

What Belongs in the Missions Budget?

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People often bristle while dealing with church missions budgets. A new opportunity is suggested and someone pipes up, "But that's not missions!" Another person responds, "Of course, it's missions! It is an important part of the mission of the church. How can you say it's not missions?"

People have many different ideas about missions. Churches are becoming "missional." Our terminology has changed. What once was clear has become cloudy. So what belongs in the missions budget?

The issue is complicated by the fact that in most churches the missions department is the only ministry of the church that gives money to outside organizations and projects. This raises the natural tendency to try to classify any work or worker that someone wants to see funded as "missions."

Further, churches often have difficulty balancing three pressures:

1. Relationships: Supporting people and ministries closely connected to the congregation
2. Self-Benefit: Supporting ministries that will contribute to the ministry of the church by stimulating people to attend, give, participate, or grow, and
3. Goal-Orientation: Supporting individuals and ministries that will be most effective in fulfilling The Great Commission?

Why should we have a separate missions budget?

One question comes about like this: If everything the church does contributes to its mission, then why do we need a separate missions budget? The answer follows the logic for having a designated, regular, daily "quiet time." It is because our time with God is important and likely to be neglected. Anything that is important but likely to be neglected in the onrush of life needs a special priority category for attention. We set up a special ministry for "missions" because God's command to disciple all the nations is important; it doesn't come naturally; and it is likely to be neglected if we don't give it special consideration.

What part of the church's overall mission is "missions?"

What differentiates "missions" from other church ministry? While the church's mission is to do

all that Jesus commanded us, "missions" stems specifically from the Great Commission to "disciple all the nations (Mt 28:19)." The goal is that all nations worship in accordance with the picture painted in Rev 5:9 and 7:9. Historically, "missions" has meant the discipling of peoples beyond our own culture and nation. It could be said that the work of the church is to disciple our own nation and the work of missions is to disciple the other nations. As someone has said, evangelism is the church growing where it is and missions is the church going where it isn't.

It is natural and appropriate for the church to minister to our own culture, the people like us nearby. At the same time, it is easy to neglect people unlike us and people far away from us. And in general, people of other nations have much less Christian wealth and Christian resources and far fewer Christian opportunities than those in our nation. Therefore, "missions" focuses primarily on ministry among people of other cultures, languages, and nations.

Who are the other nations?

Years ago, the "other nations," were people unlike us in other countries, but the world has changed. It's not nearly so clear cut anymore. We have people from every nationality living in our neighborhoods. Some of them have been here for several generations and are virtually "like us." Others have been here only one or two generations and may be less like us. Some, like the wives and parents of first generation immigrants, may not speak our language or hardly ever leave their homes.

Then there are populations of people in our inner cities and elsewhere that speak a dialect we can hardly understand or are separated from us by race, class, lifestyle, and/or economics. Some of these "other cultures" or "people groups" have a shortage of Christian resources and opportunities? Do ministries to these people belong in our missions budgets?

And then there are "people groups" who are very much like us in most ways but different in some critical way. For example, what about middle class girls or women who have been abused, who have become dysfunctional, or who are perhaps addicted? Clearly ministry to these people is needed. Does it belong in the missions department or somewhere else in the church? What about people who are unlikely to attend church because of their work schedule like long-haul truckers or professional baseball players. Ministry to them is needed. Does it belong in the missions budget?

The question of what belongs in the missions budget is bigger than what worker or what ministry should we support? The bigger questions are:

- What "people groups" have little access to the Gospel and few Christian resources?
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- What ministries best help to reach them?

These are questions each church must sort out for itself. Here are some specific things to consider:

Ministry support staff. Missions is more than "missionaries," but it isn't everything. Missions, in the sense of discipling the nations, is a huge undertaking that requires ministers on the ground, support and supervisory staff, institutions (such as seminaries, schools, and hospitals), support systems (such as flight and medical services), home office leadership and support, including accountants, fundraisers, recruiters, counselors, and so on. *The whole process that contributes to the discipling of other nations is "missions."*

Because the process is so involved, a good question to ask in considering an opportunity is: to what extent does this position (and/or person) enable the efficient and effective progress toward "discipling all the nations?"

Social Ministries and Local Ministries. As our culture has declined, many new kinds of ministry have arisen. These include campus ministries; food pantries; jail ministries; homeless shelters; battered women's shelters; recovery ministries; house construction; literacy and tutoring ministries; as well as specialized ministries to truckers, professional sports players, and business people. These are legitimate ministries for the church. They are often included in missions because there is no alternative budget category for them. Should they be included in the missions budget? Here are some questions to ask:

- Would it be better to have a separate budget for local ministries so that we avoid slighting either our local responsibilities or our international responsibilities?
- To what degree do we want to support social ministries that do not intentionally and deliberately attempt to evangelize and disciple people?
- How should we balance our financial support and our individual involvement in local ministries?

The Missions Pastor and/or church administrative support. Do we support our church missions pastor or missions administrative assistant from the mission budget? The short answer is that staff assigned to missions should be supported in the same manner as other pastors and staff. If there is a separate budget for staff, missions personnel should be supported from the staff budget.

Some Additional General Questions

- Is this need or opportunity something we would find compelling if one of our own weren't involved?
- Is this need or opportunity something that contributes instrumentally to discipling other spiritually needy "nations"?
- Is this need or opportunity something that should logically be funded by the budget of another department such as benevolence, education, or youth?
- Are we overly influenced toward this need or opportunity because it benefits us or our church?
- Are we unduly influenced to support this need or opportunity from the missions budget because we want to protect another budget that is important to us?
- Is this applicant applying for a strategic role or are we considering them because they are from our church and we sense an obligation to them? [The greatest factor in missions support decisions is the relationship of the applicant to the church. Should this be a primary criteria in light of the goal, to "disciple all the nations"?)

Ultimately each church has to answer these questions:

1. What is the goal?
2. What is required for reaching the goal?
3. What ministries and individuals are most strategic in the process of reaching the goal?

Think with me.

- What or who are the largest influences on what goes in your missions budget?
- Is your missions budget influenced most by relationships, by what benefits the church, or by what is most effective in fulfilling the Great Commission?
- Is your missions budget overbalanced toward the rest of the world or toward the U.S.?
- What are a couple of key questions for your leadership to ask in regard to potential missions support opportunities?

