

Growing Up Church Missions

What missions maturity looks like

by Ellen Livingood

More and more churches are discovering the benefits of “growing up” in their missions efforts. Maturity is required if a church is going to wrap their arms around the big-picture of what God is doing in the world and work from multiple directions over the long haul. The result of doing so is soaring productivity and major benefits to partners.

Unfortunately, other churches are stuck in the “kid stage” when it comes to global involvement—even if they have been doing missions for decades and consider themselves “missions minded.” Sadly, sometimes mission agencies are happy to leave these churches in an extended childhood because true partnership demands work.

Maturity in missions *is* worth the effort! It is not wrong for a church to begin its missions involvement as a juvenile. But no one wants to perennially be a kid, nor should churches. At the same time, it is important to remember that maturing in missions is a never-ending process. We are all just somewhere on the way.

There are important reasons to mature in missions. Local congregations have incredible potential for global impact, and they can unleash that potential most effectively when they mature in their missions viewpoint. While there are other important characteristics of maturity, this issue of *Postings* focuses on the collaborative traits.

1 GROW from a one-dimensional to a multi-dimensional perspective

Does your church define missions in terms of a single problem—say human trafficking, orphans, or the need for more missionaries? Such issues certainly deserve our attention; many of them loom very large. But no single need defines all the brokenness the church is called to address.



What Church “Missions Maturity” Looks Like... Multi-Dimensional Involvement

These days, more and more people at 121 Community Church in Grapevine, TX, are burdened for Indian peoples and doing something about it. This growing passion isn't accidental. With staff and volunteer leadership, 121 has developed multiple connections that have opened hearts and hands.

The church partners with an economic development NGO in Delhi that creates opportunities for short-termers from 121 to work beside nationals to bring physical assistance and the gospel to slum areas. The church also supports indigenous and missionary efforts to train Indian church planters. Meanwhile, 121 is being awakened to the needs of 300,000 South Asians in their metro area. They are helping to support an Indian church planter's efforts to reach Hindus in nearby Plano and a missionary family who transitioned from India to Fort Worth, now reaching neighbors in a predominantly Indian apartment complex.

Eradicating trafficking or providing a home for every orphan will not alone complete the Great Commission. And if a church defines missions solely as supporting missionaries (even if funds are going to multiple workers in a variety of locations), it can reduce missions to the single dimension of a monthly check.

In contrast, a mature, multi-dimensional perspective sees a bigger picture that could include cross-cultural workers but also the powerful engagement of national workers, technologies/tools, and partnerships. Each added element can make the rest more effective.

On the church side, expanding missions perspective also has major advantages. A one-dimensional perspective ignites the passion of only a slice of the congregation. Others are left to assume missions isn't for them because it doesn't touch their passion or gift set.

So mature congregations believe their people need to grasp God's multi-faceted plan. They are always looking for creative ways to tell the bigger story. When believers see the breathtaking scope of what God is about, they get excit-



What Church Missions Maturity Looks Like...

Focusing on Partners, not Ourselves

North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, GA, has developed effective programs in many areas of ministry, and churches around the globe would like to emulate their success. But North Point leaders are adamant that partnership is not about creating cookie-cutter reproductions of their ministries. Instead, they offer individualized help in the far more important process of strategizing customized approaches for specific contexts.

Missions Pastor Durwood Snead explains: "We come alongside visionary church leaders and ask questions like, 'Who is your audience and what do they believe?' and 'In your context, what kind of environments will cross the barriers Satan has set up to keep people from the truth?'"

Following this kind of brainstorming, North Point looks for ways to help these church leaders implement their unique plan. As a result, productive partnerships are thriving in major cities around the world.

Welcoming Church Partners...

Partners Can Do What Agencies Can't

Dave, international director of BEE World and a former pastor, watches partnerships benefit everyone.

"When we partner, BEE can bring the experience and training, but churches bring the people resources," he notes. "Together we accomplish far more."

"The church is God's holistic way of serving. Mission organizations, BEE included, can't do everything. We focus on what God has called us to. But when we partner with churches, they bring in people with eyes to see and gifts to address a much broader spectrum of needs. God has given His church gifted people and resources to minister, but people don't discover those gifts until they are engaged in doing ministry. Partnership opens doors to develop those skills so people can be what God designed them for. Paraphrasing the famous comment attributed to Eric Liddell, 'When we serve, we feel His pleasure.' That's what partnership can provide."

ed. They begin praying big prayers. And they want to know how they can get involved.

