

New Community Church
Missions Philosophy and Approach
February 2022

[NOTE: Much of the content of this document is adapted from the booklet How to Build and Effective Missions Program, published by The Master's Academy International (TMAI, 2016).]

The *Motive* of Missions

John Piper has rightly said:

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.”¹

From the beginning of time God righteously purposed to bring glory to his name by gathering together a people who would worship Him in Spirit and Truth (Ps. 67:3-4; John 4:24; Rev. 5). Increasing the number of worshippers of God is the ultimate purpose of missions.

The *Mission* and *Missions* of the Church

The *mission* of the church, the central task that Jesus assigned, is what comes from the Great Commission passages found in the Bible (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; John 20:21, Acts 1:8). Jesus Christ has sent his church into all the world to proclaim the gospel and make disciples— those who will follow and worship God for eternity—from all nations. With the enabling and regenerating power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-6; 16:7-11), the whole church should be involved in making disciples. All church activities should be centered around and connected to the accomplishment of this great *mission*.

While everything the church does should be connected to the *mission* of the church, not everything the church does falls under the definition of *missions*. Much of what the church does to accomplish making disciples will be in its own local community through the words and actions of the people who make up the church (what New Community Church generally considers “outreach”). To fully comply with the Great Commission, though, a church must also reach out beyond its normal sphere of influence. In accordance with the historical pattern, *missions* are the activities of the church to extend itself beyond its normal sphere of influence (geographic, demographic, cultural) to make disciples.

The *Message* of Missions

John Piper has expounded on the Romans 10:17 truth that “*faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ*”:

¹ John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad (Baker Academic 2003) p.17

God has ordained that saving faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ because faith is a response to Christ. If Christ is to be glorified in the mission of the church, he must be heard and known. This happens only through the Word.²

All of New Community Church's (NCC's) sponsored missionaries and missions activities must therefore be committed to faithfully proclaiming the "Word of Christ"—the gospel—above all else. Good deeds and acts of mercy untethered to the Word may offer some temporal relief, but they ultimately do *not* offer any eternal relief for a sinner or reconciliation with a Holy God.

The *Methods* of Missions

Besides giving us our motive, our mission, and the message for missions, the Bible also provides clear direction on the fundamental and specific *methods* by which we should do missions. The *fundamental* methods of missions are the following:

- **Going** (Matt. 28:18; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8) – Whether to the other side of the world or to the other side of the street, some “going” is required. This means we must be intentional and extend ourselves beyond our normal patterns of life, beyond our usual circle of friends, and beyond our ethnic, cultural, or geographical boundaries.
- **Preaching the Gospel** (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) – The centerpiece of missions is to spread the gospel. The church is to be Christ's witnesses, ones who testify to the truth of what they know.
- **Making Disciples** (Matt. 28:19-20) – The goal of missions is not just to make converts, but disciples. A disciple is one who follows and abides in Christ (John 15:4-5). Jesus identified two means to make disciples:
 - **Baptizing** – When a person repents and believes in Jesus, he or she must be baptized in water and in one Spirit into the body of Christ and (1 Cor. 12:13), signifying a death to self and new life in Christ.
 - **Teaching** – Teaching converts to obey all that Christ commands is a non-negotiable, central component of true missions. This means it is a necessity for churches of like doctrine and practice to be planted or supported wherever converts are made so the work of discipleship can be accomplished.

The following principles will serve to guide the *specific* methods New Community Church will employ and the outside missions work we will formally and financially support:

- **Missionaries should be sent by local churches** (Acts 13:1-3) – The church of Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul on their missionary journey. In our day we also have missions agencies and societies that send me missionaries to the field and sustain them there. These organizations are valuable and may be partners, but they should be in *support* of the local church. They do

² Piper p. 64

not absolve the local church of their responsibility to send and sustain missionaries whether through those organizations or independently.

