

# A Missions Philosophy Statement

## Our Overall Goal:

Our goal is to glorify God by obeying His command to make disciples through seeking to start indigenous, fundamental local churches which will, by the blessing of God, lead to a grassroots church-planting movement.

## I. “Our goal is to glorify God”

Our ultimate goal is to glorify God in everything we think, love, and do (I Corinthians 10:31). In order to do this, our ministry must be God-centered, not man-centered. It must be based completely on the Scriptures and not on pragmatism, which is making ministry decisions based on what appears to “work” rather than what is right or best (I Corinthians 2:1-5; II Corinthians 4:1-2; Galatians 1:6-10; I Thessalonians 2:1-6). Our desire is to be used by God to lead idolatrous men and women to Himself and away from false worship so that they may become true worshippers of their Creator, Jesus Christ (I Thessalonians 1:9-10).

## II. “By obeying His command to make disciples”

Jesus Christ has commanded all of His followers “to make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19-20). In order to obey this command, we believe the following things are necessary:

1. **Evangelism**: Evangelism is an essential component of all missionary work, especially at the beginning. We must “do the work of an evangelist” with boldness and humility (II Timothy 2:24-26; 4:1-5). Evangelism includes both proclaiming the truth (Colossians 1:28-29; II Timothy 4:2) and living the truth in the context of the normal relationships of life (Matthew 5:1-16; I Peter 2:12).
  2. **Baptism**: Upon profession of faith in Christ and indication of the fruit of repentance, new believers must be baptized. This baptism identifies them with their new Lord, Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4), and His visible body, the local church (Acts 2:41-42). Inherent in the command to baptize is the command to church planting since baptisms are done as a public event (see Acts 2:41-42 and how the believers were “added”)
  3. **Teaching**: Teaching or Discipleship is a non-negotiable part of all missionary work. We must patiently teach God’s word to all believers in ways that are appropriate to their cultural context. This will involve a great investment of time and energy as well as emotional and spiritual stress (Colossians 1:24; Acts 20:17-32; I Thessalonians 2:7-12). Those who are desirous and/or gifted will receive additional training in God’s word. We especially desire to train Spirit-controlled and God-called men who will be able to teach others also (II Timothy 2:2). We believe that our teaching for the most part should begin with Biblical Theology (understanding the revelation of God in the Scriptures in their original contexts as part of a chronological story) and then move to Systematic Theology (understanding and correlating Biblical truths under major categories of doctrine).
- **Important Note**: We believe that the Great Commission contains no social mandate. This means that the Great Commission is proclamational and spiritual in nature and that the tasks of the missionary are evangelism, discipleship, church starting, church strengthening,

and resource (including Bible translation work) and leadership development. He is not a social worker seeking to alleviate poverty or suffering in a country and/or seeking to bring social justice about a particular issue (i.e. human trafficking). Having said that, all missionaries are Christians and thus will have a desire to obey God's Word and must be an example of godliness. Those with more financial resources are commanded by God to help fellow believers who are without any food or clothing (James 2:15-16; I John 3:17). In doing this, he must take great care not to confuse his role as a missionary by becoming a financial patron to those who have been won to Christ. Nor must he be unwise and cause unbelievers to profess Christ out of hopes of material or educational gain. Any social work must be kept separate from evangelistic and church planting ministries.

### III. "Through seeking to start indigenous, fundamental local churches"

#### A. We desire to establish indigenous local churches

We believe that true Biblical discipleship will result in indigenous local churches. We believe that starting local churches using an indigenous philosophy of missions will greatly assist in avoiding two common errors in missions today:

- 1) A focus on evangelism and discipleship (i.e. building a para-church organization) with no clear goal of planting churches;
- 2) A focus on establishing an institution (i.e. building church buildings and programs) but failing to truly disciple people.

#### What is an indigenous local church?

By "indigenous," we mean local churches that are both culturally distinct and locally owned.

##### 1) Culturally Distinct

*An indigenous church is one that applies God's Word to its own cultural context rather than taking on unnecessary foreign cultural forms.*

In order for the local churches to be culturally distinct (and thus indigenous), we believe that the following three principles must be practiced:

##### 1. Missionaries must take seriously their calling to a particular culture by learning the language of the people and by striving to understand and make life-style adjustments to the culture that they minister in.

