

POSTINGS

articles for missions mobilizers



October 2022 | Vol. 17 | Issue 10

A Compass for Church Missions

How one church developed a strategy that works

Catalyst Services' Director Ellen Livingood recently sat down with Dave Wolf, Lead Pastor, and Joan Zeberlein, Director of Missions, of Grace Point Church in Newtown, PA. They were eager to share with other church leaders the missional strategy development process they pursued that resulted in what they call their Missions Compass. They went on to explain how they built ownership of the Compass, and how this tool is clarifying and energizing their missional direction.



Joan Zeberlein,
Director of
Missions,
Grace Point
Church



Dave Wolf,
Lead Pastor,
Grace Point
Church

Q. Joan, you were just beginning as director of missions at Grace Point when you came to me asking for help in developing a clearer strategy. The church already had a long history of missions involvement, so what did you feel was lacking?

A. Joan: As I stepped into this role, the responsibility of leading missions felt so weighty because we had nothing in place to guide us. There was no shortage of people saying, "Hey, Joan, I've got this great idea! There's this opportunity Grace Point should get involved in!"

But we had no objective guidelines to help decide whether to say yes or no. With so many needs out there, I felt irresponsible. As leaders, we are stewards of our people resources, our time resources, our monetary resources, and there wasn't anything to guide our investment of those resources. The development of a missional strategy was a lot of work, but now we're beginning to see the fruit of it, for sure.

Q. Tell us a little bit about what the process looked like. Who was involved? What were you looking to achieve?

A. Joan: We put together what we called our Mission Priorities Team including (1) our lead pastor, Dave Wolf, (2) an elder, (3) another strategic thinker with a long history at Grace Point, (4) a younger woman who was very passionate about missions but newer to our church so she had a fresh perspective, and (5) myself. I was excited to have Dave's input real time that provided validation of what we were doing. And I was really thankful for your guidance through the process, Ellen, because I didn't know what I didn't know.

This Mission Priorities Team was tasked with developing our missions strategies which we recognized needed to be based on clear priorities. We had to start by analyzing our church's unique missional DNA and our core biblical, missional values. These set the foundation for identifying priorities and strategy. The process was a lot of work but worth every second!

Q. Having the lead pastor willing to commit the time to this process was huge. Dave, you have a lot on your plate as you shepherd a congregation of about 500. Why was developing a missions strategy a priority for you?

A. Dave: The process was so worth my time. I'm a synthesizer and I really like to see ministries integrated versus having them in individual silos. And I believe missions is just so foundational. The church is called to make disciples and fulfill Acts 1:8 in our Jerusalem here, in our nearby Judea, and then far to the ends of the earth.

I wanted to be part of fleshing out our basic strategy for missions and outreach because it needs to impact so many things in so many different ministry areas—from our student ministry to our children's ministry, to our group ministry. If I hadn't been part of the conversation from the beginning, it wouldn't be fair for me later to say that I didn't like what was done.

Q. A couple of years earlier, Grace Point had gone through what Catalyst calls "Your FOCUS on the World," a process of identifying a global initiative that fits your DNA. How did those two discernment pieces fit together?

A. Dave: The focusing process involved a lot of research and groundwork to identify the next place where we would really invest, where our people could engage both in going and in developing a partnership. And it's been really

cool to see that happen. That research fed into our strategy development. In both of these processes, we considered our congregation's gifting, skills, passions, career tracks, etc.

Q. Your missions strategy development led to what you call Grace Point's "Missions Compass." This initially was a multi-page document with supporting rationales and specific assessment questions. Then it was summarized into more concise forms for various audiences and then eventually abridged into an attractive, bookmark-sized card for the congregation. Dave then introduced that Missions Compass to the congregation in a series of **sermons** that included the biblical foundation and a description of how your Compass would help shape Grace Point's obedience to Jesus' Acts 1:8 mandate. How are you actually using this Missions Compass?

A. Joan: Our Missions Compass is like my marching orders. I love that Dave spent a whole sermon series presenting the biblical foundation and unpacking the elements of the Compass so that everyone was aware that we have a guide in place that directs our decisions.

Now when someone comes to me, we can sit down with our Compass to talk about how this opportunity aligns with Grace Point's eight missional values and our carefully chosen priorities. If the alignment is really off, it feels so much better to be able to say, "You know, I love that you're passionate about this, but let's look at why it's not a fit for involving Grace Point."

Dave: Yes, the Compass provides objective criteria so that it's not just Joan or the missions team that is making a subjective decision.

One of the key elements of developing our Missions Compass was bringing our leadership on board with it. After our Mission Priorities Team fleshed it out, we presented it to our elders and staff, dedicating a full day of our elder/staff retreat to process it together. After Joan walked through it with them, we broke into groups and used case studies of organizations that were partners or potential partners. The groups were tasked with running these real organizations through this proposed grid. That exercise helped our leaders to see the value of the Compass and really own it. They embraced it with a few tweaks, and now as we move to the stage of making some hard decisions, we are

confident that our leadership is really united behind us.

Joan: I also share our Missions Compass with our organizational partners or potential partners. As I've talked through our priorities with them, it's been fun to hear some of them say, "Wow, you're really giving me some things to think about here. We're missing some pieces that would make what we're doing even better and more effective." So this Compass is really a big deal.

Dave: Not only do we now have an objective grid, we are thankful that other churches can apply their own grid and meet the needs that we have determined are not a fit for us.

