



Missions work and the total church program

It is not uncommon for people to be somewhat confused regarding how missions work or missionary activities ought to fit into the total ministry program of a local church. And this confusion could end up weakening the ties that this church feels to this kind of activity, which also could end up weakening this church's actual involvement in this kind of activity. Therefore it is important that the members of the local church understand how missions work and missionary activities fit into their church's total ministry program.

Five types of activities

In order to understand how missions work fits into the local church's total ministry program, we must first examine what types of activities a local church should be involved in. Although this might sound like a tall order, given the great diversity of ministries and local churches, there is a secret to simplifying this task considerably: almost any ministry in any local church will tend to fall into one of five *types* or *genres* of ministry activity. Thus we may speak of just five types

of activities and still describe the total ministry of practically any church. Given this simplifying factor, let's now examine these five types of activity to see where missions work best fits in.

Worship is the first type or genre of ministry activity in the local church. This groups together activities that honor and show reverence to God (such as the worship described in Revelation 4:10) and activities that declare His glory and praise (such as in 1 Peter 2:9 and Psalm 19:1).

Teaching is the second type of activity. This groups together activities that focus on strengthening, growing, and building up the believers. Especially important here are the activities that focus on achieving a full knowledge of the Son of God. We need strong, mature, and knowledgeable believers. Ephesians 4:11–16, 29, and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 are some Bible verses that speak of this type of activity.

Communion is the third type of activity. This includes all sorts of activities that focus on the sharing and fellowship that exist between brothers and sisters. These are the activities that highlight our relationship

as the family of Christ. We have many things in *common* with our brothers and sisters (the same Lord, the same faith, the same Spirit, the same hope, the same baptism, the same God and Father), and all of this unites us as a family and spurs us on toward caring for and being concerned about each other. Bible verses that speak of this communion include John 17:21; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 4:4–6; 1 John 1:7; 4:7–11; and the entire letter to the Philippians.

Evangelism is the fourth type or genre of activity. This links together a wide range of activities that focus on the persuasive communication of the good news about what God has done through His Son Jesus Christ. Therefore, here we find activities like testifying, witnessing, preaching, and evangelizing. Verses that speak about this type of activity include Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46–48; John 3:16; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:14–15; and 2 Corinthians 5:14–6:2.

Service to our neighbor (or compassion ministries) is the fifth type of activity. This includes all the activities that the Church does that manifest, in concrete, visible terms, the love of God toward humanity. In very simple terms, it is doing good to all, especially to those who are of the family or household of the faith (Galatians 6:10). Other verses that speak of service to or compassion toward our neighbor include Matthew 14:14; 20:34; Mark 6:34; 8:2; and Luke 7:13.

It fits under evangelism, right?

Looking at these five types of ministry activities,

many people would tend to put missions work under evangelism. And a considerable number of missionaries would do this too. And at first sight, it seems very logical. After all, where else could it possibly fit? But unfortunately, this is *not* where it truly fits. *In fact, putting missions work under evangelism could end up being a serious error that can blind us to the true nature of missions work.*

Well then, where does it fit?

To understand where missions work fits in, we need to understand first a bit about the *nature* of missions work, and especially about its range of activities, the method that it requires, and the context in which it occurs.

The range of activities included in missions work may be found in the texts of the Great Commission. Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46–49 and Acts 1:8 speak of preaching the gospel, preaching repentance, and testifying to all creation or to all the nations. Therefore, evangelism **certainly** is included in missions work. But, this work also includes *much* more. Matthew 28:18–20 shows that the Great Commission includes making disciples. Now this is a process that *begins* with evangelism (and thus evangelism is fundamental for missions work), but it also goes much further. According to Matthew, it includes teaching these new believers to observe or keep all that Christ has commanded us. Therefore, the range of activities included in missions work begins with evangelism and extends

throughout the *entire* process of making disciples and growing in spiritual maturity. In other words, *missions work includes all five of the types or genres of ministry activity that we have just seen*. Therefore, doing missions work is much more than just doing evangelism. It is actually being a church (fulfilling all the normal activities of a local church).

