

INTRODUCTION

Churches have changed substantially in how they operate compared to twenty-five years ago. Larger churches were run primarily by committees of laypeople. The pastor was subservient to a church board. People came to church two or three times a week. Sunday Schools often had larger attendance than worship services. In a strong missions church, the pastor preached a few times a year on missions. Reaching the world for Christ was considered the overarching mission of the Church. Missions was primarily international or “foreign” missions and was carried out by missionaries who were sent by the denomination or by mission sending agencies—often for four-year periods—and supported by many churches. Sunday School classes adopted missionaries, prayed for them, and occasionally communicated with them. Many churches held an eight-day missions conference every year. People were fascinated (or sometimes bored) by missionary stories and pictures from around the world.

The primary responsibilities of most missions committees were to organize and conduct the missions conference and to develop, recommend, and manage the missions budget. It wasn’t uncommon for a church to designate twenty to thirty percent of the church budget for missions. Raising large amounts of money for missions was a major annual goal for the pastor and the church board, who worked very hard to promote missions giving. Missions education was conducted from the pulpit through sermons and missionary presentations. The moral and economic decline of our communities and the growth of ethnic minorities had not yet hit the radar screen of most churches.

Today, church life is much different. A great number of churches are staff led. The church board often serves more in an advisory

capacity. The church meets once a week. Small groups have replaced Sunday schools. Committees still operate in many churches but are often considered more as hindrances than guiding lights. Many committees have been replaced by “teams” or volunteers who assist staff in carrying out church initiatives. Church leaders still seek to advance the Great Commission but they are much more oriented toward the pervasive moral and social needs of our communities. The scope of the church’s agenda has substantially broadened. The need for first-class facilities and multiple staff has greatly increased church overhead and reduced the proportion of funds available to reach beyond home base.

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Missions has changed as well. We can no longer hold to the dichotomy of our nation as Christian and other nations as pagan. Because of the loss of a biblical moral base in our society and the influx of immigrants, our communities have been recognized as part of the “mission field.” Church leaders have found it more practical to cast a vision for “mission”—meaning all ministry beyond the congregation—than try to explain same-culture evangelism, local ministry, and cross-cultural missions to congregations that have little “missions” background. Many churches are looking at mission from an Acts 1:8, concentric circle perspective: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

Further, missional churches are not satisfied to exclusively send long-term, church-supported representatives to other nations and cultures. Every member should participate in mission. This often

means going on mission trips and getting involved in the community or city. It might mean participating in a church-sponsored project or partnership or volunteering with an evangelistic Christian ministry, a Christian compassion ministry, a community social ministry, or a government-sponsored program.

All of this—and much more—has changed and complicated the job of the mission leadership team. But the first responsibility of any leadership team is to clarify its charter. What is the team's purpose and what is its biblical mandate? What is the scope of the team's responsibility, and what authority do church leaders delegate to them?