

seeks to match the individual with one of the targeted missions of the church. Here we worked with boards, agencies, and missiologists to inform us of the desired targets. These specialists certainly know more about those needs than does the local church, so we depend on them for information. But the church knows more about its staff. By matching the knowledge of the missions agency with the knowledge the church has of its staff, a more strategic and effective placement can be made.

Fourth, we choose the agency to which our staff will be assigned. This is a three-way decision that includes the church, the agency, and the staff. Using this approach, a three-way bond of interdependence and responsibility is established.

Fifth, we delegate authority to the agency and instruct our staff to be accountable to the agency. There are some limits to this delegation. By not delegating all authority, the church maintains its responsibility. It must have some responsibility to remind it that this work of world missions still belongs to the church.

Sixth, we fully fund the work. That is a matter of faith. Some have raised the question about the inability of some churches to fully support a missionary. There are many ways I respond to that concern, but let me raise one question: *Is it proper for fifty or one-hundred people to say "We can't support you," while saying to one "You must raise your support"?* It's all a matter of the simple question, *"Whose work is this, anyway?"*

Finally, we seek to provide an abundance of care, prayer, and encouragement for all our staff, wherever in the world they may be.

CONCLUSION

The brief message of this article can neither address all problems, nor answer all questions. Hopefully, it will stimulate the conscience of our churches to seriously address this pressing question of world missions - *"After all, whose work is it anyway?"*

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We Changed Our Attitude About Missionaries

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Why do we preach missions as a priority and respond to missions needs and opportunities as options, attachments, and often as distractions? Does the way in which the local church responds to the world missions mandate lack credibility?

These are serious questions in light of the method I was using as a pastor for my involvement in missions endeavors. Although I had a thorough commitment to world missions, I had followed, without question, the usual method of “supporting missionaries.” One day, it occurred to me that I needed to ask some hard questions. *Why do churches have such different approaches to local staff as compared to foreign staff? Why is the work at home “ours” when the work abroad is “theirs?”*

Why do we treat our young people who are willing to become missionaries as virtual orphans? Consider two young people who grow up in the same local church. Both are taught missions. Both are aware of the significance of being a part of a “missionary church” and of being a missionary. Both prosper in Christian nurture, growth, and service. Both attend the same highly-approved Bible college and seminary. One prepares for cross-cultural missions. The other prepares for a hometown pastoral ministry. Nearing graduation, both call home for some pastoral guidance. Here is where the story changes. The pastoral graduate receives a “call” from the local church to come home. He is provided with a check to cover moving expenses, given an office and a salary, and provided with various benefits all covered by the church budget. He is all set - “Welcome to the ministry.” The missionary is encouraged to find a mission board or choose a place of service in the world. He is instructed to raise funds, try to get prayer support, and may be allowed to speak at the church with the possibility that some in the congregation will want to support him in his work. Left to this process until adequate support for his work has been garnered, the church then bids him farewell, as he goes off to his field.

This scenario all too often describes the contemporary norm for missions. So entrenched were we in this approach

that it did not occur to me that it should be challenged or changed. Yet, the deeper I got into the process, the more disturbed I became. Other questions arose. *How did this process develop? Is it Biblical? Has it ever been challenged? Is there a better way?*

It appears that the evangelical church, even since the Reformation, has not been willing to examine its responsibility to world missions. For the last four-hundred years, it has been blinded with a problem. There are a few notable exceptions. Some local churches have accepted their opportunity and responsibility in world missions. But the vast majority of our local Bible-believing congregations still treat world missions as an option and missionaries as orphans. This is the problem we must address. As a local church pastor I was determined to do so.

The first step I took was to change my attitude. Then I needed to lead the church and our missionary friends to change theirs. Admittedly, that attitude had been shaped by our evangelical heritage. We just assumed that the way missions had been done was the way they should be done. Namely, that missions was the work of boards, agencies, and individuals. The local church was not expected to do anything but respond to requests for prayer and funds. Missionaries and the boards would do everything else. The church had no other responsibility. It would simply support them in their work. The church would not refer to world missions as its work. It would not assume any responsibility for the board or the missionary. Its praying and its giving would be incidental ...and insufficient.

This summary is an over-simplification, but I think the point is clear. It is just at this point that I started changing my attitude. I am happy to report that the church I serve changed its attitude also. *How was this done?*

Our traditional approach to missions was to invite a few “missionary candidates” to our Annual World Missions Conference. Most of these “candidates” were unknown to us except by letter, phone, and referrals. Through such information gathering, we learned where these

missionaries were going and what they planned to do. We knew they were in the process of raising support for their work. They would come to our church at their instigation or our invitation. We had a heart for missions and we wanted involvement. But the problem was still with us. The work of missions was still their work, not that of the church. That is where we changed our attitude.

If this attitude change was to be more than a cliché, it was obvious we must take our task more seriously. If the work of world missions belonged to us as a church, then we could no longer treat missions as an appendage to the church, an option for the church, or a burden on the church. It was our central business and deserved center stage in all that we did. “Foreign” missions must be taught, administered, and funded right along with the rest of everything else we refer to as the church’s work.

First, we began referring to the missionaries with whom we worked as “staff.” This terminology helped us focus our responsibility for them. Hopefully, it provided a little security for them. They could see their relationship with the church as more than a church merely “supporting” them. The church now became the entity of primary responsibility. Rather than just being supported by the church, the missionary was now supporting the church. In taking this step with existing missionary staff, the church had to face another question. If the church recruits “full-time” staff for its local missions, why not do the same for its foreign missions? So we did.

Our second step recognized the need for another level of local church responsibility. *How would this staff be chosen? Who would be approved?* Following the completion of required formal training, prospective missionary staff are invited to live and work with the local church for a ministry internship. During this time, the candidates minister in the local church and are observed and nurtured in personal growth patterns and personal relationships. Gifts, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses are evaluated. Needs are addressed and bonds of friendship, encouragement, and prayer are cultivated.

Third, during this time of ministry evaluation, the church