

What are some criteria that a mission committee might use in deciding which missionaries and projects to support?

[Adapted from a document of this name by the Shenango Presbytery]

One of the most important responsibilities that any mission committee has is how you lead your congregation in its missionary responsibility. Jesus told us that we would be his witnesses. (Acts 1:8) This is not an option that we may choose. It is a consequent of taking his name (Christians). The only question is "What kind of witnesses will we be."

Your mission committee is charged with answering that question in accountability to the consistory. This responsibility is no "Sunday walk in the park." Most committees receive countless solicitations by mail and personally for financial support for a myriad of "good causes." How can you ever choose! Each one seems as compelling as the last. Adding to your dilemma is the political pressure (let's call it what it is) to support the favorite cause of one of your church's members or (more problematically) one of their relatives who is a missionary somewhere.

Compounding the problem is the constant pressure on the mission budget. When things get tight financially for the church, the first idea is to "cut mission." Mission does not seem quite so pressing for those wondering how to pay the electric bill. Leading a church in mission is not only about money and the mission budget. There are other important considerations. But, even though mission is more than money, it is never less than money. Outlined here some things that your mission committee might consider in preparing the mission budget. If you do not have some basic criteria, you will constantly be fighting the same battles. If you are not clear about where you are going, you will probably end up there! It is also important to have some guidelines so you don't get jerked around by those political pressures that exist in every church.

First, another comment about "political pressures:" this is not an evil thing. Politics is about people and how they interact. Since the church is made up of people, we will always have to deal with these relationships. And when a daughter/son of the congregation receive as a call to "Youth with a Mission," no responsible mission committee can simply demean that request. After all, it was your church which told them that God does call people to missionary vocations!

And the fact that they ended up at YWAM probably says more about our failure to offer them RCA-related missionary vocations than it does about their naiveté or theological immaturity. In fact, many parachurch mission agencies demonstrate a more serious missiology (mission thinking about God) than do some mainline churches. Some parachurch mission organizations about which we can tell horror stories eventually mature and become quite respectable. So, in many respects, your mission committee needs to respond positively and supportively when these folks come asking for money to do mission.

Some criteria for your consideration (not in any priority order):

1. Number of projects

Many churches are finding that they have too many projects to support. There is no “perfect number,” but a few good projects is probably better than many over which you cannot keep track.

2. Geographical distribution

Consider again Acts 1:8. Jesus said that his followers would be witnesses for him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. That suggests a concentric circle of responsibility. People at the ends of the earth have no personal knowledge of your church, but often the story is told of how a missionary arrived in a very remote village, preaching the Gospel, and the villagers asked, “Why did it take you so long to get here?” (see “Why do mission “to the ends of the earth?” Charity begins at home, doesn’t it?”)

So Jesus makes no distinction based on geography. Mission “across salt water” is no more righteous than mission in “my backyard.” But neither does mission in “my backyard” preclude responsibility for mission “across salt water.” Every mission committee should consider responsible geographical distribution of their mission dollars.

3. Parts of the world

Your committee might have a good balance in distribution and still be parochial in the places of support. We need to be in partnership with the emerging church in all parts of the world. Asia, Africa, and Latin America are the places where the church is growing the fastest, but they are all different, not to mention the vast differences within each of those areas. Every church should have at least one point of mission involvement within each of those continents.

But do not forget Europe! Lesslie Newbigin considered Europe and North America to be the most difficult and intransigent mission fields in the world today. Europe is especially secular. Is America heading in that direction? If we understand Europe we will have a better possibility of understanding America.

4. Type of mission

Is all your mission work concerned only with evangelism? Is all of it focused on medical missions? What bias is reflected in your budget? This is a matter not simply of variety but of theological integrity. (See “What is mission?”)

A church’s mission should be holistic. It should address evangelism, church planting, racism, medical, education, social justice, poverty, hunger, the minorities and powerless (women, children, tribal), etc. Many projects are multi-faceted, but some have severe limits out of necessity or for lack of good missiology.

One area which you may want to consider is frontier mission. We don’t often think of this, but an overwhelming percentage of mission money from the west is spent in areas where

there is already an established church that can relate to the local culture. Are you supporting work to establish a church where there is no church?