- **Missionaries should be among the most qualified people in the church** (Acts 13:2) – Paul and Barnabas were the most distinguished leaders in the Antioch church. Missionaries often find themselves in hostile environments, so they must be among the most spiritually strong and mature members of the universal church. Ordinarily, a missionary should meet all the qualifications of an elder as listed in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.
- **Missionaries should remain accountable to the church that sent them** (Acts 14:26-27) – Paul and Barnabas returned to the church at Antioch to report on their ministry. Missionaries are an extension of the local church’s ministry. Elders should exercise oversight over supported missionaries (whether sent by New Community Church or another missionary organization) to ensure the maintenance of sound doctrine (e.g., Reformed soteriology) and ministry practice (e.g., believer’s baptism).
- **Missionaries should be supported through prayer and material assistance** (Phil. 4:15-16; Eph. 6:19). The Philippian church financially supported Paul’s ministry. Paul specifically asked for the Ephesian church to support his ministry in prayer. The Bible makes clear that those who cannot directly engage in missionary activity should provide material and prayer support for those who have been called to missionary service.
- **Responsibility for missions resides at the level of leadership in the church** (Acts 13:1-3) – The church in Antioch modeled this principle in that the church leaders (elders) made the decision to send Paul and Barnabas and took responsibility for them.
- **Missionaries should prioritize those methods that most directly achieve their mission** – The core of the Great Commission is to proclaim the gospel to make disciples. A missionary must therefore prioritize those activities that most directly achieve this end. The example of Paul and his associates is instructive:
 - **Preaching the gospel publicly** (Acts 9:20, 28; 13:5, 16-49; 14:1, 7, 21; 16:10, 13; 17:2, 10, 17, 22-34; 18:4-6; 19:8; 20:20; 28:30-31) – Paul took every opportunity to faithfully speak the gospel and unfold its riches, whether to individuals or to groups and in every possible setting.
 - **Planting churches** (Acts 14:23). After people were converted to Christ, they were not left scattered but were gathered into churches where (typically indigenous) leaders were appointed. So it was that churches were planted in places like Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica.
 - **Strengthening churches through teaching and encouragement** (Acts 14:21-23; 15:41; 16:4-5; 18:11, 23; 20:2; cf. the Epistles) – Planted churches require continued support and pastoral care. New believers require the spiritual nourishment of God’s Word and the spiritual care of shepherding.
 - **Training leaders** (Acts 14:23; 19:8; 20:17-35; 2 Tim 2:2; letters to Timothy and Titus) – Paul knew the ministry of the gospel had to be passed on before he died, so he very intentionally trained a new generation of leaders to replace him. Missionaries should

engage not only in planting churches but also in training local leaders to replace them (if they are not indigenous) to carry on the gospel work.

- **Mercy ministry** (Acts 11:29-30; 19:12; 28:9) – Though a more minor part of Paul’s ministry, it was certainly an element of it. The purpose was to provide relief to fellow Christians and church members (a notable focus) in difficult times or to authenticate the truth of Paul’s message as coming from God. Mercy ministries as a part of Christian missions cannot, however, merely meet physical needs; there must also be serious, intentional, and integral gospel witness, evangelism, and discipleship in such ministries.

The *Management of Missions*

- The NCC elders shall bear responsibility for defining and refining NCC’s missions philosophy, making final decisions about which missionaries and missions activities satisfy NCC’s missions philosophy, overseeing and providing guidance for missions activities, providing for necessary congregational training in missions, and determining the level of support provided to missionaries and missions activities by NCC.
- The NCC deacons shall develop and execute plans (approved by the elders) for supporting NCC-sponsored missionaries and missions activities, providing regular communications and visits to and from missionaries and the congregation, and engaging the congregation in providing support for missionaries (prayer, financial, material, physical).
- Any potential new missionary or missions activity of NCC shall be judged suitable and worthwhile for church sponsorship provided there is alignment with NCC’s missions philosophy, sound doctrine, and ministry practice. Given limited resources and the need for focus, however, not every suitable and worthwhile missions activity can be sponsored and supported by NCC.
- Existing NCC missions activities sponsored by NCC shall be regularly evaluated (every 3 to 5 years) for continued sponsorship by ensuring ongoing alignment with NCC’s missions philosophy, sound doctrine, and ministry practice. Noncompliance and changes in a missionary or missions activity that departs from NCC’s mission philosophy, sound doctrine and ministry practice shall necessitate adjustments in or cessation of NCC sponsorship and support. Any changes in this regard must be done with the utmost care and compassion for all involved and with full transparency of actions. If, for example, it’s determined that a long-time faithful missionary no longer aligns as well with NCC’s missions philosophy but there still exists doctrinal alignment, it may be best to continue NCC’s historical commitment or very gradually decrease NCC’s level of support over several years to allow the missionary time to adjust.