



How to choose a good representative

Since the missionary (understood with a capital “M”) is the *ambassador, delegate, or representative* of their sending churches, the representation that this missionary offers these churches is of *very great* importance. *In a very real sense, these churches’ missionary efforts will flow from this representation.* If the missionary offers a faithful, adequate, and precise representation (one which reflects *with precision* the desires and plans of these sending entities), then these missionary efforts probably will be accomplished well and in a fluid fashion. But if the missionary does not offer a faithful, adequate, and precise representation, then this missionary could actually complicate, and perhaps even totally obstruct, the fulfillment of these churches’ missionary efforts. In this second case, instead of being a tool for these churches, this missionary has become a handicap.

So, before accepting a person as their missionary, the local church should first ascertain the existence of certain key similarities and things held in common between this church and this candidate to be their missionary. And the candidate also needs to ascertain

the existence of these same similarities and things held in common before accepting the position of missionary of this church. Otherwise, there will be no guarantee of having the common base that underlies a faithful, adequate, and precise representation. There will be no certainty that this individual really is qualified to properly represent this church (be their missionary).

Nine critical similarities

There are certain critical similarities that tend to underlie and facilitate a faithful, adequate, and precise representation. What are they? Nine elements have been identified which we consider to be fundamental to a good representation between ambassador and sending entity. And please note that this list takes for granted that the representative (the missionary) *is willing to recognize and accept the authority of the sending entities* (his or her sending churches) *and to submit to them as their ambassador*. This list also takes for granted that this representative is committed to being a *faithful and accurate representative of his or her*

sending entities as their ambassador. Thus, these two points, although very important, do not appear in this list of nine elements. In a very real sense, they underlie this list, because without these two fundamental issues of willing submission to authority and commitment to achieving a faithful and accurate representation, *it is impossible to have a true and natural representation no matter how many similarities the potential representative and the potential sending entities may share.* No country would accept as their political ambassador an individual who was either unwilling to recognize, accept, and submit to the authority of the government of this country, or who had no commitment to being a faithful and accurate ambassador of this country. To do otherwise would be to run immense and unnecessary risks.

① **Similarities in basic missionary purpose.** The missionary and the entities that he or she represents (their sending churches) should share the same basic missionary purpose. This purpose basically answers the fundamental question “why am I on the mission field?” or “what do I want to achieve most on this mission field?” Therefore, it establishes the basic and general priorities that this entity will have in the area of missionary activity. It also sets the parameters that determine, in general terms, what activities this entity will consider as its *preferred* activities (“I certainly want to do this with all my heart”), its *acceptable* activities (“although not so much a priority for me, I’m willing to do this as well”), and its *unacceptable*

activities (“I’m not going to invest my time and efforts in this”). *If there are not significant similarities between the missionary and the sending church in this fundamental area, it will be highly difficult to achieve a faithful and acceptable representation.*

For example, how can a missionary, whose basic missionary purpose is to work in the area of theological education in Africa, faithfully and adequately represent a sending church whose basic missionary purpose and desire is to plant churches in Asia? The only way that this missionary can represent this church is *marginally*; unless the church also has an additional missionary purpose of helping in theological education in Africa (it is not rare for a church to have more than one basic missionary purpose, since the church is a rather large entity with multiple ministry facets). And if the representation happens to be marginal, what type of connection will link this missionary and this sending church? It will be a *marginal* connection. And marginal connections are very easy to break. So, sooner or later (and many times much sooner than later), a day comes when this church stops supporting this missionary in Africa. Why? *Because as a church, its heart never was in this ministry.* It was never a priority for this church. And when this happens, the poor missionary in Africa finds himself or herself in very difficult circumstances. Why? *Because all this time he or she has been inadequately representing this sending church (perhaps even unknowingly), due to differences in their basic missionary purpose.*

Now having differences of opinions about our

basic missionary purpose is *not a rare occurrence*. Nor is it a sin. God is simply calling these two elements of His army to work in two different areas. He can do this ... and He does. The problem comes when these two entities do not *recognize* their differences, but rather try to work together as ambassador (missionary) and sending entity. In this case, the misalignment of callings many times will result in either having one of the two be unfaithful to their calling, or having one offer a poor representation of the other. Both of these options are undesirable.

