

# Expanded Your Missions Capacity

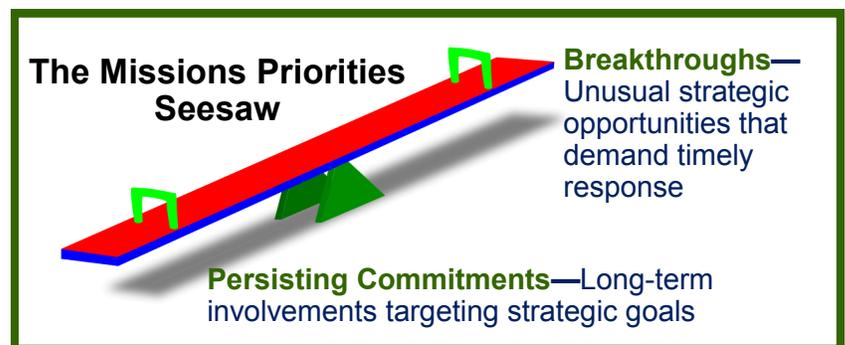
**Five church leaders share how they create margin for breakthrough opportunities**

“Wow. Exciting!” was the typical response to last month’s winning [breakthrough opportunities](#). Church leaders were challenged by the high potential for congregational impact.

“...but we couldn’t do that right now,” too often followed. Why? It usually boiled down to the church’s lack of capacity to expand their global engagement.

So this issue of *Postings* tackles the important question of how to create and maintain capacity—margin—in order to be prepared to quickly address an urgent need or unusual opportunity.

## Balancing Persisting and Breakthrough Priorities



It’s a balancing act: On one end of the missions seesaw are **PRIORITIES** that demand **PERSISTENCE**. These are people/projects that require long-term church investment in order to penetrate resistant people groups or address intractable problems. Prayer, people, and finances must continue over the long haul to see goals reached. Churches should **persist** in supporting workers and projects that have proven track records of strategic, quality global impact.

On the other end of our seesaw are **BREAKTHROUGH PRIORITIES**. These are sudden needs and unusual opportunities (often, windows that may not be open long). Churches need the capacity to address at least some of these opportunities that fit their strategy. To do so requires the capacity to respond quickly. Note that breakthrough opportunities also need to clearly be strategic. Sometimes it is easy to confuse urgency with importance.

There are New Testament examples of this balancing of priorities: Philip was **persisting** in an evangelistic campaign in Samaria when God suddenly called him to a **breakthrough** meeting in the desert with the Ethiopian eunuch. It is

March 2016

likely he then returned to his longer-term ministry. Paul was **persisting** in reaching the key cities of Asia Minor when God used a Macedonian to call him to **breakthrough** opportunities in Europe. In the long run, in person and by letter he balanced powerful ministry in both places.

It's easy to pile all of our efforts on one end of the seesaw. Churches can overemphasize either end. **We will focus here primarily on how churches which are heavily invested in long-term missionaries/projects can build capacity to respond to sudden breakthrough opportunities.**

## Strategy Should Always Guide Expansion

A well-articulated and broadly-owned strategy must be the beginning point for choosing both persisting and breakthrough priorities.

**Ryan King, missions pastor of Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, TX,** says, "We started by defining the biblical convictions that our church leaders believed are the essence of missions for us. We always want to be driven by our biblical convictions, so we have listed 10 compass points that now steer our global involvement.



"When we are asked to adopt a new opportunity, we go back and measure it against our convictions," Ryan continues.

"For instance, for us the unreached are our first commitment, so we choose to support people in ministry to UPGs at a higher level. This is not arbitrary; we do it because we are clear on our convictions. While always leaving room for a specific prompting of the Spirit, our compass points help us say "no" to someone who comes to us with a good vision that just doesn't fit our priorities. Clear convictions don't avoid the hard conversations, but they mean that decisions can be solidly based on our identity as a church."

For every church, a clear strategy should define global priorities. Begin by running any new proposal through your church's own strategy "filter."

Even after eliminating nonstrategic options, most churches still have far more "asks" than they have the current capacity to adopt. Before committing all available funds to long-term persistent commitments, be sure to make room for breakthrough priorities.

## 4 reasons...

to include breakthrough priorities in your church's global missions plan:

1. Good stewards must both plan wisely and be open to the Spirit's new directions. (Acts 8:4-5, 26-27)
2. Exciting opportunities may open for only short periods of time. Churches must be able to act quickly, "making the most of every opportunity." (Eph. 5:16)
3. Unusual opportunities seldom can be predicted. The very fact they are sudden and disruptive makes them fertile for ministry. We must have margin for the unanticipated. (2 Tim 4:2)
4. Breakthrough priorities give your congregation a way to respond to current events, engaging them

## Missions Margin

In order to embrace fresh, urgent opportunities, churches need to have missions margin. Three types of margin are necessary: funds, time, and attention.

### [ Funding Margin ]

**PM, missions pastor of Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, TN,** recommends that "mission leaders should keep 'cash on hand' to pursue opportunities. By this I mean, don't allocate your entire budget based on requests received. Reserve a certain amount for things you will search out during the year."