In order for the churches to be culturally distinct, it is absolutely necessary for the change agent missionary to thoroughly understand those with whom they labor. In most countries, this means the missionary will need to *learn and master the heart language* of the people. This is even true where the missionary's native tongue is widely known and spoken, for learning the heart language is more than merely communication since the language is a reflection of the culture and thinking processes of the people. It is also very important for the missionary to *strive to understand* the worldview of the people (i.e. Animism, Buddhism, Islam, etc.) they are seeking to reach for Christ. Also, cross-cultural missionaries must be willing to *make adjustments to the culture* in the way they live day-by-day (I Corinthians 9:19-23). This would mean avoiding a lifestyle, as much as possible, that communicates the rich foreign patron image or a materialistic value system as expressed in their culture. This language and cultural learning is an essential first step towards the possibility of seeing local churches that are culturally distinct.

2. **Missionaries must be careful not to bring American/Western cultural forms into the field culture that are not based on clear Biblical statements or principles.**  
Missionaries will be unable to properly do this point unless they have properly done the point above in learning the language and culture of the people. It will be important for the missionary to evaluate all of the habits and structures in his culture's expression of the faith and determine which things are culture-based and which are essential, non-negotiable elements of the local church.
  
3. **Missionaries must actively encourage and assist the local believers (particularly the leaders) in establishing Biblically grounded and culturally appropriate expressions of their faith.**  
Not only should the missionary seek to eliminate unnecessary foreign Christian habits (most of which are possible because the missionary comes from a wealthy society), but also, in a positive way, must strive to encourage worship styles and props, service times, and outreach strategies that are appropriate to that cultural context and are faithful to Biblical principles. There will be points where the Scriptures will definitely be at odds with the culture (i.e. example of church leaders being financial patrons with power). At those points, the Scriptures must be elevated above the culture. As often as is possible, use those ideas and strategies that have originated with Biblically informed and spiritually mature local believers.

## 2) **Locally Owned**

*An indigenous church is one that is owned by the local assembly rather than being dependent upon foreign resources, leadership, and expertise for its own spiritual life and ministry.*

In order for the local churches to be locally owned (and thus indigenous), we believe that the following three principles must be maintained:

### 1. **The Self-Supporting Principle—The national church must not depend on foreign resources in order to function.**

This is the central principle that makes the indigenous church possible. *The self-supporting principle means that the national church must take responsibility for the financial support of its own leaders, facilities and equipment, and methods and programs.* We believe that churches started on the foreign field must be self-supporting as much as possible from day one. If temporary support is necessary for the church at its inception, that assistance must be limited to a level that a small group of believers could easily assume (i.e. renting a facility to gather for worship). It is important from the very beginning that the national believers learn the duty and joy of Biblical giving to God and to His work according to their financial ability. God's people in every culture and circumstance must be called upon to do what God commands them to do without excuse.

What are some things that the self-supporting principle means for the foreign missionary?

- a. The foreign missionary must be careful to think through all of his actions and make sure that they are not leading to dependence upon his resources. *A missionary must not view himself or allow national believers to perceive him as a financial patron.*
- b. The foreign missionary must strive to use methods and strategies for church planting that are reproducible by the national believers.

What are some things that the self-supporting principle means for the national church?

- a. The national church must learn from the beginning to support their own pastors and resident evangelists at their own level. Missionaries or other donors must not

assume this responsibility (I Corinthians 9:11-14; I Timothy 5:17-18; Galatians 6:6; III John 5-8).

- b. The national church must learn from the beginning that the New Testament de-emphasizes facilities. If they desire a facility as a place of worship, the resources for the building and its upkeep must come primarily from their own money and labors. In most cultures, the simplest way to follow this principle would be to begin as NT churches began—as house churches (I Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15), until their numbers demanded a larger location of worship. At that point, they will be able to build and sustain a culturally appropriate place of worship according to their resources.
- c. The national church must learn from the beginning to use only methods and programs in the local church setting that are appropriate and doable within the context of their own spiritual and material resources. Ministries, programs, and methods that require outside funding and expertise will have some fruit because of God’s grace and the power of His Word, but the repercussions of such actions in the long run are counter-productive because the national church will be led to believe and act as if they are unable to fulfill the Great Commission without the financial aid from abroad.

- **Important Note:** There are legitimate ways for global believers to show unity and also strengthen less privileged brethren on the foreign field that do not compromise the vitality and biblical discipleship of the national church (i.e. this principle of “self-support”). These include funding projects integral to the spread of the Gospel such as Bible translations and the publication of resources (both written and audio) for evangelism, discipleship, and the training of leaders.