Q. What kind of feedback did you get when Dave presented this to the congregation?

A. Joan: The Sunday that we rolled out the Missions Compass to the congregation, we placed a copy of the Compass bookmark on every seat. Before I even got home that day, I had emails from people inspired and enthusiastic about it. People were really listening, and it was making sense to them. New people, too, were excited about what we were doing.

Dave: I want to advocate for the value of putting in the effort

to design a missional strategy summary like the bookmark we created. There are a ton of details and vetting questions that support our strategy, which are fantastic and very useful. But if we tried to communicate all of that to everybody, they would have gotten so lost in the weeds. Our Compass bookmark is a tool that gives everyone a clear summary of our priorities. Not only does it help the congregation to understand how decisions are being made, but our prayer is that people will start to vet their own involvements because they have the rationale in their hands.

Q. Your Missions Compass gives you the basis not only to make decisions about adding new engagements but also, and perhaps most important, for ongoing assessment of global workers, local ministry partners, and yourselves. It's a tool to continually ask, "Are we on target? Do our partners and our involvements match what we say we want to be doing?"

A. Joan: Ellen, you were really good about reminding me that our Compass is both a proactive and a reactive tool. For example, we are saying to our children's ministry, youth ministry, women's ministry, etc., "Now that you know what our values and priorities are, what are you are excited about that also aligns

with them?" That empowers all of our ministries; it's not just the missions ministry leading everything.

Q. I love the way your Compass is building clarity and unity about missions priorities for the whole congregation. Any last thoughts that you want to share with other churches who may be considering such a process?

A. Joan: My advice would be, don't get overwhelmed or discouraged when the strategy development process takes longer than you anticipate. It's so worth it when everyone understands why you're doing what you're doing. The end result will keep you focused and give you a way to stay on course. I highly recommend it. Enjoy the journey. You'll learn a lot along the way!

Dave: I would agree. I would recommend to lead pastors that they see this as foundational. You want every person in your congregation involved in serving, in using their gifts so that they can grow spiritually and help others find Christ and grow. For that, you need a compass. Clarity about our mandate from Christ to make disciples is absolutely worth the investment.



MISSIONAL STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

1. The church's biblical mandate
2. The changing global context
3. Why churches are moving from reactive to proactive
4. Who shapes and who owns our church's missional vision
5. The 8 major currents in missions strategy
6. Determining our missional values
7. Identifying our congregation's missional DNA
8. Discerning God's leading for our missional priorities
9. Developing and communicating our missional compass
10. Defining where we go from here

If you are interested in discussing the possibility of pursuing a similar missional strategy development process, [contact Catalyst Services.](#)

GRACE POINT MISSIONS COMPASS

Our Missions Compass will provide guidance in the ongoing process of selecting, prioritizing, and evaluating global workers to send/support, international leaders to walk alongside, organizations to partner with, and projects worthy of our time and resources. This compass will also help our global outreach leaders to evaluate their strategies and efforts to fulfill the Great Commission.



Our Missional Values

- 1 **Gospel transformation** that always defines our core purpose
- 2 **Whole-life discipleship** that includes high standards for service
- 3 **Church-centered ministry** that engages each individual member
- 4 **Holistic compassion** that reflects God's loving heart
- 5 **Energizing ownership** that instills a sense of urgency
- 6 **Proactive stewardship** that shapes all of life as service to the King
- 7 **Relationship-based collaboration** that accomplish what none of us could alone
- 8 **Sustainable and reproducible ministries** that honor our partners

PRIORITIZED MISSIONS STRATEGIES

Grace Point has chosen the following strategies to drive our missions involvement.

- 1 **Focused Global Partnering** concentrates on specific location/ministry, often with multiple partners, to achieve a larger goal with mutual benefits.

We do this by discerning God-designed priorities, gifts and needs for their church. We then develop partnerships led by on-site leaders built around a God-sized vision and goals that have the potential to engage our entire congregation. *Example: Grace Point's Middle East FOCUS in Lebanon*

- 2 **Mercy and Justice for the Marginalized** focuses on Jesus' care for those suffering and disenfranchised.

We do this by concentrating on addressing poverty, trafficking, education, etc. Grace Point affirms that mercy and justice must be accompanied by spiritual life transformation as the ultimate goal. *Examples: ChoiceOne outreach, Compassion International in Bolivia*

- 3 **Missional Integration of Local and Global Outreach** replaces attractional with missional thinking, responding to the contemporary context of global migration and the post-Christian US culture that require us to utilize missions methods to reach our community.

We do this by integrating international and domestic efforts, seeking to build cross-cultural outreach and discipleship skills applicable "here" and "there." *Example: Sorting ministry for NYC International Project*

DEFINING TERMS

PARTNERSHIPS

are major objectives adopted in tandem with a ministry or individual worker and prioritized by Grace Point for high commitment, high levels of communication to the entire congregation, high priority for involvement, and significant funding.

PROJECTS

are support provided to organizations that have a smaller core of Grace Point members highly committed to involvement and to which Grace Point gives a lesser amount of funding and support.

GRACE POINT

gracepointpa.org/missions

Catalyst's *Postings* e-newsletter is a free, monthly publication of practical articles highlighting what churches and agencies are doing to mobilize untapped potential for global impact.

SUBSCRIBE at catalystservices.org/postings.
READ past *Postings* articles at catalystservices.org/postings-gallery-of-archives.