5. Theological integrity

This is a huge issue and it is related to the previous item. First of all, don't think that you are ever going to get it perfect. No mission is "theologically pure" any more than any church. Actually, the more you learn about non-western churches the more you will see that this is a bigger problem in the west than elsewhere. We tend to divide between "liberal" and "conservative." The liberals focus on social action and the conservatives focus on evangelism. Which is right? Both! Any mission which does not address both is not authentic mission and is unworthy of the name. Now, that does not mean that every mission which you support can cover every theological dimension. Some focus on one part or another. Is this because of their context or an intentional strategy, or is it a theological bias not consistent with our Reformed (our theological tradition) heritage?

A second dimension of theological integrity is "missiological integrity." Does our give help or harm the partner receiving it? Is dependency created? Are we only concerned about feeling good about what we have done, without regard to the impact of our dollars on the partner church? For example, buying back enslaved children in the south Sudan may make us think that we are doing something vitally important, but it simply results in more taken as slaves and the price of redemption rising. Why would we expect slavers to respond in any other way?

"Missiology" also involves the integrity of the work being done. Is this a righteous cause consistent with the will and purpose of God? Does this advance the Kingdom or is it a bogus cause? Some mission projects are just "bad ideas" that are not faithful to the Gospel. How does your committee sort the "wheat from the chaff?"

This leads to a third dimension of theological integrity. Is there solid financial integrity? How do you know that there is fiscal responsibility exhibited in the use of this money? Just because we like someone does not mean that he/she is faithful in the use of money. This is a very difficult and culturally-conditioned issue that will be addressed in more detail in a future essay (see "Does our Money Corrupt and Create Dependency?")

6. Reformed Church in America vs other missions

Should we support RCA mission programs or independent agencies? The answer is "yes!" The responsibility ultimately comes back to your mission committee and your consistory. That is a very serious responsibility which we assume before God.

Some mission committees and consistories feel alienated from the RCA and will not, as a matter of principle, support any mission approved by the classes, synods, or General Synod of the RCA. That could be an arrogant and foolish mistake which is harmful to the congregation and its faithfulness in mission.

Mistakes have been and continue to be made, but the heritage and accumulated wisdom and relationships around the world are just too much to set aside. One proof of this heritage is the number of RCA pastors/leaders who lead parachurch mission organizations. We Reformers are everywhere! Even though you may be frustrated with aspects of the RCA, claim the opportunities within our denomination. Yes, be discerning. But you are missing too much if you support only work unrelated to the RCA.

7. Opportunity for relationships

As stated earlier, a mission committee and consistory are to “lead your congregation in its missionary responsibility.” That does not permit you the luxury of doing mission by simply writing checks to mission projects or missionaries. Jesus did not say, “You shall write checks for mission in Jerusalem...”

Personal involvement is essential to the missional church. This is particularly true today for Americans who are looking for “hands-on” opportunities and volunteer possibilities. Most churches have mission trips for youth and adults. People support mission according to their personal interest.

Of course, you cannot send someone from your congregation to every place that you send money. But if you do not have some relational dimension to your mission budget, interest and commitment will soon wane.

So when choosing a mission to add to your budget, ask yourself, “Can we personalize this in our church and can we have some direct involvement?” Can people of all ages have a sense of personal responsibility? When this happens, financial support is more likely. But even more, you will be transformed through your involvement.

8. Persons vs Projects

Where should we put our money, in to missionaries or projects? Yes! You are not doing mission just when you are supporting American missionaries. In fact, American missionaries are very expensive compared to those in non-western countries. Depending on their location it can cost over \$70,000 per year to keep them on the field.

It is still very important to have RCA missionaries serving internationally, but our financial support should not be limited to this option. Remember, it’s not about us! It is about the mission of God (*missio dei* is the Latin phrase for this foundational principle). The question is not ultimately about how can we get more missionaries, but it is about how is witness to Christ best given? So be careful about this trap.

9. Amount per person/project

There is no simple answer here. It depends in part on the total dollars available and the number of persons/projects that you want to support. It also depends on the particular person/project and what is appropriate to give.