## 2. **The Self-Governing Principle—The national church must not depend on foreign leadership in order to govern.**

We believe that if the self-support principle is followed, then this self-governing principle will come much more easily. *The self-governing principle means that the national church must take responsibility for its own leadership, ordinances, discipline, and financial affairs.*

What are some things that the self-governing principle means for the foreign missionary?

- a. The foreign missionary must understand that he is temporary and must act as though this were true from the very beginning. Missionaries fulfill needful tasks in church planting and then move on to other places (see Paul’s missionary teams as recorded throughout Acts and the Epistles). *A missionary must not view himself or allow national believers to perceive him as a local church pastor.* Obviously, he will do the work of a pastor at times (like pastors are commanded to do the work of an evangelist—II Timothy 4:5).
- b. The foreign missionary must allow the national believers to make decisions concerning matters of their local church as much as possible in accordance to their biblical understanding from day one. The missionary can give advice and counsel, especially in the very beginning. Sometimes this will mean allowing mistakes to be made. In this way, his role is different from the typical pastor.

What are some things that the self-governing principle means for the national church?

- a. The national church must take an integral role in deciding upon its own spiritual leadership (i.e. pastors/elders and deacons). Initially this role will be in conjunction

with the missionary. These decisions must be based upon the leading of God communicated to both the individual and to the members of the local church, as opposed to being selected primarily by the foreign missionaries (Acts 6:1-6; I Timothy 3:1-13; 5:22). We believe that national pastors and evangelists must remain in their current vocation (I Corinthians 7:17-24) until the ministry of the local church increases and the local body is able to take on the responsibility for his support (whether part-time or full-time). We believe in a congregational form of church polity. This means that the national pastors are to be servant-leaders who give direction only in matters of doctrine and practice--they must not control the local church or its financial resources (I Peter 5:1-3; II Corinthians 8:20-22).

- b. The national church must take full responsibility for guarding the two ordinances of their local church: the baptizing of its converts (I Corinthians 1:14-17) and the administering of the Lord's Table as soon as possible (Acts 2:42, 46; I Corinthians 11:23-26).
  - c. The national church must take full responsibility for all matters of discipline within the body according to Biblical guidelines (Matthew 18:15-17; I Corinthians 5). The missionary should not pursue such matters on his own initiative and authority apart from the consent and active participation of the national church.
  - d. The national church must manage its own financial affairs, take care of its own property and possessions, and decide upon its own programs and methods for fulfilling the Great Commission (Acts 2:42-46; 4:32-36; 6:1-6). The missionary can teach and counsel in regards to this, but the ministries of the local church must be of their own initiative and burdens.
- **Important Note:** We believe that the missionary's authority over the national churches must be limited to spiritual authority and not a hybrid of spiritual authority mixed with financial or material control or influence. Only in this way can a national leader rise to genuine spiritual leadership in his stead. The national pastor must not become a patron to the churches he leads either, for this principle extends to him as well.

3. **The Self-Propagating Principle—The national church must not depend on foreign expertise in order to expand.**

We believe if the local church is founded on the self-support and self-governing principles, it will be more likely that the church will be self-propagating. *The self-propagating principle means that the national church must take responsibility for its own evangelism and discipleship/spiritual growth, and for its own expansion into new areas.*

What are some things that the self-propagating principle means for the foreign missionary?

- a. The foreign missionary must understand that his role with respect to the national local churches must change over time. Initially, the missionary will be primarily an evangelist. As people come to Christ, his role changes to primarily that of a teacher/discipler. As leadership begins to be identified, the missionary's role in the church should move towards being that of an advisor and counselor. The time it takes to move from role to another will depend upon God's blessing and the culture, but the determination by the missionary to complete this cycle and leave the ministry completely in the hands of the national believers is not negotiable. *A missionary must not view himself or allow national believers to perceive him as a long-term evangelist and teacher.*

- b. The foreign missionary must make sure that each of his methods of evangelism and teaching/discipleship are reproducible in the context of the culture because his goal is for the local believers to assume these evangelistic and teaching roles (Acts 20).

What are some things that the self-propagating principle means for the national church?

