

GCC MISSIONS PHILOSOPHY

Psalm 96:3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!

Isaiah 49:6 "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Ephesians 3:10-11 "...through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Revelation 7:9-10 "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!"

Mark 16:15 "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation."

THE FOUNDATION FOR MISSIONS:

God's Glory and Word

The beginning and end of missions is the praise of the glory of God! God has commissioned the church to bring the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth so that those from every tongue might confess Jesus as Lord and worship God. Missions is temporary, for it will one day be no more. God is truth, and every word he speaks is authoritative and true. We receive the Bible as sufficient because it is the self-attesting word of God. In defining missions we should be cognizant of separating the definition of missions from the means of carrying it out. Although we are all commanded to proclaim the gospel, we are not instructed on how to do this in every detail and in every situation. In many places the Bible gives clear commands, and elsewhere it provides a model. This is most prominently seen in the book of Acts and Paul's epistles. God's holy word sufficiently defines and models our mandate for missions until the full number of God's elect is brought in.

DEFINITION OF MISSIONS:

Cross-cultural disciple-making

A Biblical Description of Missionaries

Not everyone is a missionary

While every Christian ought to be concerned with making disciples because the Great Commission was given to the entire church, not everyone is a missionary. Missions is not simply disciple-making; there is a biblical concern with tasking a select few to do a special work. The New Testament models this. In Acts 13:1-3 only those marked out by the Holy Spirit were commissioned to leave the church at Antioch.

Missionaries function as elders

New Testament missionaries were duly authorized representatives of the church commissioned to conduct the primary activities of evangelism, teaching, church planting and the building up of the saints. Therefore, we see NT missionaries as being akin to or virtually synonymous with the office of elder. The tasks of teaching and church planting necessitate that those who partake in such activities be elder qualified. Thus, we understand the Biblical definition of a missionary is an ordained pastor/elder and his wife (if married), who are sent to cross-culturally teach, preach, baptize, disciple, plant, develop, and strengthen local churches.

Missionaries need support workers too

Just because the Missionary Proper is limited to elders, this does not rule out support roles. The apostles were often accompanied by others (*e.g.*, Luke, Aquilla, and Priscilla) to assist them. Also, apprentices such as John Mark and Timothy accompanied NT missionaries. However, it is clear that missionaries such as Paul and Barnabas were specifically gifted and set apart by the Holy Spirit in a way that the others were not to conduct what we now call missions work.

Where missionaries go

Toward unreached people groups

One of the priorities of disciple-making is that we are to go and make disciples of all nations. Going into all nations emphasizes God's priority of gathering a people for himself from every nation, tribe, people and language. The priority of missions is toward those people groups that do not already have the gospel. Specifically, a place is designated as having the gospel when a church with elders is present there.

Toward other cultures

The victory of the gospel over cultural divisions was demonstrated on the Day of Pentecost. Special effort must be taken by missionaries to cross cultural barriers to the gospel (*e.g.*, learning another language) in order to eliminate every dividing wall of hostility. Many people groups remain unreached because they exist far away in distant cultures. It takes a concerted effort to break down the barriers erected by sin.

The Sending of Missionaries

By the Holy Spirit

God is the ultimate determiner of who goes where and when. He gifts the members of his body uniquely for his purposes of building and strengthening the church. Not everyone is gifted with the ability to cross cultures well. Furthermore, not everyone has the desire to be a missionary. Similar to a qualified elder aspiring to the office, the first evidence that the Holy Spirit is setting apart an individual for the work of missions is that they desire to go.

By the Church

The church recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the local church is the sole God-ordained institution for authorizing and conducting missionary activity. New Testament missions were a church centric activity. Missionaries were identified, commissioned, and funded by the church.

The Goal of Missions as Church Partnerships

GCC is committed to planting churches all over the world and their members growing in unity to maturity in Christ. The biblical pattern of missions demonstrates the necessity of establishing leadership development in churches that have been planted. Furthermore, the work of missions continues until churches across cultures are unified in their relationship. Missions continues to be needed until churches have developed a mature ecclesiology. After that point we would seek to partner with that church perhaps even in planting more churches together.

