

GCC Missions Policy

Defining Missions

We believe that our definition of missions should be rooted in God's holy word, not in the common practices of the modern church or in our own presuppositions. We believe the New Testament (NT) contains more than just a historical record of first century missionary activity.

A basic definition of missions is: *the task of making disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey all that Christ has commanded.* This basic definition is rooted in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). The core imperatives to make disciples and to teach are not exclusive to missionaries but are applicable to all Christians. Therefore we must look to other passages of the NT to more accurately define who missionaries are and what their functions should be.

Further Refinement of the Definition

How the church accomplishes missionary activity requires more specificity of our definition especially considering how the term is commonly used. In using the term missions or missionary, we commonly associate such activity with the proclamation of the gospel by certain people in a land or culture which is foreign to them. Whether the term missions is correct or not for this activity is not our concern as much as assuring that we are all using the same term to describe the same thing. Therefore we further define missions as *the task of making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey all that Christ has commanded often in a land, society, language, or culture which is not our own.*

Who are Missionaries?

It is commonly said that "we are all missionaries." In a general sense this statement is true as we have already stated. However we believe that this well meaning statement does not really reflect the NT model for how we should conduct missions. Indeed we are all representatives of Christ in this world, and have the obligation and the privilege to promote the gospel, but we are not all missionaries in the NT sense. For instance, not everyone was commissioned to venture out from the church at Antioch to spread the gospel in other lands, but only those who were marked out by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3).

NT missionaries were duly authorized representatives of the church commissioned to conduct the activities of evangelism, teaching, and church planting. Therefore we see NT missionaries as being akin to or virtually synonymous with the office of an Elder. The tasks of teaching and church planting necessitate that those who partake in such activities be Elder qualified.

This does not rule out support roles. Indeed the apostles often were accompanied by others such as Luke, Aquilla, and Priscilla to assist them. Also, apprentices such as John Mark and Timothy accompanied NT missionaries. However, it is clear for example that missionaries such as Paul and Barnabas were specifically gifted and set apart by the Holy Spirit to conduct what we now call missions work in a way that the others were not.

In defining missions we should be cognizant of separating the definition of missions from the means of carrying it out. For sure we are all commanded to proclaim the Gospel, but we are not instructed on how to do this in every detail and in every situation.

The New Testament Model for Missions

The NT records missionary activity as we have defined it most notably in the book of Acts and in the Pauline epistles. In examining the NT record of missions, there are varied approaches to how these accounts should be interpreted. Some might say that these accounts are simply narratives that provide us with an historical record, and therefore we are under no obligation to adopt any of the same practices.

At the other extreme is the idea that the NT missionary record is strictly instructional and to be followed in every detail. This approach is problematic in and of itself. There is no way for us to emulate NT church activity at every point, nor is it necessary. For sure we have an imperative to conduct missionary activity, but we do not have specific instructions on how to accomplish this task in every detail.

We believe that the best way to understand the NT passages regarding missionary activity is to view them as a model for the kinds of activities the church through the centuries should be involved in, but not containing the instructions specifically needed for concluding how it should be done in all instances. We believe that adopting the NT as a model or framework for missions is the safest and best way to please our Master and to effectively carry out the work he has given to His church. This also safeguards against using our resources to justify and rationalize every possible activity, even when there is no biblical warrant.

The Nature of NT Missionary Activity

Having established the NT model for missions as the baseline for current activity, we see that in the NT such activity consisted primarily of evangelism, church planting, and the building up of the saints. These activities formed the core of the early church's

missionary outreach, and we believe they should be our primary focus today as well. We do not believe modeling our present day missionary endeavors after the NT model negates humanitarian focused activities such as medical missions, construction activities, or relief work, it is merely a reflection of priorities and focus. Certainly it is correct to seek the physical welfare of others; we are commanded to do so. But we should always ensure that the core missionary activities have primacy.

Who Authorizes Missions and How should it be Funded?

