our biggest global emphasis in five years. We saw Europe in chaos and realized that we had partners in a number of ministries there who could use help. So we decided to focus all of our attention and short-term efforts in 2016 on the continent of Europe. We began by asking our field partners there, "What would move your vision forward?" and then recruited people specifically for short-term trips to accomplish those purposes. We didn't recruit for people to go to a specific country but to engage a particular ministry passion—like teaching ESL, youth ministry, videography, construction, etc.



Love Europe became a rallying point for the whole church. We sent 25 teams between March and November—far more than we anticipated and with more funding than we even needed! We designed these teams to be discipleship journeys following a spiritual formation curriculum based on the book of Acts. The study included accountability questions and was aimed at developing community that would continue even after the teams returned. Because our congregation has caught the vision for what God is doing across Europe today, we have chosen several sites where we will continue to focus extensive partnering efforts.

Dan Crane, Missions Pastor

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2. Do you think your senior pastor is disinterested in missions? Perhaps that is true. But sometimes pastors are just convinced that the missions team's approach is out of date and a turnoff, especially to younger generations. Ouch! Are you ready to hear your pastor's honest opinion of how your missions program is perceived? Is your commitment to the Great Commission deep enough to convince you let go of approaches and programs you love in order to engage fresh ways that will attract more of your congregation?

Lack of Leadership

Addressing the apathy hurdle (see above) will go a long way in helping your church discover more leaders. But here are several more suggestions.

1. Offer multiple one-time or short-term service and leadership roles. Many people are initially hesitant to accept an assignment that will last several years, but they will agree to work on a temporary task force to plan an event, develop a video, help welcome missionaries home from the field, etc.
2. Design leadership roles to fit younger people's lifestyles. For example, to engage thirtysomethings may require that you provide childcare during planning meetings. They may want to do more connecting online than in face-to-face meetings.

Sometimes young adults like to "job share" a role so that they don't feel overwhelmed if they have a sick child or must travel for their job.

Maxed Out Budget

1. Talk to your senior pastor and/or other leaders about how to help people understand generosity as a part of spiritual formation. Challenging generosity should not be exclusively the pastor's responsibility. How can you work together? Check out resources at www.GenerousChurch.com.
2. Adopt the practice of regularly informing the congregation of what their gifts have accomplished. Be specific. At least once a month share some type of report (social media, three-minute platform update, Sunday-morning video, an update in story format as a bulletin insert) that doesn't ask for money but just highlights what your giving has made possible somewhere around the world. Tell your people what would **not** have happened if they hadn't given.
3. Initiate a special project with a specific goal and time-frame. Consider introducing a concept like [Advent Conspiracy](#).

Getting Unstuck...

How North Point Church (Alpharetta, GA) encourages generous giving

For us, the key to generosity is helping our people understand that our projects have been well vetted. We aren't asking them to contribute to some missions bucket in the sky that we vaguely hope is accomplishing something. People want to feel confident that whatever they are supporting has clear accountability and outcomes. We find that when we do the hard work of thoroughly vetting partners and projects, then people are very generous.



Every year in late October, Andy Stanley preaches a message on his "be rich" theme. Then we talk about our global and domestic projects for the year in clear and simple terms, repeating the basic message multiple times. We also feature celebration stories. We tell our people about what has been done because they have given. Celebration is absolutely essential.

Durwood Snead, Director of GlobalX

No One to Send

1. Challenge your church leaders (pastors/elders/deacons/teachers) to prayerfully consider the example of the church of Antioch in Acts 13:1-3. Ask them to pray with you for a set period of time (perhaps 2-3 months) to listen for the Holy Spirit's indication of His call on the lives of people (of any age!) in your congregation. List those your leaders think are potential go-ers as missionaries, students, Kingdom professionals, or retirees. Then talk to each individually about beginning a process of discerning God's guidance. Note that more and more professionals and students are taking a job assignment or year of college overseas, specifically to share the gospel.
2. Ask short-term team leaders to identify any team members who evidenced special gifts or passion for crossing cultural boundaries. Be on the lookout for members of your congregation who excel in ministry to immigrants in your community. Talk to these people about whether God has a bigger role for them in missions.
3. Research and promote high-quality internship opportunities in cross-cultural ministry.

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Getting Unstuck...

How Lincoln (NB) Berean begins early to get missionaries into the pipeline

We have been intentionally developing partnership with our student ministries because we want to begin casting vision in the heart of middle schoolers. If we begin then, they will have powerful exposure to missions so that by the time they move into young adulthood, global church planting is on their radar.

We intentionally design short-term trips where our global-outreach people and our youth staff can begin discipling relationships with our youth. As a result, we are seeing a cultural change in our young adults. Six or seven years ago, missions wasn't viewed as an option, but today, some of them are considering becoming globally engaged.

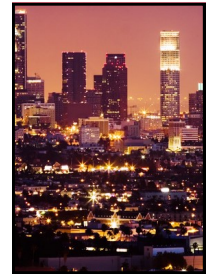
Pastor of Global Outreach

especially those on the fringes. Choosing one focus doesn't mean you will never emphasize others; rather, it may be a matter of timing.

Getting Unstuck...

How First Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga (TN) has reduced competing messages by focusing their involvement

A few years ago, we woke up to the fact that we can't do everything! We have many requests to do great things, but we realized we needed to determine what God is calling our church to do. Thus began a two-year process of prayer and strategic planning. We listened to missions pastors from other churches and leaders from agencies. We researched and prayed. We studied our congregational makeup, interests, and background. We considered our global relationships. Eventually we decided our primary focus would be church planting in major global cities with carefully selected partner organizations.



We also asked, "What can we learn from them and apply here?" Last year during our missions conference, one service was devoted to learning how our partners minister to refugees. Our partners from Germany and Jordan shared their experiences—the joys as well as obstacles they face. While our situation is different and demands somewhat different skills, there are many transferable principles.

Sandy Pierce, Executive Director for World Missions

Our *Worth Considering* blog shares, "[Try a Field Trip to Get Unstuck.](#)"

Conflicting Priorities

1. Rather than viewing differing priorities as competitive, look for ways they can be complementary. Local outreach can build ministry skills and interests that are useful globally, and vice versa. For example, if you are erecting a new facility, brainstorm ways your new building can serve immigrants in your community and begin preparing for these new ministries. Or perhaps you can engage your people in partnering with a global ministry that is also building a new facility.
2. Intentionally become a better team player by supporting the vision of other leaders. For example, if youth ministry is the predominant focus for your church, build more avenues for discipling youth through missions.
3. If your missions team has divided priorities, discuss why a focused approach is helpful in engaging the congregation,

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