There must be flexibility. Something very important might come up later in the year and you will need a way to respond. Do not rule out a special offering, but there is a limit to the number of those too. If you have a son/daughter of the congregation who is working in a type of mission and a place in the world where you are already involved, what can you do? It may be appropriate to give a token amount when you have reason not to make your usual commitment.

10. Pray!!

The nine criteria proposed above should scare the devil out of us and bring us to our knees every time our mission committee meets to decide on which persons/projects we will fund. Obviously, even the most informed and astute mission committee is going to make plenty of mistakes. If you hope to be faithful, prayer is the most important action to take.

These are only some of the most important criteria to consider. Many more could be listed. Creating a huge document which will cover every eventuality tends to make everyone rigid and legalistic on these decisions. No policies will “protect” you, nor should they. Your mission committee and consistory are always dependent on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Nothing substitutes for prayer and faithful discernment of God’s will.

Biblical Guidelines for Giving

“I come home from committee meetings with a headache,” Grace, a member of her church’s Mission Committee said. “There are so many good organizations and so many needs. How do we decide?” We’ve all struggled, whether in our churches, or as we open our mail and read the appeals that come from charitable organizations next door and on the other side of the world.

The good news is that we don’t have to struggle with these questions alone. We can turn to scripture for guidelines about giving to the people of God, just as we do for other decisions. The books of the prophets are full of God’s judgment on the Israelites when they abandoned responsibility for the vulnerable in their society.

Micah 6:8 is a representative verse from the prophets: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

We are to be advocates for justice. James 1:27 gives another very clear command: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction . . .”

We must be compassionate to the fragile, disenfranchised among us.

Matthew 28:19-20 is the Great Commission, Jesus’ command to carry the Good News of God’s sacrificial love to all peoples.

Acts 1:8 records another version of that commission, and here we get a sense of the scope of God’s plan. Jesus sent his Jewish disciples out in a widening circle. Jerusalem was their home town. Judea was their state or country. Samaria was the neighboring people, but also Represented the oppressed among them. And the ends of the earth are not too far for God’s love and concern to reach. Notice that Jesus did not give his disciples an option: the church is responsible for making disciples at home and among our neighbors and to the ends of the earth.

Take this grid (following) and pray over it. Share it with your mission committee. Fill in the squares and notice where your church is strong in giving and where there are gaps. Do you focus on compassionate missions in your town (feeding ministries, homeless ministries) but have much less involvement in the care of God’s people at the ends of the earth?

Is your church heavy on justice (Peacemaking) but light on evangelism? Does your church support local evangelism (Campus Crusade for Christ), but shies away from the need for making disciples among Unreached peoples? (Unreached peoples and places are those among whom Christ is largely unknown and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help. In contemporary terminology, unreached peoples refer to ethnolinguistic groups in which the number of evangelical Christians is less than 2 percent.)

Pray for the courage and vision to balance your mission giving, as an individual and as a church, and to be obedient to all that God asks from us: compassion, justice, and sharing the good news of God's sacrificial love for all people.

Where would you put these on the table on the following page?

- \$750 Hope College (RCA), Holland, MI
- \$6700 Northwestern College (RCA), Orange City, IA
- \$6700 City Church (RCA), Sioux Falls, SD
- \$6700 Missionaries – Wilsons (RCA), Cambodia, Asia
- \$2500 Living Stone Prison Church (RCA), Springfield, MO
- \$6700 Missionary - Jennifer Lucking (RCA), Ontario, Canada
- \$6700 Missionaries – Vis (RCA), Jerusalem/Palestine, Asia
- \$6200 Inspiration Hills (RCA), Inwood, IA
- \$6200 Center of Hope (RCA), Sioux Falls, SD
- \$750 Bethany Christian Services/Adoption, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$1500 Kenya Mission Trip, Tawa, Kenya, Africa
- \$45404 Kenya Mission Trip, Tawa, Kenya, Africa
- \$1991 Kenya VBS Mission Project, Kenya, Africa
- \$2140 Lifelight Festival, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$5100 Sioux Falls Food Pantry, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$6400 Alpha Center/Fleet for Little Feet, Sioux Falls Region, SD
- \$6800 Missionary Amber Booth, Kansas City, KS
- \$1500 Fall Festival, Amber Booth Missionary, Kansa City, KS
- \$1400 Sioux Falls Seminary, Sioux Falls Region, SD
- \$6400 The Community Outreach, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$5711 Something to Eat, SD
- \$545 Compassion Relief, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$3000 Kingdom Boundaries, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$500 Words of Hope, Global Evangelism
- \$8400 Safe Families for Children, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$100 Youth with a Mission - Sperle, China, Asia
- \$100 Youth with a Mission – Alfred, Bangladesh, Asia
- \$400 Prayer Shawl, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$2379 Neighborhood Projects, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$2145 Camp Friends, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$600 NightWatch Canteen, Sioux Falls, SD
- \$1500 Grocery Store GiveAway, Sioux Falls, SD

