

The **Eight Steps** *of the* **Missions** **Continuum**

*How Local Churches and Agencies Can Sustain Missionary
Deployment to Fulfill the Great Commission*



by HAL CUNNYNGHAM &
AMANDA DIMPERIO



WITH HIS LAST WORDS on earth, Jesus charged his church, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Christians should be encouraged and motivated by his promise of power, authority, and presence with believers as they endeavor to obey the Great Commission. However, despite our best efforts, large numbers of unreached peoples and places remain. As missionaries are being sent from everywhere to everywhere, young organizations are seeking the assistance of the International Mission Board (IMB) to enhance their missionary preparation and organizational structures. We must consider how to help lay the foundation to achieve the desired result: sustained and effective missionary presence and implementation of the missionary task.

During the last few years, the IMB Globalization Team has observed missions-sending initiatives from Asia to Africa and all points in between. Identifying common barriers to sending, we have developed eight steps to help local churches and agencies sustain missionary deployment.

The *Eight Steps of the Missions Continuum* will guide churches, agencies, or networks to lay the necessary foundation to send missionaries to the field, so they have work that sustains and remains. We offer missions consultations, which help partners assess where they are on the continuum and develop plans to mature their missions-sending processes. Following is a brief summary of each of these eight steps.

Step One Local Pastors

THE PASTOR IS THE GATEKEEPER of the church. He sets vision before the church and is responsible for giving members opportunities to use their gifts in service to the Lord and His church. The pastor helps his church understand God’s heart for the nations and recognize this theme in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. If the pastor is not missional, then mobilizing the church or identifying potential missionaries in the church will be difficult. For a pastor to be mobilized, his fundamental concerns must be addressed. These concerns are often expressed as the loss of revenue and the loss of his best members to missions. Step one is helping the pastor see that the Lord will equip the church to achieve His mission, challenging him to love the things Christ loves. We help the pastor understand that the impact of the church is not just measured in attendance, offerings, and buildings, but also in equipping the saints for ministry and leading his church to accept their role in the Great Commission.

Step Two Church Mobilization

THE ENTIRE CHURCH MUST BE MOBILIZED for missions. Two ways in which all members can be involved are going and sending. Only a few will be called to go. The rest of the church is called to send — which includes prayer, giving, encouragement, and support. These tasks should be embedded in the fabric of the church and include every age group.

Missions education is not an option in the church training program; it must be at the core because the gospel must be preached to all nations.

Step Three Local Ministry

THE LOCAL CHURCH CAN SEE ITS READINESS for missions in the status of its local ministry. Members of the church should be using their spiritual gifts in service to the church. If the pastor is the only ministry-giver, his church members do not have the opportunity to minister to one another and the surrounding community. Basic discipleship for all ages is at the core of this task, which includes the study and application of Scripture. The pastor should understand the characteristics of a healthy church, then move his church to become healthier. If the pastor’s vision for his church is a healthy church, then examining the status of the church is an important early step to help the church embrace God’s mission for the nations.

Step Four Raising Up Missionaries

A CHURCH CAN INTENTIONALLY RAISE UP missionaries for service. As the pastor casts the vision of the Great Commission and provides opportunities for service and ministry, the Lord will call out some to leave home and engage the lost in another location. The church can encourage those interested in exploring their gifts and their calling to missions. This is best accomplished through mentoring relationships and studying Scripture to understand the missions calling. One must also understand the missionary task, the requirements of missions, and what role might best match his or her preparation and gifting.

Step Five Planning for Cross- Cultural Missions

MANY CHURCHES AND PASTORS FEEL LIMITED in their potential to be involved in missions due to their size or economic limitations. However, even a small church can make a significant contribution to the missions enterprise. Each church must do what it can and what the Lord places on its members’ hearts. If missions is at the core of the church’s vision, the Lord will provide direction and resources. To make progress, the church must have a plan that creates visible action steps to invite and encourage full participation of senders and goers. A thorough plan is necessary for the church to send and sustain missionary presence.

Step Six Selecting and Training Cross-Cultural Missionaries

A MISSIONAL CHURCH MUST SOON MAKE DECISIONS about whom to support and whom to send. The motto — Right People, Right Place, Right Time — is an excellent guide to effective missions sending. The missionary call must be carefully evaluated. Christian disciplines should be reviewed. Involvement in and support of the local church are important traits to be assessed, along with competencies and qualifications for service. The candidates’ health and wellness are a key factor that must be considered. Lastly, several practical issues must be reviewed such as debt, children’s schooling, and family obligations, among other limiting factors.

Step Seven Developing Partners

NO SINGLE CHURCH OR AGENCY possesses all the resources needed to accomplish missions alone. Both churches and agencies should recognize where they do not have expertise and develop partnerships to fill in the gaps. These partnerships can be in areas such as funding for missions involvement, assistance in missionary assessment, accomplishing a portion of the missionary task, addressing security challenges, or even providing the field supervision and training necessary for effective ministry. Missions agencies are often the best partners to fill these gaps. However, church-to-church partnerships, networks, or denominations may also provide resources that a church lacks. When considering a partnership, a careful plan and agreement are necessary to address issues such as decision-making, field supervision, and financial matters. Thinking through these issues will be important in avoiding conflict and inaction when a problem or unanticipated event arises.

Step Eight The Mission Field

THE GOAL FOR EACH STEP OF THE CONTINUUM is accomplishing the missionary task: entry, evangelism, discipleship, church planting, leadership development, and exit to partnership. Completing the missionary task also includes the mission field becoming the mission force, and seeing all churches, even those in pioneer areas, embrace their role in the Great Commission. The *Eight Steps* provides the foundational structure necessary to implement and sustain the missionary task. ☺

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