② **Similarities in basic missionary vision.** This element describes where the entity wishes to head in the future in missionary work. As such, it has much to do with determining what will be an entity's *future* basic missionary purpose. For example, a missionary may have as their *current* missionary purpose to work as a missionary doctor in a clinic in the jungles of South America. But, their vision for the future might be to open a complete hospital in this jungle setting. If so, then although opening a hospital is not their current basic missionary purpose, it very well may become this purpose within the next 10 or 15 years.

Since this area deals with the future, and treats *anticipated* changes, it is not 100% obligatory that the missionary and his or her sending churches share similarities with regard to missionary vision. But it certainly helps if they can share them, because these similarities will allow the ministry to develop in a fluid and harmonious way as the years pass. If the entities

lack similarities here, their deepest future dreams and desires are not in agreement, and this very well could create a growing “distance” between this missionary and this sending church as time goes by and as the work becomes more fully developed. This distance will become an obstacle to a faithful and adequate representation in the future, and it will likely negatively impact any deep and lasting relationship in the present (since both entities know that they are on different paths which just happen to cross right now, but are headed in different directions in the future).

③ **Similarities in doctrine and theology.** For the well-being of the missionary endeavor, it is *highly* important that the missionary and their potential sending churches share significant similarities in doctrine and theology. Obviously, these entities should both share an *evangelical* doctrine and theology. But even within the evangelical camp there are theological and doctrinal differences that cannot be ignored when sending out an ambassador.

For instance, take the case of a missionary who comes from a non-Pentecostal background and wants to go to Russia and evangelize and plant churches. So, he begins to seek potential sending churches, and it turns out that there are many more Pentecostal churches than any other in his country. So, he goes to these Pentecostal churches and requests that they send him out as their missionary to Russia, and they accept. And some seven years later, let's suppose that this missionary has founded three churches. But, what *kind* of

churches? Will they be Pentecostal (as per the desires and expectations of his sending churches), or will they be non-Pentecostal (as per the personal convictions and background of this missionary)? How can he, being non-Pentecostal, *faithfully, adequately, and with precision* represent Pentecostal churches in the task of church planting? Similarities in the area of doctrine and theology lead to an efficient and smooth achievement of the missionary objective, without undue theological and doctrinal obstacles, and without unnecessary surprises.

④ Similarities in concept or philosophy of ministry. Although this area is not as fundamental as the area of doctrine and theology, it is still very important to analyze the degree of agreement between the concept or philosophy of ministry held by this missionary and that held by this potential sending church. What does “doing ministry” mean for each of them? What is their concept or philosophy of key terms like “evangelization,” “church,” “discipleship,” “theological education,” or “Bible study”? What basic philosophy of ministry do they prefer?

For example, the missionary may have a philosophy of ministry that places a lot of emphasis on the study and preaching of the Bible, and this individual may spend three days studying and preparing for the Sunday sermon. But what if the sending church has a concept of ministry that emphasizes elements like visiting people, playing basketball with the neighborhood youth, or spending hours in counseling sessions?

If this happens to be the case, then *this missionary and this sending church probably will have problems.*

In very simple terms, our philosophy of ministry defines which types of activities we consider to be a priority. Thus, a lack of agreement here leads to a difference of priorities where the missionary cannot dedicate himself or herself to what the sending church considers to be a priority, *without betraying this missionary’s own personal sense of priorities.* This can easily lead to a situation where each entity feels that what is *really* important is only of minimal importance to the other. Situations like this are not conducive to good relations or to harmonious working together. *A lack of agreement in this area weakens a faithful, adequate, and precise representation.*

⑤ Similarities in ministry priorities and focus. This point examines the priorities assigned to the *specific* activities within missionary work. And this step is necessary because *it is not enough to have the same basic missionary purpose and the same philosophy of ministry.* Although similarities in these two areas do lead to establishing general work parameters that are common to both, they do not guarantee agreement with regard to the priorities assigned *within* these parameters. In other words, being in agreement on the *general* points does not automatically mean that an agreement exists on the *minor* points.