MEANS OF MISSIONS:

Wisdom through Local Churches

Missions Team

Purpose

The GCC Missions team acts on behalf of the elders and the entire church to develop and implement the church's missions policy. The team's objectives are to keep missions as a priority for the church, to maintain support for our current missionaries and to make recommendations for potential ministry partners. The church will keep missions as a priority by organizing missions updates and corporate prayer times for missionaries. The church will maintain support for missionaries through financial gifts and regularly updating with missionaries. The church will make recommendations about future supported missionaries through deliberate interaction and prayer.

Organization

The Missions Team will delegate various responsibilities (*e.g.*, team leader, secretary, and care organizer) to team members. Each missionary will also be assigned to missions team members to serve as a point person between the missionary and the church, ensuring that the church is

up to date with prayer for and communication to that missionary. A portion of the team will be devoted to providing missionary care for the missionaries we send. We expect that the missionaries we support that are sent by other churches find their care primarily through their sending churches. In those cases we come alongside their sending church to help support them as we are able; the missionary care team engages with their church in providing support from GCC.

The Identification and Development of Missionaries

The church should be identifying which people have a heart for evangelism here in their own Jerusalem, and then possibly sending those individuals to work alongside veteran missionaries in the field at some point to see if the Holy Spirit has marked them out for such service. We are surrounded by masses of unsaved people. We should identify future foreign missionaries by the concern and efforts individuals first demonstrate locally under the watchful care and guidance of the local church.

Oversight and Funding of Missionary Activity

We believe that local churches (not parachurch organizations) should be setting the agenda for missionary activity and use of missionary resources. The sending church should set the broad agenda for what types of activities the missionary should engage in and hold the missionary accountable to that agenda. The local church on the mission field, if there is one, should direct the specifics of that activity. If there is no local church present, then the activities of the missionary should accord with the wisdom and council of his sending church, other missionaries and any missions sending agency that is involved.

Selection of Missionaries to Send, Support, and Pray For

The reality of life in a fallen world unfortunately means that devoting significant resources to one ministry leaves fewer resources available for others. We must make wise decisions about how we allocate the resources God has entrusted to us in order to maximize the effectiveness of our missions efforts. It is our view that priority should be given to full-time missionaries over short-term trips because this more closely reflects the New Testament model. We prefer to provide significant financial support to a select few full-time missionaries instead of token support to many missionaries.

It is also our view that missionaries sent out by our church do not go out untethered from us. Our goal is to maintain a close relationship with them and partnership in their ministry so that we can be sure they receive sufficient support in all matters of their lives: financial, emotional, logistical, and spiritual.

With this priority of sending missionaries, we are also mindful of the many connections to missionaries that God has sovereignly brought to our church, whether through family members, friends, or partner churches. Since we find it unwise to support many missionaries at a token amount, we will also maintain a list of missionaries that we pray for but do not support

financially. The missions team will determine if there is a sufficient connection to our church to add these missionaries to our church's prayer list. In the event that we can financially support more missionaries, we will first consider the missionaries we pray for as potential candidates.

Grace Covenant Church's Prioritization of Missions Funding

We believe that the logical prioritization in missions funding is as follows:

1. **Sending church:** We prioritize those GCC sends, then those sent from churches in partnership with GCC, then those sent from unaffiliated churches;
2. **Affiliation:** We prioritize those serving with our missionaries as a team, then those not serving with our supported missionaries;
3. **Service Type:** We prioritize full-time missionaries, then part-time missionaries, then missionary aid/support workers, short term missionaries, and missionary apprentices/interns.