We believe that the local church is the sole God ordained institution for authorizing and conducting missionary activity. NT missions were a church centric activity. Missionaries were identified, commissioned, and funded by the NT church. Today Para-church organizations have taken on significant responsibilities and resources which were originally handled by the local church.

We believe Para-church organizations are vital to the Kingdom of God. But we also believe that they should augment the local church in areas where the church is not structured or mandated to meet specific needs, not supplant the primary ministries of the local church.

In the NT, local churches organized and sent out missionaries. When a Para-church organization conducts a mission project, often local church financial resources are used either directly and or indirectly to fund it. We believe local churches should be setting the agenda for missionary activity and the use of missionary resources, not Para-church organizations.

How Should the Church Identify and Develop Missionaries?

Today, it is commonly felt that we need to expose young people to the mission field with the hope that some of them will develop the desire to become full time missionaries. We believe such thinking should be reversed. We should first be identifying which young people have a heart for evangelism here in their own Jerusalem, and then perhaps send those individuals to work alongside veteran missionaries in the field at some point to see if the Holy Spirit has marked them out for such service. We believe that indiscriminately sending as many young people as possible on costly trips does not fit the NT model and is not the best use of church resources.

We are surrounded by masses of unsaved people. We should identify future foreign missionaries by the concern and efforts individuals first demonstrate locally under the watchful care and guidance of the local church.

The Obligations of Good Stewardship

In citing the NT as the first and primary basis for how we do missions, it may seem odd that we would also choose to reference business concepts as a means to help us develop a better model for the funding of missions activities. Whether in the church or in business, a wise use of resources is always prudent.

The business concept of ‘opportunity cost’ is a reality which the church is subject to and can not ignore. In this context it means that if we devote significant resources to one ministry, we invariably end up paying for it with resources from another ministry. In other words the more funds we allocate for short term mission’s trips, the fewer funds will be available for full time missionaries.

One argument says that since we in the U.S. have so much wealth, we should not confine ourselves to just what the NT church did in this area. We believe such a rationale ignores the importance of good stewardship which is vital for the church in all ages. The additional resources we have been blessed with should be channeled into supporting the kinds of work we see in the NT, and for which there remains a great need.

Missionary Classifications

Based on the above understanding of the NT model for missions along with sound principles for stewardship, we identify the following classifications and adopt the following practices:

Missionaries

A missionary is an ordained pastor/elder and his wife (if married), who are sent to teach, preach, baptize, as well as plant, develop, and strengthen local churches.

Missionary Aid/Support Worker

A person sent to provide evangelistic, teaching, humanitarian, logistical, linguistic, or other support needed to promote missionary activity.

Missionary Apprentice/Intern

A missionary apprentice or intern is a male who meets the biblical qualifications of missionary (above) who has been identified as possibly becoming a full time missionary or missionary aid/support worker.

OR

A missionary apprentice or intern is also a female who is seeking to become a missionary wife (even if single) or a missionary aid/support worker.

Practices and Prioritization in Missions

1) We believe that the logical prioritization in missions funding is as follows:

Full Time Missionaries

Full Time Missionary Aid/Support Worker

Short Term Missionary

Missionary Apprentice/Intern (An internship is by nature a short term activity)

Short Term Missionary Aid/Support Worker

2) We prefer to provide significant financial support to fewer full time missionaries' rather than token support to many full time missionaries.

3) We recognize that some within our congregation may desire to occasionally take a trip as a Short Term Missionary Aid/Support Worker. We also recognize that there must be limits to the kinds and number of trips which can be financially supported as to not detract from works of higher priority. Therefore GCC financial support of Short Term Missionary Aid/Support Workers is set at a maximum of 25% of the total cost of a trip or \$500, whichever comes first. GCC also sets short term missions trip spending to 15% of our total missions budget. All such funding is ultimately left to the discretion of the Elders and Deacons.

4) Finally, we encourage all Christians to be involved in missionary activity in whatever capacity they are able. This means praying for and supporting the advancement of God's Kingdom in other lands and cultures while remembering that we are first called to share the gospel and live holy lives within our own spheres of influence.