For example, let’s look at a missionary who wants to serve as musician and music coordinator on a team doing evangelism and church planting in Tanzania (in

Africa). We can say that this missionary's *basic and general* priority (their basic missionary purpose) is evangelism and church planting. Their priority with regard to *types* of activities (concept or philosophy of ministry) is the use of music in evangelistic and church planting activities. And their priority with regard to the *specific* activities (ministry focus) could be to program all facets related to the use of music in evangelistic events and in the church services held by this team. Thus, before heading off to Africa, this missionary communicates all this to their potential sending churches. Those that wish to work in these types of activities (in other words, those churches with similar priorities to these) then send this missionary to Africa to serve as their representative, planning to fulfill their plans and desires through this individual.

But, upon arriving in Tanzania, and upon seeing the conditions in which the street children live, this missionary then decides that God is calling him or her to change their ministry focus, leave the team with which they had planned on working, and work directly with these children. This missionary will still be working in evangelism. And, to at least a certain degree, they will still be working in church planting or church strengthening (since the new converts among these children will be incorporated into a local church). So, there has been no *drastic* change in this missionary's basic missionary purpose. There has been *some* change in their concept or philosophy of ministry, due to the transition into using their musical gifts in working with these children. But there has been a large

change in the area of ministry focus, and this change now jeopardizes a faithful, adequate, and precise representation of these sending churches. In short, these churches did not send this individual to Africa to do this type of ministry.

Therefore, *before* making a change like this, this missionary should contact their sending churches, communicate their desire to change ministry focus to working with these children, speak of the need for this type of a ministry, explain how this new ministry can contribute to the goals and objectives that this missionary and these churches still have in common, and ask them if they would like to *expand* their missionary ministry to include these activities (under God's leading, and not the human pressure exerted by this missionary). For the churches that *agree*, there should be no problem. This missionary can still provide a faithful, adequate, and precise representation. For the churches that do *not agree*, there will be a problem. This missionary is no longer qualified to represent these churches adequately, and he or she should resign as the ambassador of these churches.

⑥ **Similarities in geographical and ethnic focuses.** What church would send their missionaries to France when they really want to develop a ministry in India? Or what missionary that wants to work among the Chinese would seek to be sent by churches that only want to work among the Eskimos? Of all the similarities in our list, this one is perhaps the easiest to understand and grasp. If God is calling the missionary

to a ministry in a certain geographical area with a certain ethnic population, then this missionary needs to team up with other entities that share this same geographical and ethnic focuses.

Therefore, the missionary seeks to be sent by churches that share his or her geographical and ethnic focuses. And if the missionary doesn't do this, how can they expect to be a faithful and adequate representative of these churches? How can he or she help these churches achieve the tasks to which God has called them, if this missionary feels called to work in *another* completely different area?

⑦ **Similarities in expectations regarding work dedication.** Here, the phrase “work dedication” is used to signify the type of work commitment that the missionary has with the missions task and with their missions agency. For example, there are *short-term missionaries* (serving for two to twelve months), *medium-term missionaries* (serving from one to three years), and *long-term missionaries* (serving three or more years, frequently many more, up to their entire lifetime). In addition, there also are what could be referred to as “*full-time*” missionaries (dedicated exclusively to missionary work) and “*tent-maker*” or *bi-vocational missionaries* (who have a secular job in addition to their missionary activities).

There are advantages and disadvantages to each of the above work dedications, and it is not our focus here to analyze them. Rather, we simply point out that these options do exist and that it is *very* likely that the

missionary and the potential sending church each will have their preferences with regard to what type of work dedication they wish for their missionary.