Because the span of Jesus' mandate is so large and complex, many missions-mature churches today are selecting to embrace the multi-dimensional scope of the task but concentrate their attention and efforts in terms of geography or people group. Often this takes the form of one or a limited number of strategic initiatives (in Catalyst we use the term, FOCUS). Multi-faceted, God-sized, faith-stretching goals are adopted, but on a scalable physical size.

For example, a church collaborates with a national church partner which has a vision to see biblical transformation happen across a quadrant of their city. Or a church joins a network of organizations dedicated to reaching an unengaged people group. Initiatives like these address a broad spectrum of needs and stretch across an extended period of time. But because they are limited in physical scope, the goal seems reachable.

2 GROW from simplistic solutions to unleashing a host of resources

One-dimensional perspectives lead to simplistic solutions. Addressing a single problem may be highly beneficial, but alone it is at best inadequate. Such fixes as Christmas shoeboxes, child sponsorships, or even pledging support for a field worker are almost never stand-alone solutions. Yet when glowing reports flow back to them, it is tempting for churches

to assume their gift has produced a happily-ever-after conclusion.

Reality is much more complex, but God has already designed the church to address that complexity. The Apostle Paul's analogy of believers as a body emphasizes that God has created His church with an amazing range of gifts and functions that are all essential (1 Cor. 12:12-31). One of the joys of coaching churches toward missions maturity is helping them analyze their global DNA. They discover how God has very intentionally invested in their congregation—regardless of its size—a vast array of resources to accomplish His purpose through them.

Corresponding to that God-given gifting is an intense hunger for significance He places in every human heart. And this longing is fulfilled only through service that benefits others. The best gift you can give any believer is to help them discover “This is what I was made for” as they experience the thrill of seeing God use them to transform the lives of others.

To fail to help every Christian find and fulfill their role in Kingdom advance is to fail in our stewardship as church leaders.

3 GROW from “me centered” programs to true partnership

Like children, missions-immature churches often exhibit a heartfelt compassion for others which is a highly commendable trait. But this compassion can lead into a trap of seeing themselves as fairy-story heroes—chivalrous knights riding to the rescue. Churches can be tempted to assume nothing happens in missions until they and their programs arrive to fix everything. This leads to undervaluing partners and overemphasizing their own contribution.

Maturing churches recognize the benefits of working with partners and the importance of allowing others to lead. Maturity also means welcoming others to join the team.

Introducing...

A NEW COLLABORATION that will grow your partnership capacity!



All Means is a hub connecting...

- ✓ the untapped resources of churches,
- ✓ the expertise of equipping ministries, and the
- ✓ mobilization help of church consultants

All Means agencies facilitate highly effective involvements in partnership with local churches.

All Means churches determine how they want to participate:

- ➔ Get tools and help to identify global potential and best ministry fit
- ➔ Develop global capacity through equipping
- ➔ Connect to agency partners' high-impact ministry opportunities
- ➔ Enjoy a partnership community



Find out more at www.AllMeans.org

Would you like to join us?

Churches: All Means is looking for church partners. We need experienced churches as well as churches who are new to global partnership.

Agencies: If you are interested in the possibility of helping to develop this model, please talk to us.

Catalyst Services is serving as the All Means communication hub.

Contact us at: 215.579.4346 / info@AllMeans.org

Maturing churches and their members are willing to experience some discomfort in the process of learning how to cross cultural barriers. They also very intentionally choose to follow on-site partners who are better equipped to set direction and lead the way.

4 GROW from short attention spans to longer-term staying power

Churches often want to fix a problem quickly and move on to the next new and exciting thing. In our ever-changing culture, we have a hard time making a commitment to something that can't be completed quickly. Yet it takes time to become good at something. Kobe Bryant and Yo-Yo Ma probably wanted to quit many times, but because they kept working at improving their skills, they eventually achieved incredible success.

Much that remains to be done in missions is tough and takes time. A church that insists on getting done in a hurry will seldom generate long-term results. Another factor is the sizeable learning curve to be fruitful global partners. Contributing to transformational change almost always demands

some in-depth understanding of the context and time invested in building relationships. These can't be rushed. At the same time, it is important to note that an open-ended commitment or one that stretches for many years can be counterproductive too. The sense of urgency is lost, and energy declines. Missions-mature churches have generally found that a commitment of three to five years (with the potential to "re-up") is optimum.

