

The Role of the Church in Sending Missionaries

Workshop Goals

The Workshop was assigned the following goals:

- Articulate a biblical, Church centered theology of sending.
- Clarify the roles of Churches, missionaries, and networks.
- Shepherd missionaries with clarity and care.
- Strengthen African Churches as primary senders to the nations.

In our endeavour to answer the complex questions associated with these goals, the team was made aware that this is no small undertaking. The following represents what we concluded would be a place to start for local Churches, Missionaries, Partner Organizations and other Stakeholders.

1. Theological Foundations

1.1. The Local Church's Biblical Role in Sending Missionaries

Johan Herman Bavink, the Dutch theologian and missionary to Indonesia, said:

Answers can be given solely on the basis of Scripture. For the work of missions is the work of God; it is not lawful for us to improvise.

Scripture alone governs ecclesiology and missions. Drawing from biblical texts like Acts 13:1-3; 3 John 1-8; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 3:10; Revelation 7:9-10 and related passages we observe that the Church is God's ordained means for displaying His glory among the nations, and no external organization may usurp the Church's authority in setting apart those called, sending, supporting, or shepherding its sent members.

The local Church is not a secondary player in global missions; it is the primary agent, authority, and aim of the Great Commission. Partnerships with networks, agencies, or other Churches can strengthen and should serve the Church in its mandate but must never replace or override the local congregation's God given responsibilities.

1.2. A Brief Biblical Outline of the Church

In a global context that often tends to speak in a derogatory fashion of local Church formations, though perhaps superfluous in our present company, it seems necessary to summarize some conclusions from the Scriptural witness about the Church.

- The Church is the Body of Christ, united to Him as Head (*Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18*). Every member is gifted for service within the body (*1 Corinthians 12:12-27*), and the Church grows up into Christ in every way (*Ephesians 4:15-16*).
- The Church is the Bride of Christ, redeemed and purified by His blood (*Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7-8*). Christ loves and sanctifies her; she exists to reflect His glory.
- The Church is the Household of God and Pillar and Buttress of the Truth (*1 Timothy 3:15*). It upholds and displays the gospel in the world.
- The Church is God's chosen instrument for displaying his manifold wisdom (*Ephesians 3:10*). Through the Church, made up of the redeemed from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, the rulers and authorities in heavenly places see God's redemptive plan (*Revelation*

7:9-10).

- The Church is Commissioned for the Nations (*Matthew 28:18-20*). The risen Christ commands His Church to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching obedience to all He commanded. This mandate is corporate, not individualistic.
- The local Church is the visible expression of the universal Church and the primary context for discipleship, worship, and mission.

2. The Church's Role in Global Missions

Scripture assigns mission to the Church as its central task; proclaiming the gospel to all peoples so that transformed disciples gather into reproducing local Churches that glorify God.

2.1. The Church is the Primary Sender (*Acts 13:1-3*)

In Antioch, the gathered Church worshipped, fasted, and prayed. The Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work; the Church confirmed this by prayer, fasting, laying on of hands, and sending them. They reported back to the sending Church (*Acts 14:26-27*), showing ongoing accountability.

2.2. The Church is the Primary Supporter (*3 John 1-8*)

John commends Gaius for welcoming and sending missionaries who went out "for the sake of the Name," accepting nothing from Gentiles. The Church ought to support such workers generously "in a manner worthy of God" so as to be "fellow workers for the truth."

2.3. The Church is the Aim and End of Missions (*Matthew 28:18-20; Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23*)

Missions gather disciples into local Churches, appoint elders, and teach obedience, so that healthy, reproducing congregations display God's glory among the nations (*Ephesians 3:10; Revelation 7:9-10*).

2.4. The Church Discerns and Confirms Callings (*Acts 13:2-3*)

The Holy Spirit calls individuals, but the Church discerns, affirms, and commissions through prayerful examination of character, doctrine, and gifting.

Partnerships with mission networks or agencies (e.g., for logistics, field coordination, or specialized training et.al.) are encouraged, even biblically (*3 John 1-8*), but must not usurp the sending Church's authority. Agencies are servants to the Churches, not superiors. No external body may call, commission, or oversee missionaries apart from the local Church's affirmation.

Simultaneously, while partner organizations must be careful to respect and honour the Church by not intruding upon its autonomy and Christ given authority, Churches in turn should not abandon her own responsibilities and abdicate the authority given to Christ but faithfully steward the same.

3. Church Guideline for Setting Apart and Affirming those Called into Ministry

In practice, setting apart (commissioning) those called to missionary service follows the pattern of *Acts 13:1-3* and *1 Timothy 4:14* (laying on of hands by elders with congregational recognition). This is a solemn act of the gathered Church, not a private decision or agency process.

3.1. Personal Sense of Calling

The individual testifies to the Holy Spirit's inward call through Scripture, prayer and other providences of God.

3.2. Church Examination

Elders interview the candidate on doctrine, character (*1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9*), gifting, and mission vision. The congregation observes their life and ministry within the body.

3.3. Public Affirmation

The Church votes to recognize the calling or by whatever other means the Church.

3.4. Commissioning Service

Elders lay hands on the candidate in a public gathering, praying for the Holy Spirit's empowerment, and sending them as the Church's representatives.

This process ensures the Church's authority is honoured and protects against self appointed missionaries.

4. Church Centered Sending Pathway

The pathway follows the missionary lifecycle chronologically, with recommended actions for the Church at each stage. Missing elements from prior outlines (e.g., Church wide missional vision, training, furlough, evaluation, appreciation) have been added for completeness.

4.1. Establishing a Missional Church Foundation

The sending process begins with the whole Church embracing a God given vision for the nations, not as an optional ministry but as central to its identity (*Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 3:10; Revelation 7:9-10*).