FOUNDATION

What is the ministries sense of calling to this specific work? Why does the missionary believe they are called to this, what kind of qualifications, experience, and training do they have?

What is this ministries understanding of the Gospel? There are a lot of causes out there simply serving men. If a mission does not have a firm grasp on the Gospel then it cannot be a God-centered ministry.

Is this ministry biblically sound and Christ-centered? This is not the same as asking if they belong to your church or denomination. Often we may not participate in a good work the Lord is doing if we make that our criteria. But, do ask enough important theological questions to know if you are more or less on the same page and that they have the theology necessary to help them endure well on the mission field. You might also ask how they would handle different theological situations or what they believe about issues important to you.

How does this ministry communicate the Gospel and biblical truths to the culture they are in? Do they understand the culture and are their methods for reaching them informed, effective, and wise?

IMPLEMENTATION

What sets this ministry apart from the other ones you could invest in? There are a lot of ministries to give to out there. Some encourage people to choose two or three and back them in a serious way, as opposed to supporting many in smaller ways. What is it about this ministry that would make you want to support them in a large way?

Does the ministry actually do those things that it tells you it's going to do? Of course, situations may change on the field and everything cannot be predicted or controlled. It is possible that we may have one plan and God have another. Missionaries must possess flexibility and be able to roll with the punches. However, is their direction and intentionality consistently working towards the vision the ministry communicated with you? What is the fruit and evidence of it?

Do the ministry leaders possess strong character and integrity? If you don't personally know them, try to get an objective view. Ask them what their weaknesses are and see how they respond. Consult with others. Get in touch with their pastors or people who have worked under or alongside them in ministry.

What church has sent them out or what church(es) are they working alongside? What church they are apart of should answer many questions about their theological distinctions and methods. It also gives you a contact base to follow up on them with and get character references. It is highly important that the ministry be tightly connected to a church in the States and/or abroad.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Are they using the funds efficiently? A good portion of the funds should go straight to fieldwork, however it is normal for a portion of the funds to go to overhead and fundraising. Ask them what percentage is used for each and how the funds on the field are being used.

This may be a bit much, but I have heard of organizations calculating souls won to the dollar. Each missions context is different, requires a different amount of workers, a different method at times, different amounts of money for different projects, and will result in differing amounts of fruit. Judging by souls won seems like a poor way to calculate efficiency. Rather, look to the integrity of the workers, the soundness of the strategy, what is being taught by them, and the perseverance in the work over time.

How much money do they need and how long will they need your support? Ask them what their long-term goals are and for how long they plan to need your support. If they are long-term missionaries, consider sticking with them for the long haul. If you don't think it is a ministry you can stick with for 20 or 30 years, or for life, then I would recommend finding one you can commit to in that way.

Are they financially accountable/transparent? "Accountable" can mean a lot of different things to different people. Ask them if they do periodic financial reports and if they are available by request.

Before giving elsewhere, have you fulfilled your giving obligation to your local church? Giving to your church should take first place. You should also ask your church how they are using the money and if they are funding missionaries. What percentage of their funds goes to what?

EXCEPTIONS

There may be acceptations to this and God has done many great things through missionaries who did not fit all of these criteria to a T. I would never put God in a box, however, these questions can give you a good basis to get you started praying about where to invest your money.