Welcoming Church Partners... We Need Churches!

"TWR couldn't function without partners," Wayne Frost, church partnerships director, explains: "Because we always use native speakers on our broadcasts, from the very beginning TWR has been dependent on our national partners. Today we also look to partner more extensively with Western churches. Churches have people with technical skills who don't have an outlet to use their talents for Kingdom purposes in their local setting. But when we team up, we can match these people with places where their expertise is needed."

Helping Churches Reach Maximum Maturity

Moving churches from youth to maturity is accomplished through intentional effort by their leaders. Mission agencies can also play a significant role. Here are some steps:

Church leaders

- 1. Resist the pressure to focus on a single need or solution.**
Are you a more traditional church that focuses solely on supporting missionaries, or a more contemporary church that trends toward hot-button issues? Regardless, latching onto a single issue or solution may spike some interest, but a broader perspective will involve more people hands-on and hearts-in.
- 2. Communicate the multi-faceted picture.**
Challenge creative members of your congregation to communicate the bigger picture of how God today is using a spectrum of people and tools in the exciting process of fulfilling His global purpose. Describe concrete ways a plethora of gifts is being used to accomplish the task.
- 3. Consider embracing a multi-dimensional initiative but focusing it in a specific place/people.**
Commit to helping address a broad scope of needs but concentrate in a particular city or district. Or "go deep" in reaching a people group or people-group cluster. Catalyst's [FOCUS materials](#) are one resource to guide this process.
- 4. Join a collaborative effort that will provide multiple service opportunities.**
Find out what partners are already working together in the area(s) where you want to make an impact. This type of partnership will help you mature your involvement. (See the All Means ad on the previous page as one example.)
- 5. Invite other churches to work with you.**
Could your church's strengths and weaknesses be balanced by the contributions of sister congregations? Could you encourage them in their missions-maturing process? Or perhaps you should consider joining with other congregations in what they are already doing.

Agency leaders and mobilizers

1. Assess how your priorities affirm that you value missional maturity in churches.

Do your actions demonstrate your enthusiasm about church involvement or do they reveal that you really prefer to work with congregations which are still content to just write the check? How can you better articulate and implement ways to help local congregations function as powerful missions partners?

2. Become a team player yourself.

Join collaborative efforts and educate your church mobilizers to know the opportunities these networks and partnerships offer on the broader scale. Reject the urge to recruit partners exclusively for your ministry. In fact, specifically recruit your churches to be part of the larger effort.

3. Dedicate some of the time and gifts of your communications department to develop creative ways of presenting the big picture of how God is accomplishing His global purposes.

Show how your ministry complements other efforts—translation, medical work, children's ministry, orality, sports ministry, church planting, mass media, business, education, leadership development, etc.

4. Challenge field personnel to invest time and effort to become skilled facilitators.

Effective use of the gifts and resources of the local church takes vision, time, and skills. Invest in helping staff and national partners facilitate well.

5. Value what churches have to offer beyond money.

Refuse to lead with a request for funds. Find out what God-given DNA each church brings to the missions task and what untapped potential they could unleash.

5. Brainstorm how you can encourage churches to stay in the race for the long term.

Look for ways that you can help churches to build depth into their leadership team that can withstand personnel shifts. Help them grasp why and how longer-term commitments better serve the Kingdom.



Ellen Livingood launched and leads Catalyst Services to help churches and agencies mobilize the body of Christ's untapped potential. She is available to help your church or mission agency address the priorities mentioned here or other mobilization issues.

Interchange Postings

Catalyst's *Postings* e-newsletter is a monthly publication designed for mission agency personnel and local church leaders involved in collaborative global efforts. The practical articles highlight what churches and agencies are doing to mobilize believers, especially those of younger generations, to expand the Kingdom.

DON'T MISS FUTURE ISSUES!

To subscribe to future issues of this FREE e-newsletter, go to www.catalystservices.org/postings/

WANT TO READ MORE?

Find past *Postings* at www.catalystservices.org/postings-gallery-of-archives/

CONTACT US

To ask questions, suggest future topics, change your address, or unsubscribe to this monthly publication, email info@catalystservices.org.

CONTRIBUTE

If you appreciate *Postings*, please donate to help fund future issues at: www.catalystservices.org/donate/.

© 2013 Catalyst Services, Inc.