The method required by missions work is evident in its very name. It is missions work. Therefore, *it is work that requires the presence of a missionary, an ambassador, so that this local church can successfully fulfill this task*. In other words, there are barriers that prevent this local church from carrying out this task *directly* (through the average member of its congregation). Because of this, this church selects, names, and accredits an official representative (a missionary), and it works *through* this representative. For further information, please see the articles *What Makes an Activity a Missionary Activity?* and *What is a Missionary?*, found under “Key terms” on the “Missions info” tab of the WMA website.

The context in which missions work occurs is *a context that has sufficient differences with the context of this local church that it prevents the average member of this congregation from ministering directly in this target context*. Perhaps this work is located too far (geographically) from this church, and the average member of this congregation can only visit this work every once in a while. Perhaps a different language is spoken in this target context. Perhaps the people of this target context follow a religion that is so different that

the average member of this congregation doesn’t even understand it. Perhaps this target context has a culture and worldview that are so different from those practiced by the average member of this congregation that this member hardly has any idea of how to present Jesus Christ as the true answer to the spiritual needs and spiritual searching that is rooted in this target context. Or perhaps it is a combination of two or more of these differences. Whatever these barriers are, they create sufficient “distance” between this church and this target context to require that this church use an ambassador in ministering there (someone who will study, analyze, and be specially trained to work in this different context). For further information regarding the contexts in which missions work occurs, please see the article *Barriers and Contexts in Missions Work*, found under “Key concepts” on the “Missions info” tab of the WMA website.

Summary

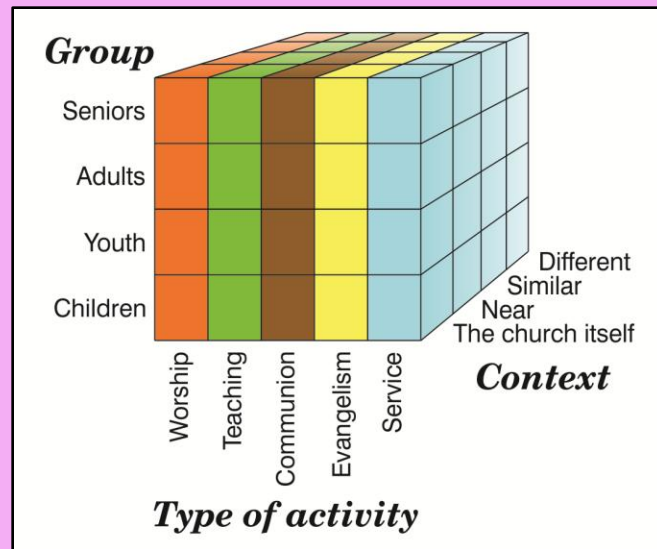
In summary, we can say that *missions work is everything that is done by a local church, through its official ambassador, that is geared toward making mature disciples in “distant” contexts where this church cannot go directly*. As such, it includes all the ministries associated with the five types or genres of ministry activity with which we opened this article, adapted to the different major age groups of believers found in this “distant” context, and aimed at being understandable, applicable, pertinent, and persuasive

within this “distant” context. *This is much more than just evangelism.* In terms of the following graphic, missions work includes all the activities involved in the back two rows of blocks in this cube (the rows corresponding to the “similar” and “different” contexts – which are also referred to as “category three” and “category four” contexts in the article *Barriers and Contexts in Missions Work*, mentioned earlier).

The entire cube in this graphic represents the total ministry program of a healthy, missionary-minded local church. Of course, some churches will have certain areas developed more fully than others, but *in order to be a healthy, complete, missionary-minded church*, it ought to offer (either directly or through its ambassadors) ministries in the five types of activities, adapted to the different major age groups of believers in the given context, and in all four categories of contexts. *To do this is to fulfill the Great Commission, within this church’s own context and beyond.*

The first two rows of blocks in this cube represent the contexts where this church can and does minister *directly*. Here the distances and barriers between contexts are relatively small, and the average member of this congregation can participate *directly* in these ministries. Therefore, these first two rows form the local ministry of this church.

The last two rows of blocks in this cube represent



the contexts where this church basically ministers *through the representation* offered by its official ambassador, its missionary. Due to the distances and barriers that separate this church from these last two categories of contexts, the average member of this congregation participates in these ministries *by being represented by their missionary* (who lives in, understands, and makes the necessary adaptations to this distant context). Therefore, these last two rows form the missionary ministry of this church.

