

POSTINGS

articles for missions mobilizers



October 2023 | Vol. 18 | Issue 10 | by Ellen Livingood

Take Inventory

Identify the resources
God has invested in
your church

Store owners don't advertise their business or even open their shop door without carefully considering their inventory. Yet sometimes churches are so eager to move ahead with their missions plans that they jump into ministry that does not fully utilize their assets. As a result, some, maybe most, of their God-given resource inventory sits unused, with less effective ministry and fewer people engaged in the opportunities offered.

Church leaders are responsible to prayerfully and proactively manage all the resources under their care for greatest Kingdom impact. In the New Testament, church leaders are often referred to

as “overseers,” a role which Titus 1:7 describes as “God’s steward.” When He spoke to the Antioch church leaders in Acts 13:1-3, the Holy Spirit clearly affirmed their people-stewarding responsibility, directing them to commission two of their key men for a new missions ministry.

If you have some level of responsibility to lead missions in your church, a portion of this stewardship has been delegated to you. What is the “inventory” that God has given to your church to be used for His glory? Sometimes it is easy to focus on what we wish we had instead of concentrating on fully utilizing what God has already invested in our local body. Read on for questions in seven categories that will help you begin to inventory the amazing, unique resources in your congregation. Defining your God-given “assets” is the first step in using them well.

1. LEADERS

Start your inventory process by analyzing what unique attributes God has invested in your church’s leaders, including yourself. What resources has God given you in your pastor(s), elders/church leaders, missions leadership team, etc.? What is their background, training, experience, and expertise that God wants to employ in a greater way for missional impact? What are their passions? How could you creatively engage more of their potential?

2. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Take a walk around your church building(s) and try to evaluate these physical resources with new eyes. What is the potential of these rooms? What about the outdoor spaces? Do you own housing or a camp or other property? What equipment do you have—vehicles, tech equipment, instruments, etc.? Are there periods of time when these resources are not being fully utilized?

Do some creative dreaming. Can you imagine ways that these resources might be more fully used? Could an immigrant congregation use your facilities? Perhaps you could provide office space for a mission agency or other

non-profit? Could you make a van(s) available for use by a local ministry? Who might use your camp property in a creative way? Ask the tough questions like, “Do we have a tendency to let concern about damage thwart our generosity in sharing?”

3. SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

Some churches have taken a skills assessment of their congregation using a generic survey, but these often do not ask the questions most useful for missional purposes (such as languages spoken). In addition, post-pandemic most congregations have a significant number of newcomers they don’t know well. Consider if this is a good time to take an in-depth assessment of the unused potential sitting in your church today. Here is a very extensive [survey](#) you can use as is or simplify for your purposes.

How could you identify people in various phases of life whom God has gifted for short- or longer-term missions service? One area that you want to be sure to track is culture-crossing skills and experience. Who has gone on a short-term ministry trip and been especially good at building cross-cultural friendships? Who has a gift for languages? Who is involved with a local ESL program? Who is burdened to regularly pray for the unreached or the persecuted? Do you see other indications that God may have gifted a member for missions service?

4. RELATIONSHIPS

You may never have thought about relationships as a valuable resource—but they can be one of the most useful assets God has given your church. Relationships may also be one of the hardest to assess. As you interact with individuals in your congregation, make it a habit to listen for clues to your people’s relationships that God may want to use.

Relationships are formal and informal: denominational or local ministerial connections, business and professional relationships your people have in your country and abroad, cross-cultural friendships, strong

relationships with your missionaries and nationals they work with, community associations your members participate in (such as Rotary), connections with local elected officials or other government positions...the list is almost endless.

Relationships are door-openers. Sometimes you will instantly identify the way God wants to use a particular connection, but initially you may have no idea. Keep a running list of relationships, and stay alert for God to show you how to use them as springboards for ministry. Sometimes the purpose is not revealed until much later or ever, but when you and your congregation watch for opportunities that open up through relationships, God's fingerprints become clear and these connections produce amazing fruit!

Leaders in one US church discovered that a member who worked in law enforcement had built friendships with other believers in his department. When missionaries heard about these relationships, they invited them to come on a "professional visit" to meet with their counterparts in the city where the missionaries worked.

The trip created an opportunity for the visiting "representatives" to build friendships and share their faith among a group of local police the missionaries had no other means of reaching. It also meant that the missionaries now had contacts inside the local police if they needed to work through an issue.

All of this was possible because church leaders recognized the potential of the relationships their member had built among his professional colleagues.

5. FINANCES

Money is not at the top of this inventory list because it is easy to mistakenly see money as our primary asset. While not all-important, finances are certainly an asset God calls every church to steward. Estimate your total church budget for the next 5 or 10 years; how much do you anticipate God will entrust your leaders to use wisely over the coming years? It is likely a sobering amount to manage responsibly.

Now consider what your total missions giving may total over the same time period. Include not only budgeted funds but also special offerings. Are you confident that you are investing these funds for the greatest Kingdom return? Do you have some benchmarks for effective investment of missions monies?

Also consider the contributions your people give directly to other charities. Obviously you don't control these, but you can definitely educate your people in their giving. Have you considered how you might do that?

Another very large pool of finances in many churches are the funds your people will leave to others in their wills or other estate plans. Again, these are outside of your control, but you can challenge your congregation to prayerfully plan how they will steward the funds they leave behind when they are called to their heavenly home. You can remind your people that they can make bequests that will have eternal impact.

6. "NEIGHBORS"

This is a very broad category that provides an opportunity to think creatively about assets stemming from your geographic location. What resources are within your reach? Are there immigrant or refugee communities in your area? What nearby congregations have missions expertise that might help you? Are there global missions headquartered in your city? What local ministries could train your people and/or be served by your church? Are there schools or universities nearby with international students, student ministries or valuable training courses? What other local resources or opportunities could you make use of?

7. OTHER

Has the process of taking inventory of your God-given resources reminded you of other tangible or intangible gifts? Has He blessed you with unusual “inventory” that you can utilize creatively for His glory and the blessing of those in your congregation, your community, or the far-flung regions of the world? In this “other” category, add anything you think might be of value, even if you aren’t sure just how it could be used.

FROM INVENTORY TO STEWARDSHIP

This inventory process should stimulate some fresh ideas about how you could better engage what God is trusting you to manage. Discovering your church’s varied assets may have already started multiple conversations across your congregation about how to use them more strategically. It should also have created a sense of urgency to pray regularly about how God has designed all of these assets to be invested toward the fulfillment of His global mission.

Why not gather a group of Millennials and Gen Zers from your church to hear their suggestions for engaging your untapped potential in ways that excite them? They can help you understand the motivations of their peers and brainstorm methods to involve them. Consider sharing your inventory list with a leader in your denominational mission agency or another trusted mission/ministry and ask them for ideas as to how you could use your resources more effectively.

Don’t attempt to pull every inventory item off your church’s “shelf” right away. Instead begin by prayerfully choosing a couple that seem particularly promising and

pursue discussions about how to better steward them for God’s glory.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells a parable about talents to highlight His Kingdom principle of entrusting more to those who have proven wise stewards of what they already have: “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’”

May you as missions leaders hear these words of commendation from your Master because you were trustworthy servants who invested His resources wisely.

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