

**FINALLY, I reminded my friend of the key foundation that undergirds the previous characteristics: a strong prayer base.** Churches that are propelling their people beyond self-centered, health-related prayer are doing three things:

1. Teaching about prayer, not in threatening ways but with good models of how to do it.
2. Getting good, specific information for prayer to people.
3. Making sure that everyone can participate; i.e., offering multiple avenues for prayer.

I was recently asked by someone, "I hear a lot about 'missional' churches these days. What's a missional church?" I answered, "It's a church where missions is at the core of its identity and where that purpose is carefully and intentionally protected." May we see God raise up more and more missional churches!

# 5

## Characteristics of a Missions-Effective Church

GLOBAL  
MINISTRIES



*"...all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."  
Gen 12:3*



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*-by Tom Telford*

Recently I was asked on the spur of the moment, "What are five most important characteristics of a church that's effective in missions?" The five aspects that came to mind are the common threads that I see running through the tapestry of several great churches across the county.

## ONE

**Every member understands the Biblical mandate for world evangelization and lives it out.** *Perspectives* is a course that spends a significant amount of time teaching the Biblical mandate for world missions as it is woven throughout the Bible from cover to cover. I teach *Perspectives* courses frequently; and a stunning number of people tell me that before taking *Perspectives*, they had never heard of missions as a major theme of the entire Bible.

This level of ignorance is shameful. The typical American evangelical local church is doing a "C" job at helping its people understand the Biblical basis of missions. Even fewer churches are helping their people live in ways that align with this great calling and buck the values of our culture.

Our culture is obsessed with self help. Wander into any (Christian) bookstore and into its "Self Help" aisle, and you'll know what I mean. Unfortunately, this obsession has spilled into the evangelical Church. Preachers are majoring on the "benefits" of Christianity in order to reach people in the pew. I recently met a pastor who said, "My 'bag' is recovery," meaning that his major passion is helping people recover from their wounds and afflictions. Another pastor recently told me, "We want to be known as a 'recovery' church." It's fine to help heal, but churches should not get stuck in that mode.

## TWO

**The church has a well thought out missions strategy, policy and vision.** Without a clear vision and strategy for accomplishing that vision, churches are spinning their wheels. More and more churches are developing well thought through strategies, but they are still the exception and account for only 10-15% of American evangelical local churches.

Yet the truth is that few churches even have a clear vision or strategy for their overall ministry, let alone their missions ministry. Young businessmen tell me, "If I ran my business the same way that this church is led, I'd be out of business."

Other churches have strategies that are great on paper but are practically irrelevant to the daily operations of the church. In these churches, execution off the strategy is the problem.

## THREE

**The church has a missions leadership team that studies the issues and trends and also models missions for the rest of the church.** Today's most effective missions leadership teams view themselves as empowerers of the congregation rather than controllers, prohibitors, or mere financial decision makers. They are also teams whose members have been recruited rather than elected.

Often people who volunteer for missions committees love missions but are not strategic thinkers. In some churches, I walk into the missions committee and most of the members are older than I am. And I'm old! Along the way, these kinds of missions leadership teams get into ruts of doing missions. In some cases I'm seeing churches discontinuing these teams, starting over, and recruiting strategic thinkers, including younger folk

## FOUR

**The church offers opportunities for hands-on involvement in missions for every member.** The churches generally tend to be ones that major on disciplining people as others-centered ministers. They are taking full advantage of local, cross-cultural outreach opportunities and short-term missions vision trips.

Finishers (those who are able to retire early and devote the balance of their careers to missions) are catalyzed and thrive in these sort of churches. These churches normally give 15-20% of their missions budgets to missions education and mobilization, and the fruit of the investment is many people directly and personally involved in missions.

If your church's missions ministry is in decline, this level of investment in mobilization may be your remedy and may be a necessity rather than a luxury. Fortunately, many cross-cultural exposure trips can be taken locally (in American cities) these days and don't require money to make happen.

## FIVE

**The church has developed creative ways to win people to Christ in its own community.** I include this characteristic because it's hard to believe that a church can be truly excited about reaching the world if it is not impassioned about reaching local unchurched through events on the church's campus. For example, one church in Las Vegas began putting on a fantastic festival each year as an alternative to Halloween. Originally it was intended for folks in the church, but it was such a well done event that neighborhood unchurched people started coming in droves. It has become a major neighborhood outreach.

Other churches are reaching unchurched people through events away from the church. For example, they are sponsoring golf tournaments that feature a meal afterward that offers a brief talk about Christianity. Many creative ideas for such outreach will come from the younger folks in your church. Either way, winning local people to Christ only feeds a desire to do the same around the world.