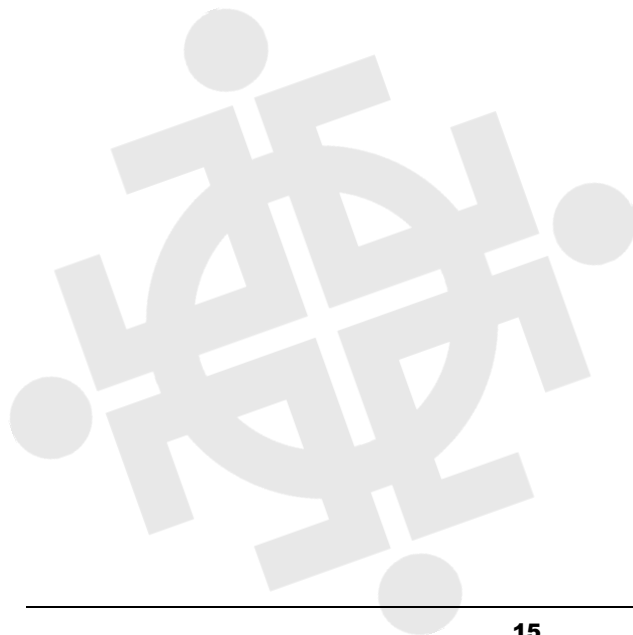




MISSION DISCERNMENT

“SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?”

The Meaning of Missional	17
God’s Vision, World Mission’s Mission	19
Small Group Interaction	20
Next Steps	21











“Should I Stay or Should I Go?”

*How do we know if we should go on a cross-cultural mission trip?
If so, where do we go?*

It seems pretty clear from Scripture that Christians are called to “go into all the world”. A quick look at Matthew 28:18-20 or Acts 1:8 can motivate a local church, a small group, or an individual to move across cultures to follow Jesus’ call. Yet, crossing cultures in mission involves more than just good intentions and a desire to be faithful to the Great Commission. “Going” involves listening to God, letting the Holy Spirit lead, allowing Jesus space to transform us along the way. There is a necessary discernment piece in the church’s desire to be faithful in mission... to be missional.

ICON KEY	
	Exercises
	Journaling
	Forms
	Bible Study

Missional is a term growing in popularity in evangelical Christian contexts. The word “missional” originated with a group of North American practitioners, missiologists & theorists, called the Gospel & Our Culture Network. Christian leaders gathered to discuss the implications of Lesslie Newbigin’s work. Returning from a career of missionary service in Asia, Newbigin described Western society as pagan and encouraged the church in the US and Canada to take a missionary stance in relation to its own culture.⁹

⁹ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, April 1, 2009).

As the Gospel & Our Culture Network discussed this challenge of taking a missionary stance to its own culture, they came to describe a missional church “as a community of God’s people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God’s mission to the world.”¹⁰ In this approach, “the mission of God flows through every believer and every community of faith that adheres to Jesus. Living out this mission through a local church setting means asking some big as well as personal questions. It’s important for church leadership teams to take time to consider the unique nature of the congregation’s identity, passion, giftedness as they consider how to engage with God’s mission to the world.”¹¹

The Triune God is at work in the world, restoring relationships, drawing people into his Kingdom. As followers of Christ engage in the broadest sense of “mission,” according to Bryant Myers in *Walking with the Poor*, we are to ask the question:

HOW MIGHT THE CHURCH JOIN THE LIFE-GIVING WORK
OF GOD’S KINGDOM?¹²

The answer to this question comes from a biblical understanding of God’s Mission (see the MMC-Merge “Missio Dei” study). Principles drawn from Scripture open our eyes to the depth and breadth of God’s interaction with humanity, which lay a basis for the church’s action in the world. And, from Scripture, we also discover priorities for the work of God’s Kingdom. Corbett and Fikkert in *When Helping Hurts* say it this way, “what mattered to Jesus ought to matter to us.”¹³



For example, in **Luke 4**, Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, to announce that he came to earth to “preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, release the oppressed, proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Later in the chapter, Jesus summarizes his ministry as preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, a kingdom of love, peace, forgiveness, justice, grace, self-sacrifice, and right relationship. (This just scratches the surface of what matters to Jesus.)