- a. The national church must take full responsibility for the evangelism of their area (making disciples) as well as the discipleship and spiritual growth of its members (maturing disciples). The missionary must teach this by word and by example but must not allow these propagations/advancements to continue to revolve around his own labors (I Thessalonians 1:6-10; II Timothy 2:2). The national church must decide upon ministry ideas from their own understanding of God's will that are according to their own abilities. Ministry ideas that come from the national's own heart and personal burdens will be the most effective and permanent (Acts 4:32-37; 9:36-43; 18:24-28).
  - b. The national church must have a desire to spread and expand the church of Jesus Christ into new areas without missionary efforts or foreign patronage. This is the final stage where the national churches see their own missionary obligation and set out to accomplish it.
- **Important Note:** Because we believe that these three "self" principles are based on the Scriptures, missionaries must instill in the national believers their own sense of need to continue in these principles after the missionary's departure. The missionary must be able to say with a clear conscience that he has faithfully warned and taught the national believers in preparation for the day he leaves (Acts 20:17-38; Colossians 1:28-29).

## **We believe that the indigenous principles detailed above are based upon the following key Biblical and Theological foundations:**

### **1. *Theological Foundation: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit***

The Holy Spirit indwells the national believers just as He does the foreign missionaries. This means that the nationals are also very capable to admonish one another (Romans 15:14), are lacking in no spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 1:4-7), and can even encourage the faith of the missionaries (Romans 1:11-12). Therefore, the national believers are fully able and responsible to obey all of God's commands.

### **2. *Biblical Foundation: The New Testament Pattern in the book of Acts and the Epistles***

The numerous examples of churches in the New Testament were all autonomous churches. The natural interpretation of the historical facts as recorded in Acts and the Epistles can only refer to an indigenous method of missions. The Apostle Paul and his missionary team (who were especially chosen to reach the Gentile world) give to us by their example the central principles for church planting missions. There are no recorded instances where any mission churches were dependent on missionaries or foreign churches. The only example we have in the New Testament of one church helping another church financially was the famine relief for the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:27-30; 15:1-29; I Corinthians 16:1-3; II Corinthians 8-9; Galatians 2). These gifts were indeed motivated by compassion because of persecution and natural disaster, but they were primarily motivated by the need to express unity in the body of Christ because of a great theological tension: The Gentiles needed to prove their oneness with the Jews who struggled with their inclusion in the church, the body of Christ. These gifts were not continual. Thus the burden of proof lies with the non-indigenous model to show its legitimacy. While allowing for some

differences in culture between then and now, we believe that following the NT church-planting pattern is the safest strategy. We believe that God gave us this pattern for a reason: it allows God's people to operate according to His Word in every context.

**We believe that non-indigenous methods of missionary practice puts the national churches in situations where they are led to disobey clear NT teachings given to all local churches as part of their discipleship process:**

Here are some important examples:

1. The NT clearly teaches all local churches to support their own pastors (I Corinthians 9:1-14; I Timothy 5:17-18) and resident evangelists (Titus 3:12-14; III John 5-8). This does not take place in a non-indigenous model. Often the foreign missionary or some foreign organization financially supports the national pastor and evangelists.
2. The NT clearly teaches local churches to discipline their own members (I Corinthians 5; II Thessalonians 3:6-15). Without self-government, this often becomes the task of the foreign missionary in non-indigenous ministries.
3. The NT clearly teaches that national believers must trust the Lord to meet their material needs (Philippians 4:10-19). In the non-indigenous setting of patronage, believers are taught to look to foreign donors to meet their ministry needs, and sometimes even their daily needs.
4. The NT clearly teaches that local churches must guard their testimony before unbelievers (Romans 14:16; II Corinthians 6:3; I Peter 2:12). When foreign missionaries or foreign organizations patronize national believers and churches, unbelievers naturally and rightly question the believer's sincerity, especially when they see the material or educational benefits associated with being part of the church. For this reason, national believers are often asked by unbelievers in their community, "What do they give you since you became a part of their church?" Unbelievers then see the church as a business enterprise, a marketing strategy that buys adherents. Therefore, any method of missionary practice that unnecessarily causes unbelievers to question the believers' sincerity must be avoided.
5. The NT clearly teaches that church members must care for one another in time of need (James 2:14-17; I John 3:16-19; Titus 3:14). When foreign patronage is present, the national believers naturally allow the patron to assume what should be their own responsibility—to show the love of Christ in deed. We believe that indigenous churches, which give even out of their poverty as the Macedonians did, provide a far greater testimony for Christ in the community than they would through the use of foreign aid.
6. The NT clearly teaches that church leaders should never use their position in the church to gain money and power (I Peter 5:2-3). By following a non-indigenous model, especially in developing countries, national pastors and evangelists often gain authority and respect from their fellow believers through their ability to obtain funds and/or obtain relationships with foreign patrons (i.e. missionaries or donors). Church leaders should be given spiritual authority because they have led a blameless life (I Timothy 3:2-7; II Corinthians 6:3-10; Titus 1:6-8), know the Word of God (Titus 1:9; II Timothy 2:15), and are known for godliness of character (I Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-8; II Timothy 2:24-26). Non-indigenous models of missions cannot but warp this vital relationship in the national churches.