Grace Covenant Church's financial support policies

Missionary support

To reflect our priorities in missions, missionaries sent by GCC and the support workers for those missionaries sent by GCC should receive 50-75% of the missions budget. We seek to spend between 10-25% of our budget on workers that are neither full-time missionaries sent by GCC nor short-term workers. In other words, these missionaries or missionary supporters in this second category are likely sent by partner churches that have some relationship to GCC. While those churches are primarily responsible for sending and caring for those missionaries, GCC is glad to partner with those churches by supporting them.

Missions team spending

The remaining portion of the missions budget (0-40%) is at the discretion of the missions team, which is divided into three categories: field trip support, missionary care, and short-term missions. GCC is committed to supporting missionaries by visiting them in the field, and will seek to send an elder or a missions team member on a field visit every year. Missionary care can be given to visiting missionaries or special projects that encourage a missionary. Aside from the field trip visit, GCC's maximum financial support of short term missionary aid/support workers is the smaller of 25% of a trip's total cost or \$500. GCC also sets short-term missions trip spending to 15% of our total missions budget. All missions funding is ultimately left to the GCC elders' discretion.

RELATED QUESTIONS

Q: Why does GCC differ from other churches or missionaries in its approach to missions?

A: We believe that our definition of missions should be rooted in God's holy word, not in the common practices of the modern church or in our own presuppositions. We believe the New Testament (NT) contains more than just a historical record of first century missionary activity.

In examining the NT record of missions there are varied approaches to how these accounts should be interpreted. Some might say that these accounts are simply narratives that provide us with an historical record and, therefore, we are under no obligation to adopt any of the same practices. At the other extreme is the idea that the NT missionary record is strictly instructional and to be followed in every detail. This approach is problematic since there is no way for us to emulate NT church activity at every point, nor is it necessary. We certainly have an imperative to conduct missionary activity, but we do not have specific instructions on every detail for how to accomplish this task.

When the Bible does not have clear commands, we believe that the best way to understand the NT passages regarding missionary activity is to view them as a model for the kinds of activities the church throughout history has been involved in, but not containing the instructions for how it should be done in all instances. We believe that adopting the NT as a model or framework for missions is the safest and best way to please our Master, as well as the most effective method to carry out missions activity. This also safeguards against using our resources to justify and rationalize every possible activity, especially when there is no biblical warrant.

Q: What about those who don't go as missionaries? And how do US-based "missions" fit with a biblical understanding of missions?

A: The core imperative to make disciples is not exclusive to missionaries; it is applicable to all Christians. Our disciple-making is qualified with various priorities. We encourage all Christians to be involved in missionary activity in whatever capacity they are able. This means praying for and supporting the advancement of God's kingdom in other lands and cultures while remembering that we are first called to share the gospel and live holy lives within our own spheres of influence. In regards to going out or staying, all Christians are either sacrificial goers, sacrificial senders, or disobedient. The priority of missions is placed upon cross-cultural evangelism. Although that can happen in a local context to a degree, missions is an extension of the work that every Christian is called to do in evangelizing our neighbors. Those neighbors whom we interact with are essentially reached because we are the ones interacting with them. The burden still remains to take the gospel to places that do not have access to the gospel.

Q: What is the role of short-term missions?

A: When a lot of people hear the words "short-term missions" they typically think of the youth group traveling somewhere for a week or two. We do not call these youth "missionaries;" instead, we define their activity as short-term missions support. It is commonly felt today that we need to expose young people to the mission field with the hope that some of them will develop a desire to become long-term missionaries. We believe such thinking should be

reversed: young people must first have a heart for local evangelism, and then possibly work alongside veteran missionaries in the field at some point to see if the Holy Spirit has marked them out for such service. We believe that indiscriminately sending as many young people as possible on costly trips does not fit the NT model and is not the best use of church resources.

Q: What is the difference between a Missionary Aid/Support Worker and a Missionary Apprentice/Intern?

A: A missionary aid/support worker is a person sent to provide evangelistic, teaching, humanitarian, logistical, linguistic, or other support needed to promote missionary activity. A missionary apprentice/intern is either 1) a male who meets the biblical qualifications of missionary (above) who has been identified as possibly becoming a full-time missionary or missionary aid/support worker, or 2) a female who is seeking to become a missionary wife (even if single) or a missionary aid/support worker.