According to Rich Stearns, “The kingdom of which Christ spoke was one in which the poor, the sick, the grieving, cripples, slaves, women, children, widows, orphans, lepers, and aliens – the ‘least of these’ (Matt 25:40 KJV) – were to be lifted up and embraced by God. It was a world order in which justice was to become a reality, first in the hearts and minds of Jesus’ followers, and then to the wider society

¹⁰ Hirsch, Alan, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, April 1, 2009) 82.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Myers, Bryant, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practice of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999) 20-56.

¹³ Fikkert, Brian and Steve Corbett, *When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty Without Hurting the Poor* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Publishers, July 1, 2009).

through influence. Jesus' disciples were to be 'salt' and 'light' to the world.¹⁴ They were to be the 'yeast' that leavens the whole loaf of bread.¹⁵ His was not intended to be a far-off, distant kingdom to be experienced only in the afterlife; no Christ's proclamation of the "kingdom of heaven" was a call for a redeemed world order populated by redeemed people – *now*.¹⁶

So, as the local church discerns an answer to the question, "How might our local congregation join the life-giving work of God's Kingdom?" attention must be paid to principles and priorities found in Scripture. Myers points out that this mission from God is about "sending" that is "centrifugal" ("flee" from the center) – rather than "centripetal" (following a curved path that heads toward the center).¹⁷

Ministries flow out of this center to share the love, peace, forgiveness, justice, grace, and right relationship of the Triune God.

God's mission is about sending...

about going out or "fleeing" from the center. What does this mean for a local church? Grounded in Scripture, we discover principles and priorities, which shape Kingdom commitments, and this foundation leads to ministries. Ministries flow out of this center to share the love, peace, forgiveness, justice, grace, and right relationship of the Triune God – Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler.

God's Vision, World Mission's Mission

The Evangelical Covenant Church desires to see more disciples among more populations in a more caring and just world. In our mission partnerships around the world, we are committed to culturally relevant evangelism and the formation of communities of Christ followers, to spiritual formation and equipping God's people for ministry and leadership, and to transformational ministries that demonstrate the whole gospel by seeking to address the spiritual, social, emotional, mental, physical, and justice needs of people.

We desire to see more disciples among more populations in a more caring and just world.

As leadership within Covenant World Mission (CWM) seeks to refine vision and principle commitments, we describe our focus this way. By God's grace, we seek to be:

1. Disciples True to God's Mission of love and grace (Gen 12:1-3; Is 6:8; Jn 3:16-17; Acts 13:1-3; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

¹⁴ Matt 5:13-14

¹⁵ Matt 13:33

¹⁶ Stearns, Richard, *The Hole in our Gospel* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson; 1st edition, March 10, 2009) 16.

¹⁷ Myers, Bryant, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practice of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

2. Participants in God's Sending to all nations (Is 49:6; Matt 28:18-20; Mk 12:29-30; Eph 2:8-10).
3. Companions with God's People serving God's Kingdom (Ps 119:63; Jn 10:16; Gal 3:26-28, 6:10).
4. Partners in God's Work of transformation and reconciliation (Jn 16:7-8, 13; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph 4:11-16; Phil 1:4-6).



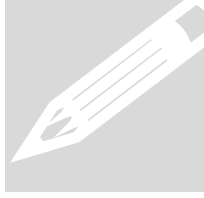
Small Group Interaction

Leadership teams need time to evaluate identity, “who are we?” and “what are we about?” before deciding, “how we are going to engage in mission?” This process ought to be bathed in prayer – as the community gathers, as teams meet, as individuals discern.

It is helpful for individuals to think through answers to the questions before the team discusses them together. Input from a variety of people helps shape a greater vision, perhaps a more realistic picture, of where God is leading the church and reflecting on what the church is up to. Consider how a number of voices may be invited into this discerning conversation. Gather input from people beyond the leadership team or paid staff.

Here are some questions to get you started in the reflection process.