That requires designating a portion of your missions budget for breakthrough priorities that might not even have arisen when the budget is developed. Remember that many breakthrough priorities are shorter term, so once one is completed, that percentage of the budget will be freed up to be re-designated for another breakthrough project. It is wise to

March 2016

annually reserve a portion of your missions budget for these types of urgent, yet unanticipated opportunities.

**[ Leadership Margin ]**

Reserving leaders' *time* to vet new opportunities is absolutely crucial, often even more important than reserving funds.

**PM** designates some of his personal time and travel budget to visit future projects that often haven't even been identified when annual planning takes place. This avoids two opposite problems: (1) having to reject sudden opportunities simply because leaders don't have time to vet the partners and project or (2) the opposite issue of adopting a project without sufficient evaluation

due to lack of time to thoroughly investigate the situation.

**Ryan** knows he must rigorously protect portions of his time to evaluate the big picture and make sure the missions program is on course. Monthly, even weekly, he stops and takes time to ask himself, "Am I consistently engaging in ways that refresh vision? If not, I am in danger of becoming a technician



just cranking out the same things we've always done."

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**[ Congregational Attention Margin ]**

**PM** cautions that it is crucial to understand the kinds of projects that resonate with your congregation and to limit the number. If you are featuring a different project or missionary every month, many people will be overwhelmed and effectively shut out all missions messages. Less is more.

Present stories that offer a way, preferably multiple ways, to get involved. If at all possible, make breakthrough involvement about more than just giving a financial gift.

**E·x·p·a·n·d Church Capacity to Grasp Important Opportunities**

**1. Expand around your core purpose**

The missions leaders at Austin Stone Community Church meet annually for several days to evaluate where God is taking them. "We spend time dreaming and re-asking the strategic questions," **Ryan** explains. "For example, we ask ourselves, 'Are we aiming at the right things? Or are there strategic shifts we need to make or at least look into? What will it take to achieve what we feel God is calling us to? What should we change?'"

Regardless of the size of your missions leadership team, you can do this. Don't fill your meeting agendas so full with administrative tasks that you forfeit giving priority time to asking these big questions. Include your pastor and other leaders in the process to make sure you are all on the same page. Talk about how to develop and preserve capacity for responding to unusual opportunities coming your way.

**2. Expand by tapping the motivational power of breakthrough opportunities**



**Jeff Whitaker, missions pastor at Calvary Bible Church, Kalamazoo, MI**, emphasizes, "The issue isn't limited funds; it's limited generosity. Here is where breakthrough opportunities have an advantage because people can see major things happen. As our

congregation sees God at work, they are ready to sacrifice for the goal. That's more difficult with monthly support for career missionaries. Giving for our breakthrough challenge in Nepal has more than doubled our goal of \$125,000—totally outside of our normal giving.

Our people have also gotten involved in other ways, even though our breakthrough focus is in a location where it is

March 2016

tough to take a lot of folks onsite. We didn't even launch until we had a project manager from the congregation in place. We also have highly competent field facilitators who are powerful communicators. It's their frequent updates on the story coupled with good internal organization that keep our people engaged.

"We also see breakthrough opportunities as an important part of our conversation with potential workers," Jeff continues. "As we walk alongside men and women considering missions, we want to present to them ministry options with potential for high impact at a strategic level. The breakthrough opportunities presented in *Postings* are a great tool because they hone in on lots of key ministry aspects that describe what we consider most strategic."

### 3. Expand leaders' ownership

**Shannon Libengood, director of missions at North Way Christian Community in Pittsburgh, PA**, has been concerned about balancing what they term "legacy" ministry with new efforts God is leading them to today. One step is challenging senior leaders to have the margin to visit key ministry opportunities on the field.

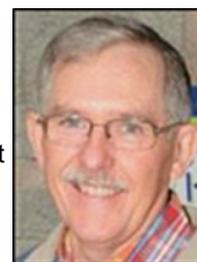


"Last year we took two of our pastors and key elders to the field to see strategic ministry options," she shares. "Since

then, vision for new and expanded efforts has come from the pulpit without our pushing. It has increased our confidence that we can hit the refresh button for moving ahead. And an added bonus is that because leaders have caught the vision, they are willing to designate from the church budget the needed funds for expansion."

### 4. Expand capacity via discipleship and prayer

**Dave Fischer, director of local and global outreach at Gateway Fellowship in Poulsbo, WA**, emphasizes that capacity is linked to discipleship. "There's a direct tie between developing disciples and having the people and financial resources for missions. So first of all, we have to figure out what to stop doing in order to have the capacity to invest in building disciples. Our senior pastor frequently asks us, 'What do we need to say no to in order to say yes to God?'"



**Shannon** adds a challenge to prayer: "Here at North Way, we are excited that things are moving forward and people are getting on board. But we know the enemy is not happy, so we are intentionally focusing on intercession both for global partners and for leaders of our church. It's the only way we can build the capacity to go on the offensive, not just function in the defense. God will do it, but we need to be dependent on Him."

Read our related *Worth Considering...* blog entitled, "[Complicit in Mission Desperation?](#)"

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