Recommendations

- Preach and teach regularly on the Great Commission, unreached peoples, and God's global glory.
- Develop a written missions strategy (target unreached ethnic groups, prioritize Church planting, define doctrinal standards for partners).
- Foster a culture of prayer, fasting, and intercession for the nations (*Acts 13:2-3*).
- Involve the congregation in outreach, evangelism, and cross-cultural exposure within the local context to cultivate a missional mindset.
- Appoint a missions elder, deacon or committee (under elder oversight) to champion vision and coordination.

4.2. Identifying Potential Missionaries

The Church actively observes and invites those who demonstrate faithfulness, maturity, and a sense of calling (*Acts 13:1-2*).

Recommendations

- Look for evidence of genuine conversion, baptism, faithful membership, attendance, service, evangelism, and spiritual growth (*Hebrews 10:24-25*).
- Interview interested individuals and families: assess spiritual, physical, mental, emotional health; financial literacy; family support; awareness of cultural/family strain.
- Elders invite promising members who show reliability, integrity, doctrinal maturity, spiritual gifting, and a burden for the unreached.

- Encourage short term trips or local cross-cultural ministry under Church oversight to test interest and readiness.
- Pray corporately for the Holy Spirit to set apart workers (*Acts 13:2*).

4.3. Discipling, Training, and Preparing Candidates

The Church equips candidates thoroughly before sending, ensuring they are doctrinally sound, character tested, and practically prepared (*Titus 1:5-9; 2 Timothy 2:2*).

Recommendations

- Provide ongoing discipleship through teaching, mentorship, and Church life.
- Offer targeted training: biblical theology of missions, cross-cultural adaptation, language basics, fundraising, tentmaking/entrepreneurship, Church planting, evangelism methods.
- Involve the family in preparation (marriage/family counseling, financial planning).
- Require doctrinal alignment with the Church's confession and a clear understanding of the target unreached group.
- Partner selectively with trusted networks or agencies for specialized training (e.g., linguistics, security), but under Church approval and oversight.

4.4. Testing and Confirming the Calling

The Church rigorously examines and confirms the calling to protect the gospel and the candidate (*Acts 13:2-3; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9*).

Recommendations

- Elders conduct in depth interviews on doctrine, character, family life, gifting, and vision.
- Require background checks, pastoral/character references, feedback from the congregation, and confirmation of family support.
- Test through assigned ministry roles (teaching, evangelism, leadership) within the Church.
- Involve congregational input (observation, feedback) and prayer/fasting.
- If agency involvement is considered, the Church retains final authority in selection.

4.5. Commissioning and Public Affirmation

The Church publicly sets apart and sends the missionary as its representative (*Acts 13:3; 3 John 5-8*).

Recommendations

- Hold a public commissioning service: prayer, laying on of hands by elders, testimony, celebration.
- Issue a letter of commendation affirming the Church's examination and support.
- Declare the missionary as the Church's sent worker "for the sake of the name".
- Mobilize resources: Church budget commitment, member involvement in support raising, specific prayer times.

4.6. Sending to the Field and Ongoing Care

The Church provides generous, accountable support and maintains primary oversight (*3 John 6-8; Philippians 4:15-16*).

Recommendations

- Ensure financial support "in a manner worthy of God" (regular, timely, sufficient).
- Require regular communication: prayer letters, reports, supervisor updates.
- Appoint a Church champion/contact for consistent care and connection.
- Schedule periodic elder visits to the field, short term teams for encouragement, and member correspondence.

- Maintain accountability to Church elders (not agencies alone): doctrinal fidelity, progress, family wellbeing.
- Express appreciation publicly and privately for their work.

4.7. Furlough / Home Assignment

The Church stewards furlough as a time of rest, reporting, and mutual encouragement (Acts 14:26-27).

Recommendations

- Plan furlough as a Church responsibility: provide housing, rest, pastoral care, crisis counseling if needed.
- Schedule opportunities for the missionary to testify, report, and encourage the congregation.
- Use furlough for evaluation, refreshment, and continued training.
- Strengthen relationships through fellowship, specific prayer, and family support.

4.8. Reentry and Long term Shepherding

The Church continues shepherding returning missionaries as lifelong members (Hebrews 13:17).

Recommendations

- Prepare for reentry: debriefing, counseling, reintegration plan, housing options.
- Provide ongoing pastoral care, financial transition support, and opportunities to share experiences.
- Involve them in edifying the congregation (teaching, mentoring, mobilizing others).
- Evaluate their time on the field and celebrate faithfulness.
- Maintain lifelong care: they remain under Church shepherding, even if they serve again.

5. Guiding Principles for Implementation

5.1. What must remain firmly in the hands of the local Church?

Vision setting, identification, examination, confirmation, commissioning, primary financial/pastoral support, accountability, and long term shepherding. The Church alone has authority to send and oversee those who represent Christ and the gospel (*Acts 13:3; 3 John 8*).

5.2. Where can partnerships strengthen Church responsibility?

Agencies/networks may assist with training, logistics, field coordination, security, or specialized resources. The sending Church retains veto power, final approval, doctrinal oversight, and primary care. Partnerships serve the Church as servants, not superiors.

5.3. How can small Churches participate faithfully?

Small Churches glorify God through obedience, not scale. Focus on one missionary family, sacrificial giving, fervent prayer, short term involvement, and partnerships with likeminded Churches for shared sending.

This pathway equips Churches to move from vision to structured, accountable, gospel centered sending. We hope congregations will use it as an initial guide and be strengthened as a primary sender to the nations, for the glory of Christ and the advance of His kingdom.

The local Church is God's ordained means for global mission. Obeying the Great Commission requires reclaiming our authority under Christ in identifying, sending, supporting, and shepherding missionaries as a congregation. Partnerships aid but never usurp.