1. What ministries are you currently committed to? Involved in? Leading on a regular basis? What mission commitments have you made?
2. Categorize this list of ministries – are they centrifugal or centripetal activities? Are they both?
3. How are the individual ministries contributing to the “life-giving” work of God's Kingdom? What priorities of Jesus do the ministries reflect?
4. How “engaged” is your congregation in these ministries? How many people volunteer in the work? (What percentage of the total congregation is that?)
5. What motivates people to participate? What keeps them committed?
6. As you think about the priorities of Jesus; the mission statement of your church; the gifts, skills & talents of your congregation; the needs and opportunities around you; what kinds of ministries may need to be developed? What ministries may need to be refined or re-directed?
7. How does cross-cultural ministry, short-term mission, global ministry fit into where God is leading your local church?
8. Try fit into where God is leading your local church.



Next Steps

In the discernment process, keep the guiding question from Bryant Myers before you – **How might the church join the life-giving work of God’s Kingdom?**

Begin by identifying **what compels you and your church “to go”** in mission. As you compile answers, think about whether the compelling reasons for “going” lead to centrifugal or centripetal results. To use Myers’ categories, if discipleship of your “own” is at the heart of the church’s involvement in global mission, then what might seem like a “centrifugal” activity in reality is “centripetal”.

If your responses are primarily about your “own” congregation or your “own” discipleship, then perhaps a “mission trip” is not an appropriate next step. If global ministry compels a local church because it’s primarily going to benefit the members of your group or church, consider going on a Vision Trip or cross-cultural learning experience. Call it what it is – a discipleship, personal growth experience.

What ministry activity is your local church involved in that may connect you to opportunities around the world?

As we learn about what is happening all around the world, the opportunities for serving alongside people in other lands can overwhelm us. It is not possible for a local church to respond to every need, every request for help.

As you seek to “go in cross-cultural mission, take time to consider:

1. **“What are you drawn to?”** As you learn more about what is going on around the world, what needs and opportunities resonate with you? What breaks your heart? What ministry activity is your local church involved in that may connect you to opportunities around the world? What gifts and skills does your congregation or group have to offer in service?
2. **What is your church’s capacity to engage in ministry locally and globally?** Church leaders need to consider long-term impact of short-term commitments. **What does it look like to sustain the mission and ministry decisions a local congregation is drawn to?** It might seem simple to invest in a community bank for one year, but what is required to keep that bank functioning beyond the initial stages? Capacity decisions impact the local church that sends, as well as the ministry who receives.
3. **“What is your purpose in connecting?”** Identify goals for the short-term mission experience. Healthy options for goals begin with: to learn, to pray, to be present. In the discernment process, a church or group may begin with a desire to connect in personal ways, yet, as needs are identified and goals are defined, leaders may discover that “physical presence” is less of a “help” (or more of a hindrance) than long-distance

relationship. It is important for a local church to feel “permission” to not always “go in mission”.

Deciding where to go and what to do are about matching your particular church’s skills, gifts, and resources with specific opportunities where those skills, gifts, and resources may be offered **in partnership with** those living in the area. The ECC offers a variety of mission experiences through **Covenant Merge Ministries**, as well as **MMC (Mission Mobilization & Connection)**. Options include connecting with ministries Covenant missionaries are involved in.

STEM (Short-Term Evangelical Missions) has helpful resources for ministries preparing for cross-cultural ministries. Included in their materials are “Seven Standards of Excellence” that are good to consider as local churches move forward in mission.

Mission Discernment Resources:

Fikkert, Brian and Steve Corbett, *When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty Without Hurting the Poor*, (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Publishers, July 1, 2009). Mission committees or church leadership teams should read through this book together & use the exercises/discussion questions to inform conversation about healthy mission practices.

Priest, Robert J., Terry Dischinger, Steve Rasmusen, C. M. Brown. *Researching the short-term mission movement*. *Missiology* 34 (4): 431-450. What impact do short-term mission trips have on those who go? How might this research help a local church as they choose to go on trips, prepare, send and follow-up?

Hirsch, Alan, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, April 1, 2009). *The Forgotten Ways* is a good resource for pastors to use when thinking through vision and mission steps for a local church and considering partnerships with others.

www.covchurch.org, “Compassion, Mercy & Justice Resource Paper” for the ECC with local church discussion questions.