**B. We desire to establish fundamental local churches**

We believe that true Biblical discipleship will result in fundamental local churches. If individuals have come to Christ, been baptized, been organized into local indigenous churches, been systematically taught the Word of God, and upon our leaving them fail to remain faithful to the fundamental doctrines of Scripture, then we have not achieved our

ministry objective. Ultimately, though, the responsibility to remain fundamental in doctrine and practice rests with the national church.

We believe the following biblical teachings must be taught to the national church in order to encourage the preservation of Biblical Christianity:

- 1) The national church must be taught to love the Truth. Doctrine and theology based on God's Word must be emphasized, applied to daily living, and enjoyed (II Timothy 3:16-17; Acts 2:42; 17:11; Psalms 119).
  - 2) The national church must have a strong desire to defend the Truth. They must actively fight against error and "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3; II Timothy 4:1-3).
  - 3) The national church must understand that they are separated unto Christ and so must of necessity separate from false doctrine and false teachers (II Peter 2; II John 7-11; Romans 16:17-18; Galatians 1:8-9). They must also see the need to distance themselves from those genuine believers that fail to obey the Scriptural command to separate from false doctrine and false teachers (II Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15). The national leaders must understand the necessity of degrees of separation and be able to apply it to their own circumstances so that they do not become isolationist.
  - 4) The national church must understand that they are separated from sin unto holiness in Christ and so must strive to separate themselves from sin and worldliness (I John 2:15-17; I Peter 1:13-16; II Corinthians 6:14-7:1).
- **Important Note:** In order for the national church to have these personal convictions listed above regarding the preservation of Biblical Christianity, foreign patronage must be avoided at all costs. Genuine indigenous, fundamental Christianity cannot be known or gauged while a national church is dependent upon outside influences for its resources, leadership, or expertise. The dynamics of patron-client relationships as well as the ongoing necessity of foreign funds puts the national believers in a position where they are unable to fully exercise the priesthood of the believer.

#### IV. "Which will, by the Blessing of God"

This task of accomplishing the Great Commission is absolutely impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit. Our hope for spiritual success and fruitfulness in the fulfilling of this commission is the sovereign grace of God. This is because of man's total depravity—his inability to respond positively to God in salvation on his own without a special work of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 2:14; John 6:44; I Corinthians 12:3; Colossians 1:21; Titus 1:15). We must always remember that God is the "Lord of the harvest" (Matthew 9:38) and we are His laborers by His grace (II Corinthians 4:5). Thus, the following things must be priorities in our personal lives, in our families, and in any collaboration with fellow missionaries:

- 1) We must be careful to acknowledge our personal inability and our need for total dependence on the Lord. Therefore, we must keep daily prayer a priority (Colossians 4:2-4; Acts 6:4; John 15:5-8, 16). We must also stress the need for prayer support for our ministry by faithfully communicating to our prayer supporters around the world (Romans 15:20; II Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:2-4; II Thessalonians 3:1-2).
- 2) We must strive for personal holiness in our lives, lest we quench the Holy Spirit and become unclean vessels (Titus 2:12; II Timothy 2:21-22; I Thessalonians 5:19; John 14:13-15).



- 3) We must be aggressive in doing the work of the Gospel so that our labors can be used as channels for the grace of God to work (II Timothy 4:5-8; Philippians 2:17; II Corinthians 12:15; Colossians 1:24, 29).

## **V. “Lead to a grassroots church-planting movement”**

We believe very strongly that our task is not done once we have helped to establish an indigenous church or even a few indigenous churches on the field. There must be a desire and commitment on the part of the national believers to spread and expand the church of Jesus Christ into new areas themselves, using their own resources, leadership, and expertise. This is the final stage where the nationals themselves see their own missionary obligation and set out to accomplish it without the immediate missionary presence. This “missionary” movement should be characterized by the following:

- 1) It will be a grassroots movement. The energy for this movement will come from the work of the Holy Spirit through the natural spiritual growth of the indigenous churches.
- 2) It will be a church-planting movement. The focus for this movement will be the expansion of Christ’s church into pioneer areas through both evangelism and discipleship.