How can a missionary that feels called to dedicate himself or herself *exclusively* and *completely* to the task of their missionary labors (that is to say, serve as a “full-time” missionary) contemplate going out as the ambassador of sending churches that only wish to send out bi-vocational or “tent-maker” missionaries? *There is no agreement on work dedication.* And if this missionary is sent by these churches, then they may very well expect him or her to get a secular job, and concentrate on missionary activities in his or her free time in the evenings and on weekends. But this missionary, on the other hand, feels that God wants him or her to dedicate all of their time to missionary activities. *As can be imagined, this can be grounds for a considerable disagreement between the ambassador and the sending entities.*

Or let's suppose that the sending churches want their missionary to work “full-time” in his or her missionary labors. Then how can these churches think of sending as their missionary, their ambassador, someone who feels called to be a bi-vocational missionary? *There is a conflict of interests, priorities, and dedication here that obstructs a faithful, adequate, and precise representation.*

⑧ **Similarities in expectations regarding spiritual, logistic, and financial support.** Spiritual support refers to activities like praying for the mission-

ary. Logistic support refers to activities like sending a work team to help the missionary, or helping send out prayer letters (printing, photocopying, and mailing). And financial support refers to activities like taking up offerings to cover this missionary's salary and the expenses of their ministry.

It is *very* likely that the missionary and their sending churches will have expectations with regard to these forms of support. They may even have their own definitions of what this support is. *And these concepts and expectations may not necessarily agree.* For example, the missionary may expect their sending churches to pray daily for the ministry, but these churches might only plan on a formal prayer time one Sunday a month. The missionary may expect their sending churches to assemble, publish, and distribute a monthly missionary prayer bulletin (using information sent by this missionary), but the sending churches may expect the missionary to do all this. The missionary may expect an adequate salary according to the economic realities of the country where he or she works, but the sending churches may have a very different concept of what constitutes an “adequate” salary.

The more agreement there is in this area (and especially with regard to the more important or critical expectations), the more harmony there will be on the mission field and in this missionary's labors, and the easier it will be to achieve a faithful, adequate, and precise representation. It is like marriage. The future groom and the future bride each come into a marriage

with certain expectations. The more similarities there are between their expectations, the greater the harmony in the home. And the more differences there are between their expectations, the greater the friction in the home. *And when the differences are sufficiently great enough and important enough, the couple must seriously question whether or not they should really get married.*

⑨ **Similarities in expectations regarding communication.** What country would allow their ambassador to exercise his or her functions without maintaining practically *constant* communication with the government that this ambassador represents? The caliber of his or her representation *depends* upon good and frequent communication with his or her government. Can it be any different between a sending church and their missionary?

In missions work, both the missionary and their sending churches will have expectations with regard to communication (and responsibilities inherent in these expectations). For example, the missionary may expect that his or her sending churches will send him or her monthly updates on what is happening within these churches. To fulfill this expectation, these churches will need to accept certain responsibilities with regard to communication. And the sending churches may expect that their missionary send them monthly (or bi-weekly) prayer letters with news of the ministry and prayer and praise requests. To fulfill this expectation, this missionary will need to accept certain responsibili-

ties with regard to communication.

Therefore, the missionary and the potential sending church need to examine and analyze 1) their various expectations in the area of communication, 2) what degree of agreement exists with regard to these expectations, 3) what responsibilities are inherent in these expectations, and 4) how willing is each entity to fulfill these responsibilities. For example, if the churches and the missionary are in agreement with regard to the desirability of rapid and frequent communication between themselves (a *very* healthy thing), they also ought to be willing to accept the responsibilities generated by this expectation. For these churches, this could mean providing a computer for the mission-

ary and setting aside additional funds each month so that both they and their missionary will be able to pay for an Internet connection. For the missionary, this could mean setting aside a few hours each week or two for the tasks of writing, polishing, and sending a periodic prayer letter to his or her churches.

If we want a truly successful missionary work, if we want a faithful, adequate, and precise representation on the mission field, if we want each member (missionary and sending church) to feel that they are a *vital* part of this missionary venture, *then we must have good and frequent communication. And we must be willing to pay the price.*