Q: What is the difference between a field visit and a short-term missions trip?

A: We distinguish between these two activities because of the typical modern western conception of short-term missions trips as described above. These have the lowest priority for us, while field visits by our church leadership and members are highly encouraged. Field visits are always in connection with our current missionaries or prospective mission fields. GCC is committed to sending an elder or missions team member to visit the mission field every year.

Q: What should the role of parachurch organizations be in missions?

A: We believe that the local church is the sole God ordained institution for authorizing and conducting missionary activity. NT missions were a church centric activity. Local churches in the NT organized and sent out missionaries; missionaries were identified, commissioned, and funded by the NT church. Today, parachurch organizations have taken on significant responsibilities and resources which were originally handled by the local church. Although we believe parachurch organizations are helpful to the kingdom of God, we believe that they should augment the local church in areas where the church is not structured or mandated to meet specific needs and should not supplant the primary ministries of the local church. When a parachurch organization conducts a mission project, local church financial resources are often used either directly or indirectly to fund it. We believe that local churches (not parachurch organizations) should be setting the agenda for missionary activity and use of missionary resources. Parachurch organizations are helpful in supporting the work of the church insofar as they do not supplant that work.

Q: How do good, humanitarian-focused activities fit with a biblical understanding of missions?

A: We do not believe modeling our present day missionary endeavors after the NT model negates humanitarian focused activities (*e.g.*, medical missions, construction activities, and relief work); it is merely a reflection of priorities and focus. It is good to seek the physical welfare of others, and we are commanded to do so. However, we should always ensure that

the core missionary activities of preaching the gospel and establishing local churches have primacy. Humanitarian focused activities should support but never supplant the priority of gospel proclamation. We cannot seek changed lives without first seeking changed hearts.

Q: Why does GCC support some missionaries that do not fully align with the definition of missions, the missions policy and the stated priorities?

A: For quite some time GCC has “grandfathered” many into our policy, because they were supported before its development. While we respect the decisions of elders and those in charge of missions who came before us and believe that their intention was to support these missionaries indefinitely, GCC has evolved in its missions philosophy and policies. We recognize that those we have supported have not changed as we have, and we have been intentionally slow to stop their financial support, unless we would have otherwise. We also recognize that our current policies (outlined in this document) are matters of wisdom and not necessarily matters of sin and obedience. We operate out of our biblical convictions but also recognize that not every Christian we work with will share those convictions; we believe that we can successfully partner together for the advance of the gospel. While this policy is primarily designed to establish decision making priorities for GCC from now onwards, a secondary implication is that we will engage with our current missionaries concerning our policies. The missions team will make recommendations to the elders concerning missionaries that are not moving into alignment with our philosophy. Because we are convinced that these policies are derived from scripture, significant divergence may mean that we eventually discontinue our support. Out of love for these people, this move will never come as a surprise.

Q: What churches is GCC in partnership with?

A: Since GCC prioritizes supporting missionaries from churches we are in partnership with over those we are unaffiliated with, it is important to define our partner churches. Our first consideration for partnership is churches that we closely align with in doctrine and ecclesiology (*i.e.*, churches we would gladly and easily start a church plant with). An easy assessment of this unity is whether the church is also a FIRE church member. Secondly, we also see ourselves in partnership with churches that God has placed within our local sphere of influence in the Miami Valley region. Thus, our partnership with the local chapter of The Gospel Coalition helps define which churches we are eager to partner with. Although several of these churches belong to denominations that would make co-planting a new church very difficult to accomplish, we nevertheless believe they faithfully preach the gospel and would seek at the very minimum to not be in competition with the geographic range of their ministry.

Grace Covenant Church

780 N Fairfield Rd
Beavercreek, OH 45434

contact@gccbeavercreek.org
www.gccbeavercreek.org

937-306-8566