For two other excellent articles on this topic visit the websites of:

[The EFCA, Evangelical Counsel for Financial Accountability](#)

[Eternal Perspective Ministries with Randy Alcorn](#)

How To Pick Which Missions To Support

One of the things I usually discover when I'm brought in to coach a Senior Pastor is their church has a convoluted mission's strategy.

Most churches don't understand why they support the [missions](#) they do, nor do they have a clear process for adding new works.

Recently a good friend of mine at CCV actively involved in helping a school in the Dominican Republic emailed me and asked if I could get the church to support that particular mission. He asked if I could go out to lunch to meet the leader of the mission so he could share what they do and make a pitch for support.

I politely, but immediately declined.

Since you probably are presented with similar requests on a regular basis I thought you might appreciate my response...

Hi Jim,

Thanks for the invitation, but unfortunately I must decline.

I am really excited about the partnership that you have with Gustavo and really believe in what he is doing, but we won't be able to support him as a church.

Each year I get 30+ similar types of requests for support – schools, new churches, child sponsorships, homeless shelters, etc. Though all important works, unfortunately very few meet the criteria we have set for missions our church will support.

Initial Mission Criteria

Years ago we created four core criteria that must be met in order for a mission to become an officially sponsored CCV mission.

1. The mission must have a long-term track record of demonstrated success.

This allows for a mission to clearly establish itself and prove that it will actually be around in 5, 10, 15 and 20 years into the future.

2. The mission must have two types of governing boards.

The first is a board of directors to which the leader of the organization reports, and another board that oversees all financial aspects of the mission. The first ensures quality leadership and

decision-making. The second ensures that the hard earned money CCV'ers send overseas gets to where it is intended to go.

3. The organization must be closely aligned theologically with our Fellowship of Churches – Independent Christian Churches.

This ensures that what is being taught at the mission aligns with what we teach at CCV, and vice versa.

4. The organization must be prepared to receive annual mission trips from CCV'ers so our own people can go on-site and serve, and oftentimes inspect, the continued effectiveness of the mission.

This is a crucial aspect of who we choose to support. This requires the presence of staff and area facilities necessary to house a group of 25-50 people at a time. While it may be something as simple as tents on the ground, the infrastructure must be in place to accommodate large CCV groups annually.

Team Approval & Financial Support

Upon completing/confirming these four criteria, I make a recommendation to our team here and submit the mission for extensive review. If approved, the mission is placed into next year's financial cue for consideration for budget approval. There is no guarantee at this point whether or not that mission will get approved, but by that point it is highly likely. New missions start out with either one-time Christmas, Easter or Kids' Camp offering support.

Seeing With Your Own Eyes

If the mission wishes to receive on-going financial support, and not just a one-time gift, there is a fifth criterion. The mission must allow me to personally visit the mission on-site for a complete top to bottom review of everything – the financials, grounds, personnel and processes – all of which involves prolonged staff and constituent interviews. I make these visits roughly every other year. The next one will be late summer/Fall of 2016, and that particular mission slot is already spoken for. I must see the mission with my own eyes and believe down to the depths of my soul that it is a good match for our church and worth pouring ourselves into.

Once that criterion has been met, the mission is considered for inclusion into our budget over a three-year period of time. At the end of that time-frame another assessment is completed, and the mission can re-apply for continued support and partnership status.

To date we have only approved a handful of organizations – [Lifeline Christian Mission](#) (Haiti, El Salvador, Honduras), [Christian Missionary Fellowship](#) (Kenya), [Casas Por Cristo](#) (Mexico and Guatemala), [Team Expansion](#) (India), [Christ in Youth/Rapha House](#) (Cambodia), and a new one coming this Christmas season – Bob Goff's [Restore International](#) (Iraq) though Restore is only approved for one-time support at this time.

This process, while time-consuming, has created a model for missions that other churches around the country are now copying. It properly vets potential missions, ensures financial accountability, and creates long-term sustainable partnerships.

I know that's WAY more than you asked, but I felt like you deserved more than a quick "no," and that's it.

My encouragement is for you and Jackie to keep supporting and encouraging Gustavo. He obviously is tasked with very important kingdom work, even though it may not be a match for us at this point.

Press on,

Brian